



Foreign Policy as Battlefield: A Study of  
National Interest and Party Motives

Ulf Bjereld and Marie Demker \*

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### Foreign Policy and Party Politics

In no other policy arena are party unity and national unity considered as critical as in matters pertaining to security and foreign policy. In these matters, political parties are expected to put aside their differences in order to attain unity across party lines. Operating within a small non-aligned country, during the Cold War situated between East and West, Swedish political parties have had particular expectations placed upon them to avoid coming to blows over matters of foreign policy. A domestic tumult could dismantle the credibility that Swedish neutrality has managed, in spite of various obstacles, to establish in the post-war period. However, there are many examples of intense arguments in the foreign policy field between the parties during the post-war years. As restrictions on Swedish parties have been so severe, an empirical investigation of party strategic and party ideological motives compared with actually politicized issues could deepen our understanding of parties' strategic and ideological dilemmas in foreign policy issues. Through a longitudinal case study of Swedish party positions

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in foreign policy, we hope to generate a plausible hypothesis about why and when political parties politicize foreign policy issues.

There are at least two reasons why foreign policy issues are characterized by a spirit of unity and consensus. First of all, party unity on foreign policy is viewed as a national security strategy of particular importance in times of international crisis and uncertainty (Christensen 1990; Everts 1983; Goldmann et al. 1986). Unity across party lines enhances the credibility of a country's foreign policy by making it less dependent on temporary majority constellations in parliament. Domestic political unity surrounding the conduct of foreign policy also makes it difficult for a potential (external) opponent to exploit internal division in negotiations or in a situation of crisis or conflict. Parties' efforts to reach unity become an expression of national responsibility; in the interest of the nation, parties avoid trying to score political points in foreign policy matters. Not surprisingly, this is the explanation put forth by the political parties themselves.

However, the unwillingness of parties to seek confrontation over foreign policy can also be an expression of party strategic considerations. Efforts to reach agreement between parties would, in this case, not be a sign of national responsibility, but would instead stem from partisan self-interest. Also ideology could be a motive for avoiding confrontation. If there are, in the party ideology, strong restrictions from ideological standpoints on debate and open argument about foreign policy, the party will of course try to avoid that kind of discussion (Downs 1957; Sjöblom 1968; Robertson 1976; Klingemann et al. 1994).

There are several reasons why parties might choose not to stand out on international issues. No party wants to be seen, in the eyes of the electorate, as dividing national unity, since such an image would jeopardize votes for the party. Election surveys have also shown that foreign policy issues are of less concern to voters when choosing a party than are domestic issues such as employment, welfare, and taxation. Thus, there are few votes to be gained from taking up foreign policy issues (Graham 1988; Hinckley 1992; Holsti 1992; Rattinger 1990; Shapiro & Page 1988; 1992; Wittkopf 1986; 1990). Parties also have difficulty translating foreign policy issues into parliamentary advantage, since the influence of parliament in such matters is limited. Power over foreign policy tends to rest with government (Farrell 1969; Richards 1973; Risse-Kappen 1991). Internal party interest in foreign policy issues has also been limited. Therefore, it is difficult for the party leadership to identify any internal strategic advantage in bringing up foreign policy matters.

Regardless of whether agreement on foreign policy issues is seen as a sign of national responsibility or as a result of party strategic and ideological considerations, much seems to speak against seeking out or taking issue with foreign policy. Still, it is known to happen.<sup>1</sup>

Why, despite the many counter-incentives, do parties choose to depart from unanimity and raise the issue of foreign policy? Under which pre-conditions do parties tend to believe that it is more important to pursue the 'correct' policy (which, of course, is always their own) rather than preserve national unity? Is it easier to take on matters that do not directly affect the national interest (such as foreign aid policy, human rights, support for liberation movements, etc.) as opposed to issues that are more central to the country's security (such as defense policy, superpower relations, etc.) (Goldmann et al. 1986; Olsen 1983)? Is unity greater when there is a crisis closer to home? Is it greater during periods of tension as opposed to times of relative calm in the international system (Reiter 1997)?

While internationalization and increased integration in Western Europe have certainly reduced the differences between domestic and foreign policy, the most important distinction remains intact: the concurrent existence, on the one hand, of national state power with the right to pass laws and the capacity to maintain order within its boundaries, and the lack of existence, on the other hand, of a corresponding supranational authority in the international arena (for a discussion, see Baldwin 1993; Kegley 1995; Checkel 1997).

What, then, are the consequences of the differences between national and international politics for the strategic considerations of political parties in international matters? In the voter arena, anarchy in the international system can influence the strategic considerations of parties in at least two ways. First, anarchy can lead to the primacy of security issues for each individual state, since there is no supranational authority that can guarantee the rule of law and the collective security of states. The primacy of security issues leads to demands for internal collaboration on national security matters. Turning national security issues into partisan issues is thus risky, because the party that does this can appear to be driving a wedge into national unity, which in turn could lead to a loss of votes. Second, it is sometimes claimed that anarchy in the international system renders foreign policy issues so complex and complicated that voters approach them with a lack of interest. The limited interest that voters have in foreign policy issues can also be a result of the perception of these issues as 'distant,' both geographically as well as in the sense that they do not contain immediate and apparent consequences for the individual citizen.

