Linköping University | Department of Management and Engineering
Master's thesis, 30 credits| International and European Relations
Spring 2026| LIU-IEI-FIL-A--26/05316--SE

Nordic Brothers in a Shifting Alliance

– A Feminist Analysis of National Identity and Gendered Security in Sweden and Finland in the Wake of the Greenland Crisis

Emelie Källström
Emmy Kujanpää

Supervisor: Emma Rosengren
Examiner: Elin Wihlborg

Linköping University
SE-581 83 Linköping, Sweden
+46 013 28 10 00, www.liu.se

Table of content

1 Introduction 1

1.1 Aim and Research Questions 2

1.1.1 Research Questions 2

1.2 Theoretical Framework and Previous Research 2

1.2.1 Feminist Perspectives on International Relations 3

1.2.2 Feminist Perspectives on Security 3

1.2.3 Gendered Militarized Language in Security Discourse 5

1.2.4 NATO and Gendered Security Narratives 6

1.3 Research Design 7

1.3.1 Poststructuralism 8

1.3.2 Operationalization 9

1.3.3 Material 12

1.4 Limitations 15

1.5 Disposition 16

2 Background 17

2.1 Finland's path to NATO 17

2.2 Sweden's path to NATO 18

2.3 The Arctic Region and the Greenland Crisis 19

3 Analysis 21

3.1 The National Territory 21

3.1.1 Space 21

3.1.2 Time 24

3.1.3 Responsibility 26

3.1.4 Feminist Analysis: Good Men, Bad Men 28

3.2 The Nordics 30

3.2.1 Space 30

3.2.2 Time 31

3.2.3 Responsibility 32

3.2.4 Feminist Analysis: Natural Protectors of the Arctic 34

3.3 The EU 35

3.3.1 Space 35

3.3.2 Time 37

3.3.3 Responsibility 40

3.3.4 Feminist Analysis: Newly Masculinized European Security 40

3.4 NATO 41

3.4.1 Space 41

3.4.2 Time 43

3.4.3 Responsibility 45

3.4.4 Feminist Analysis: Deflecting Feminization 46

4 Discussion and Conclusions 48

4.1 Main Findings 48

4.2 Silences 49

4.3 Future Research 50

5 Bibliography 52

Abstract

This study aims to analyse how Swedish and Finnish national identities have been constructed through gendered security discourses in the aftermath of the Greenland crisis. Building on previous research identifying shifts in national identity through gendered and racialized understandings of security following NATO accession, the study examines how these identities are articulated in a context where the conditions that initially legitimized this alignment are increasingly being challenged. Drawing on Lene Hansen's poststructuralist discourse framework of space, time, and responsibility, combined with feminist and postcolonial IR theory, the analysis employs a comparative approach to examine the official security discourse of Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and Finnish President Alexander Stubb across four discursive spaces: Sweden and Finland, the Nordic region, the EU, and NATO. The analysis identifies how both states reposition themselves from a feminized identity associated with neutrality, discursively constructed as naive and irresponsible, toward a masculinized one of capable military protectors. The Arctic emerges as a key arena for performing masculine security identity, the primary space of belonging shifts from a broader notion of "the West" toward Europe, and while Russia continues to be constructed as the radical threatening Other, the US is increasingly constructed as a less radical Other, diverging from, rather than opposing the values that define the European Self. The key difference identified between the two cases is that while Finland grounds its security identity in a historically rooted masculinity shaped by resilience, Sweden articulates a more future-oriented masculine identity centered on preparedness. Together, these findings reveal that the Greenland crisis has intensified prior constructions, as both states reposition themselves from dependent recipients of security to capable providers while claims to autonomy remain articulated within rather than outside of a masculinist logic of protection. The thesis ultimately demonstrates that militarization has become so thoroughly naturalized that no alternative understanding of security is considered.

Foreword

This thesis was written as a collaborative effort by both authors, Emelie Källström and Emmy Kujanpää. From the initial development of the research idea to the final stages of writing and revision, the work was carried out jointly and continuously. It was an ongoing process of sharing ideas, engaging in discussions, and making joint decisions regarding the theoretical framework, methodology, analysis, and presentation of the findings. The thesis is therefore the result of a shared intellectual and practical effort, in which both authors contributed equally to all stages of the project. The work presented here reflects our collective efforts, and we are grateful for the opportunity to have undertaken this research together.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our supervisor, Emma Rosengren, for her guidance, feedback, and continued support throughout the writing process. Her expertise, critical engagement, and genuine interest in our work has been instrumental in shaping this thesis.

1 Introduction

On 22 December 2025, US President Donald Trump stated that the US "needs" Greenland for the safety of America (Reuters 2025). Rather than an isolated remark, this reflects a broader shift in US security policy following his re-election. For Sweden and Finland, NATO's newest members, this development is particularly significant. In 2022, they applied for NATO membership together, in response to a deteriorating security environment in Europe following Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Forsberg 2023). This came after a long period of neutrality as a defining component of security policy and national identity in both Sweden and Finland, though to different degrees (Aunesluoma & Rainio-Niemi 2016). The accession to NATO required both states to reframe their national identities, a process in which gendered narratives of military masculinity and belonging were central elements. In Finland, this reinforced an image of a militarized, resilient state positioned on the frontline of defending Europe, whereas Sweden was positioned as a key security provider in the "High North". Notably, these narratives remained silent about how NATO and its most powerful member, the US, have at times acted in ways that challenge international law (Rosengren et al. 2025).

Amid shifting alliance dynamics and Trump's, now retracted, threats of taking over Greenland using military force (CNN 2026a), Sweden and Finland's newly established identities are once again subject to renegotiation. This is especially notable given that their NATO accession constitutes one of the most significant transformations in regional security since the end of the Cold War (Juntunen & Rosengren 2024). The puzzle this thesis addresses is therefore not simply what NATO membership means under these conditions, but rather: what happens to the gendered security identities that were constructed to legitimize membership when the conditions underpinning them shift?

To answer this puzzle, the thesis adopts a post-structural discourse approach developed by Hansen (2006), providing a framework for analysing how national identity is articulated through security discourse by tracing the boundaries drawn between Self and Other, and the representations through which belonging is defined and contested. A feminist perspective on IR further enables a critical examination of how gendered hierarchies are mobilized through seemingly neutral concepts such as security (Young 2003; Cockburn 2010), understanding gender as a socially constructed and intersectional concept, embedded in the institutions and discourses through which security is produced and reproduced. Feminist security scholarship spans a wide range of (in)security contexts, from climate change and cyberattacks to pandemics and conflict-related violence (Joachim, Kronsell & Dalmer 2025). This study contributes to that broader field by focusing specifically on how gendered security identities are constructed and contested through official discourse in the context of shifting alliance politics. Applying a feminist lens makes it possible not only to analyse how identity is constituted, but also to uncover the gendered logics through which these constructions are organized and normalized (Young 2003). This perspective also enables a critical interrogation

of security itself: how threats are framed, who is positioned as in need of protection, and what forms of protection are considered legitimate. Methodologically, this approach is operationalized through Hansen's analytical dimensions of time, space, and responsibility, combined with a comparative analysis. Comparing Sweden and Finland further helps denaturalize assumptions that might otherwise appear self-evident within each national security discourse, thereby making visible the political and discursive processes through which these understandings are produced (Wendt & Åse 2019).

Against this background, this study examines how Swedish and Finnish national identities were mobilized through gendered security discourses in the aftermath of the Greenland crisis. Particular attention is given to how security identities were articulated within the territorial spaces of the nation, the Nordics, the EU, and NATO, and how these constructions were shaped by gendered and racialized understandings of space, time and responsibility (Hansen 2006).

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

The study aims to analyse how Swedish and Finnish national identities have been constructed through gendered security discourses in the context of the Greenland crisis. Building on previous research that has identified shifts in national identity through gendered and racialized understandings of security following NATO accession, this study further examines how such identities were articulated in a context where the conditions that form the basis of this alignment are being threatened.

1.1.1 Research Questions

The overall research question concerns how Swedish and Finnish national identities have been discursively constructed through gendered and racialized security logics in response to the Greenland crisis, and how these constructions differ. To address this question, the following theory- and method-driven sub-questions have been identified:

a. How are gendered and racialized constructions of time, space and responsibility mobilized in Swedish and Finnish security discourse, and what silences do such constructions produce?
b. How do emotions contribute to the construction of Swedish and Finnish national identity and security discourse?

1.2 Theoretical Framework and Previous Research

The following section outlines the theoretical framework within which the thesis is situated, together with previous research on gender, Sweden, Finland, and NATO. The selected scholarship examines how gendered and racialized identities, emotions, and historical narratives shape understandings of security and national identity. It highlights that security is not only a material or strategic issue, but is also produced through symbolic, gendered, and historical narratives. Collectively, this literature provides the conceptual foundation for

analysing how Swedish and Finnish security identities are rearticulated in response to the Greenland crisis, situating the study within a post-structural feminist approach to security. Additional research on Sweden's and Finland's respective paths to NATO membership, as well as on the Arctic as the geopolitical context in which the Greenland crisis unfolds, will be addressed separately in Chapter 2.

1.2.1 Feminist Perspectives on International Relations

Feminist International Relations (IR) scholarship challenges the assumption that international politics is gender neutral. Instead, it argues that core concepts, institutions, and practices in IR are shaped by gendered power relations. Gender refers to social constructions based on the male/female distinction, where traits coded as masculine are typically valued more highly than those coded as feminine. This binary and heteronormative order is argued to often be taken for granted within IR theory and practice, shaping how security and international politics are understood (Wibben 2011, 31). Political scientist Cynthia Enloe (2004) argues that although feminist scholarship has highlighted identity as an important analytical tool, it remains marginalized within the discipline. Identity-based research is often treated as less credible, reflecting the field's deeply embedded masculine self-conception, where dominant perspectives are presented as neutral and objective. Enloe contends that this claimed neutrality instead reproduces a masculine ideal that shapes both theoretical frameworks and methodological practices. She further suggests that resistance to identity-focused analysis is linked to an underlying fear of the "feminization" of the discipline (2004). As a result, IR has often lacked the conceptual tools necessary to critically examine its own gendered assumptions and masculine practices, despite being deeply involved in constructing masculine narratives through cultural norms, political discourse, and institutions such as the military, as argued by political scientist Charlotte Hooper (1999).

1.2.2 Feminist Perspectives on Security

Feminist scholars have shown that militarized ideas of security are built upon gendered and racialized hierarchies of power. Political scientist Maya Eichler (2019) argues that militarism is inherently gendered, privileging traits coded as masculine, such as strength, aggression, and toughness, while associating femininity with empathy, vulnerability, and the need for protection. Importantly, this constructed duality circulates beyond the military domain, reinforcing broader hierarchies related to gender, race, and sexuality that shape how states construct credibility, responsibility, and authority (Whitworth 2004 in Eichler 2019, 162). Enloe (2023, 140) further develops this analysis by conceptualizing militarization as a process through which such gendered assumptions become embedded across political and social life, positioning the state as a masculine protector, rational and capable, while those in need of protection are cast as feminized and vulnerable.

Political theorist Iris Marion Young (2003) conceptualizes this as the logic of masculine protection. This logic frames security as a hierarchical relationship in which a powerful protector provides safety in exchange for obedience and loyalty. Within this framework, authority must remain strong and largely unquestioned, as dissent or divided power is seen as

a threat to security. Protection is constructed through gendered narratives in which "good" men defend vulnerable populations against dangerous outsiders, linking virtuous masculinity to the presence of threatening Others. Citizens are consequently positioned as dependent on the protector and attempts to challenge this relationship can be interpreted as disloyalty (Young 2003). Militarism should therefore be understood not as a fixed structure but as a set of meanings reproduced through political discourse and institutional practices. From this perspective, gender becomes central to how security and identity are co-constructed. Further, association with military can enhance political leaders' claims to legitimacy, as authority in security politics is closely tied to the ability to project strength and decisiveness (Eichler 2019, 162). As Enloe argues, patriarchal norms position men who are ridiculed for naivety as being symbolically feminized, and therefore lacking the authority required of a political leader (2023, 140). Feminist critiques of militarized security thus reveal that claims to rationality, credibility, and authority are deeply gendered.

Racialized constructions are deeply intertwined with gendered understandings of security, particularly in relation to how threats are framed and legitimized. A feminist postcolonial approach reveals that gender is not constructed in isolation but through its intersection with other power structures, of which race and ethnicity are particularly central in the context of security and national identity. Through binary representations of the Self as advanced and the Other as backward, threats become simultaneously racialized and gendered: the dangerous Other is constructed as both racially inferior and insufficiently masculine, while the Self is positioned as civilized, rational, and capable of protection (Khalid 2019, 42). These gendered and racialized constructions are further reinforced through notions of exceptionalism, whereby Nordic states are represented as inherently peaceful, democratic, and morally superior (Groglopo & Suárez-Krabbe 2023). Such narratives reproduce colonial hierarchies and contribute to the construction of a valued Self in opposition to a less legitimate Other, echoing the binaries identified by IR scholar Maryam Khalid (2019, 40–45).

One additional aspect of security that this thesis takes into consideration is the role of emotions in Swedish and Finnish security discourse. Emotions are deeply intertwined with both gendered and racialized power relations, influencing how belonging, threat, and protection are constructed within the nation. Rather than being understood as merely individual psychological states, emotions are socially and politically produced. They are embedded in cultural and discursive contexts that shape how bodies, subjects, and collectives are made intelligible within security politics. Drawing on feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2004), emotions can be understood as politically and culturally constructed through processes that attach individuals to collective identities. Emotions such as fear, love, and hate do not simply describe existing relations, but actively produce boundaries between "us" and "them." In doing so, they shape how individuals within the nation relate to one another, as well as how they relate to the nation itself. Through this process, emotions contribute to imagining the nation as something in need of protection, while external or internal figures become associated with danger and threat.

The concept of security is shaped by both race and gender, as they are deeply intertwined and together determine how power and knowledge are produced, recognized, and legitimized (Khalid 2019). Drawing on feminist analyses of militarized masculinities, particularly Enloe (2004, 2023) and Eichler (2019), the protection myth by Young (2003), as well as postcolonial perspectives by Khalid (2019) and Ahmed's (2004) perspective on how emotions produce boundaries, the framework highlights how gender and race are intertwined in the production of security discourse. While other power structures such as class and sexuality are equally relevant to a comprehensive feminist analysis, this thesis focuses on gender and race as the dimensions most directly operative in security discourse and national identity construction. Centring these dimensions allows for an in-depth critical interrogation of how security identities are constructed and legitimized in the empirical material. Together, these perspectives position this thesis within a post-structural feminist and postcolonial approach to security, understanding security identities as discursively produced through gendered and racialized hierarchies. To answer the thesis aim, the analysis particularly draws on the concepts of militarized masculinity, masculine protection, exceptionalism, and emotions to examine Swedish and Finnish security identity.

1.2.3 Gendered Militarized Language in Security Discourse

Building on the critique that the field of IR systematically marginalizes gender and reproduces masculine ideals as neutral, feminist scholarship has shown how security discourse itself is structured through gendered language and symbolic binaries. The gender and security scholar Carol Cohn (1987) has demonstrated how language not only describes but also shapes understandings of security and war among "defence intellectuals" in the US during the 1980s. She argues that this community was characterized by a masculine conception of rationality and deterrence. This logic was expressed through a technical, elitist, and dehumanizing language that naturalized militarized force as rational. She primarily focuses on the discussions of nuclear weapons, arguing that they often are permeated by sexualized and masculine metaphors, which contribute to distancing these debates from the human consequences of nuclear devastation. Cohn's findings highlight how security language actively produces gendered hierarchies of rationality, which is central to this thesis' understanding of discourse.

These gendered hierarchies of rationality are not limited to nuclear discourse but extend to broader political concepts, including neutrality. Political scientist Christine Agius (2024) examined how neutrality had been constructed through gendered and emotional discourses that positioned it as weak, naive, and morally suspect. Drawing on feminist IR, she demonstrated how mainstream International Relations was structured around hierarchical binaries such as strong/weak, rational/irrational, order/anarchy, and masculine/feminine, in which neutrality was linked to femininity. Agius's findings illustrated how the language of IR was evaluated not only through strategic terms but also through gendered constructions of masculine and feminine. Agius further exemplified this by referencing historian Roderick Ogley's (1970) discussion of neutrality, in which he famously compared neutrality to virginity, arguing that it was something all states initially possessed but which some lost

more quickly than others. Drawing on Agius's insights, this thesis recognizes how gendered language shapes the construction of political concepts such as neutrality within security discourse.

A related strand of feminist scholarship focuses on security heritage and the gendering of military pasts. Political scientists Cecilia Åse and Maria Wendt (2021) analysed how Swedish Cold War heritage was shaped through gendered constructions, examining two concrete sites of memory: the Cold War exhibits at the Air Force Museum in Linköping and the repurposing of a once classified military installation at Bungenäs, whose wartime bunkers have since been converted into vacation homes. Through these cases, they showed how such sites privileged certain histories, identities, and forms of military belonging while marginalizing others. Their work highlighted how historical representations of security continue to inform contemporary understandings of national identity and defence through gendered community, gendered bodies, and gendered territory. Their analysis demonstrated that assumptions about heterosexuality, gender binaries, and male protection make it difficult to imagine security outside the framework of the nation-state and military power, with the result that security politics tends to focus on state protection rather than human safety and wellbeing. By questioning these constructions, Åse and Wendt opened space to critically rethink dominant ideas about security and protection. This thesis builds on these insights by examining how such gendered constructions of military protection and security are reproduced in current Swedish and Finnish security discourse.

