Re-conceptualizing the Pursuit of National Interests in World Politics

- Augmenting the realist concept of national interests to include constructivist theories on identity

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ABSTRACT

Within the debate on international relations an increasing amount of scholars have acknowledged that the debate is unnecessarily entrenched in old paradigms and that the dividing lines are in many cases arbitrary. This theory-developing paper is an answer to the call for cross-fertilization specifically between realism and constructivism. Here the concept of national interests, and its role in the realist tradition of international relations, is re-examined. The argument is made that, classical- and neo-classical-, realist theories should take identity into account when explaining states pursuit of national interests. This is done not only by identifying and explaining the constructivist theories that is useful to realism, but also by illuminating an unexplored potential within realism to directly include identity into its theories. In the final part of the paper, a brief case study of Sweden's reluctance against a NATO-membership is conducted. This study illustrates one way in which a widened understanding of the concept of national interests can be used as an extension to an existing realist theory.
If realists wish to be relevant beyond the very rare instances when the very survival of great powers is at issue, they need a concept of national interest beyond survival.

- *Samuel J. Barkin* 1

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1 Barkin (2010), p.172
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1. INTRODUCTION

Within the debate on international relations an increasing amount of scholars have acknowledged that the debate is unnecessarily entrenched in blunt paradigms and that the dividing lines are in many cases arbitrary.\(^2\) Some efforts have been made to bridge these gaps by exploring the possibilities of partially combining realist and constructivist theories.\(^3\) Beyond the general discussion on how compatible the foundations of realism and constructivism are many questions remains unanswered. One way of continuing the debate is to compare specific aspects within realist and constructivist theories and explore the possibilities of creating a link between them.

Something that has been discussed at length by constructivists is the role of national identity in world politics.\(^4\) There are also constructivist theories that specifically show how national identities influence the foreign policy of states and that these identities are inseparable from states perceived interests.\(^5\) The concept of a national interest is central to all different schools of realism.\(^6\) Even though the importance of national identities have been recognized by some contemporary realists, national identity has not yet been directly included in realist theories however.\(^7\) This is noteworthy, since even some of the works of the early classical realists inadvertently and indirectly touched upon the subject. An example of this is Morgenthau who discussed the national character of states, without fully theorizing the concept and exploring it further.\(^8\)

During the latter part of the twentieth century, a long debate between classical- and neo-classical realists took place.\(^9\) The main issue was whether or not it is human nature or the structure of the international system that is the most influential aspect behind state action and world politics.\(^10\) Eventually the structural theories became the most dominant ones, but the debate also led to the emergence of neo-classical realism, a school of realism which acknowledges that both the structure of the international system and the internal factors of states matters.\(^11\) Even though

\(^2\) Barkin (2003)
\(^3\) The numbers of published articles and books that argues for this point a relatively limited
\(^4\) Hopf (2002)
\(^5\) Katzenstein (1996)
\(^6\) Morgenthau (1948) and Mearsheimer (2001) provides clear explanations on this
\(^7\) Griffiths (1999)
\(^8\) Morgenthau (1948), p.140-141
\(^9\) Baylis, Smith & Owens (2005)
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^11\) Rose (1998) p.146
different realist theories have been developed in order to further explain the reasons behind state action by including internal factors, there is still a potential of also including national identity.\textsuperscript{12} If some of the many theories and insights, which have been provided by constructivists, would be used to further develop realism into taking national identity into account when explaining a state’s pursuit of national interests, it could possibly enhance the explanatory power of realist theories.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
This theory-developing paper is an answer to the call for cross-fertilization between realism and constructivism. Here the concept of national interests, and its role in the realist tradition of international relations, is re-examined. The purpose of this paper is to show that classical- and neo-classical realist theories can, and should, take national identity into account when explaining states pursuit of national interests. This idea is presented and validated by two major arguments that are developed throughout the paper. The first argument is that there is an unexplored potential within many realist theories to directly include national identity into the concept of national interests. The second argument is that there are constructivist theories on national identity that are compatible with the central aspects of realism.