Within parties, in the internal arena, the demand for unity can make it difficult for the party leadership to garner member support for backing a party profile on foreign policy and security matters. The perceived complexity and distance of foreign policy issues can also contribute to a lack of internal involvement.

A party's most common ground is its program for foreign policy issues. If the party has a clear foreign policy standpoint it will be a matter of

credibility to make that standpoint official. Although there are many constraints on politicizing foreign policy, a party that has an encompassing party ideology where certain foreign policy issues are central and that also emphasizes open debate and reasoning on such issues will take a debate on foreign policy. If not, the members, and the voters, will begin to wonder about the accountability of the party's political positions. But the party ideology can also be a constraint on open debate. If it is a main theme for the party not to quarrel about foreign policy – for security reasons for instance – a very low profile on these issues could prevail.

The purpose of this article is, based on our own primary research on Swedish party positions, voters' and members' opinions, and discussions of foreign policy issues, to find possible explanations as to why certain foreign policy issues are politicized in the domestic arena while others are not. Against the backdrop of differences between the international and national political systems discussed above, we expect to find that the more engaged voters and party members are in a foreign policy issue, the greater the likelihood that the party will choose to politicize it for strategic reasons. If, on the other hand, there are values or ideological motives behind the politicization, we expect to find parties quarreling only if their values assume that open debate is a good thing and only around issues that have a central place in their party ideology. In addition, this study will also examine whether parties are more inclined to take up so-called 'internationalist' issues instead of those that more directly affect national interest, and whether parties are more inclined to agree on foreign policy issues during periods of superpower tensions.

## Voter Interest in Foreign Policy Issues

The supposed lack of voter interest in foreign policy issues is, according to the literature, a result of the alleged intrinsic differences between foreign and domestic policy. Foreign policy is ascribed a character of 'distance' in that it deals with geographically remote and generally complicated issues with no apparent consequence for the individual citizen. Voters are instead supposed to be more interested in immediate social and economic issues (Holsti 1992; Rattinger 1990; Rosenau 1967). In his classic study *The American People and Foreign Policy*, for example, Gabriel Almond writes that 'the complexity of international politics, as well as the minimal influence an average person can directly exert within this arena, restrains interest and involvement' (Almond 1960, 83; see also Aldrich et al. 1989; Caspary 1970; Chittick et al. 1995; Hurwitz & Peffley 1987; 1991; Peffley & Hurwitz 1992; Sinnott 1995).

According to Almond's reasoning, foreign policy issues should distin-

guish themselves from domestic issues in terms of their complexity and opportunity for citizen influence. Foreign policy issues should thus be characterized as being more distant, either in terms of their limited, or not overtly apparent, influence on the everyday life of the citizen, or in terms of the geographical distance of the areas they involve.<sup>2</sup>

'Distance' in the geographic sense must be seen as less relevant to voter interest in international issues today. Developments in mass communications, particularly the spread of television, have undeniably rendered the world smaller. Civil wars, famines in Africa, and political persecutions in distant countries are examples of occurrences that the individual citizen, via the mass media, can be confronted with today to a much greater extent than only a few decades ago.

Internationalization and increased mutual dependence among states have also rendered geographic distance between countries less meaningful in terms of consequences for the individual citizen. The globalization of trade, the risk of the spread of regional conflicts to surrounding areas by superpower involvement during the Cold War, and borderless environmental destruction are examples of factors that minimize the importance of geographic distance.

Although this implies that voter interest in foreign policy issues ought to have increased over time, it is likely that domestic issues continue to hold more direct consequences for individual citizens. Therefore, voter interest in international issues is likely to remain lower than interest in domestic issues.

What, then, is meant by voter 'interest' in foreign policy issues? First, the voter must be interested in the issue.<sup>3</sup> Second, the voter must judge the issue important in the sense that its outcome is meaningful to the voter's high-priority values. This can be material or non-material in nature and it can apply either to the voter personally or to society at large.

We will first compare interest in foreign policy issues versus domestic issues and examine whether any changes have occurred over time. Is the hypothesis that interest in domestic issues is stronger than interest in foreign issues confirmed? Has the interest of the Swedish people in foreign issues increased during the post-war period? The Swedish electoral surveys make it possible to compare voter interest in politics with their interest in political relations in the rest of the world at two different points in time, 1973 and 1991.

More voters claim to be interested in 'political relations in the rest of the world' than in 'politics in general.' In 1973, 56 percent of respondents reported being either very or fairly interested in political relations in the rest of the world, and in 1991 this figure rose to 62 percent. The proportion of voters claiming to be very or fairly interested in politics in general rose from 52 percent in 1973 to 54 percent in 1991. On both occasions, the figure

reflecting an expressed interest in politics in the rest of the world exceeded that of interest in politics in general.<sup>4</sup> These results cannot automatically be interpreted as meaning that the Swedish population's interest in foreign policy issues is greater than their interest in domestic issues, however. The distinction between interest in 'political relations in the rest of the world' and 'politics in general' is not the same as the distinction between 'political relations in the rest of the world' and 'domestic politics' or 'political relations in Sweden.'