1.2.4 NATO and Gendered Security Narratives

NATO itself has also been examined as a site where gendered security constructions are produced and reproduced. Historian Frank Costigliola (1997) analysed how alliance politics were articulated through symbolic and gendered language in NATO discourses during the Cold War, examining how US and Western policymakers and diplomats used metaphors and imagery to describe relations between the US, Europe, and the Soviet Union. He showed that NATO often represented the alliance through the imagery of the heterosexual nuclear family, where the US was constructed as the masculine protector and European states as feminized partners, while the Soviet Union was portrayed as the masculine threatening Other. Through such representations, security discourse connected power, protection, and leadership to masculinity, while dependence and vulnerability became associated with femininity. While Costigliola's study is situated in a Cold War context, it remains relevant for this thesis as it demonstrated how security discourse and identity are constructed through gendered representations of protection and threat.

Focusing specifically on the Swedish NATO accession debate, political scientists Cecilia Åse, Maria Wendt, and Maria Jansson (2024) examined how security discourse was deeply embedded in notions of heterosexuality, masculinity, and violence, particularly through the trivialization of gender equality and peace-oriented initiatives. The authors explored how the mobilization of gender was used to generate emotional responses that both enabled and constrained certain approaches to security. For instance, the female body was constructed as incapable of producing security. Moreover, they demonstrated how emotions were deployed

in contradictory ways: fear of a defined external threat was framed as rational, whereas fear of weapons of mass destruction was portrayed as irrational (2024, 60–63). They further argued that a sense of equality with NATO was discursively produced, despite Sweden being the party seeking protection, an evocation of national pride in Sweden's military capabilities that could be interpreted as a remasculinization project (2024, 69). They also highlighted how emotions were gendered, showing how citizens were encouraged to act rationally and avoid displaying fear of Russia, with fear to be mitigated through trust in the military (Åse, Wendt & Jansson 2024, 72). This study provides insight into how gendered and emotional constructions shaped security discourse in the Swedish NATO debate.

Most directly relevant to this thesis, IR scholars Emma Rosengren, Leena Vastapuu, Astrid Brodén, and Minna Lyytikäinen (2025, 752) analysed how government officials in Finland and Sweden reconciled their national identities as historically non-aligned countries with NATO membership. They argued that NATO membership was discursively constructed through gendered constructions of military masculinity and belonging, which tended to overlook internal inequalities related to gender, race, and class. Finland and Sweden were discursively portrayed as natural partners and "brothers" within NATO, while Russia was constructed as the Other, a "gone wrong" military masculinity, legitimizing NATO's role as a defender of the international rules-based order of "the west". While this study provided important insights into how NATO membership was discursively enabled, it focused on the moment of accession as a process of identity stabilization, leaving less attention to what happens after this rearticulation, particularly when the conditions that helped legitimize this shift are destabilized. This thesis therefore draws on their insights as a point of departure, extending the analysis into a renewed moment of identity crisis prompted by the Greenland crisis.

Building on this body of literature, this thesis turns to a contemporary case of Swedish and Finnish security discourse in relation to NATO, following the crisis triggered by the second Trump administration’s claims of “needing” Greenland. Previous research has shown that binaries, metaphors, and symbolic language do not merely describe international politics but actively shape identities and relations between actors. This thesis therefore draws on, and contributes to, the feminist research outlined above.

1.3 Research Design

This section outlines the research design, encompassing the theoretical and methodological approach as well as its operationalization in the analysis. The study is guided by an abductive research strategy, in which the analysis develops through a continuous interplay between feminist and postcolonial perspectives and the empirical material (Bryman 2012). Accordingly, the theoretical framework has been refined throughout the research process in response to insights generated from the material. This section starts with an instruction to poststructuralism with a focus on security and identity, informed by Lena Hansen (2006). Then, it goes on to elaborate on how identity and security are gendered and racialized. Since Hansen’s discourse approach does not explicitly consider gendered and racialized power

structures, this thesis draws on Rosengren's (2020) adaption of the method that integrate a feminist theoretical framework in the method. Finally, the section outlines how the combined methodological and theoretical approach is operationalized through Hansen's analytical dimensions of temporality, spatiality, and responsibility, alongside comparison as a strategy of denaturalization, which together inform the formulation of the thesis's aim and research questions.

1.3.1 Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism views language as formative rather than merely representational. This means that language shapes reality and identities, creating meaning through the construction of identity and difference. In this view, discourse is not just a reflection of pre-existing ideas but actively participates in the formation of social and political realities. In contrast, traditional approaches often treat ideas as static entities that exist independently of the contexts in which they are articulated. While traditional approaches often separate material factors such as military capabilities, from ideational factors like beliefs, poststructuralism integrates both into the understanding of discourse. In this way, poststructuralism blurs the lines between the material and the ideational into one. Discourse is in this way never static but evolves over time and is influenced by historical and political contexts (Hansen 2006, 43–47).

In accordance with Hansens method, this thesis adopts a relational understanding of identity, where identities are constructed through discourse in relation to Others (Hansen 2006). From this perspective, identity is not fixed or given but produced through political language that differentiates the Self from various Others. While traditional analyses seek causal links between ideas and policy outcomes, poststructuralism focuses on the complexity and interconnectedness of discourse and identity (Hansen 2006, 47–52). This thesis examines what and who are positioned as part of the Self in the official governmental security discourses and how the Other is constructed in relation to it. This means that both Sweden and Finland are examined as distinct articulations of the Self in relation to the same political moment, the Greenland crisis, allowing for a systematic comparison of how national identities are constructed and articulated (Hansen 2006, 94).

Within this discursive framework, security itself becomes a political construct rather than an objective condition. Issues do not automatically constitute security threats, rather, they become securitized through political discourse and must be successfully framed as such. The concept of national security is therefore closely tied to processes of identity construction, in which the state is represented as a unified actor with a common identity that requires protection. This framing grants authority to political actors while simultaneously assigning them responsibility, positioning state security as the precondition for individual security. The concept of security is further connected to the construction of threats. In order to establish a legitimate Self, the state must define a threatening Other. This is achieved through a distinction between the national and the international: within the state, shared values such as democracy, order, and stability are emphasized, while the outside is constructed as different

and potentially anarchic. The state therefore relies on the existence of an Other, and the persistence of threat, to define itself as secure, rational, and in need of protection. As Hansen argues, "the state only knows who and what it is through its juxtaposition against the radical, threatening Other" (2006, 56–58).

Building on Hansen's discourse analytical approach, this thesis also adopts a comparative perspective in order to further denaturalize existing security discourses. While Sweden and Finland's NATO membership processes unfolded within the same geopolitical moment and were justified through partly overlapping security narratives (Rosengren et al. 2025), a cross-national comparison enables a critical examination of how these discourses are differently embedded in national contexts. Rather than treating the nation as a given unit of analysis, comparison is used as a feminist methodological strategy to question its apparent coherence and self-evidence. Inspired by how Åse and Wendt (2019) apply Gayatri Spivak's call to unsettle nationalist imaginaries and their gendered foundations, this thesis employs comparison to disrupt taken-for-granted understandings of national identity. By adopting a comparative approach between Sweden and Finland, assumptions that may appear natural within one national setting become visible and open to examination in another. In this way, comparison functions as a tool of denaturalization, revealing how nation and gender are constructed and stabilized rather than pre-existing or self-evident categories (Åse and Wendt 2019, 79-82).

In sum, a poststructuralist perspective understands security and identity as discursively constructed through relational distinctions between Self and Other. Security is not given, but produced through narratives that define threats, assign responsibility, and legitimize authority. A feminist and postcolonial lens further demonstrates that these constructions are not neutral but shaped by gendered and racialized hierarchies. The following section outlines how this theoretical and methodological framework is applied in practice, operationalized through Hansen's analytical dimensions of temporality, spatiality, and responsibility.

1.3.2 Operationalization

To examine the national identity of Sweden and Finland, this thesis applies Hansen's three key concepts: space, time, and responsibility (2006, 27). These concepts function as analytical tools to reveal how identities are formed through political discourse, without one dimension being more essential or serving as a condition for the others. Together, they provide the analytical foundation for the entire analysis. Considering these dimensions as interconnected allows us to analyse not only how political identities are formed, but also how they differ between Finland and Sweden (Hansen 2006, 19). While discourses often attempt to create stable links between space, time, and responsibility, identity is not fixed, multiple configurations are possible (Hansen 2006, 27). In this thesis, space, time, and responsibility are used to examine how Finland and Sweden construct their national identities.

Space

The first key dimension guiding the analysis is space, which refers to both territorial and abstract forms of space. As argued above, identity is understood in this thesis as relational, existing only in relation to difference. Consequently, identities are constructed through the drawing of boundaries that separate and define distinct spaces. Territorial space has historically been defined by the state, which becomes visible in how countries describe and position other countries as a means of defining their own national identity. When the state is constructed as the legitimate provider of security, political leaders come to embody and represent the state identity. Their performance is evaluated in relation to dominant ideals of masculinity, particularly their capacity to appear strong, rational, and in control (Hooper 1999, 11). However, spatial identities are not limited to the state. More complex formations also emerge, such as regional identities like "the West," "Europe", "the Middle East" and to discourse of universalism. Universal discourse presents ideas like "international order" as if they apply to everyone and without exclusion. However, in practice, these concepts are constructed relationally, defined in opposition to those who are seen as violating or threatening it. As such, even seemingly universal identities are constructed through distinctions between a Self and particular Others (Hansen 2006, 28). Building on Rosengren's (2020) methodological development, feminist research further demonstrates that these spaces are gendered. Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) has demonstrated that the state itself is gendered, as national belonging and citizenship are structured through ideas about masculinity and femininity, a dynamic echoed in Young's (2003) concept of masculine protection. Spatial identities connected to territory, such as nations or regions, are therefore always political, involving questions of power, interest, and belonging. Yet spatial identity is not only tied to physical land or borders but can also be articulated through abstract political spaces, boundaries, and subject positions (Hansen 2006, 28).

Time

The second key dimension guiding the analysis is temporality, which refers to how security identity is shaped through constructions of past, present, and future. By drawing on the past to define the present and anticipate the future, political actors construct what threats are real, what responses are legitimate, and what responsibilities must be assumed (Hansen 2006, 20–22). History is not neutrally recalled but selectively mobilized where certain pasts are invoked to naturalize present alignments while others are suppressed, producing a sense of continuity that forecloses the contingency of present political choices. The future operates equally as a site of identity construction. By framing it as threatening or uncertain, certain policies and measures are legitimized in the present. Fear becomes politically productive within security discourse as it directs attention toward the anticipated danger, shaping how threats are recognized, how collective identities are formed, and how responsibility for protection is distributed (Ahmed 2004). Emotions are therefore understood as part of the discursive production of security.

Temporal constructions are additionally organized through racialized and gendered hierarchies, drawing on representations of the Self and the Other through ideas of progress

and backwardness. Within such discourse, the Self, often associated with Western, rational, and masculine-coded values, is constructed in opposition to a feminized and racialized "underdeveloped Other" (Khalid 2019, 40–45). While the Self is positioned as modern, rational, and forward-looking, the Other is constructed as backward, destabilizing, or primitive. As Khalid argues, these distinctions draw on colonial binaries such as civilized/barbaric, producing an "us versus them" logic that helps justify war, conflict, and security practices (2019, 40–45). Racialized hierarchies thereby underpin the relational construction of the Self through the production of a threatening Other. The Other can also be constructed as a historical Self, portrayed as less developed in contrast to a present Self (Hansen 2006, 22 & 29). Moreover, Rosengren (2020) argues that time is gendered, as women have long been represented through temporal constructions of backwardness in relation to a masculinity defined as progressive. As these perspectives demonstrate, difference is articulated through notions of progression, making temporal comparison a central aspect of this thesis's understanding of how security discourse is legitimized. By examining how time is mobilized in the selected material, the analysis is able to trace how Swedish and Finnish security identities are constructed.

Responsibility

Responsibility is the third key concept guiding the analysis and refers to the way constructions of time and space within security discourse produce notions of what is perceived as legitimate and necessary. When something is constructed as a threat to national security, it legitimizes particular responses and creates an expectation to act, positioning political leaders as protectors and granting them authority to define the terms of security. Such notions of responsibility are deeply gendered, working through the logic of masculine protection to shape who is recognized as a legitimate security actor, what forms of action are considered appropriate, and how the obligation to protect is articulated and performed (Enloe 2023, 140). Hansen further argues that responsibility can move from being framed as a national interest to being presented as an international moral duty, whereby invoking an ethical identity justifies intervention on moral grounds and increases the pressure to act (2006, 56–58). At the same time, responsibility can legitimize non-action by framing a threat as the Other's responsibility rather than one's own. Responsibility therefore functions as a key dimension where security identities are produced and is applied in this analysis to examine how Swedish and Finnish security discourse legitimizes particular security practices while defining who is responsible for security and against whom.

Silences

Central to Hansen's (2006) discursive framework is the analytical interplay between three dimensions of identity construction: time, space, and responsibility and the silences that emerge through their interaction. No single dimension operates in isolation, rather, foreign policy discourse works to align and reinforce all three, constructing an identity as legitimate and necessary. As Hansen (2006,67) argues, "[…] the overriding goal of foreign policy discourse is to articulate the three elements in such a manner that they draw upon and reinforce each other, […]". Yet as Hansen (2006) notes, while discourses strive to create stable links between the three dimensions, it is this very stabilisation that produces silences.

When an official discourse is consolidated through time, space, and responsibility, certain assumptions become embedded. Silence, in this sense, is not simply an absence but a product of discourse itself, an effect of the way identity constructions works to naturalise some framings while undermining others. Kronsell (2006) deepens this insight by arguing that revealing such silences requires looking beyond what is explicitly stated, attending to the assumptions that surround and underpin the articulation. In this study, silences are unpacked through Hansen's three dimensions by examining not only how Self and Other are articulated, but what such binaries foreclose and leave unspoken in the construction of security discourse. The comparative design further contributes to this by denaturalizing assumptions that might appear self-evident within each national context, making visible the discursive choices that produce these silences.

To ensure a systematic and transparent analysis, the study operationalizes Hansen's (2006) analytical framework into a set of guiding dimensions. These dimensions specify what the analysis looks for in the empirical material, including how the Self and the Other are constructed and how identities are positioned spatially, temporally, and ethically. As outlined above, gender is not treated as a separate category but as a dimension that cuts across all aspects of the analysis, shaping how identities, differences, and security are articulated. This framework conceptualizes security and identity as discursively produced through relational distinctions between Self and Other, structured through spatial, temporal, and responsibility-based logics. The table below outlines these dimensions and the corresponding analytical questions used to structure the reading of the empirical material.

Table:1

Dimensions	Guiding Questions	Examples of indications
Spatial/Space	What or Who are/is positioned as Self and how? And what or who is/are positioned outside of it?	“The Nordics”, “Strong”, “Capable”, “European”
Temporal/Time	How is the past, present and future mobilized to construct the Self? How is the Other temporally positioned in relation to it?	“Progressive”, “Nostalgia as dangerous”, “Future threat”
Ethical/Responsibility	How is responsibility constructed in relation to the Self and the Other?	“Militarization”, “Defence capabilities”, “Security providers”, “Arctic protectors”

1.3.3 Material

The material in this study consists of mainly spoken material including official statements, speeches, and interviews by Swedish Prime Minister, Ulf Kristersson of the Moderate Party

and the Finnish President Alexander Stubb of the National Coalition Party. Three key considerations guided the selection of these officials. Most importantly, both officials are selected on the grounds that, as democratically elected leaders, they hold a popular mandate to represent their nations internationally. They speak not merely on behalf of their governments but on behalf of the nation as a whole. This distinguishes them from appointed officials such as ministers of foreign affairs, who hold institutional responsibility for foreign policy but lack the same representative legitimacy (Republikens president n.d.; Regeringen n.d.). In the context of this study, which examines how national identity is constructed and performed in Swedish and Finnish security discourse, this democratic mandate makes Kristersson and Stubb the most authoritative and symbolically significant voices through which Swedish and Finnish national identities are articulated (Hansen 2006, 101).

The selection is further motivated by the nature of the Greenland crisis itself. The crisis is not approached primarily as a matter of routine foreign policy administration, but as a broader challenge to the security and identity framework underpinning Swedish and Finnish NATO membership. In the Finnish case, the material therefore focuses primarily on the discourse of President Stubb rather than the Finnish Prime Minister, given the president's constitutionally central role in foreign and security policy (Republikens president n.d.). While other actors, such as NATO, the European Union, or the US, are important to the broader geopolitical context, they do not constitute separate categories of material. Instead, they are analysed insofar as they appear within Swedish and Finnish governmental discourse and contribute to the construction of security narratives, identities, and relations between Self and Other.

The selection of Kristersson and Stubb was further informed by the empirical material itself. The initial collection of material was broader and included statements from a range of governmental officials such as ministers of foreign affairs. However, during the data collection process it became evident that Kristersson and Stubb were the most prominent voices commenting on the Greenland crisis. Their statements constituted the largest and most consistent body of material through which Swedish and Finnish responses to the crisis were articulated. Given the thesis focus on the construction of national identity through official security discourse, the scope of material was subsequently narrowed to these two heads of state.