The aim is only to show that national identity can, and should, be taken into account in realist theories. How this specifically could be done is not a question that is answered in the paper however. In order to fully construct a realist theory that takes national identity into account, a much more comprehensive argument needs to be made than what is possible within the confines of this paper. The reason behind writing this thesis is that it could serve as a part of the foundation of a new, and more inclusive, realist theory that does take national identity into account.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN
This is a theory-developing paper and the type of method that is needed is one that can be used to correctly assess and identify the most important ideas and arguments from a number of published works on IR-theory. There are many available methods that can be used to study and

\textsuperscript{12} Baylis, Smith & Owens (2005)
analyze texts. These include: discourse analysis, idea & ideology analysis, content analysis, argument analysis, concept history; narrative analysis and linguistic text analysis.\textsuperscript{14} In the following section, an appropriate method for analyzing texts is presented and discussed. Beyond this method, the main arguments of this paper are also solidified by conducting a brief narrative case study. The narrative case study is conducted as a part of the argument that realist theories can, and should, take national identity into account. The goal is to illustrate one way in which a widened understanding of the concept of national interests can be used as an extension to an existing realist theory. The design of the narrative study is presented in the final part of this paper.

3.1 Method
In order to construct a comprehensive argument for why the concept of national interests should be augmented to take national identity into account, an extensive number of academic publications need to be examined. The discussions in the thesis must take into account the many arguments that have emerged from of the vast cluster of intertwined debates and discourses that already exists. In order to do this in a transparent and reliable way, the process of how the earlier arguments are acknowledged must be explained. Since the focus of the thesis lies on the realist tradition of IR as a whole, all the different schools within realism and the works of the most influential theorists must be included in the discussions in order to avoid any mischaracterizations. The major schools of realism, and the differences between them, are continuously compared to each other in the thesis. The majority of the comparisons are made between classical realism and neo-realism since they stand in stark contrast to each other when it comes to the discussion on human nature vs. structure. Neo-classical realism is mentioned in the cases where it adds something to the debate that is not already mentioned by classical realists or neo-realists. The process of mapping the different relevant realist arguments starts with an examination of the theories of the most influential scholars. There are a few individuals that are constantly referred to in discussions on realism.\textsuperscript{16} The publicized works of these realists has a central role in the discussion on realism. An effort is also made to include theories from less known realists in cases where they have provided original insights. The sources that are used consist of books and peer reviewed articles that have been published in academic journals and that are considered, either by the authors themselves or by others, to be a part of the realist

\textsuperscript{14} Bergström, Boréus (2005), p.18
\textsuperscript{16} Mainly Thucydides, Hobbes, Carr, Morgenthau, Waltz, Walt and Mearsheimer
tradition. Even though the contents of the material is often freely interpreted and reflected upon, there are also some cases in which the interpretation of other scholars is included.\footnote{It should be said that when other scholars interpretations of the major realist works are included they are clearly referred to in the footnotes.} In order to assess the debate among realists, the arguments and criticisms between them are also studied.

In the discussion on what constructivist theories and arguments that can be useful for the thesis it is not an end in itself to include a wide variety of works from different scholars. Instead, the discussion focuses on a few selected works that provides the most useful arguments for the thesis. The books and articles that are selected are those that are most frequently cited by later scholars and that are mentioned as central works within the constructivist tradition. Also, the theories that are used to augment the realist concept of national interests are roughly termed as constructivist. Even though many of the theories are strictly constructivist, some can also partially be labeled as theories from sociology and psychology. In the discussion on the concepts of the nation and the state, theories from a specific discourse on nationalism are also included. It should be emphasized that the idea that cross-fertilization between realism and constructivism is possible has been extensively argued for by earlier scholars.\footnote{Most notably Barkin (2003)} These arguments are included and further developed in the thesis.