In the 1993 SOM survey,<sup>5</sup> respondents were able to express their interest in seven different political issue areas. When a comparison with traditional domestic issues is offered, foreign policy issues are those that voters claim to be least interested in. The greatest interest is in employment policy (82 percent), environment policy (77 percent), and economic policy (75 percent), while family policy (68 percent), immigration/refugee policy (63 percent), EC policy (62 percent), crime policy (60 percent), and foreign policy (57 percent) wind up at the bottom of the list (percentage of persons reporting themselves as being very or fairly interested in the issues).<sup>6</sup>

Foreign policy issues also appear not to be particularly important factors for voters when they decide for which party to vote. In 1979, foreign policy was a decisive issue for 1 percent of the voters in choosing their party. In the 1982 election, the figure rose to 4 percent, in 1985 it was 6 percent, in 1988 it was 5 percent, in 1991 the figure rose to 12 percent, and in the 1994 election to 16 percent. But although foreign policy issues have become, over the years, a more decisive factor for voters when they choose, they nonetheless play a subordinate role to traditional domestic policy issues such as employment, the economy, welfare, and the environment. The increase in the number of voters citing foreign policy as a decisive factor can be largely explained by the encroachment of the EU issue on Swedish debate.

In which type of foreign policy issue can one expect the Swedish population's interest to be the greatest? We claimed above that the geographic factor, as a result of developments in mass communications and internationalization, is likely to be less significant. Interest in the events in the rest of the world should not, then, be primarily directed toward areas closer to Sweden.

Since the Cold War, the Swedish people have considered the Nordic countries the most important for future Swedish foreign policy (72 percent). Western Europe (57 percent) is clearly prioritized more than the Baltic countries (39 percent) and Eastern Europe (39 percent). Geographically distant regions such as the Middle East (8 percent), Latin America (6 percent) and southern Africa (6 percent), which had previously played a major role in the so-called active Swedish foreign policy, find themselves decidedly at the bottom of the list of priorities (percentage of persons answering 'very important').<sup>7</sup>

These results could be interpreted to mean that, in times of uncertainty



and confusion, voters tend to seek out what is safe and identifiable. Developments in Latin America, southern Africa, and the Middle East no longer risk spreading to Europe and the regions close to Sweden. In this sense, these conflicts are seen as less important to voters.

Earlier we discussed the distinction between 'national interest' and 'internationalist' foreign policy issues. Which of these generates the greatest degree of interest among Swedish people? Issues concerning human rights (71 percent), the environment (69 percent), and trade (63 percent) were judged to be the most important in 1992. Disarmament issues occupied a middle position (42 percent), while defense (19 percent) and foreign aid (18 percent) were judged to be the least important (percentage of persons answering 'very important').<sup>8</sup> Thus, we find a combination of internationalist, ideologically laden issues and more materially oriented issues surrounding the national interest among those areas in which the interest of the Swedish population is the strongest.

## Party Members' Interest in Foreign Policy Issues

In the above discussion, we defined voter interest in terms of 'importance' and 'interest.' These two components can be applied to the interest of party members as well.

For foreign policy issues to be considered an important element in maintaining party cohesion, which is the goal of the party leadership in the internal arena, it is necessary that party members consider foreign policy issues both important and interesting. As was the case with voters, importance for party members is defined as the significance of the particular issue for the members' most highly prioritized policy arenas and ideological values. Similarly, party member interest in an issue reflects motivation or will to obtain information about the issue in order to monitor developments.

Party members who consider foreign policy issues to be of central importance and who have the will to obtain information on the issues also tend to monitor foreign policy issues and bring them up for discussion within the party. Such 'interest' is manifested in the fact that members often raise foreign policy issues in motions at party congresses or meetings. Party members engaged in foreign policy issues do not fail to make use of the official and formal channels provided by motions at a party congress.

To what extent, then, do the motions of party congresses or meetings address foreign and security issues? We have studied the main Swedish parliamentary parties during the post-war years – Moderata Samlingspartiet (Conservatives), Folkpartiet Liberalerna (Liberal Party), Bondeförbundet/Centerpartiet (Center Party), Socialdemokratiska Arbetarpartiet (Social

Table 1. Percent of Motions Concerning Foreign and Security Policy Issues at Congresses and Meetings 1964–1990: Conservatives, Liberal Party, Center Party, Social Democrats, and Left Party (1972–1990)

	1964–1973	1974–1981	1982–1990
Left Party	–	8.9	4.5
Social Democrats	9.8	3.9	6.6
Center Party	5.2	3.3	3.7
Liberal Party	10.4	5.2	4.8
Conservatives	5.0	5.0	5.9

Democrats), and Vänsterpartiet (Left Party). Table 1 presents the proportion of motions dealing with foreign and security policy at party congresses and meetings between 1964 and 1990.

Until 1960, foreign policy issues are noticeable in their complete absence from party congress agendas. The exception proving the rule is a motion at the Social Democratic congress in 1956 dealing with Nordic cooperation. From the beginning of the 1960s, however, motions with an international dimension start to appear in all parties.