The material consists of statements and interviews from January 2026 to March 2026, a period marked by heightened tensions following Trump's repeated threats toward Greenland beginning on 22 December 2025. Although Trump's initial statement regarding Greenland was made on 22 December 2025, the empirical material begins in January 2026, as it was only as the threats escalated and attracted sustained political attention that Kristersson and Stubb began addressing them prominently in public discourse. The empirical material includes interviews conducted by SVT (Sveriges Television, Sweden's public broadcaster), TV4 (Swedish television network), appearances at high-profile international forums such as the World Economic Forum in Davos and the Munich Security Conference, as well as official governmental press briefings, speeches, and statements. These formats are prioritized because of their broad reach and institutional visibility, ensuring that the material captures

discursively dominant positions. The selection is guided by the study's focus on Swedish and Finnish security discourse in the aftermath of the Greenland crisis, with material purposively selected in which Kristersson and Stubb address questions of security identity, including what constitutes a threat, who is constructed as an ally, and how national identity is positioned in relation to NATO and the US.

SVT Agenda and TV4 interviews (SVT 2026a, 2026c, 2026d; TV4 2026) are selected as they represent Kristersson's most direct engagement with the Greenland crisis before a Swedish domestic audience, addressing questions of national security, more specifically US reliability and Article 5 credibility. While SVT 2026a, 2026c, 2026d, and TV4 2026 feature Kristersson, SVT 2026e includes Stubb speaking before the same national audience, regarding the same issues, enabling a comparison of how the two leaders frame Swedish and Finnish security identity within an identical communicative context. Press briefings, Presidential speeches, and governmental statements (Regeringen 2026a, 2026b, 2026c; Government 2026, Republikens president 2026a, 2026b) represent the most institutionally authoritative articulations of Swedish and Finnish security policy. As formally produced texts directed at both domestic and international audiences, they provide insight into how the Swedish and Finish state positions itself in relation to national security and the Greenland crisis. International forum appearances (SVT 2026b, 2026d; World Economic Forum 2026a; Munich Security Conference 2026a, 2026b) at the World Economic Forum in Davos and the Munich Security Conference represent high-profile international arenas in which both Kristersson and Stubb address questions of security and transatlantic relations before a global audience. These sources are particularly valuable for examining how national identities are performed and negotiated in relation to an international arena. While social media posts on the platform X (Kristersson 2026; Stubb 2026) differ in register from formal speeches and interviews, their inclusion is motivated by their immediate and direct character, both leaders used the platform to respond publicly to Trump's threats in real time, making them analytically significant as unmediated articulations of security positioning.

The empirical material consists of a total of 17 interviews, public statements and speeches by Ulf Kristersson and Alexander Stubb. The dataset includes a larger number of recorded appearances by Kristersson (ten) compared to Stubb (seven). This imbalance reflects differences in their respective public roles and visibility during the studied period rather than deliberate selection bias. Stubb appears more frequently in international forums, often in panel discussions and at global events focusing on security and economic issues. In contrast, Kristersson’s public statements are primarily situated within a national context, often consisting of shorter interviews, press briefings, or statements directed toward a domestic audience. While the intended audience may shape certain aspects of rhetorical framing, this study proceeds from the assumption that national identity constructions are not fundamentally altered by audience context. Drawing on Hansen (2006), identity is understood as relationally constituted through discourse regardless of whether the speaker addresses a domestic or international public, the us/them distinctions and identity markers that structure security discourse remain analytically traceable across both settings. The numerical difference in material is therefore assessed to be balanced by differences in format and context, allowing

for a broadly comparable empirical basis. Consequently, the study must be attentive to these structural differences when comparing the two actors. Rather than treating these differences as purely limitations, they are understood as part of the empirical reality that shapes how political actors communicate in different arenas. Nevertheless, this imbalance may influence the comparability of the findings and should therefore be considered when interpreting the results.

Most of the Swedish official statements, speeches, and interviews are originally published in Swedish and are analysed in their original language before being translated into English when cited in the thesis. However, some speeches and interviews are already delivered and published in English, particularly when directed toward an international audience. The same applies to the Finnish material. While many Finnish official statements are published in English, the ones used in this thesis are available in both Finnish and Swedish, as it is an official language of Finland. Stubb's statements are typically issued in both Finnish and Swedish as parallel official versions. These have been analysed in Swedish where available, and in English when spoken in English. Swedish texts are therefore analysed in Swedish and translated into English. The quotes in its original language will be included in the footnotes.

Both authors are native Swedish speakers and fluent in English, which enables analysis in these languages, while neither author has proficiency in Finnish. This introduces a linguistic limitation insofar as Finnish-language originals cannot be directly analysed. It reflects a common limitation in multilingual discourse analysis, where linguistic access inevitably shapes the boundaries of the empirical material. While developed primarily in ethnographic contexts, this principle applies equally to discourse analytical research (Rickert et al. 2026). Translation inevitably involves a degree of interpretation which can affect the tone, terminology and framing of a statement (Bryman 2021, 248). However, this is partly addressed by the fact that the material included in this study consists primarily of official statements that are systematically translated into Swedish and English for public and international dissemination. As a result, the analysis is based on widely circulated and institutionally validated versions of the texts, rather than exclusively on Finnish-language sources.

1.4 Limitations

This study is subject to certain limitations. First, it focuses exclusively on official security discourse, that is, statements, speeches and interviews by Ulf Kristersson and Alexander Stubb which excludes bureaucratic actors, institutions, and expert communities that may also shape security discourse. This focus reflects the study's aim of examining how security identity is constructed and legitimized at the level of official state discourse, rather than mapping the full range of actors involved in security discourse production. As a result, alternative discourses, and potential forms of resistance from civil society, opposition parties, or marginalized groups are not included in the analysis. Consequently, it does not address how these discourses are received, challenged, or interpreted by opposing actors. Second, the analysis is situated within an ongoing and evolving political context, which limits the ability

to capture longer-term developments or account for how these discourses may shift over time. At the same time, focusing on a specific political moment enables a more nuanced and context-sensitive analysis, as such moments are often characterized by heightened political significance (Hansen 2006, 54). Finally, although the temporal scope of the study is limited, the comparative analysis of Sweden and Finland enables greater analytical depth by making it possible to identify similarities, differences, and patterns in how security identities are articulated. While the findings are context-specific and not intended for broad generalization, they may nonetheless offer analytical insights into similar processes of national identity construction through security discourse.

1.5 Disposition

The first chapter introduced the study's research problem, aim, and research questions, situating the thesis within the contemporary security context shaped by Sweden and Finland's NATO accession in 2022 and the Greenland crisis of late 2025. It presented the theoretical framework, drawing on feminist and postcolonial perspectives on security alongside poststructuralist discourse theory, and reviewed the existing scholarship within which this study is situated and to which it seeks to contribute. The chapter further operationalized the analytical method through Hansen's (2006) framework of identity construction through space, time, and responsibility. The second chapter provides the broader political and historical background necessary to contextualize the analysis. It traces Sweden and Finland's respective paths to NATO membership, before turning to their shared position as Arctic states and the geopolitical significance of the Arctic region. It concludes by outlining the Greenland crisis and the shifts in the transatlantic relationship that together define the political moment within which the security discourses examined in this study unfold. The third chapter presents the empirical analysis of Swedish and Finnish security discourse. Structured around Hansen's analytical dimensions of space, time, and responsibility, it examines how national identities are constructed through representations of the national territory, the Nordics, the EU, and NATO. Particular attention is given to how these identity constructions are organized through gendered and racialized understandings of security, ending each section with a feminist analysis. The fourth and final chapter presents the concluding discussion, returning to the study's research questions and aim. It presents the main analytical findings and the silences produced by these constructions, reflects on the broader theoretical and empirical implications, and identifies directions for future research.

2 Background

This chapter introduces the context for the analysis by tracing Swedish and Finnish paths to NATO accession and explaining their connection to the Arctic as a central geopolitical space. Drawing on critical geopolitics, it demonstrates how the Arctic has been politically framed, before turning to the shifting great power dynamics and the Greenland crisis that together define the political moment within which the security discourses examined in this study unfold.

Sweden's and Finland's decisions to apply for NATO membership in 2022 marked a profound transformation in both countries security policies and national identities. Historically, Sweden had cultivated an identity as a neutral state and a "moral superpower," emphasizing diplomacy, international law, and non-alignment. Finland, while also militarily non-aligned, maintained a more security-oriented identity shaped by its geopolitical position and historical experience with Russia. The decision to join NATO therefore required both states to reposition themselves within a new security framework. This shift also altered the relational dynamics between Sweden and Finland. While Sweden has traditionally been perceived as the more prominent actor, Finland assumed a leading role as the "big brother" in the NATO accession process, acting more decisively and joining earlier. This development contributed to a partial reversal of established roles, with Finland emerging as a more security-driven actor in the regional context (Ålander & Salo 2023).

2.1 Finland's path to NATO

Prior to joining NATO, previous research shows that Finland's security policy was characterized by a longstanding commitment to neutrality and military non-alignment, shaped by its geopolitical position during the Cold War. In the aftermath of the Winter War and the Continuation War against the Soviet Union in the 1940s, Finland adopted a policy of neutrality during the Cold War, remaining under significant Soviet influence for decades. This was institutionalized through agreements such as the 1948 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, which constrained Finland's ability to align with Western security alliances (Aunesluoma & Rainio-Niemi 2016).

Previous research has argued that Finland's path toward NATO membership was characterized by a rapid and profound shift in public opinion, largely driven by the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Prior to 2022, support for NATO membership had remained relatively low and stable, typically ranging between 20 and 30 percent, while a majority of the population opposed joining the alliance. However, this long-standing pattern changed dramatically in February 2022. Within a matter of weeks, public support for NATO membership surged, surpassing a majority, and continuing to rise steadily throughout the spring. By May, support for NATO membership had risen to 76 percent, whereas opposition had declined to under 15 percent (Forsberg 2023, 90–92).

Forsberg argues that this shift in public sentiment was accompanied by a strong sense of national unity. Drawing on historical experiences of crisis, particularly during World War II and the Cold War, Finnish society demonstrated a high degree of consensus across political and societal actors. The question of NATO membership did not generate significant political polarization, instead, both government and opposition aligned in support of the process (Forsberg 2023, 92). At the same time, the decision-making process in both Finland and Sweden was seen as remarkably swift and is argued to have involved a limited broader societal debate (Jonter & Rosengren 2024, 2).

The formal decision-making process unfolded during the spring of 2022, culminating in a parliamentary vote with overwhelming support for submitting the application. The decision was framed as a response to a fundamentally altered security environment, where NATO membership was seen by the government as a means of enhancing stability and deterrence in Northern Europe. Finland's application thus preceded and helped pave the way for Sweden's own decision to seek NATO membership (Forsberg 2023, 92–94).

2.2 Sweden’s path to NATO

In the Swedish case, Forsberg argues that the development of NATO membership was shaped both by domestic party dynamics and by developments in Finland. While Finland’s accession was characterized by broad public support and strong political consensus, reflected in overwhelming approval in the parliamentary vote, Sweden did not display the same level of certainty. Then-Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson initially argued that NATO membership could contribute to increased insecurity, and public opinion remained divided. Notably, there had never been a clear majority in favor of NATO membership, not even immediately following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. As late as April 2022, 33 percent of the Swedish public opposed joining the alliance (Forsberg 2023, 90–92).

Ålander and Salo (2023) further argue that while parties such as the Moderates and the Sweden Democrats had long supported NATO membership, the Social Democrats remained hesitant, largely due to their strong attachment to military non-alignment as a core party value. This hesitation became increasingly difficult to sustain as Finland moved more decisively toward membership, emerging as a “big brother” in the NATO process. The Swedish position shifted rapidly in line with Finland's, and within the same month that Andersson had described NATO membership as ill-advised, she revised her stance and opened up to the possibility of joining (Forsberg 2023, 90–92).

At the same time, the Swedish debate has been observed to be marked by a sense of ambivalence. NATO membership came to be presented as the most credible path to security, while also being associated with new risks and uncertainties (Hagström 2024, 42–56). At the same time, research showed that Swedish security policy had been based on over 200 years of military non-alignment, which was widely understood as the foundation of a prolonged period of peace (Forsberg 2023, 92). As Sweden did not have the same collective memory as Finland, the move towards NATO membership was articulated through emotional and

identity-based narratives. From 2016 onwards, and more clearly after 2022, security narratives focused on the need to protect shared values such as democracy and stability from external threats. In Sweden this was emphasized by creating distinctions between a collective "us" that needs to be protected from an external "them" (Nyman 2024, 192–194).

Previous research argues that the major shift in Swedish national identity from neutral to NATO-aligned was partly justified through the framing of an extreme threat towards the collective us. Hagström (2024) argues that this was done by repeated claims of a fundamentally changed security environment that required military protection, without clearly specifying what this change in national identity would entail. Rather than being driven by a concrete threat, the shift was rooted in identity politics, where belonging to "the West" was constructed as both natural and necessary (Hagström 2024, 42–56). Nonetheless, Sweden was understood as part of a broader transatlantic security community, characterized by shared values, political alignment, and institutional cooperation. NATO membership could therefore be seen as formalizing an already existing sense of belonging to a Western security community, rather than creating an entirely new identity (Bremberg 2024, 148–149).

A clearer discursive shift became evident following a meeting between Andersson and Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin in April 2022, after which Andersson stated that Sweden could pursue membership alongside Finland. Forsberg (2023, 90–93) notes that public opinion evolved in parallel with this political shift as over 60 percent of Swedes expressed support for joining NATO if Finland were to do so. By the time both countries formally applied for membership in May 2022, a majority of the Swedish public supported accession.

2.3 The Arctic Region and the Greenland Crisis

Alongside their NATO membership, Sweden and Finland are both defined as Arctic states and have been members of the Arctic Council since its establishment in 1997 following the Ottawa Declaration of 1996. The Arctic states are defined as Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the US (Arctic Council n.d.c). The Arctic Council describes itself as "the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic Indigenous Peoples and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues" (Arctic Council n.d.c). Both Sweden and Finland have approximately one third of their territory within the Arctic circle. However, Finland's Arctic Strategy from 2013 defines the entire country as part of the Arctic region (Arctic Council n.d.a: Arctic council n.d.b).

Critical geopolitics understands geopolitics not as something fixed or objective, but as something constructed through language, narratives, and representations. In this view, the Arctic is more than a physical region defined by geography or by the eight Arctic states; it is also shaped by how political actors describe, frame, and give meaning to it. As a result, the geopolitical significance of the Arctic is constantly produced and contested. This means that the Arctic can be defined in different ways depending on political interests and perspectives. For example, Norway speaks of the "High North" in flexible, strategic terms, while other

actors, such as China, describe themselves as “near-Arctic” to justify involvement in the region. At the same time, environmental changes, such as warming and melting, show that the “geo” in geopolitics is also material and changing. This perspective highlights how Arctic geopolitics is not limited to territory or Arctic states alone, but is shaped by discourse, interests, and evolving spatial understandings (Dodds, Woon, & Xu 2022).

The Arctic has long been framed through narratives of exceptionalism by the Arctic states, including the US, Russia, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kingdom of Denmark. Scholars have argued that this framing has been reinforced by portrayals of the region as characterized by cooperation, international law, and relative separation from broader geopolitical conflict, despite the persistence of strategic interests (Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017). This narrative has been increasingly challenged in recent years by intensified militarization and renewed great power competition. Olesen (2020) argues that the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 can be seen as the starting point for the downfall of the Arctic exceptionalism. The Russian Arctic has since then been an object of many Western sanctions and the military cooperation between Russia and “the West” has greatly diminished, both Russia and NATO have been observed to have increased their military presence in the Arctic region. Trump's second administration has further accelerated this trajectory, articulating ambitions of increased American influence and control in the Arctic (Kravchik and Kullaa 2025).

This framing is evident in the Pentagon’s Arctic Strategy (US Department of Defense 2019), which presents the Arctic as a space for expanding US strategic influence, a narrative that coincided with the Trump administration’s proposal to purchase Greenland later that year (Olesen 2020). When Trump returned to the White House in January 2025, his ambitions to bring Greenland under American control resurfaced with new force. Tensions escalated sharply from 22 December 2025, and in early January 2026 the administration refused to rule out the use of military force, with Trump warning that if a deal could not be reached “the easy way,” the US would pursue it “the hard way” (CNN 2026b). On 21 January 2026, following significant international pressure, Trump stepped back from these threats at the World Economic Forum in Davos, stating he would not use force or tariffs to acquire Greenland (World Economic Forum 2026b). While Greenland is formally autonomous, it remains part of Danish and NATO security arrangements, which makes these developments particularly significant. It is in this context that Trump's threats toward Greenland must be understood, and within which the Swedish and Finnish security discourses examined in this study were produced.

3 Analysis

In this chapter, the analysis of the empirical material is presented, drawing on Hansen's (2006) discursive framework of time, space, and responsibility, with attention to how constructions of national identity are articulated in the security discourse Sweden and Finland through Ulf Kristersson and Alexander Stubb. Each dimension is examined in turn, following the operationalisation outlined in chapter 1.3 and the structure presented in Table 1. The analysis aims to answer the overall research question of how Swedish and Finnish national identities have been discursively constructed through gendered and racialized logics of security in response to the Greenland crisis, and how they differ. The silences produced by these constructions are addressed more thoroughly in chapter four, where the findings are subjected to a deeper deconstructive reading.

The chapter is organized around four territorial spaces through which identity is articulated: the national territory (Sweden and Finland), the Nordics, the EU, and NATO. These are understood not merely as geographical but as discursively produced spaces, which emerged from the empirical material as the primary sites through which security identity was articulated in the aftermath of the Greenland crisis. Within each of these spaces, the analysis traces how notions of Self and Other are mobilized through the dimensions of space, time, and responsibility, drawing on feminist and postcolonial theory together with Hansen's framework of relational identity. The chapter begins by examining how Sweden and Finland construct security identity within the discursive space of the national territory, analysing how the national Self is produced through representations of threat, militarization, and protection. It then turns to the Nordic space, tracing how collective identity is discursively produced through constructions of friendship, shared values, and Arctic responsibility. The following section examines the EU as an emerging discursive space of belonging through which Swedish and Finnish security interests are increasingly articulated. Finally, the chapter addresses NATO as a discursive space within which both states negotiate their relationship to the US and articulate claims to security agency within the alliance.