### 3.2 The Structure of the Paper

The central argument of this thesis is developed in two steps. The first part of the discussion is presented in the section ‘National Interests and the Realist tradition’. A number of different, crucial, discussions are presented there. In order to make the argument that realism can include insights from constructivism, the theoretical foundations of realism needs to be identified and discussed, with the main argument of the thesis in mind. Even though this section covers a variety of different subjects they all serve the purpose of providing a foundation for the later discussion. The aim of the second section, ‘Incorporating Identity into the National Interest’, is twofold. First, a general discussion on how constructivism and realism can be combined is presented. Then the possibilities of augmenting the concept of national interests to take national identity into account are presented. In the final part of the paper a brief narrative case study, of Sweden and the question of NATO-membership, is conducted. The study is then followed by a concluding discussion where some final reflections are presented.
4. NATIONAL INTERESTS AND THE REALIST TRADITION

The argument that is being developed in this paper consists of many components that need to be rooted in a clear understanding of the many concepts and theories within the realist tradition of IR. Before the concept of national interests is further developed, some central aspects of realism are discussed here.

4.1 The Ambiguous Role of Rationality within Realism

Among the basic premises and core arguments that form the foundation of IR-realism the rationalist premise stands out as both very important and very ambiguous. A widespread misunderstanding is that all realist theories are built upon rational choice theory and that states are deemed to be rational actors. However, something that becomes apparent when reading the actual arguments presented by realists, which have been acknowledged by some researchers, is that the use of rationality “…does not originate with the assumptions of rational choice theory”.25 Rational choice theory is used by some, mainly contemporary26, realists but it was never part of the original classical realist arguments. What needs to be remembered is that the early realists of the twentieth century explicitly turned against the idea that states are strictly rational actors. Carr and the other classical realists saw the concept of the rational actor as naïve and utopian.27 The validity of the rational choice theory in world politics, which the liberal idealists of the early twentieth century argued for, was one of the main reasons behind 'the great debate' in the nineteen thirties and forties. The critique against a strict rational choice based understanding of world politics, and especially of international relations, was also presented by Thucydides who noted that the foreign policy of a state is susceptible to the flaring emotions and passions of its citizens.28

The role of rationality in classical realism can, as Barkin concisely formulated it, be seen as consisting of two elements.29 The first of these is the stance that scholars and theorists of world politics should have a rational approach to how their research is constructed and conducted and that, as he puts it, “…we should look for general patterns of behavior, an admonition accepted

25 Barkin (2010), p.23
26 Mearsheimer (2001), p.31
27 This is argued for repeatedly throughout Carr (1948)
28 Thucydides (431 BCE)
29 Barkin (2010), p.23-24
by a wide range of social scientists”. The second way in which realism uses rationalism, should be understood as prescriptive rather than predictive. Realist theories that are aimed at explaining how a state should act in order to optimize its pursuit of its interests is called prescriptive theories, while theories aimed at explaining how the world actually works and how states actually act is called predictive. It is rare for a realist theory to be purely prescriptive or predictive. To keep the concepts of prescription and prediction apart has proven to be hard within the debate among realists. A striking example of this can be seen in Mearsheimer's critique of Waltz. Mearsheimer argues that Waltz's neo-realism, partially due to its lack of a rational actor assumption, is of little use as a predictive theory. Waltz theory is therefore more prescriptive than what it was meant to be, according to Mearsheimer. At the same time, Mearsheimer's offensive realism has been noted to suffer from a similar problem. Mearsheimer claims in his theory that states act rational, and that they do so because other states act rational and that states therefore should strive to act rational. This creates a strange circular logic that confuses the question of whether or not the theory is prescriptive or predictive, or alternatively both. It is not only among contemporary realists that this type of debate has been going on. The conventional interpretation of the works of the early realists has also been the subject for discussion and has led to some discord within the realist debate.