Before 1972, the proportion of motions with an international orientation varied from a few percentage points up to just over 10 percent among the four parties examined. In 1968, the Liberal Party reached an exceptional peak at 48 percent. The years following 1972 display a decline in the proportion of foreign-related motions for all parties, dropping toward the 5 percent level by 1990. The exception is the Left Party, with 12 percent in 1975.

We can thus see three periods of international activity, measured in terms of the number of motions, among the party cadres as a whole during the period under study: 1946–1963 with no or very little activity; 1964–1973 with considerable but varied activity; 1974–1981 with a slight decline among Social Democrats and Liberals; and 1982–1990 with more stable activity among all five parties. Which issue areas received most attention from the activists?

Table 2 shows that the issue areas receiving the overwhelming majority of party attention were foreign aid and international solidarity (210 motions). Next, with considerably fewer motions, are trade issues (82), security policy (77) and weapons export (74). Issue areas such as human rights and diplomatic matters – for example, recognition issues – are at the bottom of the attention meter.

Foreign aid issues are both numerous and dominant in each period; trade issues peak between 1974 and 1981; weapons export is a new issue that appears during the 1980s. The general security issues addressed during this period are largely demands for bans on nuclear-armed vessels in Swedish ports.

Table 2. Motions Directed at Particular Issues during the Years 1964–1973, 1974–1981, and 1982–1990 (Absolute Figures)

	1964–1973	1974–1981	1982–1990	Total
Foreign aid and international solidarity	78	63	69	210
Trade issues	14	54	14	82
Security policy	5	15	57	77
Weapons export	3	13	58	74
Disarmament and nuclear arms	11	14	20	45
Peace issues	3	16	24	43
Human rights	4	15	5	24
Diplomacy	4	5	1	10

*Note:* Only motions that expressly addressed issues are included in the table.

In summary, the proportion of foreign policy related motions among the congresses and meetings of the four parties examined is greatest during the 1960s, at 10–15 percent, dropping from the mid 1970s to a stable level around 5 percent. The motions in general pertain to specific issue areas and tend to address foreign aid, international trade, and national security oriented issues, with large variations over time.

## Party Ideological Motives

Does it really matter for politicization of foreign policy what kind of ideological values a party has? We think that the answer to this question is theoretically ‘yes.’ Ideological motives in foreign policy can make a party more or less interested in specific issues, but also more or less interested in political debate about these issues. Morgenthau said that the only need for ideology in foreign policy is when someone wants to change the status quo (Morgenthau 1978, 97). Although this was said long ago, many researchers after him have made the same type of reflection.

Knutsen points at two perspectives in world politics: radical globalism and conservative realism. The first perspective emphasizes the view of rational sense between states and nations, while the second is founded in the view of national security (Knutsen 1992). Also in empirical studies this kind of two-dimensional view between change and status quo has been used (Elgström 1982, 19–20). Change or status quo is a key to ideological values in foreign policy motives. Foreign policy ideology differs from other party ideology in terms of political goals. Instead of pointing at conditions inside a nation a foreign policy ideology points at world conditions.

Our belief is that if the behavior of a political actor is related to the actor’s picture of reality and principal goals, their motives for politicization can be traced. A political actor with realistic-conservative values cannot

be expected to start a fight over foreign policy issues, because such a fight could shake the power balance and thus affect the security situation. A political actor with a radical-globalist view of world politics is more likely to start a fight over foreign policy issues. This political actor has a perspective that makes them believe that arguments and discussions could affect the behavior of other states, and the power balance between states is not perceived as the main structure in the world system. Based on these reflections, we have defined two ideal types of foreign policy ideologies, called 'liberalism' and 'historicism.' An ideal type, the concept introduced by Weber, is not present in the real world. Instead, the concept is used to increase our understanding of why and how party ideology can motivate quarrels over foreign policy, by comparing value elements of party ideology to these ideal types. These ideal types are introduced exclusively to highlight the motives for politicizing foreign policy issues, and we are not claiming that they are the only possible ideologies. Another research problem demands, of course, another pair of ideal types.

Both ideal types are founded on an anarchical system, and both have the goal of national sovereignty. But there are two alternative paths (strategies). Of course, we do not expect parties or persons to have exactly these belief systems, but we have used them as methodological instruments in analyzing the foreign policy ideology of five Swedish parties. We expect a party with values equivalent to the ideal type of 'liberalism' – strategies like international jurisdiction and peace – to be keener on politicization of foreign policy issues than a party with values equivalent to the ideal type of 'historicism' – strategies like national prestige and strength. The argument is that national unity is a necessary condition for using strategies like national prestige and strength in upholding the international world order, while an open and rational debate is the prerequisite for cooperation and surveillance in upholding the international world order.

Figure 1. Foreign Policy Ideologies.

	Liberalism	Historicism
<i>View of reality</i>		
System characteristics	Anarchy	Anarchy
Actor characteristics	Cooperative	Expansiveness
<i>Strategy</i>		
Mean I	Legal system	National pride and prestige
Mean II	Peace	Balance of power
<i>Superior goal</i>	National sovereignty and promotion of political distinctiveness	National sovereignty and promotion of political distinctiveness

However, it is not enough to say that values of party ideology determine the preferences of an actor in taking or avoiding foreign policy debates and struggles. The issues that are politicized must also be of some importance for the party. If an issue area is central to the party – if it is repeated in party programs and platforms – we can assume that it is more likely that the party will politicize that issue area. If the issue area is more peripheral in the party ideology, it is more likely that the party will not start a debate in that issue area.