3.1 The National Territory

This first part of the analysis focuses on the nation as the first of four key discursive spaces of Swedish and Finnish security identity. It examines how the nation is constructed within security discourse through spatial, temporal, and ethical dimensions, and how these interact to produce the nation as a particular kind of security object. The section examines how the construction of Swedish and Finnish security identity within the national space is compared to reveal how the two official governmental discourses articulate their respective security identities.

3.1.1 Space

Within the space of the (territorial) nation, the Self is constructed through the attributes assigned to it, the values, moral frameworks, and qualities that define what the nation is and what it represents. Across both territorial spaces of Sweden and Finland, the Self is

constructed as principled and capable in relation to a destabilizing international environment, yet the two states ground this identity differently, Finland through values and democratic exceptionalism, Sweden through economic strength and self-sufficiency.

In Finnish security discourse the Self is articulated as consistent and internally aligned, grounded in a stable set of norms. Stubb repeatedly defines Finland through references to values, societal models, and ways of organizing political life. In the quote, "I've also made it quite clear that we're now seeing a US foreign policy that isn't as values-based as ours, nor as interest-based, nor as power-based as ours […]"[1] (SVT 2026e), Finland is positioned in contrast to the US through a differentiation of value-based, interest-based, and power-based politics. This establishes a relational boundary in which Finland is constructed as a coherent and principled actor, grounded in a specific set of values. At the same time, a relational boundary is established in relation to the US, which is positioned as deviating from these principles. The Other is thus constructed not simply as different, but as lacking the same coherence between values and interests. This differentiation produces a hierarchical relation in which Finland appears as more balanced and normatively grounded, establishing the Self as a legitimate and moral actor.

At the same time, these values are simultaneously depoliticized and framed as pragmatic rather than ideological. As Stubb states: "Finnish diplomacy is based neither on moralizing nor on identity politics. It is based on values, interests, and actions […]"[2] (Republikens President 2026b). This introduces an important tension within the security discourse. While Finland is clearly defined through values, this formulation simultaneously depoliticizes them, framing it as self-evident. This allows Finland to maintain an image of rationality and effectiveness, where values are not presented as abstract ideas, but as actionable principles linked to influence and decision-making. This tension produces a particular form of Finnish exceptionalism by presenting its foreign policy as grounded in values while simultaneously distancing itself from "moralizing" and "identity politics". This sense of exceptionalism is made explicit in Stubb's characterization of Finland as "Finland is today an exceptionally strong democracy and a country governed by the rule of law. International non-governmental organizations rank Finland as the world's freest country, the world's second least corrupt country, and the world's third strongest country governed by the rule of law." (Republikens President 2026a)[3]. Finland is here constructed not merely as a capable state but as a model of governance, a Self, defined by its exceptional position within a global hierarchy of political development.

In contrast to Stubb's value-based construction of the Finnish Self, Kristersson bases Swedish national identity primarily on economic strength and autonomy. When discussing Swedish

[1] "Jag har ju sagt ganska starkt också att nu ser vi en amerikansk utrikespolitik som inte är lika värdebaserad som vår, inte heller lika intressebaserad, inte heller lika maktbaserad som vår […]."
[2] "Finlands diplomati grundar sig varken på moraliserande eller på identitetspolitik. Den grundar sig på värderingar, intressen och handlingar […]."
[3] "Finland är i dag en exceptionellt stark demokrati och rättsstat. Internationella icke-statliga organisationer rankar Finland som världens friaste land, världens näst minst korrupta land och världens tredje starkaste rättsstat."

national security following the Greenland crisis, Kristersson repeatedly foregrounds Sweden's economic resilience, stressing that Sweden possesses the resources necessary to withstand external pressure: “We trade with pretty much the whole world; we aren’t dependent on energy in the same way; we have a rock-solid economy of our own, our own defence industry, and we are well-positioned.”[4] (SVT 2026a). Sweden is through such a statement, constructed as economically strong, globally connected, and relatively independent. This establishes a relational distinction in which Sweden appears as less vulnerable than other countries, and therefore better positioned to act in an uncertain international environment. Kristersson returns to this formulation repeatedly, explicitly linking economic strength to national security, through the recognition that: “We have world-class public finances. But that doesn’t come for free, and it won’t last forever, […]” (Regeringen 2026b)[5]. Economic resilience is thus constructed not as a given but as something that must be actively maintained for national security. Through the repeated articulation of economic strength as the basis of national security, economic resilience is stabilized as a defining and distinctly Swedish marker of security identity.

Beyond the attributes assigned to the national space itself, Swedish and Finnish spatial identity is simultaneously shaped through their positioning within a broader international order that is constructed as under threat. The nation is not only defined through internal values and capabilities but through its relationship to a rules-based international system — upholding this order becomes a defining feature of the Self, while those who undermine it are constructed as Other. Kristersson frames this as particularly serious for smaller states such as Sweden:

> As we enter 2026 and perhaps see the first glimmers of hope for peace in Ukraine, we also see that the world order is under greater threat than it has been in many decades. This is dangerous in several ways. The risk of major conflicts increases, but so does the risk of smaller nations being sacrificed along the way. For a country like Sweden, this is particularly serious[6] (Regeringen 2026a).

Through this formulation, Swedish security identity is constructed as inherently dependent on a stable and rules-based international order, making its destabilization a direct threat to Sweden's position and security as a smaller state. Similarly, Stubb refers to the international order as something that must be supported and defended, linking it to values such as democracy and fundamental rights (World Economic Forum 2026a), reinforcing a relational distinction between those who uphold the order and those who undermine it.

However, a key difference emerges in how this threatening Other is identified. While Kristersson primarily points to Russia as a destabilizing force, Stubb broadens this framing

[4] “Vi handlar med precis hela världen, vi har inte beroenden av energi på samma satt, vi har en urstark egen ekonomi, egen försvarsindustri, vi är väl positionerade.”
[5] “Vi har statsfinanser i världsklass. Men det har man inte gratis och inte för evigt, […]”.
[6] “När vi nu går in i 2026 och kanske ser begynnande möjligheter till fred i Ukraina, så ser vi också att den världsordningen är mer hotad än på många decennier. Det är farligt på flera vis. Risken för stora konflikter ökar, men också risken att mindre nationer offras på vägen. För ett land som Sverige är det här särskilt allvarligt.”

by also suggesting that the US can act in ways that challenge the same international order: “I have to admit that when I crafted value-based realism, I wasn't really thinking about having to do it with the United States, but I have to admit that there is an elements of that (World Economic Forum 2026a). As Hansen argues, security identities are shaped relationally, Swedish and Finnish security identity is thus shaped in relation to distinctions between those constructed as the Self and those constructed as the Other (Hansen 2006, 20–28). Yet despite this acknowledgment, the US is not constructed as a direct Other in the same way as Russia. It is not discursively aligned with aggression or lawlessness but instead positioned as a partner marked by unpredictability and shifting values, where the issue is framed less in terms of threat and more in terms of deteriorating trust. While Russia is constructed as a clear radical Other within Swedish and Finnish security discourse the US occupies an intermediate position, neither fully outside the Self nor an unproblematic part of it. This reflects Hansen's (2006) concept of degrees of Otherness, where identity is not constructed through a fixed binary between Self and Other but through gradations of difference in which some actors are positioned as more radically Other than others. This is evident in Stubb's caution against overreacting towards the actions of the US, stating: “Don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater” (World Economic Forum 2026a), and in Kristersson's redirection framing of Russia as the real threat when asked about the Greenland crisis, stating that “no one but Russia would be happy [about it]”[7] (TV4 2026). According to Hansen (2006), this suggests a rearticulation of the Self in which internal differences are acknowledged without collapsing the boundary between Self and Other. As such, the US is constructed simultaneously as an ally, a dependency, and a source of insecurity within Swedish and Finnish security discourse.

3.1.2 Time

Swedish and Finnish national security identities are structured through temporal logics that take different forms, where Stubb draws on a historically embedded narrative of continuity with Russia, while Kristersson constructs security primarily through a future-oriented logic of preparedness and uncertainty. In the Finnish case, the Self is constructed through a historically rooted relationship with Russia, where security discourse draws heavily on collective memory and past experiences of vulnerability. As articulated by Stubb, the Russian threat is treated as historically ingrained and largely self-evident, requiring little further elaboration. This is apparent through Stubb’s reflections on Finland’s decision to join the EU: “[…] And I think that the original decision for us to join the union in 1995, in a referendum, was based on security, that we didn't want to talk about it at the time. We never wanted to be alone again, so we did that.” (World Economic Forum 2026a). Here, threat is embedded in a shared historical memory that functions as a taken-for-granted foundation for national identity. Following Hansen (2006), this reflects a temporal construction in which the past is directly mobilized to stabilize the present Self.

In contrast, Kristersson more explicitly reiterates and reinforces Russia as the primary threat: “The security situation in Europe is the most serious since World War II, with Russia

[7] “Det finns ingen annan än Ryssland som skulle ha glädje av att Natoländer börjar uttrycka sig i tveksamma ordalag om detta.”

threatening its neighbours. We must be able to deter attacks and safeguard our own security and freedom"[8] (Regeringen 2026c). Such statements indicate the need to continuously reproduce and stabilize the boundary between the Self and the Other within Swedish security discourse. Unlike Finland, Sweden lacks a recent history of direct confrontation with Russia, the future therefore becomes the primary temporal frame through which the Swedish Self is articulated, emphasizing anticipation of uncertainty. As the spatial analysis has shown, Swedish security identity is closely tied to economic strength as a marker of national capability. This logic is further reproduced at the temporal level, where the future is imagined through the maintenance of present-day economic stability and resilience. Within this temporal framing, security is linked to the capacity to sustain strong public finances, ensure economic growth, and maintain continued engagement with the international rules-based order. This is reflected in Kristersson's statement that: "Ultimately, it is a strong Swedish economy that underpins Sweden's security in uncertain times"[9] (Regerigen 2026a), where economic strength is positioned as the foundation for managing future insecurity. Temporally, the Swedish Self is thus constructed through a forward-looking logic in which preparedness and resilience become central markers of security in an increasingly unstable international. In Hansen's terms (2006) this reflects a relational and anticipatory construction of identity, where economic autonomy is framed as a key condition for acting as a secure and capable state.

Within Swedish and Finnish security discourse, emotions play a central role in the construction of identity through temporal logics by shaping how past experiences and future threats are rendered meaningful. It functions to construction what is perceived as a threat and which responses to said insecurity that is rational, responsible, and legitimate (Ahmed 2004). Emotions is through temporal logics discursively structured to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate responses. A recurring aspect in both Swedish and Finnish security discourse is the rejection of fear and nostalgia as valid. As Ulf Kristersson states, "Nostalgia is not a strategy, and neither is fear"[10] (SVT 2026a), while Alexander Stubb similarly argues: "Change is not something we need to fear or run away from […] the key is to be able to influence it… [...] Nostalgia is not a strategy."[11] (Republikens President 2026a). Here, both Kristersson and Stubb mobilize temporal references by framing nostalgia as a problematic relation to the past. The past is constructed as something to move beyond, where nostalgia is delegitimized as backwards looking and politically unproductive. Rather than referring to "the past" in abstract terms, these formulations can be understood in relation to the historical security policy of neutrality that previously structured both Swedish and Finnish foreign policy identity to different extents (Aunesluoma & Rainio-Niemi 2016). Within this temporal framing, nostalgia becomes associated with a political orientation that risks reproducing earlier modes of security understood as insufficient for the present strategic environment. The

[8] "Säkerhetsläget i Europa är det allvarligaste sedan andra världskriget, med ett Ryssland som hotar sina grannar. Vi måste kunna avskräcka angrepp och värna om vår egen säkerhet och frihet."
[9] "Ytterst är det en stark svensk ekonomi som bygger svensk säkerhet i en osäker tid."
[10] "Nostalgi är ingen strategi, rädsla är ingen strategi heller."
[11] "Förändring är inget vi behöver vara rädda för eller fly från [...] det gäller att kunna påverka den […] Nostalgi är ingen strategi."

past is rendered both undesirable and threatening insofar as it is associated with modes of security represented as inadequate. At the same time fear is mobilized to legitimize a radical Other. While fear in general is delegitimized as naive or unproductive, fear of Russia is instead normalized and politically necessary. This distinction is crucial, as it reveals how emotions are selectively authorized. Russia is constructed as an external threat that exists both in the past and in the future. Temporally, references to a historical threat position Russia as a continuous danger, strengthening the spatial boundary between "us" and "them" within Swedish and Finnish security discourse.

These temporal constructions produce a specific hierarchy between past, present, and future. The past is rendered politically problematic insofar as it is associated with passivity, hesitation, and a reluctance to act. Moving beyond this past is therefore not framed as optional, but as a necessary condition for security in the present. In contrast, the future is constructed as a space of agency and preparedness, where political responsibility lies in adaptation and anticipatory action. As such, both Kristersson and Stubb contribute to the construction of a security identity in which legitimacy is tied to future action and neutrality is dismissed as naïve.

3.1.3 Responsibility

Building on the spatial and temporal constructions of identity, this section turns to responsibility as the dimension through which these logics are translated into expectations of action and obligation. Responsibility in Swedish security discourse is defined through notions of sacrifice and loss of autonomy. In the quote by Kristersson: "[…] we expect a great deal of personal dedication. For Sweden is not only a place for self-fulfilment, but also a place for self-sacrifice […]"[12] (Regerigen 2026a), the nation is constructed not only as something to be protected, but as something that demands commitment and sacrifice from its citizens. Sweden is thus articulated as a political and ethical community in which freedom is made rendered conditional upon the willingness to defend and, if necessary, sacrifice for the nation. Responsibility is thereby extended beyond the state and distributed onto the individual.

In the Finnish case, the relationship between state protection and individual obligation is less explicitly articulated, operating instead as a largely taken-for-granted aspect of national security discourse. This reflects a longer historical trajectory in which Russia and the Soviet Union has been consistently constructed as a proximate threat, embedding expectations of sacrifice and preparedness within a temporality of continuity rather than requiring active justification. In contrast, the Swedish discourse reflects a more recent rearticulation of security, shaped by a historical emphasis on disarmament and neutrality (Rosengren 2020). As a result, the Swedish construction of security requires a more explicit justification of sacrifice and obligation, whereas in the Finnish case such expectations appear more normalized and expected.

[12] "För det fjärde förväntar vi oss stora personliga insatser. För Sverige är inte bara en plats för självförverkligande, utan också en plats för självuppoffring […]".

This construction produces a binary between legitimate and illegitimate security positions, constructing internal boundaries within the Self. Those that prefer earlier security imaginaries built on neutrality or passiveness, or that express doubt about current security strategies, risk being positioned as internal Others, excluded from legitimate security discourse through their association with emotional weakness or irresponsibility. Importantly, this distinction is not explicitly articulated but operates through the repeated delegitimization of fear as a response. Responsibility further reinforces this construction. By rejecting fear and nostalgia, political leaders articulate a moral obligation to act towards the nation, and the future (Ahmed 2004, 71-72). In this context, responsibility becomes tied to the ability to remain composed, strategic, and rational. Emotions aligned with control, determination, and action are implicitly validated, while fear is marginalized and delegitimized. Fear is constructed as politically dangerous, as it becomes associated with those who question security strategies or challenge the protector and the terms of protection.

Responsibility further structures the relationship between Sweden and Finland as security actors. Within the discourse of responsibility, a "little brother–big brother" dynamic can be identified between Finland and Sweden, in relation to security provision and military capability. This dynamic was already noted by Ålander and Salo (2023) during the two countries' NATO accession process, where Finland assumed a leading role in what was publicly framed as a joint entry into the alliance. This analysis argues that this positioning has not dissolved with NATO membership but continues to structure how security provision and military capability are formulated between the two countries, as is particularly evident in the rhetoric of Stubb. While both states are articulated as responsible security actors, Finland is more explicitly constructed as carrying a direct responsibility for territorial defence due to its geographical proximity to Russia and its historically embedded role as a frontline state. This is particularly visible in how Stubb articulates not only Finland's capacity to defend itself, but also its ability to contribute to the protection of Sweden and Europe more broadly.

In response to questions regarding a potential Russian military repositioning after a peace settlement in Ukraine, Stubb states: "I'm not worried about us, nor about Sweden, because we'll protect you"[13] (Agenda, 1 March 2026). Here, Finland is positioned as militarily capable and dependable in the face of Russian aggression, while Sweden is implicitly constructed as comparatively less capable of protecting itself, explicitly framed as a recipient of Finnish protection. Finland's responsibility is further legitimized through references to its geographical proximity to Russia and the need for military capabilities. Stubb repeatedly emphasizes Finland's defensive capacity, arguing that Finland possesses both the capability and determination to protect its territory and, by extension, NATO's eastern frontier. Such formulations contribute to legitimizing extensive militarization, which is further emphasized through the framing of Finland as possessing "one of the largest militaries in NATO" (Munich Security conference 2026a) relative to its size. Responsibility is thus tied to spatial proximity to threat: Finland's geographical position, with its border to Russia, produces a

[13] "Jag är inte orolig för oss, inte för Sverige heller, för vi kommer skydda er."

discourse in which it assumes the role of protector not only of itself but also of Sweden and the broader international security order.