Beyond the discussion on how the existing realist theories should be interpreted, a central question for the current debate on realism remains: should realists first and foremost try to construct predictive or prescriptive theories? Barkin, among others, sees prescription as the most important goal. He also claims that the early classical realists strived towards this. I disagree on both accounts. A theory that can be used as an instruction for states on how they should act must be based on arguments and assumptions on how the world actually works and how other states act. The need for a predictive theory that can bring some crucial insights into how the world works should therefore be acknowledged to be the most important pursuit. This was also argued for by the early realists. Contrary to Barkin's arguments it should be apparent that the early realists mainly tried to understand and to explain how the world works, not how it should work.

30 Barkin (2010), p.23
31 Ibid. p.124-129
32 Mearsheimer (2001) is a rare case of what is, at least supposedly, both prescriptive and predictive
33 Mearsheimer (2009)
34 Ibid.
36 The most radical re-interpretations has been presented by Griffiths (1999) and Williams (2005)
37 Barkin (2003), p.331-334
38 Ibid. p.332
39 This includes Thucydides, Morgenthau and Carr
It is plausible to understand these works as also including prescriptive arguments beyond the focus on prediction. I would however claim that this is a partially unintended result of the authors own confusion on the subject, much like the incontinences that Mearsheimer revealed in Waltz work. Others have criticized Barkins stance on prediction vs. prescription but for reasons that are not relevant here.  

What should be acknowledged though is that there are many important discussions that derive from this issue.

The concept of rationality itself also needs to be discussed. Even though the rational actor assumption is only shared by a few realists many arguments on rationality are used by nearly all realists. A number of scholars, from different academic fields, have disputed the conventional understanding of the concept of rationality.\(^{41}\) Mercer, among others, has claimed that rational behavior cannot be separated from emotions and psychology.\(^{42}\) In order to understand an individual’s actions and to make sense of it by counting it as a rational behavior then the emotions behind it needs to be accounted for. This type of argument does, if its validity is acknowledged, have an impact on the classical realist arguments on human behavior. Another type of argument that implicates realism has to do with perception. Even if states are not claimed to always act rational, in order to make sense of a state’s actions in hindsight it is important to understand how the state, in a particular point in time, assessed the situation and how it conceived of the possible alternative actions it could take. Also, a state has in reality never access to all the knowledge that it needs to make an optimal decision. In national economics this is called the problem of perfect information and it is also applicable here.\(^{43}\) Other theories that have to do with issues of perception can also be found within the IR-debate.\(^{44}\)

It has been shown here that the rationalist foundation of realism is more complicated than is often recognized. The ambiguity that surrounds both the understanding, and the usage, of the term rationality is important to acknowledge in the later discussions.

\(^{40}\) Sterling Folker, in (2004) p.341-342  
\(^{41}\) These arguments have emerged from the fields of political psychology, sociology and political science, among others.  
\(^{42}\) Mercer (2005)  
\(^{43}\) McDowell, Thom, Frank & Bernanke (2006) p.341-365  
\(^{44}\) Jervis (1976)
4.1.1 Materialism and Idealism

In order to take on the task of bridging the gap between realism and constructivism the fundamentals behind the whole debate needs to be clarified. Within the debate on IR-theory the concepts of materialism and idealism does often get confused when the discussions on epistemology and ontology are not kept apart.\[^{45}\] In a discussion on epistemology it is possible to both formulate a useful foundation for the discussion or to invalidate the whole debate, depending on the philosophical starting point. However, as Wendt points out “the debate should be about what the international world is made of – ontology – not how we can know it.”\[^{46}\] It is not necessary to get too bogged down in a discussion on the philosophy of science in order to advance the argument that is being made in this thesis as long as the most important points are being made.