We have two specifications for a political party to politicize foreign policy with ideological motives: values and centrality. If a political party has ‘liberal’ values in foreign policy and if a certain issue has a central position in the party ideology, then we expect the party to politicize the issue. If, on the other hand, a party has ‘historicist’ values in foreign policy and a certain issue does not have a central position in the party ideology, then we expect the party not to politicize the issue. But what happens if there is a ‘liberal’ party ideology and an issue that is not central? Or a ‘historicist’ party ideology and a central issue? That is, as we usually put it, an empirical question.<sup>9</sup>

Our empirical investigation of the five Swedish parties shows that all of them, except the Left Party, have had ideological motives to politicize foreign policy. The Conservative Party and the Center Party changed their party ideology from ‘historicist’ to ‘liberal’ around 1970. The Liberal Party and the Social Democrats have had the same liberal type of party ideology throughout the period. But the Left Party has changed direction: since 1970, the Left Party has emphasized the Marxist view much more than before and therefore we cannot analyze this party in the post-1970 period using our ideal types.

Concerning the centrality of issue areas, three areas have been central to more than one party: foreign aid, the policy of neutrality, and foreign exports and trade. Foreign aid has been central for all parties throughout the period. All parties have ideologically prioritized social and economic development in the Third World, but in different ways. While the Social Democrats list national self-determination as a key element, the Conser-

Figure 2. Party Ideologies as Ideal Types, 1945–1990.

	Conservatives	Liberal Party	Center Party	Social Democrats	Left Party
1945–1960	Historicism	Liberalism	Historicism	Liberalism	Historicism
1960–1970	Historicism	Liberalism	Historicism	Liberalism	Hist/Lib
1970–1980	Liberalism	Liberalism	Liberalism	Liberalism	Historicism
1980–1990	Liberalism	Liberalism	Liberalism	Liberalism	–

vatives emphasize industrial interests and loans. The policy of neutrality has been central to the Center Party and the Social Democrats – for both parties a cornerstone of Swedish foreign stability. Foreign trade issues have been central for the Liberal Party, the Center Party, and the Left Party – of course in very different ways. While the Left Party put the inequalities in world trade and the debt burden first, the Liberal Party is more concerned about free trade and the abolition of trade barriers.

Based on this investigation, we expect increased politicization of foreign policy issues after 1970, and especially in the issue areas of foreign aid and foreign exports and world trade. Swedish neutrality policy was central to only two parties, and it was central in the same way. Of course, this focus on neutrality policy could also give way to a common understanding between the Center Party and the Social Democrats to fight about the issue if some of the other parties wanted a debate.

## Politicization of Foreign Policy

We have now, at a general level, mapped out the strategic and ideological preconditions surrounding the politicization of foreign policy issues by Swedish political parties. The results show that there were few strategic incentives for parties, both in the voter arena and internally, to seek out or take on issues in foreign policy matters. In the internal arena, party members' interest in foreign policy matters was limited and divided among a large number of individual issues. The greatest interest at the internal level occurred among the Social Democrats and the Liberal Party. There were preconditions, in the presence of liberal ideological values, for politicization in the Liberal Party and in the Social Democrats from the beginning of the period. After 1970, however, there were value preconditions for politicization in four parties, while the Left Party fell out of our scheme. It is worth noting that the strategic preconditions for politicizing foreign policy issues have increased over time, both at strategic and ideological levels.

The individual issue areas among the strategic preconditions for politicization were greatest, at the internal level, in foreign aid policy and trade policy, while the preconditions at the voter level were most favorable in the areas of disarmament and conflicts in which the superpowers were involved. At the ideological level, strong preconditions existed in the issue areas of foreign aid policy and foreign export and world trade policy.

Based on these considerations, we can expect a foreign policy debate that is mainly characterized by unity among the political parties, but with a tendency toward increased politicization over time. We can also expect the most polemic debates to occur in the areas of foreign aid and trade, as well as issues involving Swedish neutrality policy or conflicts in which the super-

powers are expected to be involved. The Liberal Party and the Social Democrats can be expected to participate most in foreign affairs debates, while the Center Party ought to be the least active in such discussions.