At the same time, this "big brother" positioning is reinforced diplomatically through Stubb's articulated relationship with the US and particularly, with Trump. While Kristersson tends to emphasize the responsibility of institutional cooperation, Stubb more explicitly presents himself as capable of managing direct great-power relations. Referring to Finland's bilateral relationship with the US, he argues that: "Thanks to our strong bilateral relations with the United States, we are able to discuss issues directly"[14] (Republikens President 2026a). This dynamic is further strengthened when Stubb describes his personal relationship with Trump as one in which he is able to speak "quite directly" to the American president despite political disagreements (SVT 2026e). Responsibility here expands territorial defence, to include the ability to manage geopolitical relations on behalf of a wider security community.

3.1.4 Feminist Analysis: Good Men, Bad Men

Examining the preceding constructions of space, time, and responsibility through a feminist lens reveals how Swedish and Finnish security discourse is structured through gendered understandings of security, where certain forms of masculinity are constructed as responsible and authoritative, while others are rendered threatening and illegitimate. Within the gendered construction of security, distinct temporal logics of masculinity emerge where Finland embodies a stable, historically grounded masculinity, while Sweden performs a future-oriented masculinity that must be continuously produced without slipping into the illegitimate space of fear.

In the Finnish case, masculine identity appears rooted in the past as stable, inherent, and requiring little discursive reaffirmation, mobilizing historical continuity. In the Swedish case, by contrast, masculinity is future-oriented and can fundamentally performative, requiring constant reconstruction through anticipatory discourse. Sweden must repeatedly demonstrate preparedness for a potential future threat in order to position itself as a capable and responsible actor, masculinity is here earned through anticipation. At the same time, this construction is constrained by the earlier rejection of fear. While Sweden must invoke a future threat to justify preparedness, it cannot appear fearful without risking feminization, reflecting a broader gendered dichotomy where rationality and action are coded as masculine, while fear and emotionality are positioned as feminized. In line with Young's (2001) logic of masculinist protection, legitimate political subjects are those who act, protect, and take responsibility, whereas those who express fear risk being positioned as dependent or naive. This creates a tension in the discourse where the threat must be emphasized strongly enough to legitimize action, but not in a way that signals vulnerability or lack of control.

Kristersson's rhetoric precisely enacts this logic, presenting the responsible leader as one who acknowledges danger while remaining composed and strategic. Authority derives not from the absence of threat, but from the ability to manage insecurity without losing control. As a

[14] "tack vare våra starka bilaterala relationer med Förenta staterna kan vi diskutera frågor direkt"

result, alternative discourses, such as openly questioning Sweden's defence capacity or expressing uncertainty, are largely absent. Drawing on Cynthia Enloe (2023, 140), failing to embody these traits, by appearing fearful or naive, risks feminization and, consequently, a loss of authority and legitimacy in matters of national protection. Within this gendered framework, such articulations risk being constructed as incompatible with responsibility and legitimate political authority. In this way, the boundary between Self and Other is not only geopolitical but also functions through gendered understandings of security.

Further, the articulations of sacrifice and duty found in Kristersson's discourse can be understood through Young's logic of masculinist protection, in which security is framed as a reciprocal arrangement: citizens are expected to surrender a degree of personal autonomy in exchange for state protection (Young 2003). Crucially, this exchange is not framed as coercive imposition but as a desirable and morally meaningful commitment. While Finnish security discourse aligns with a relatively stabilized and implicitly masculine logic of protection, one that, as established above, requires little active renegotiation, the Swedish discourse can be read as actively reconstructing its gendered identity. In doing so, it implicitly positions earlier Swedish security practices as feminized: characterized by passivity, neutrality, and an avoidance of military commitment. The current emphasis on duty, preparedness, and willingness to sacrifice thus functions not only to legitimize specific security policies, but as part of a broader discursive process of re-masculinizing the national Self and othering the past.

This process of re-masculinization is not only defined through what Sweden and Finland are becoming but through what they are distinguished from, both the feminized past Self and the illegitimate masculinity of the threatening Other. Young (2003) identifies this as the figure of the "good man", the protector who shields a vulnerable population from dangerous outsiders, and in doing so, calls upon those under his protection to accept personal sacrifice for the greater good of the nation. The willingness to sacrifice thus becomes not merely a civic obligation, but a marker of moral worth and belonging within the national community. This gendered construction of security operates through distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate forms of masculinity. The shared construction of Russia as the radical Other is, consequently, deeply gendered. Rather than opposing a masculine Self to a feminine Other, the discourse contrasts competing forms of masculinity (Young 2003). Swedish and Finnish militarization is articulated as rational, defensive, and legitimate, what can be understood as a "good masculinity", whereas Russian militarism is represented as aggressive and threatening, constituting a "bad masculinity", creating a distinction between what Young (2003) calls good men and bad men. The distinction is therefore not between masculinity and femininity, but between masculinities considered legitimate and illegitimate within the prevailing security order.

This gendered binary of good vs bad men is, however, not applied consistently. While sovereignty-violating behaviour is constructed as illegitimate and aggressively masculine when associated with Russia, comparable actions by the US, do not trigger the same discursive response. The US is not repositioned as a threatening or illegitimate and brutal

masculine Other, but is constructed as a degree of Otherness, framed instead through the language of unpredictability and misaligned interests. This asymmetry reveals that the attribution of aggressive or illegitimate masculinity is not a neutral analytical judgment, but is shaped by existing geopolitical alignments, alliance dependencies, and historical relations.

3.2 The Nordics

In Swedish and Finnish security discourse, the Self is increasingly articulated through a broader Nordic formation. Within this space, the Self is consistently associated with values linked to progress, modernity, democracy, and a distinctive societal model, positioning the Nordic countries as politically and morally advanced actors. This section examines how the Nordic region is increasingly constructed as a space of Swedish and Finnish security identity formation, through which the responsibility of protecting the Arctic becomes a central discourse.

3.2.1 Space

While Swedish and Finnish national identities are at times articulated separately, they are also increasingly constructed through representations of a shared Nordic identity. In Swedish and Finnish security discourse, the Nordic region emerges as a distinct spatial community defined through geographical proximity, shared values, political alignment, and narratives of mutual trust. Drawing on Hansen (2006), this reflects how security identity extends beyond the nation-state and becomes anchored within broader spatial formations. The Nordic region thus functions as an important identity space through which security is articulated, one that has gained importance in the context of the geopolitical uncertainty following the Greenland crisis. Through such spatial constructions, a threat against one Nordic country is treated as a threat against the entire Nordic collective.

Following the Greenland crisis, the Nordic region has emerged as an increasingly prominent referent in Swedish security discourse, constructed as Sweden's closest circle of friends. Kristersson emphasized cooperation with fellow Nordic countries and the EU over reliance on the transatlantic alliance, indicating a greater emphasis on a Nordic identity (SVT 2026c). This is made explicit in his statement that Sweden, the Nordic countries, and the Baltic states are “standing together in support of our Danish friends”[15] (Regeringen 2026a), a formulation that constructs the Nordics as a distinct spatial unity defined by shared political boundaries and friendship. The heightened insecurity following the second Trump administration's territorial ambitions towards a fellow Nordic country has thus produced a more pronounced Nordic spatial formation. By invoking the Nordics as a distinct spatial unity, the statement constructs a clear territorial boundary within which Sweden simultaneously functions as a national actor and a member of a broader Nordic community. A similar logic of Nordic friendship appears in Finnish security discourse, as Stubb describes Finland's closest friends

[15] “Sverige, Norden, de baltiska staterna och flera stora länder i Europa står gemensamt upp för våra danska vänner.”

as being “in the North and Europe”[16] (Republikens President 2026b). Sweden and Finland are through such statements positioned not merely as national actors but as embedded within a broader Nordic spatial order where security is fundamentally relational and collective.

While Kristersson and Stubb both construct a shared Nordic spatial identity, the grounds on which they do so differ. Whereas Kristersson constructs Nordic spatial identity primarily through the lens of geopolitical insecurity, namely military threats, territorial integrity, and alliance solidarity, Stubb frames it as a constitutive dimension of Finnish identity itself. Stubb repeatedly frames Finnish interests in relation to broader regional cooperation rather than as purely national concerns, situating Finland at the intersection of both Nordic and European political communities (Republikens President 2026b: Munich security conference 2026a: World Economic Forum 2026a). This layered sense of belonging is made explicit when he describes himself as “Finnish, Nordic, European and transatlantic,” constructing the Nordic as a distinct layer of identity (World Economic Forum 2026a). As Rosengren et al. (2025) suggest in their analysis of Finnish national identity during the NATO accession process, aligning with the Nordic, and by extension the EU, functions as a distancing from Finland's history with the Soviet Union and a positioning within a broader framework of privileged whiteness.

Within this Nordic space, the region is further constructed through discursive articulations of progress, modernity, democracy, and a distinctive societal model (Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe 2023). This is most clearly expressed through Stubb’s references to Nordic values:” Us coming from Nordic countries, we value welfare societies […] all the measures of international data, which 5 countries are in top 10? Whether its justice, whether its least corrupt, whether it is open, welfare, environment, whether it is open media, gender equality, they are the Nordics.” (Munich security conference 2026a). Through such articulations, the discourse not only describes the Nordic region as a space but actively produces it as a coherent political and ethical community. The articulation of common values such as democracy, gender equality, openness, and welfare constructs a collective “we,” positioning the Nordics as sharing a distinct common identity and worldview. Following Hansen (2006), the Nordic Self emerges relationally through the production of difference; by defining values such as openness, equality, and welfare as inherently Nordic, these values function as spatial markers that establish the boundaries of belonging and distinguish the Nordic Self from those positioned outside it.

3.2.2 Time

The temporal dimension of Nordic identity operates through a selective mobilization and strategic avoidance of history, stabilizing present political alignment by rendering it natural, inevitable, and deep-rooted. Neither Stubb nor Kristersson explicitly references the past when discussing Nordic cooperation, instead, the Nordic bond is presented as self-evident and timeless, requiring no historical justification. Through repeated references to the Nordics as each other's “friends” and as naturally united in moments of security crisis, the absence of

[16] “Finlands närmaste vänner finns i Norden och Europa.”

historical narrative becomes a temporal strategy in itself, making present alignment appear inevitable rather than politically constructed.

Constructing the Nordic friendship as natural achieves its stabilizing effect through what it erases. The framing of Sweden and Finland as old friends erases a considerably more complex historical relationship. Framing the relationship of the Nordics as one of friendship reconstructs the historical power hierarchies between Sweden and Finland. According to Rosengren et al. (2025) the narrative of Sweden and Finland as part of a historic friendship ignores the colonial history of Sweden over Finland and its more contemporary racial stereotypes of the Finnish population. The same discursive mechanism was deployed during the NATO accession process, where a shared narrative of Russian threat was mobilized to produce the image of a united Nordic community with a common historical enemy, a narrative that is now extended in the post-Greenland crisis context (Rosengren et al. 2025, 764–765). This mechanism remains visible in the present material. Despite US threats to assert control over a fellow Nordic country, Russian presence continues to be constructed as the enduring and structurally significant threat in Nordic security discourse, reinforcing the boundaries between "East" and "West". This is reflected in Stubb's emphasis on the strategic centrality of the Nordic region through its connection to the north and the Arctic: "[…] there is basically 8 countries that have arctic ownership […] and I think the importance of Norway Finland and Sweden, including of course Denmark is that the biggest centre of nuclear weapons from Russia are in the Coala Peninsula and in Mormusk […]" (Munich security conference 2026a). By constructing Russia as the enduring and significant threat to the region, the discourse generates a shared Nordic past oriented around a common Other, projecting an image of a historically united community in which Sweden and Finland appear as natural allies, erasing the colonial power hierarchies that have in fact characterized their relationship.

This selective construction of history is further reinforced through a broader discourse of Nordic exceptionalism. As Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe (2023) argue, representations of the Nordic countries have historically drawn on colonial ideas of the West, and particularly the North, as inherently progressive, modern, and morally advanced. Within this temporal framework, the Nordic region is constructed as the natural expression of a historically progressive and morally advanced community, a construction that renders present alignment as the inevitable continuation of what the Nordics have always projected.

3.2.3 Responsibility

The construction of a shared Nordic security identity produces a corresponding discourse of responsibility, through which Sweden and Finland are repositioned from objects of protection to providers of security. This responsibility is articulated primarily through the Arctic, which functions as the arena where Nordic capability and obligation are performed and legitimized. Within Swedish and Finnish security discourse, both nations are constructed not merely as participants in Arctic security but as uniquely qualified to lead within it. Through discursive articulations of geographical position, historical experience, and military capability in Arctic

conditions, Sweden and Finland are positioned as holding a special responsibility towards the region, one that renders Arctic security almost inseparable from Nordic identity. The North thus becomes a site where responsibility is enacted, allowing both states to present themselves as capable militarily security actors.

The responsibility towards the Arctic is framed by both Stubb and Kristersson through a discourse of unique competence held exclusively by the Nordic countries. Stubb articulates Finland's role as a provider of Arctic security in terms of capacity and expertise: "[…] we have the biggest military force of Arctic capabilities in the alliance […] we have one million individuals, men and women, who had their military training in arctic conditions […] so I think we are strengthening actually, the alliance as we speak" (World Economic Forum 2026a). Kristersson similarly describes Sweden as "one of seven Arctic countries in NATO with a unique responsibility" (Regeringen 2026b). Here, the Arctic is constructed in a similar way to the nation, as an object in need of protection by a capable subject. Both countries construct themselves as indispensable contributors to Nordic security whose role as Arctic states is inseparable from the broader Nordic space. The Arctic is thereby discursively produced as a strategic security domain that enables Sweden and Finland to perform their position as capable security subjects within the North. This construction builds on a logic already mobilized in relation to Swedish and Finnish NATO accession, where the Nordics as "protectors of the High North" functioned both to align national identities with the alliance and to establish them as security providers (Rosengren et al. 2025, 765-767). Through the statements analysed here, however, this logic is taken further: the North and the Nordics are increasingly constructed as coextensive with the Arctic itself, making Arctic security a central dimension of both Swedish and Finnish security discourse.

Following Trump's statements regarding Greenland, the narrative has intensified taking on renewed importance as a way of showcasing Nordic military capability and regional expertise. As the US has expressed strategic interest in a Nordic country and the Arctic region, Swedish and Finnish Arctic competence is positioned as something valuable for US security itself. Both Stubb and Kristersson emphasize the unique knowledge of the Nordic military, framing them as indispensable. Both heads of state highlight forms of military knowledge and operational capacity that few other NATO members possess. For example, Stubb claimed that:

> The biggest security conglomerate that we have right now in the Arctic is Finland, Sweden, and Norway so we are very focused on that, just to give you an example, next week there is going to be an arctic training with 25 000 NATO soldiers, 5000 from the US, in northern Norway and in northern Finland [...]. (Munich security conference 2026a)

Within this context, the Nordics are positioned as key contributors through their ability to train and support US forces in Arctic conditions. The US is thus implicitly constructed as reliant on Nordic expertise in "the High North", repositioning Sweden and Finland from dependent on US protection to indispensable security contributors. In this sense, the discourse

works to stabilize the transatlantic relationship by rearticulating interdependence. By positioning themselves as necessary security providers in the Arctic, Sweden and Finland create a relational dependency between the Self and the US.

3.2.4 Feminist Analysis: Natural Protectors of the Arctic

The discursive construction of the Nordic Self as rational, capable, and unique, as demonstrated above, is deeply gendered and racialized. This is particularly evident in the emphasis on military strength and the ability to operate in extreme Arctic conditions. It reflects what Eichler (2019) describes as gendered militarism, where political legitimacy becomes tied to the display of masculine-coded traits such as strength, toughness, and rationality. References to the size of the military, the number of trained soldiers, and the ability to operate in harsh Arctic conditions function as markers of competence and authority. As the newest NATO members, Sweden and Finland emphasize Nordic military capability, discursively positioning themselves as unique contributors within the alliance, a construction through which legitimacy and relevance are produced. Furthermore, it can be argued as a way of performing masculinity by Stubb and Kristersson. As Hooper (1999) argues, political authority in international relations is closely connected to the performance of masculine traits, where leaders must demonstrate strength, endurance, and decisiveness in order to be recognized as legitimate both domestically and internationally. Claims about military capability, readiness for sacrifice, and the ability to operate in extreme Arctic conditions can therefore be interpreted as ways of performing masculinity to construct a certain security identity, rather than simply describing capabilities. In this sense, the Arctic becomes a test of credibility, where responsibility, masculinity, and alliance loyalty intersect, allowing Sweden and Finland to present themselves as strong, reliable, and fully committed Arctic security members of NATO.

Meanwhile, positioning Sweden and Finland as natural protectors of the Arctic can, from a postcolonial perspective, be understood as a manifestation of Nordic exceptionalism. In the material, both countries present their role in the region as based on unique capabilities and responsibilities. Kristersson states that Sweden carries a "unique responsibility" [17] in the Arctic as one of the Arctic states (Regeringen 2026b), while Stubb emphasizes that Finnish military personnel possess special expertise due to their training in Arctic conditions, implying a form of knowledge and competence that other NATO members do not share (World Economic Forum 2026a). Stubb tends to express a more explicitly essentialist relation to the north compared to Kristersson through claiming Finnish people as of the north: "We are a small and resilient nation far up in the north. We must keep both feet firmly on the ground but hold our heads high and gaze at the beautiful blue Finnish sky"[18] (Republikens President 2026b). Through such statements responsibility is naturalized as an expression of who Finland and Sweden are as Nordics. This essentialist understanding of Nordic competence, where Sweden and Finland appear as inherently qualified to take responsibility

[17] "unikt ansvar"
[18] "Vi är en liten och ihärdig nation långt uppe i norr. Vi måste stå med båda fötterna på jorden, men hålla huvudet högt, se den blåa vackra finländska himlen."

due to their nature as upbrought in the cold north, in addition to their claims of developed military capabilities. Such representations reinforce an image of the Nordic countries as both progressive and militarily capable, combining ideals of modernity and responsibility with the ability to exercise hard power.