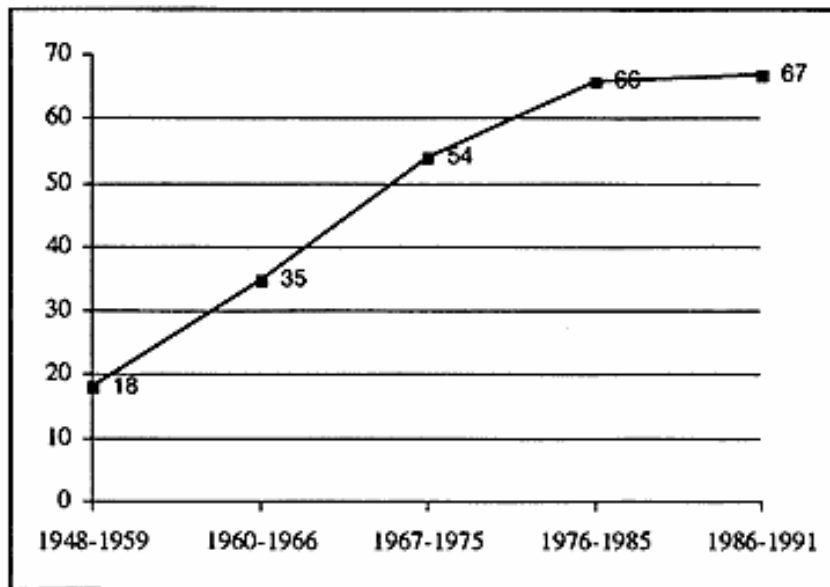
Annual foreign policy debates in parliament between 1948 and 1993 and the protocols of the Foreign Ministry 1945–1992 will serve as the basis for this analysis. The Swedish foreign policy debate will be divided into the following five time periods. During period one (1948–1959), the foundation of Swedish neutrality policy was laid. Period two extends to the beginning of the so-called active foreign policy in the middle of the 1960s. Period three (1967–1975) consists of the first half of the active foreign policy period, up to the assumption of power by the bourgeois parties in 1976. Period four (1976–1985) extends to the murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme. Finally, period five (1986–1993) consists of the years following the death of Olof Palme, including the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

The extent of the politicization of foreign policy is measured by the level of conflict in parliament's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs (Utrikesutskottet). Formally, decisions in the Swedish Riksdag are made by the assembly during plenary sessions. Every parliamentary resolution is, however, based upon a report from one of parliament's 16 standing committees. These reports are deliberations on both governmental proposals and parliament members' bills. Each committee has about 15 members, and the division of seats in each committee reflects the parties' respective strength in the assembly. Since party discipline is strong in the Swedish parliament, the reports from the committees are, most often, accepted by the assembly (Jerneck et al. 1988, 174).

A committee member who disagrees with the majority in the committee about the content or some formulation in the report can make a reservation – a formal statement of disagreement. Figure 3 presents the number of reservations relative to the number of parliament members' bills addressed by the committee during the post-war period. The figure illustrates the continuous rise in the number of reservations relative to the number of members' bills during the years 1948–1993. During the period 1948–1959, the number of reservations comprised only 18 percent of the number of members' bills addressed by the committee. In 1960–1966 this proportion had risen to 35 percent, in 1967–1975 to 54 percent, in 1976–1985 to 66 percent, and in 1986–1992 to 67 percent.

However, measuring the politicization of foreign policy according to the number of reservations in the foreign affairs committee is not completely problem free, since the relative degree of reservations has increased in all committees in the post-war era, not only in the foreign affairs committee. Therefore, we must also examine the strength and intensity of the argument over time.

Figure 3. Number of Reservations in Foreign Affairs Committee, 1948–1992 (Percent).



An analysis of parliament's foreign policy debates during the period 1948–1993 shows that the intensity of the argument between political parties has also increased over time (Ekengren 1994). During the years 1948–1959, the intensity of the debate stayed at a medium or moderate level. It was mainly Sweden's relation to the Soviet Union as well as Sweden's position and actions in the UN concerning the Korean War which led to confrontations between the Social Democrats and the Conservatives and Liberals. During the years 1960–1966, the level of confrontation dropped dramatically. Foreign policy debates were relatively calm, and differences primarily reflected the EFTA/EEC issue. In the late 1960s, the degree of conflict increased. The years 1967–1975 were characterized by sharp confrontations between the parties, mainly surrounding Sweden's position on the Vietnam War and the EEC. In 1976–1985, debate continued at a high level of conflict; in the beginning of the period it was mainly about the Middle East, democracy, and human rights, and, at the end of the period, it involved major disagreements about Sweden's relations with the Soviet Union. In 1986, the foreign affairs debate was very restrained, reflecting a feeling of gloom following the murder of Olof Palme. The period 1987–1993 was characterized by a lower level of conflict, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakdown of the Soviet Union. The main areas of disagreement were, in the beginning of the period, Sweden's relation to the EC, and, at the end of the period, Sweden's East European policy. Following the national referendum on Swedish EU membership in the fall of 1994, however, the debate heated up again.



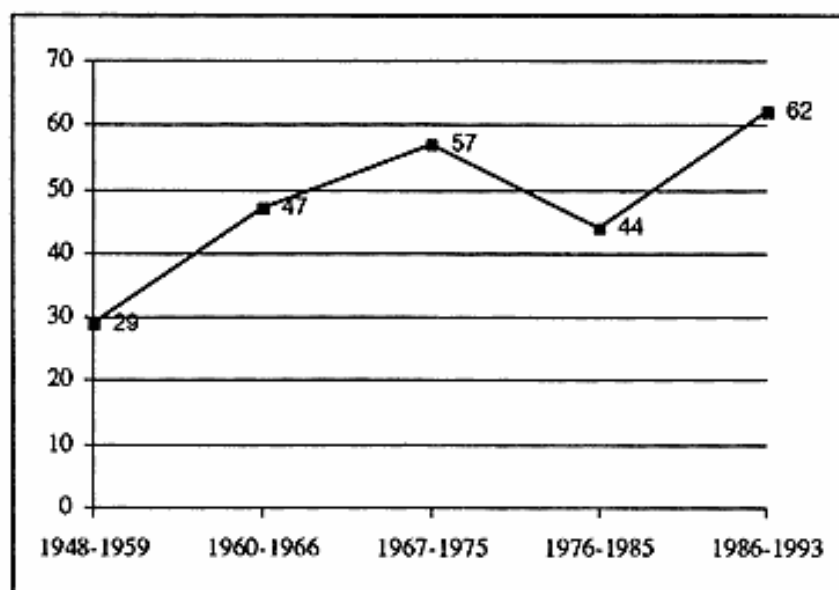
Thus, we can say that the intensity of foreign policy issues was considerably greater during the period 1967–1985 than it was during the period 1948–1966. With the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, the intensity again diminished.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, there is no direct connection between the degree of tension in the international system and the inclination of political parties to politicize foreign policy issues.<sup>11</sup> A comparison of the years generally viewed as particularly tense (1948–1952, 1956–1963, 1979–1986) and the years generally characterized by a relaxation of tension (1953–1955, 1964–1978, 1987–1993) shows that there is no difference in the extent of politicization and polemic intensity.

We have now shown that the extent and intensity of the foreign policy debate between political parties were relatively great during the period 1967–1985. But should this will to politicize foreign policy issues be seen as an expression of parties' attempts to strengthen their ideological profile vis-à-vis the electorate? If this were the case, the conflicts should have centered around the so-called 'internationalist' issues as opposed to those concerning Sweden's national security. By 'internationalist' issues, we mean issues characterized by ideological overtones, without well-organized domestic interests with which one must bargain, and that the issues are unimportant in the sense that one's impact on developments is likely to be small (Goldmann et al. 1986, 34). Issues concerning human rights, foreign aid, and criticism of dictatorships in the Third World are examples of internationalist issues. In issues more directly concerned with national security, too much is at stake for symbolic politics to be possible (*ibid.*). Figure 4 illustrates the degree to which party polemics in foreign policy exchanges reflected internationalist issues during the period 1948–1993.

The proportion of internationalist issues among politicized foreign policy issues has increased over time. During 1948–1959, they comprised only 29 percent of the debate (the comparable figure for national interest issues was 71 percent). During period two (1960–1966) the proportion increased to 47 percent, and during period three (1967–1975) it increased to 57 percent. The proportion of internationalist issues dropped during period four (1976–1985) to 44 percent, their main focus being submarine transgressions and Sweden's relations with the Soviet Union. During period five (1986–1993), the proportion of internationalist issues increased again, rising to 62 percent of politicized foreign policy issues. For the period 1948–1993 as a whole, the proportion of internationalist issues amounted to 47 percent and the proportion concerning national interest to 53 percent. But our most important point is that foreign policy debate between the parties is not limited to internationalist issues. Argument occurs to the same extent on issues that more directly concern Sweden's national security.

Figure 4. Proportion of Internationalist Issues in Argument against Other Parties in Foreign Policy Debate Exchanges, 1948–1993 (Percent).



## Why Argue about Foreign Policy?

The restraining effects of the cause of unity and the national interest on the will of political parties to disagree on foreign policy have waned over time. As a result, both ideological and strategic preconditions have become more visible. Party conflicts over foreign policy have undoubtedly become more intense and more confrontational in the 1980s and 1990s than they were during the 1950s. For the political parties, it has become more important for Sweden to conduct the ideologically 'correct' foreign policy. At the same time, political parties nonetheless desire national unity to rally behind their own foreign policy. Demands for unity are therefore an argument for their respective views.

It is now anachronistic to refer to debate about neutrality policy or foreign aid policy as 'domestic foreign policy.' Swedish foreign policy has become a legitimate battleground for both ideological and strategic arguments between political parties.

Why is this so? The 1970s brought about a new climate of foreign policy debate. Consensus ideology was replaced by a liberal 'discussion ideology' based on international law rather than the traditional balance of power. Such a legal system requires free and open debate. The causes underlying the new discussion ideology can be traced to the processes of decolonization and internationalization and the revolution in communications technology.

The results of our study have strengthened or confirmed some of the themes outlined above concerning parties' strategic and ideological preconditions. Foreign aid and Sweden's neutrality policy, including national relations to the superpowers, are the most politicized issues, and this corresponds primarily to ideological motives, but also to the issues that have engaged party members. Trade issues have been politicized through the actions of the Left Party on issues around free trade and protectionism, but otherwise not to the degree expected. The politicization of foreign policy has also increased over time. Similarly, the politicization of internationalist issues has increased over time. The Center Party has, as expected, been less active in the politicization of foreign policy than have other parties. The Liberal Party, by contrast, has not been as active in the politicization process as strategic and ideological preconditions suggested.

Our study has also disproved some expressed views about the relationship between parties in matters of foreign policy. We have shown, for example, that the presence or absence of tension in the international system does not affect the inclination of parties to take issue on matters of foreign policy. Parties argue just as much or just as little, regardless of the situation in the rest of the world. Why is this so? If there is tension or a crisis in the immediate region, it becomes more important to maintain national unity than for parties to pursue the 'correct' policy. The dilemma of balancing the demand for unity against the demand for the 'correct' policy persists during times of crisis, but at a higher, more pressing and politically more intractable level.