However, it is important to note that the discourse of a Nordic Arctic responsibility largely ignores the Arctic as an already existing and inhabited social and political space. Instead, the region is framed primarily as a strategic security arena, through which Sweden and Finland can demonstrate their relevance within NATO and the broader international arena. The Arctic itself is often portrayed in international politics as an exceptional region characterized by cooperation despite geopolitical tensions, with institutions such as the Arctic Council frequently highlighted as examples of successful multilateral governance (Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017). Even so, presenting the region as a space requiring protection by capable Western states risks reproducing colonial discourses. As Huggan (2016) argues, depictions of the Arctic as empty, vulnerable, or in need of protection by powerful actors erase local agency and legitimize external intervention. In this sense, Swedish and Finnish claims to act as Arctic protectors can be understood as reproducing a colonial logic in which authority is granted to those who present themselves as modern, rational, and militarily capable, while the voices of Indigenous communities and local populations remain largely absent.

3.3 The EU

This third part of the analysis focuses on the European Union (the EU) as the third key space of identity articulation within Swedish and Finnish security identity. It examines how the EU is constructed within Finnish and Swedish security discourse and how it is interlinked with spatial, temporal, and ethical dimensions. The section explores how the EU is defined as a security community, how its boundaries are drawn in relation to external and internal Others, and how notions of responsibility are constructed within the space.

3.3.1 Space

In Swedish and Finnish security discourse, the EU increasingly functions as a rearticulated version of what was previously framed as “the West.” While references to a broader Western community, defined by shared values such as the rule of law, were central in legitimizing NATO accession (Rosengren et al. 2024, 736), recent discourse shifts toward positioning the EU as the primary space of belonging and security identity. This suggests a transformation in how the Self is constructed where the EU emerges as the central political and security community through which Swedish and Finnish security identities are articulated, replacing “the West”.

The EU is increasingly constructed not merely as an external institutional framework, but as a constitutive part of what Sweden and Finland are. Rather than positioning themselves simply as national actors within Europe, both Kristersson and Stubb formulate security through an EU-centred discourse in which national and European interests become closely intertwined. Stubb repeatedly frames Finnish interests in terms of what benefits Europe, aligning national

and European priorities rather than treating them as separate spheres (Republikens President 2026a: Republikens President 2026b). A similar logic appears in Swedish discourse in the aftermath of the Greenland crisis, where Kristersson framed the situation as an "EU question that affects many more countries than those currently being singled out" (Kristersson 2026), relocating the issue from a Nordic context to a European one and constructing Nordic and European security as fundamentally interlinked. Sweden and Finland are thereby discursively positioned not merely as national or Nordic actors, but as European ones.

In the Swedish case, EU belonging is frequently articulated through economic security and the maintenance of international order, operating on a similar logic as the national space but at a larger scale. As Kristersson argues: "We [the EU] are the largest trading block in the world, and we bring much needed stability and predictability to global trade. We must continue working for new trade and partnership agreements" (Government 2026). Swedish security is here linked to the maintenance of a stable rules-based international economic order, while the EU is positioned as the actor capable of upholding that stability. Importantly, the "we" in this formulation refers not to Sweden but to the EU, embedding Swedish interests within a broader European political and economic community. Spatially, this constructs the EU as a collective Self through which security and international responsibility are articulated. This EU-centred security identity is further reinforced in Kristersson's responses following the Greenland crisis. When asked whether the EU should adopt a more assertive position toward the US, a question that already presupposes an EU-centred security framework, Kristersson responds as a European actor rather than a purely Swedish one, arguing that they do not want to "set something in motion that would be bad for Europe,"[19] (SVT 2026c). Such an argument diffuses the distinction between Swedish and European security interests and reinforcing a shared European identity grounded in the upholding of the international rules-based order.

In Finnish discourse, EU identification is articulated less through economic stability and more through values and political belonging. This becomes visible in interviews where Finnish security is already assumed to be inseparable from European security. In one interview, Stubb is asked how Europeans can safeguard their sovereignty in the new world order, framed through what the interviewer describes as a "fundamental transformation of Finnish identity" from neutrality to becoming "one of the most passionate defenders of European sovereignty and of the EU." Stubb reinforces this framing by stressing that Finland is the only Nordic country that is "100%" an EU member, positioning Finland not merely as participating in European security but as embodying it (World Economic Forum 2026a). In contrast to the Swedish discourse, where the EU primarily functions as a guarantor of economic and geopolitical stability, the Finnish discourse constructs the EU more explicitly as a political community aligned with Finnish values. While the aim of this thesis is not to analyse media discourse as such, these exchanges are analytically significant as they reveal how an EU-centred security identity is actively normalized. The empirical examples illustrate how the EU increasingly functions as the framework through which Swedish and Finnish

[19] " […] inte dra igång något som skulle vara dåligt för Europa."

security interests are defined, threats are interpreted, and responsibilities to act are legitimized.

This spatial rearticulation simultaneously produces new relational boundaries between the European Self and external Others. The growing importance of the EU is closely connected to a discursive distancing from the US, as Europe and the US increasingly appear as separate political spaces with diverging values and strategic priorities, splitting the previously unified notion of "the West" into two distinct categories. When discussing the new world order, Stubb notes that: "there is nothing that unifies Europe more than pressure, and now that pressure is coming from both the East and the West [...] this means that European union enlargement has become strategic and existential rather than legal and juridical" (World Economic Forum 2026a). Here, "the West" does not refer to a shared Western identity but specifically to the US, marking a significant discursive shift in which the transatlantic community is no longer constructed as a unified space of belonging. By placing US and Russian pressure in the same formulation, the statement implicitly positions the US as an external threat rather than an ally, constructing it as an Other alongside the East. This logic is further reinforced in Kristersson's statement prior to the Munich Security Conference, where he argues that "the rules-based international order as we know it is under pressure and Europe and the EU needs to face this reality and act accordingly" (Government 2026). Europe is here constructed as the actor responsible for upholding international order, associating the European Self with rationality, cooperation, and stability, while the US is implied as a source of instability. This reflects broader Eurocentric imaginaries in which Europe is constructed as the principal guardian of liberal order and civilizational progress, reproducing colonial hierarchies that naturalize European authority over the definition and defence of the liberal rule-based world order (Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe 2023).

It is important to note, as established in the national territory section, that othering is not a binary construction but operates in degrees. The US is not positioned as an Other in the same way that Russia is, but as a diverging part of "the West", a former ally whose priorities are increasingly misaligned with European ones. This becomes clear when Stubb and Kristersson discuss Europe's ability to defend itself. Both reject hypothetical scenarios centred on the US becoming an enemy of the EU, returning instead to what they frame as the actual security situation, emphasizing the war in Ukraine, Russian aggression, and the brutality of Putin's violence (World Economic Forum 2026a; TV4 2026). The EU Self continues to be defined in relation to Russia as the primary threatening Other. Through such statements, clear spatial and relational boundaries are constructed between Self and Other, producing a layered security landscape in which Europe becomes the central space of protection, Russia the primary threatening Other, and the US a reminder of a fracturing Western order.

3.3.2 Time

The growing importance of the EU in Swedish and Finnish security identity is produced through a temporal discourse structured around uncertainty and transformation. Security is repeatedly articulated in relation to an unstable future in which both the reliability of the US

and the broader international order are called into question, while Russian aggression is constructed as a persistent and enduring threat at Europe's borders.

Future-oriented insecurity is reinforced through narratives of broader geopolitical transformation. Stubb frames the current transformation as one of systemic change:

> In the world of diplomacy, it is better to be a player than a pawn. It all comes down to understanding what the upheaval in the world is all about and what we can do about it. Change is not something we need to fear or run away from, the key is to be able to influence it[20]. (Republikens President 2026a)

Kristersson further emphasises the changing rule-based order stating that: "The rules-based international order as we know it is under pressure and Europe and the EU needs to face this reality and act accordingly." (Government 2026). Within this temporal framing, the international order is constructed as fundamentally unstable, with the EU implicitly positioned as an actor capable of shaping its own security and future. Security can no longer be taken for granted but must instead be actively produced.

This transformation is largely attributed to the growing uncertainty surrounding the US and the Trump administration. Stubb constructs the US as an actor in transition, arguing that "The US is undergoing a transformation,"[21] particularly in its approach to allies and foreign policy (Republikens President 2026a). This is further elaborated in an interview with SVT, where Stubb states that: "We see a US foreign policy that is not as values-based as ours, not as interests-based as ours, nor as power-based as ours"[22] (SVT 2026e). The repeated use of "no longer" constructs a temporal narrative of regression, positioning the US as deviating from the institutional and normative order it previously helped sustain. In contrast, the EU Self is constructed as stable, continuous, and value-driven. By emphasizing diverging values and priorities, the discourse positions the US as an actor that no longer fully shares the political logic or strategic vision that defines the EU, further consolidating an EU-centred security identity as the framework through which Swedish and Finnish security is articulated.

In contrast, Kristersson does not articulate the US through the same explicit discourse of decline or deterioration. Rather than explicitly framing the US as departing from shared values, Swedish discourse tends to frame tensions within the transatlantic relationship more cautiously, redirecting attention toward the need for European autonomy. When asked about values, Kristersson advances a similar argument to Stubb, emphasizing that Sweden and the EU must uphold and defend their own values, arguing that the EU needs a stronger and more independent defence industry capable of matching that of the US (SVT 2026a: SVT 2026c). This forward-looking orientation reflects what Hansen (2005) describes as a future-oriented

[20] "I diplomatins värld är det bättre att vara en spelare än en spelpjäs. Allt bottnar i att vi förstår vad omvälvningen i världen handlar om och vad vi kan göra åt den. Förändring är inget vi behöver vara rädda för eller fly från det gäller att kunna påverka den."
[21] "Förenta staterna håller på att förvandlas."
[22] "Vi ser en amerikansk utrikespolitik som inte är lika värdebaserad som vår, inte heller lika intressebaserad som vår, inte heller lika maktbaserad som vår."

temporality, in which anticipated insecurity justifies present action. The possibility that Europe may no longer be able to rely fully on American leadership thereby becomes a rationale for increased militarization, defence spending, and European strategic autonomy.

The future functions here as a political resource where uncertainty about what may happen legitimizes security investments and the strengthening of European cooperation in the present. While both Stubb and Kristersson avoid explicitly invoking fear, masculine-coded traits such as preparedness and capability are consistently emphasized as the appropriate response to uncertainty. Yet as Ahmed (2004, 71) notes, "it is the fear of anarchy that leads subjects to consent to being governed," suggesting that the avoidance of fear as explicit rhetoric does not eliminate its structuring role. In this sense, EU identification can be understood as shaped by a similar logic where collective European belonging emerges as a way of securing stability in the face of uncertainty from both east and west.

While there is an active distancing from the US, Russian aggression continues to be framed as both the present and enduring primary threat to European security. Kristersson links Russia's war in Ukraine directly to the future stability of Europe, warning that the EU must "stay focused on Russia's war against Ukraine and Russia's behaviour in Europe. Countries around the world are watching, carefully noting what Russia might get away with" (Government 2026). Similarly, Stubb argues that even after the war in Ukraine ends, "the threat is not going to reduce for the rest of Europe [...] because the inherent DNA of Russia and Putin is imperialism and expansion" (World Economic Forum 2026a). Through such formulations, Russia is constructed as a permanently threatening Other whose expansionist nature extends beyond the present conflict, making European unity and militarization appear as necessary.

Russia is thus constructed as a permanently threatening Other, inherently imperialistic and expansionist, while Europe is discursively produced as the legitimate guardian of a rules-based international order committed to democratic values. Following Hansen (2006), security identity is produced through such distinctions, where threats are necessary for defining who must be protected and by whom. Ahmed further argues that fear functions as a productive political force that shapes collective identities in moments of perceived crisis, not merely responding to threats but actively contributing to the formation of a "we" by directing subjects toward particular forms of belonging and protection (2004, 71). Within this framework, identification with the EU can be understood as an attempt to anchor security within a broader collective, thereby producing a sense of stability and protection in an uncertain international environment.

Together, these dual constructions, an unreliable transatlantic partner, and an enduring external military threat, displace "the West" as a coherent security referent and position the EU as the primary framework through which Swedish and Finnish security identities are articulated. Responsibility for maintaining order is thereby increasingly attributed not to "the West", but to Europe itself.

3.3.3 Responsibility

The construction of the EU as the primary security Self further redefines responsibility for protection. With Russa positioned as a persistent threat and the US as an unreliable partner, future security can no longer be assumed, legitimizing the need for European military capacity in the present. Responsibility thus emerges not merely as a reaction to immediate threats but through the anticipation of insecurity itself. Through such spatial and temporal constructions, a responsibility to strengthen European security and sovereignty is produced, enabling a discourse in which collective defence, and increased European capability are framed as necessary obligations.

Both Swedish and Finnish security discourse increasingly emphasize Europe's own capacity building. As Kristersson argues, “the European defence industry, economy, and growth are extremely important for achieving greater independence from other countries” (SVT Agenda 2026). Security responsibility is here articulated through independence, preparedness, and the capacity to act, linking European security to the ability to sustain itself economically, politically, and militarily. This logic is further developed in Stubb's response to the question of whether Europe can defend itself:

> We have conscription. 1 million have done it. We can mobilize 280,000 soldiers within weeks [...] we have long range missiles, land, sea, and air," yet he simultaneously acknowledges a structural limit: "do they fly without America? No they don't. But do we trust that they will continue to fly because it's in the interest of America to do so? Yes (World Economic Forum 2026a).

European responsibility is here performed through a display of capability while ultimate dependency on the US is not abandoned but rationalized as mutual interest. As Hansen (2006) argues, responsibility within security discourse grants authority to take measures in order to protect the political community. Within this framework, the capacity to defend Europe, safeguard sovereignty, and preserve order is repeatedly framed as a European duty, associating responsibility with rationality and decisive action.

3.3.4 Feminist Analysis: Newly Masculinized European Security

The emphasis on EU military capability and strategic autonomy is in itself a gendered construction of security. By replacing the earlier identification with “the West” with a clearly defined European Self, the discourse restabilizes a sense of belonging while simultaneously legitimizing increased European responsibility for security through militarization. From a feminist perspective, this construction of responsibility reflects what Young (2003) describes as a gendered logic of protection, in which political authority is grounded in the role of protector against dangerous Others. Here, responsibility does not merely justify defence capabilities; it authorizes a militarized security discourse in which protection of the European Self becomes the basis of political legitimacy. In this articulation, security is structured through assumptions about who can provide protection and who is positioned as in need of it. Rather than being neutral, this discourse builds on gendered logics that associate authority, strength, and responsibility with a masculinized position, while casting vulnerability as something to be protected. As Enloe argues, such understandings are not incidental but

constitutive of militarization itself (2023, 140). The emphasis on responsibility thus not only legitimizes defence policy but also reproduces a gendered hierarchy in which political authority is tied to the capacity to protect with military force.

Just as Sweden and Finland faced the feminizing implications of seeking military protection through NATO membership, potentially positioning themselves as dependent recipients within the alliance's protection myth (Rosengren et al. 2025), the EU as a collective actor confronts a parallel gender ambivalence. However, the instability produced by the Greenland crisis creates an opportunity for Europe to rearticulate this vulnerability into an assertion of autonomous masculine agency. Rather than remaining symbolically feminized as dependent on US protection, Sweden and Finland's integration into a Europeanized security discourse allows them to reposition themselves as active contributors to a collectively masculine European security order. Drawing on Costigliola's (1997) analysis of gendered alliance politics, in which the US was constructed by Western policymakers as the dominant masculine protector of European security, the contemporary discourse analysed here increasingly frames this protector figure as unreliable and withdrawing. When the dominant protector withdraws or becomes unreliable, the gendered hierarchy that structured the alliance is destabilized and new masculine subject positions become available. Sweden and Finland are thereby recast not as feminized dependents but central contributors to a newly masculinized European security order. The risk of feminization is thus, not avoided but redirected where the construction of European strategic autonomy becomes the discursive space trough which Sweden and Finland can perform a newly assertive and masculinized security identity.

3.4 NATO

The fourth and final part of the analysis turns to NATO as a central site through which the implications of the changing security identities of Sweden and Finland are articulated. It examines how the identity constructions developed across the preceding sections: The national territory, the Nordic region, and the EU, shape how NATO is understood and represented. It explores how constructions of space, time, and responsibility are reproduced within the alliance.

3.4.1 Space

The security discourse of both Stubb and Kristersson centres on the need for a more independent and self-reliant Europe, alongside a framing of the Arctic as an important space for demonstrating capability amid increasing uncertainty surrounding US partnership. At the same time, NATO and the US remains positioned as the ultimate security guarantor. This produces a central paradox within the discourse. The US is increasingly constructed as deviating from shared European values and the rules-based international order it previously helped uphold, yet NATO, an alliance fundamentally dependent on the US, continues to be constructed as the primary defender of that very order.