We have also shown that parties argue just as much about issues that are central to Swedish security policy (such as non-alignment, neutrality, etc.) as they do about issues that do not directly affect the national interest (human rights, support for liberation movements, etc.). Parties thus did not argue more, for example, about the situation in Chile after the 1973 coup or about the conditions of human rights in various dictatorships than they did about national interest issues such as the size of the defense budget or Sweden's relations with the Soviet Union.

Why is this so? The main sources of party disagreement over foreign policy are ideologically motivated. All of the themes that have been politicized between the parties were central ideological questions for at least two parties. It looks as if ideological preconditions are necessary but not sufficient for a politicization of foreign policy issues. If there is no ideological motivation – in terms of content and centrality – there will be no politicization. In each individual case, however, the intended strategic effect vis-à-vis the electorate and party members could be the decisive factor in determining a party's will to take issue with foreign policy. If the party has votes to win, membership support to get, or coalition considerations to consider, these strategic motives could be conclusive. To decide whether voters,

members, or coalition partners are the most important on each occasion calls for case studies.

## Conclusion

The notion of the restraining effect of national interest on the will of political parties to enter into conflict over foreign policy has been questioned. Of course, comparative studies of European countries with and without alliance membership and with different political cultures would carry this work empirically significantly further than we have been able to do with this limited study. Integration efforts in Europe have also further blurred distinctions between foreign and domestic policy. However, we suggest that such a comparative study should adopt as its starting point the assumption that national interest has considerably less significance in determining the will of political parties to politicize individual foreign policy issues than have the parties' ideological preconditions and considerations regarding voters and party members. Otherwise our understanding of quarrels over foreign policy issues will not reach new horizons and we will only repeat and confirm an obsolete distinction between domestic issues and foreign policy issues.

Here we wish to point out that the number of actors in foreign policy both within each state and in the international system has multiplied. There are much more complex motives for these actors than national interest or national security. The work of Baldwin (1993) and Kegley (1995) emphasizes that liberal and realist views are merging and observes that theories about international politics need to be more sensitive to the different levels of decisions in our integrated world. Our empirical study has underlined this notion and leaves us with the need for better understanding of how these levels interact. In the words of Checkel, 'this exercise inevitably makes our theories less parsimonious and our lives as scholars more difficult, but such interaction captures the essence of the world we should be attempting to understand and model' (Checkel 1997, 132).

Today, the weapons used in the battlefield of foreign policy are the same as those used in the battlefields of other policy arenas.

## NOTES

1. In this study, the term 'foreign policy' is used in the broad sense, including actions and statements from official decision makers regarding relations beyond Sweden's boundaries. The term 'foreign policy' thus refers to traditional diplomacy as well as security policy, trade policy, and foreign aid policy.
2. The discussion about voter interest in foreign policy issues is most often based on US literature and is undoubtedly affected by the US party system structure. Swedish parties are not the election machines the US parties are. However, we see no reason why differences in party system should affect the voters' view of foreign policy issues as distant.

3. 'Interested' refers here to the existence of motivation or a pure desire on the part of the voter to obtain information about that issue. Without such an interest, the party's propaganda on the issue has only the slightest possibility of reaching the voter.
4. The questions read: 'How interested are you in politics in general?' and 'How interested are you in political relations in the rest of the world?' Responses were 'very interested,' 'fairly interested,' 'not particularly interested,' and 'not at all interested.'
5. Since 1986, the SOM (Society, Opinion, Media) study has been a yearly nationwide survey which is carried out in the form of a mail questionnaire to 2800 randomly selected persons aged 15 to 80. The response rate is about 65–70 percent. The surveys are administrated by the SOM Institute at Göteborg University.
6. The question read: 'How interested are you in the following political issues?' Responses were 'very interested,' 'fairly interested,' 'not particularly interested,' and 'not at all interested.'
7. The question read: 'How important do you think the following geographic areas ought to be for Sweden's future foreign policy?' Responses were 'very important,' 'quite important,' 'not particularly important,' 'not at all important,' and 'no opinion' (1992 SOM survey).
8. The question read: 'How important do you think the following issues ought to be for Sweden's future foreign policy?' Responses were 'very important,' 'quite important,' 'not particularly important,' 'not at all important,' and 'no opinion' (1992 SOM survey).
9. Here we have used all, but only, official party programs for the five main Swedish parties 1945–1990, a total of 25 programs.
10. Of course, the increase of intensity in the foreign policy debate could be an effect of increased intensity in the general political debate in parliament. However, no study of Swedish politics during the period 1948–1993 argues for a general increased intensity in political debate. A study of Swedish political rhetoric from the 1950s until the 1990s has found no trends of higher intensity or conflictual attitudes in election campaigns (Håkansson 1999).
11. Here we come to the same result as did Reiter (1997) when he tried to link small states' alliance seeking to tensions in the international system. He found no such link. Instead, he found a tight connection between learning by historical experiences and alliance building.

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