Rather than resolving this contradiction, Swedish and Finnish leaders manage it through a re-stabilizing discourse that reaffirms NATO as coherent, reliable, and necessary. This is particularly visible in how the transatlantic relationship is discursively re-secured. Stubb repeatedly articulates this position through formulations such as calling himself "pro-European, pro-American and therefore by default pro-transatlantic" (World Economic Forum 2026a). This articulation effectively undermines the previously constructed divergence between the US and the EU, where Stubb had positioned US foreign policy as no longer aligned with European and Finnish values. By simultaneously identifying as pro-European, pro-American, and pro-transatlantic, Stubb contradicts the discourse of a split within the West, attempting to resecure a unified transatlantic Self through NATO. This recentring of NATO is further reinforced when asked who could resolve the Greenland crisis following failed peace efforts, to which Stubb answers simply "Oh, Mark Rutte" (World Economic Forum 2026a). By invoking NATOs secretary general as the central figure capable of managing the tensions between the US, the EU and NATO, Stubb recentres NATO as the ultimate space for security and diplomacy.

A parallel re-stabilizing move is visible in Swedish security discourse. Kristersson repeatedly refers to NATO as a space of collective strength and cooperation, reasserting the transatlantic alliance. For instance, when asked about the alliance and the choice to join, he describes it as important as it provided Sweden with 31 allies (SVT 2026d: Regeringen 2026b). By emphasizing the extension of allies, Kristersson shifts attention away from potential tensions within the alliance, framing membership as an expansion of collective security capacity and reinforces NATO as a source of security, unity, and collective protection. This framing pre-empts any reading of NATO as a fragile or divided structure. NATO is thus reinforced as a stabilizing and unified space central to Swedish security identity.

NATO is repeatedly constructed as a stabilising space of collective strength and security; a further spatial configuration begins to emerge in the form of a "European NATO" and a "NATO 3.0". Both Stubb and Kristersson articulate variations of this concept, focused primarily on European and Baltic cooperation and decentring the role of the US (SVT 2026a: Regeringen 2026a: World Economic Forum 2026a). Kristersson for example frames the need to "build a European NATO"[23] as a response to citizen concerns regarding US reliability (SVT 2026a). When defining the alliance itself, he leaves out any mention of the US entirely: "NATO has given us 31 allies [...] To me, NATO means Norway, Finland, Denmark, the Baltic countries, and Canada"[24] thereby broadening the understanding of NATO beyond a US-centric framework. (Regeringen 2026b). A "European NATO" is thus used to differentiate between "the old" NATO and "the new one", in which Europe constitutes its core. Rather than signalling a break from the alliance, it redefines its internal centre of gravity, not signalling a break from NATO but redefining its internal centre of gravity,

[23] "Bygga ett europeiskt Nato"
[24] "Nato har gett oss 31 allierade [...] Nato är för mig Norge, Finland, Danmark, de baltiska länderna och Kanada."

allowing for a partial distancing from US leadership without fully challenging NATO as the primary framework of security.

Yet this attempt to decentre the US sits in direct tension with its simultaneous construction as indispensable. It is made explicit in Kristersson's reaffirmation of the transatlantic relationship:

> This does not at all mean we should abandon the transatlantic relation. The US is the EU's largest trading partner, the ultimate guarantor of NATO's Article 5, and our historic and people-to-people ties are deep. [...] Sweden, as the newest member of NATO, is keenly aware of the importance of the US to security in our part of the world. (Government 2026)

Here, the US is not only reintegrated into the security architecture but explicitly positioned as the ultimate guarantor of NATO's collective defence through Article 5. Stubb further reinforces this positioning of the US as he emphasis NATO as the institutional embodiment of unity: "By definition, NATO is an alliance that unites North America and Europe. Together, we are the world's strongest defence alliance"[25] (Republikens President 2026a). Here, NATO is constructed not only as a military alliance, but as the natural and enduring space through which transatlantic cooperation is organized. Even as Europe is encouraged to become more capable and autonomous, this is framed as strengthening NATO and US cooperation rather than moving beyond it.

When NATO is simultaneously defined as the primary security guarantor, this discursive attempt to separate Europe from the US becomes only partially sustained. Instead, the transatlantic dimension re-emerges as the dominant framework for security within NATO discourse, reintroducing the US as a central to Swedish and Finnish security identity.

3.4.2 Time

In addition to spatial constructions of NATO, Swedish and Finnish security discourse mobilises temporal references to a historical relationship with the US, mobilizing these in different ways to construct trust and security.

Within Finnish security discourse, Stubb reinforces the transatlantic relationship in material terms, expressing explicit trust in the US and its nuclear umbrella. He states that he has "100% confidence"[26] in it and that there are "no indications"[27] of its weakening (SVT 2026e). This stabilizes a hierarchy of security in which European autonomy remains structurally dependent on American capabilities, particularly its nuclear umbrella. Through such framing, security is implicitly tied to material capacity: the possession of the largest military force, the strongest economy, and above all nuclear weapons, which function as the ultimate guarantee of deterrence. Together, these formulations disrupt the earlier attempt to construct a

[25] "Nato per definition är en allians som förenar Nordamerika och Europa. Tillsammans är vi världens starkaste försvarsallians."
[26] "100% förtroende"
[27] "inga indikationer"

“European NATO” or a post-transatlantic security order. Instead, they reassert NATO as a fundamentally transatlantic structure in which the US remains indispensable.

This temporal anchoring in deep historical ties extends to how Finland frames its NATO accession. When Stubb discusses Finland's path to membership, he emphasizes continuity: Finland had “basically made [itself] NATO compatible, ever since the beginning of the 1990s” (Munich security conference 2026a). Where NATO membership might elsewhere be narrated as a decisive break or a response to immediate threat, Stubb constructs it as the natural endpoint of decades of deliberate preparation. Finland's accession is thus presented as earned rather than reactive, rooted in long-term investments in military capacity rather than crisis-driven adaptation.

In contrast, Kristersson mobilizes a distinctly future-oriented temporality. Hansen (2006) argues that security identity is produced through the articulation of time, where the future becomes a site of anticipated threat that structures present action. Within this framing, Sweden’s responsibility is not grounded in past experiences, but in the anticipation of future insecurity. At the same time, this future-oriented logic constructs Sweden as an adaptive and innovative security actor. By emphasizing rapid increases in defence spending and active agenda-setting within NATO, Sweden positions itself as capable of responding to changing security conditions and thereby of securing legitimacy within the alliance. History, when it appears at all, functions not as a source of identity continuity but as a rhetorical device to delegitimize resistance. In a press briefing before the National Security Council (2026), Kristersson addresses critics of NATO membership directly:

> Those who criticize our decision to join NATO should take a good look in the mirror and ask themselves if things were better back when we only cooperated with the US and no other NATO countries. At first, it was done in total secrecy so as not to compromise our neutrality, the Swedish people didn’t even know about it, and later more openly, but still only with the US.[28] *(*Regeringen 2026b)

Here, Kristersson constructs the past as one of secrets framed by an asymmetric relationship with the US that the Swedish public was deliberately kept ignorant from. The neutrality policy is reframed as a fiction maintained through secrecy. This statement constructs the past as already compromised, and in doing so Kristersson renders nostalgia an illegitimate political position. Those who invoke the former era are thus implicitly asked to defend a past built on secrecy and dependence. History, in this framing, does not anchor Swedish identity, it discredits the alternative.

Together, these divergent temporal logics produce a coherent but internally differentiated NATO identity for Sweden and Finland. Finland's narrative of decades-long preparation constructs NATO membership as earned and historically grounded, stabilizing Finnish security identity through continuity. Sweden's future-oriented temporality, by contrast,

[28] “Dem som kritiserar att vi gick med i NATO ska kolla sig i spegeln och fråga om det var bättre förr när vi endast samarbetade med USA och inga andra Natoländer. Först i total hemlighet för att inte förstöra neutraliteten, svenska folket visste inte ens om det, därefter mer öppet men endast med USA.”

constructs membership as adaptive and forward-looking, while using history not as a source of identity but as a means of foreclosing dissent.

3.4.3 Responsibility

Responsibility is articulated in Swedish and Finnish security discourse through NATO capability, where both states construct their security identities by demonstrating their capacity to contribute to the alliance. In this framing, responsibility is something that must be continuously proven through material strength, preparedness, and military capability.

Stubb articulates military capability as responsibility through his description of Finland as "hopefully security providers minted of security consumer" (Munich security conference 2026a), thereby positioning the state as an active contributor to collective defence rather than a dependent recipient of protection. In doing so, he simultaneously acknowledges Finland's historical reliance on external security guarantees while distancing the current security identity from that past dependency. Responsibility thus becomes synonymous with the ability to deter which is grounded in material terms, references to Finland having "one of the largest militaries in NATO" and "the strongest Arctic force within the alliance" (Munich security conference 2026a) serve as evidence of credibility, making military capability the currency through which responsibility is claimed and recognized within the alliance.

A similar logic of capability-based responsibility is present in the Swedish discourse. As Kristersson emphasizes: "Sweden has tripled our defence spending during the last five years, planning to reach NATO's Defence Spending target of 3,5% five years ahead of NATO's schedule" (Government 2026), while also highlighting that Sweden has been "[...] a driving force behind a new and much higher NATO goal"[29] (Regeringen 2026a). Here, responsibility is framed as both a political and economic commitment, where increased military spending is presented as necessary to uphold Sweden's role within NATO.

Moreover, NATO membership is itself constructed as the responsible position. Kristersson's insistence on the unquestionable reliability of Article 5 illustrates this discourse: "There is absolutely no doubt that the ultimate deterrent, Article 5, stands firm and unwavering […]. On the contrary, it would be dangerous to reason in any other terms" (TV4 2026)[30]. By framing doubt itself as dangerous, Kristersson actively forecloses the possibility of questioning NATO's credibility and constructs scepticism towards the alliance as an irresponsible act. This ethical logic can be seen again when Kristersson is asked about public anxiety towards US reliability, where he redirects toward Sweden's embeddedness in the alliance, stating that Sweden acts partly: "[...] through NATO member states […] our part of the world is embedded in close NATO cooperation, where Sweden is a very strong and respected member"[31] and emphasizing trust in the alliance and Article 5 (SVT 2026a).

[29] " [...] drivande för ett nytt och mycket högre Nato-mål."
[30] "Det råder ingen som helst tvekan om att den yttersta avskräckningen, artikel 5, står stadigt och fast […]. Tvärtom vore det farligt att resonera i andra termer."
[31] "[…] genom Natoländerna […] vår del av världen är inbäddad i ett tätt Nato-samarbete där Sverige är väldigt stark och respekterad."

Insecurity is here not resolved by addressing its source but by reaffirming the subject's position within the alliance. In this way, the alliance is not only presented as stable, but is continuously reaffirmed through discourse, contributing to the stabilization and naturalization of NATO as the ultimate guarantor of security. At the same time, those who question or cast doubt on NATO's reliability are implicitly othered, as their scepticism is constructed as irresponsible or even threatening, thereby reinforcing the boundaries of the legitimate security discourse. Responsibility and NATO membership becomes inseparable in Swedish security identity. To be a responsible security actor is to be a committed NATO member, and to be a committed NATO member is to perform militarized responsibility.

Kristersson further constructs Swedish responsibility within NATO through the emerging space of a "European NATO", stating: "Secondly, we have quickly become an established and respected force within NATO. Our presence in Latvia, Poland, and Finland is highly valued, and Sweden plays a key role in building a stronger European NATO."[32] (Regeringen 2026a). By positioning Sweden as a key contributor to a stronger European NATO, responsibility is expanded. Sweden is here positioned as an active contributor to a new definition of the alliance. In Finnish security discourse Stubb's description of "NATO 3.0" further captures this expansion of responsibility: "This is pretty much Nato 3.0 [...] and remember that we dubbed the border of the alliance of Nato with Finland joining and then with Sweden joining, so I think we are creating a new Nato where Europe takes more responsibility." (World Economic Forum 2026a). The definition of a "European NATO" thus functions responsibility-expanding, in which Europe's growing centrality within the alliance produces a corresponding obligation for Sweden and Finland to lead and contribute. As the alliance evolves, so too does the scope of Swedish and Finnish obligation within it.

Taken together, these articulations suggest that the transatlantic relationship is discursively constructed as undergoing reconfiguration. Within this framing, the US is represented as remaining indispensable, yet no longer as the unambiguous anchor of the NATO Self. Instead, these formulations produce a more differentiated and internally structured NATO Self, in which Europe, and by extension Sweden and Finland, is discursively positioned as assuming increasing responsibility as security actors while ultimately relaying on the US as a guarantor of security.

3.4.4 Feminist Analysis: Deflecting Feminization

From a feminist perspective, this security discourse reproduces a militarized logic in which political legitimacy is tied to the capacity to provide protection. As Enloe (2023) argues, militarization operates by embedding gendered assumptions into political practice, naturalizing the association between authority, strength, and control. This can be further understood through Young's (2003) concept of the logic of masculinist protection, in which the legitimacy of the protector is contingent on the existence of a threat, and on the willingness of those protected to trust and defer to the one who protects. Within this

[32] "För det andra har vi snabbt blivit en självklar och respekterad kraft i Nato. Vår närvaro i Lettland, Polen och Finland är mycket uppskattad och Sverige är en central aktör i att bygga ett starkare europeiskt Nato."

framework, Sweden and Finland's embeddedness in NATO is not merely a security arrangement but a performance of belonging, membership is continuously earned through the demonstration of military capability rather than simply attributed which is further performed through "NATO 3.0". Crucially, this logic positions Sweden and Finland simultaneously as protected states dependent on Article 5 and alliance solidarity, while also as protectors in their own right, capable of contributing to collective defence. The tension between these two positions is managed discursively by emphasizing capability and commitment, deflecting the feminizing implications of dependence through the performance of militarized masculinity.

The language through which capability is articulated further reflects this gendered understanding of security. Drawing on Cohn (1987), the emphasis on military strength, alliance loyalty, and Article 5 as the ultimate guarantee of security reflects a masculine conception of protection in which safety is produced through dominance and deterrence rather than diplomacy or de-escalation. Such language distances security discourse from its human stakes, rendering questions of fear, and uncertainty as discursively illegitimate, incompatible with the rationalized, controlled masculinity that political authority requires. Autonomy is thus articulated within, rather than outside of, the alliance: to be strong is to belong, and to belong is to protect.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

This thesis has examined how Swedish and Finnish security identities have been constructed through (gendered) security discourse in response to the Greenland crisis. Through the four discursive spaces of the national territory, the Nordics, the EU, and NATO, and across the dimensions of space, time, and responsibility, the analysis traced how both states have partly renegotiated their security identities, differentiating themselves from the US while simultaneously working to restabilize NATO as the ultimate security guarantor. This concluding chapter summarizes the main findings, reflects on the silences reproduced within the discourse, and identifies directions for future research.

4.1 Main Findings

At the level of the nation, the analysis reveals that Swedish and Finnish security discourses are structured through gendered logics that reproduce masculine understandings of protection, rationality, and legitimacy. Both discourses construct Russia as a threatening and illegitimate masculine Other, while positioning the national Self through masculine-coded attributes such as preparedness, control, and military capability. Notably, the US, despite its sovereignty-violating behaviour in the Greenland case, is not subjected to the same discursive othering, revealing that the attribution of illegitimate masculinity is largely shaped by geopolitical alignment. The two cases exhibit distinct temporal logics where Finnish masculine identity is formulated as inherited and historically grounded, requiring little discursive reaffirmation, while Swedish masculinity is formulated as future-oriented and performative, continuously reconstructed through anticipatory discourse. This is further reinforced through the gendered mobilization of emotions, where fear is framed as irrational while preparedness and resolve are constructed as rational responses, a contradictory logic identified by Åse, Wendt, and Jansson (2024) in their analysis of the Swedish NATO debate. The past of neutrality is correspondingly framed as weak, naïve, and irresponsible, consistent with Agius's (2024) argument that neutrality has historically been constructed through gendered discourse that associates it with femininity and political immaturity. In both cases, the capacity to manage threat without expressing fear or vulnerability emerges as a central marker of legitimate security identity, where feminization functions as the implicit boundary of political authority, consistent with Enloe's (2023) argument that leaders perceived as naive or weak are symbolically feminized and thereby delegitimized.

Secondly, through the Nordic space, both states construct a collective identity anchored in shared values, friendship, and a common responsibility toward the Arctic, positioning themselves as uniquely qualified protectors of the High North, building on the protective logic already identified by Rosengren et al. (2025) during NATO accession. This construction is deeply gendered, as claims to Arctic capability and military endurance function as performances of masculinity through which Sweden and Finland seek legitimacy and recognition as credible NATO members. At the same time, the framing of the Arctic as a space requiring protection by capable Nordic states risks reproducing colonial logics that

erase Indigenous agency and naturalize Western authority over the region, drawing on the broader Eurocentric imaginaries identified by Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe (2023).

The third section of the analysis emphasized the EU emerging as “the new West”, replacing the broader transatlantic framework and splitting “the West” into two diverging spaces, with Europe increasingly constructed as the responsible actor capable of upholding the liberal international order. This shift from dependence on American protection toward European self-reliance is argued as a transition from a feminized position of dependency to a masculinized one of autonomous agency, a dynamic that resonates with Costigliola's (1997) analysis of how European states have historically been constructed as feminized partners within the transatlantic alliance.

Lastly, within the space of NATO, the analysis identifies a central paradox in which the US is increasingly constructed as deviating from shared values yet continues to be positioned as the ultimate security guarantor. The Greenland crisis functions as a before and after within NATO discourse, marking the moment at which the alliance's internal hierarchy becomes visible and challenged, producing a new discursive space in which Sweden and Finland claim a more active and autonomous role through the EU. Yet this claim to autonomy remains structured through a masculinist logic of protection in line with Young's (2003) framework where legitimacy is not redefined but redistributed. Sweden and Finland reposition themselves from dependent recipients of security to capable providers of it, deflecting the feminizing implications of dependence through the continuous performance of military capability and alliance commitment. This dynamic extends the remasculinization logic identified by Åse, Wendt, and Jansson (2024) during the NATO accession debate, suggesting it has not concluded but continues to operate in the post-accession period.

The analysis identified a core difference between Swedish and Finnish security discourse where Finland is positioned as a more authoritative and as such, a masculine protector over Sweden. Finland consistently occupies the position of the older, more experienced, and more directly threatened security actor, a big brother dynamic already identified during NATO accession that has been reinforced rather than dissolved by the Greenland crisis. Sweden, by contrast, performs a more explicitly reconstructed security identity, one that is still actively working to establish itself as a credible and capable NATO member. This asymmetry is most visible in Stubb's statement that Finland will protect Sweden, which positions Finland as the regional security provider and Sweden as comparatively dependent, a relational dynamic that reproduces the gendered hierarchies of protection described by Young (2003), even within the Nordic Self.

4.2 Silences

The analysis additionally reveals significant silences within Swedish and Finnish security discourse. Most notably, the relative absence of references to "women and children" as objects of protection. Historically, such figures have played a central role in legitimizing militarization by grounding security in the protection of vulnerable bodies (Enloe 2014). In

the Finnish case, equality is partially incorporated through Stubb's references to "men and women" undergoing military training, gesturing toward a discourse of shared responsibility rather than gendered vulnerability. In the Swedish case, however, this category is absent altogether, with Kristersson making no equivalent references. Alongside this, a shift can be observed from protection to defence. Instead of defining who is being protected, the discourse increasingly emphasizes what must be defended, such as international order, free trade, and societal values. Where gender appears, it does so not as a marker of vulnerability but as a component of Nordic exceptionalism, incorporated into the values that characterize the Nordic Self. From a feminist perspective, this reconfiguration is significant as legitimacy is produced not through the protection of vulnerable bodies but through reference to abstract and universalized entities framed as requiring defence. Militarization is thus justified through responsibility and action rather than care or protection, reproducing a masculinized understanding of security within a discourse that nonetheless presents itself as progressive and gender equal.

A related silence concerns the absence of human security from the discourse. Militarization is naturalized to the point where security and military capability become synonymous, leaving no discursive space for alternative understandings of what security might mean. In the discussions of Arctic security following the Greenland crisis, both Stubb and Kristersson frame the region exclusively through military knowledge, capability, and hard power. When individuals do appear in the discourse, it is exclusively in terms of sacrifice and military contribution to the state, distancing the discourse from the human consequences of militarization, similarly to the dehumanizing logic Cohn (1987) identifies among defence intellectuals in the US during the 1980s. Militarization has in this sense moved beyond depoliticization where it has become so thoroughly naturalized that no alternative is considered, rendering the equation of security with military strength not a political choice but an apparent given. As Åse and Wendt (2021) demonstrate in their analysis of Swedish Cold War heritage, such gendered assumptions about protection and male authority make it difficult to imagine security beyond the nation-state and military power, a logic that appears equally operative in the post-Greenland crisis discourse examined here.

4.3 Future Research

This study encourages several directions for future research. Since this thesis is situated within a relatively limited timeframe closely connected to the Greenland crisis, further research would benefit from examining how these discourses develop over time as Arctic security politics continue to evolve. In particular, the future of Arctic security from a feminist perspective remains an important area of inquiry, particularly as this thesis has shown that both Sweden and Finland construct the Arctic as an uninhabited masculine space, a strategic arena defined by military capability, hard power, and the performance of masculine protection, in which the people who actually live in the region are entirely absent. As Sweden and Finland consolidate their roles as self-appointed protectors of the High North, and as the Arctic shifts from a historically exceptional space of cooperation toward an increasingly militarized one, the gendered and colonial dimensions of this process warrant closer

examination. While feminist frameworks have begun to make inroads into Arctic research, the field has historically been characterized by a male bias, (Vladimirova & Habeck 2018) leaving critical engagement with questions of gender, militarization, and belonging in Arctic security politics comparatively overlooked. The thesis therefore calls for continued feminist and postcolonial research that critically examines whose security is prioritized in Arctic politics, who is excluded from these constructions, and how militarized understandings of the region shape future security imaginaries in the High North.

Moreover, as this thesis has focused exclusively on official governmental discourse, a natural direction for future research would be to examine the resistant and alternative discourses. Official security discourse often functions to depoliticize and naturalize particular understandings of security, identity, militarization, and belonging, presenting them as necessary or self-evident. Future studies could therefore investigate what forms of resistance or counter-discourses persist outside these dominant articulations, for example within civil society, feminist movements, Indigenous activism, opposition parties, or peace organizations. Such research could explore how these actors challenge dominant security hierarchies, militarized understandings of protection, and gendered constructions of political authority, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of how security identities are contested rather than simply reproduced.

This thesis has shown indications of an increasing discursive distancing from the US alongside a growing emphasis on European responsibility for security and defence. An important question for future research would therefore be how this development unfolds over time, whether the construction of a "European NATO" or "NATO 3.0" moves beyond discourse and reshapes the actual structure and dynamics of the alliance, and whether the distancing from the US deepens or is pulled back as geopolitical conditions continue to shift.

Such developments raise broader questions concerning militarization, strategic autonomy, and nuclear deterrence within Europe. Future research could gain from exploring how increasing discussions regarding European nuclear deterrence and expanded EU defence cooperation may reshape Swedish and Finnish security identities and further transform the relationship with and between, NATO, the EU, and the US.

5 Bibliography

Agius, C. (2024). "Weak, immoral, naïve: Gendered representations of neutrality and the emotional politics of peace and security". *Cooperation and Conflict* 59(2): 266–289.

Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Arctic Council. (n.d.a). *About states: Finland.* https://arctic-council.org/about/states/finland/ [Accessed 20 February].

Arctic Council. (n.d.b.*). About states: Sweden*. https://arctic-council.org/about/states/sweden/ [Accessed 20 February].

Arctic Council. (n.d.c). *About the Arctic Council.* https://arctic-council.org/about/ [Accessed 20 February].

Aunesluoma, J. & Rainio-Niemi, J. (2016). "Neutrality as Identity?". *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18(4):51–78.

Bremberg, N. (2024). "Sverige, Nato och den transatlantiska säkerhetsgemenskapen", i Hagström, L. (red.) *Är Sverige säkert nu? Perspektiv på svensk säkerhetspolitik och Nato.* Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag:61–82.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods.* 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

CNN (2026a). *Trump says military force not ruled out in discussions about Greenland.* Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2026/01/21/politics/military-force-us-greenland-trump [Accessed: 18 May 2026]

CNN (2026b). *US will take Greenland "the hard way" if it can't do it "the easy way," Trump says*. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2026/01/10/politics/us-will-take-greenland-the-hard-way-if-it-cant-do-it-the-easy-way-trump-says [Accessed: 18 May 2026]

Cockburn, C. (2010). "Gender relations as causal in militarization and war". *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12(2):139–57. DOI:10.1080/14616741003665169.

Cohn, C. (1987). "Sex and Death in the Rational World of 31 Defence Intellectuals". *Signs* 12(4):687–718.

Costigliola, Frank (1997). "The Nuclear Family: Tropes of Gender and Pathology in the Western Alliance". *Diplomatic History* 21(2):163–183.

Dodds, K., Woon, C.Y. & Xu, L. (2022). "Critical geopolitics". In: Lindroth, M., Sinevaara-Niskanen, H. & Tennberg, M. (eds.) *Critical Studies of the Arctic: Unravelling the North.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan: 77–98.

Eichler, M. (2019). "Gendered militarism". In: Sjoberg, L. (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security.* London: Routledge:160–170.

Enloe, C., H. (2014). *Bananas, beaches and bases: making feminist sense of international politics.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Enloe, C. (2004). "Gender' Is Not Enough: The Need for a Feminist Consciousness". *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 80*(1): 95–97.

Enloe, C. (2023). "Militarization starts during peacetime" in *Twelve feminist lessons of War*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Exnor-Pirot. H., and Murray R., W., (2017). "Regional order in the Arctic. Negotiated Exceptionalism". *Politic* 20(3): 47–64.

Forsberg, T. (2023). "Finland and Sweden's road to NATO". *Current History* 122(842):89–94.

Government (2026). Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson official statement. Available at:https://www.government.se/statements/2026/02/statement-by-prime-minister-ulf-kristersson/ [Accessed 17 February].

Groglopo, A. and Suárez-Krabbe, J. (Eds.) (2023). *Coloniality and decolonisation in the Nordic region*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hagström, L. (2024). "Sveriges känslomässiga väg mot Nato". In: Hagström, L. (red.) *Är Sverige säkert nu?Perspektiv på Nato och svensk säkerhetspolitik.* Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag:39–60.

Hansen, L. (2001). "An introduction to gender and International Relations in a Nordic context". *Cooperation and Conflict* 26(2):147–151.

Hansen, L. (2006). *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Hjertström, E. and Hagström, L. (2025). "Changing identity to remain oneself: ontological security and the Swedish decision on joining NATO", *Journal of International Relations and Development* 28:29–54.

Hooper, C. (1999). "Masculinities, IR and the 'Gender Variable': A Cost-Benefit Analysis for (Sympathetic) Gender Skeptics". *International Studies* 25:475-491.

Huggan, G. (2016). "Introduction: Unscrambling the Arctic". In: Huggan, G. & Jensen, L. (eds.). *Postcolonial Perspectives on the European High North*. Palgrave Macmillan:1-30.

Joachim, J., Kronsell, A. and Dalmer, N. (2025). "Introduction: mapping the gendered dimensions of global (in)securities in the 21st century". In: Joachim, J., Kronsell, A. and Dalmer, N. (eds.) *Handbook on Gender and Security*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing: 1–10.

Jonter, T. & Rosengren, E. (2024). "Advocating Nuclear Disarmament as NATO Members—Lessons from the Past and Possible Routes Ahead for Finland and Sweden". In: H-Diplo, *NATO and Nuclear Disarmament.* Policy Roundtable III-2. Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum.

Juntunen, T. and Rosengren, E. (2024). “Naturalizing nuclear deterrence: A comparative analysis of Finnish and Swedish discourses on nuclear weapon politics, 2016-22”. *Nordic Review of International Studies* 3:24-45.

Khalid, M. (2019). “Gender race and the insecurity of security”. In: Sjoberg, L. (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security.* London: Routledge: 37-47.

Kravchik, E. and Kullaa, R. (2025). “From cooperation to containment: Reactions in the Nordic states to Russia's and the United States' Arctic assertiveness”. *Nordic Review of International Studies* 2025.

Kristersson, U. (2026). Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson statement on X. Available at: https://x.com/SwedishPM/status/2012589849585344518 [Accessed 23 January].

Kronsell, A. (2006). “Methods for studying silences: Gender analysis in institutions of hegem- onic masculinity”. In: Ackerly BA, Stern M and True J (eds) *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* Cambridge University Press:108–128.

Miller, S., E. (2023). “The Return of the Strategic Arctic,” *Arctic Yearbook 2022* (revised March 2023):1-8.

Munich Security Conference (2026a). President Alexander Stubb in panel discussion *On Par? Fortifying the Foundation of Transatlantic Security*. Available at: https://securityconference.org/en/msc-2026/agenda/event/on-par-fortifying-the-foundation-of-transatlantic-security/ [Accessed 20 February].

Munich Security Conference (2026b). President Alexander Stubb in panel discussion *Tariff-fying Times: Managing the Weaponization of Trade*. Available at: https://securityconference.org/en/msc-2026/agenda/event/tariff-fying-times-managing-the-weaponization-of-trade/ [Accessed 20 February].

Nymalm, N. (2024). “Svensk militärstrategisk doktrin som en berättelse om vi och dem”. In: Hagström, L. (ed.) *Är Sverige säkert nu? Perspektiv på svensk säkerhetspolitik och Nato.* Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag:179–197.

Olesen, Mikkel R. (2020). “The end of Arctic Exceptionalism? A review of the academic debates and what the Arctic prospects mean for the Kingdom of Denmark”. In: Fischer, K. & Mouritzen, H. (eds.) *Danish Foreign Policy Review*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies:103–128.

Regeringen (2026a). Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson speech at the Folk och Försvar annual national conference. Available at: https://www.regeringen.se/tal/2026/01/statsministerns-tal-pa-folk-och-forsvars-rikskonferens-i-salen/ [Accessed 25 January].

Regeringen (2026b). Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson press briefing post national security-council. Available at: https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2026/01/pressbriefing-efter-mote-i-nationella-sakerhetsradet/ [Accessed 10 February].

Regeringen (2026c). Prime Minister Ulf Krisstersson official statement. Available at: https://www.regeringen.se/uttalanden/2026/03/uttalande-av-statsminister-ulf-kristersson-och-danmarks-statsminister-mette-frederiksen/ [Accessed 5 march].

Regeringen (n.d.). Statsministerämbetet i Sverige. Available at: https://www.regeringen.se/sa-styrs-sverige/statsministerambetet-i-sverige/ [Accessed: 5 June 2026].

Republikens president (2026a). President Alexander Stubbs speech the opening of the National Assembly. Available at: https://www.presidentti.fi/sv/republikens-president-alexander-stubbs-tal-vid-riksmotets-oppnande-den-4-februari-2026/ [Accessed 16 February].

Republikens president (2026b). President Alexander Stubbs new year's speech. Available at: https://www.presidentti.fi/sv/republikens-president-alexander-stubbs-nyarstal-den-1-januari-2026/ [Accessed 24 January].

Republikens president (n.d.). Duties of the President. Available at: https://www.presidentti.fi/en/presidency/duties/ [Accessed: 3 June 2026].

Reuters (2025). *Trump announces Louisiana governor as Greenland special envoy*. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-announces-louisiana-governor-greenland-special-envoy-2025-12-22/ [Accessed 20 January].

Rickert, M., van de Weerd, P., Hovens, D. and Cornips, L. (2026). "The Construction of Researcher Positionality Through Language Practices in Multilingual Contexts". *Social Inclusion* 14(10844):1–19.

Rosengren, E., (2020). *Gendering nuclear disarmament: Identity and disarmament in Sweden during the Cold War.* Stockholm: Stockholm University.

Rosengren, E., Vastapuu, L., Brodén, A., & Lyytikäinen, M. (2025). "Becoming NATO brothers: A feminist analysis of how government officials in Finland and Sweden reconciled national identity with NATO membership". *Cooperation and Conflict* 60(4):752–776.

Stubb, A. (2026). President Alexander Stubb statement on X. Available. At: https://x.com/alexstubb/status/2012618082523418831 [Accessed 25 January].

SVT (2026a). Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson interview in SVT Agenda. Available at: https://www.svtplay.se/video/8vvg4GA/agenda/skilsmassan?video=visa&position=398 [Accessed 10 February].

SVT (2026b). Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson interview in Munich security conference Available at: https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/senaste-nytt-om-sakerhetskonferensen-i-munchen?inlagg=76a7f97483546f59414acee3a0f4698c. [Accessed 16 February].

SVT (2026c). Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson interview in SVT Agenda. Available at: https://www.svtplay.se/video/jmL9pwN/agenda/hotet-fran-usa?position=169 [Accessed 17 February].

SVT (2026d). Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson press conference in Davos World Economic forum. Available at: https://www.svtplay.se/video/Ky2mEdD/svt-nyheter-direkt/presstraff-med-kristersson-i-davos [Accessed 26 January].

SVT (2026e). President Alexander Stubb interview in SVT agenda. Available at: https://www.svtplay.se/video/84dm31V/agenda/ayatollans-dod [Accessed 3 March].

TV4 (2026). Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson interview. Available at: https://www.tv4.se/artikel/6o9WTFgtOxZ1PRjkIGIozu/kristersson-en-farlig-utveckling [Accessed 25 January].

US Department of Defense (2019). *Report to congress: Department of defense Arctic Strategy*. Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense. Available at: https://media.defense.gov/2019/jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-dod-arctic-strategy.pdf [Accessed 29 February].

Vladimirova, V. and Habeck, J., O. (2018) "Introduction: feminist approaches and the study of gender in Arctic social sciences". *Polar Geography* 41(3):145–163.

Wendt, M. and Åse, C. (2019). *Gendering Military Sacrifice*. Routledge.

Wendt, M. & Åse, C. (2021). "Gendering the military past: Understanding heritage and security from a feminist perspective". *Cooperation and Conflict* 56(3) 286–308.

Wendt, M., Åse, C. and Jansson, M. (2024). "Könskorrigering och rosa flickdrömmar: kön, känslor och säkerhetspolitik". In: Hagström, L. (ed.) *Är Sverige säkert nu?* Carlsson Bokförlag:61–81.

Wibben, A.,T. R. (2011). *Feminist Security Studies: A Narrative Approach*. Routledge.

World economic forum (2026a). President Alexander Stubb at panel discussion *Can Europe defend itself? World Economic Forum*. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/meetings/world-economic-forum-annual-meeting-2026/sessions/can-europe-defend-itself/ [Accessed 25 January].

World economic Forum (2026b). President Donald Trump special address at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/meetings/world-economic-forum-annual-meeting-2026/sessions/special-address-by-donald-j-trump-president-of-the-united-states-of-america-49a709be7a/ [Accessed 25 January].

Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). *Gender & nation*. London: Sage.

Ålander, M. and Salo, S. (2023). "NATO's Nordic enlargement: Reconfiguring Sweden's foreign policy identity after 200 years of neutrality and non-alignment". *Nordic Review of International Studies 2023*:55–63.