The many theories that have emerged within the realist tradition of IR is often understood mainly as taking material conditions into consideration when explaining world politics.\[^{47}\] Something that needs to be acknowledged however, that has been pointed out by some scholars, is that realism has been ascribed a wider materialist assumption by its critics than by its actual proponents.\[^{48}\] The straw man argument that realists only focuses on comparing military strength and economic resources does not correlate with the actual realist theories. It is true that material conditions do play an important role in realism, but other facts are taken into account as well. As the later discussions on realism in this paper shows, the early realists also discussed at length the influence of morality, emotions and human nature over world politics. They did not discuss identity however. Even though the importance of non-material factors in the realist discourse can be argued for it is still evident that material conditions plays a crucial role in realism. Constructivists, on the other hand, do not explain world politics by focusing on any objective material reality. They study ideas and norms instead of material conditions.\[^{49}\] As the later arguments in the thesis shows, these differences between realism and constructivism are not that wide however. Even when this is acknowledged some scholars takes it a step further. Griffiths have argued that the early realists of the twentieth century should be reinterpreted as idealists and that many of the arguments in the major works within the realist tradition have some inherent contradictions.\[^{50}\] It is not necessary to take the argument that far. It does however show how the conventional

\[^{45}\] Barkin (2010), p.31-49
\[^{46}\] Wendt (1999), p.90
\[^{47}\] Gustavsson & Tallberg (2006), p.35
\[^{48}\] Barkin (2003), p.329
\[^{49}\] Ibid. p.326
\[^{50}\] Griffiths (1992), p.69-70
understanding of the materialism of the early realists can be reinterpreted towards constructivism, without giving up the central realist premises.

4.2 Realism, Power and the Concept of National Interests

In order to discuss national interest and its role within realist theories the concept of power needs to be explained. These two concepts are directly linked in many ways and are rarely separated in the realist discourse. The concept of national interests is often ambiguously used when discussing the actions of states. The focus of the discussion here is both on the role of power and interests in realism. The concept of national interests is also deconstructed and discussed continuously throughout the thesis.

The basic realist premise that states act in accordance with their national interests is defined simply as a pursuit of power.\textsuperscript{51} No matter what foreign policy that any particular state pursues that policy is always viewed by realists as a pursuit of increased power. Since power also is seen as a zero-sum game, any increase in power of one state is achieved on the expense of other states. Realists have different answers to the question of whether or not power is an end in itself or if it is a way of achieving something else. This dispute is maybe most apparent in the differences between Mearsheimer’s offensive realism and Walt’s defensive realism. A restless pursuit of power aimed at an eventual regional hegemony and a possible dominance over world politics has to be the long term goal for any state, according to Mearsheimer.\textsuperscript{52} Walt, on the other hand, sees power primarily as a means to achieve a secure and peaceful existence for the state.\textsuperscript{53}

No clear definition of what power actually is, and what it is not, has emerged from the realist tradition. Even though many researchers and theorists have formulated some basic definitions of power, the concept continues to be elusive. The fact that realists base their whole argumentation on a concept that they don’t clearly define has attracted frequent criticism.\textsuperscript{54}

The pursuit of power in world politics is, as already have been explained, stated only as an assumption within realism. Many realists defend this assumption primarily by pointing out its

\textsuperscript{51} Morgenthau (1948), p.4-6
\textsuperscript{52} Mearsheimer (2001), p.29-54
\textsuperscript{53} Walt (1987)
\textsuperscript{54} This criticism has also been leveled against the liberal theories that also uses a rational actor assumption.
observable validity throughout history.\textsuperscript{55} This argument has also indirectly been forwarded by historians that have not taken part directly in the IR-debate.\textsuperscript{56} The pursuit of power and its central role in realism can however also be traced back to a philosophical argument. Schopenhauer’s reasoning of the will as the central, and even only, driving force behind the actions of individuals gives the idea of state's relentless pursuit of power theoretical a foundation beyond the realist debate. It needs to be noted however that Schopenhauer’s ontological idealism, for which he is often\textsuperscript{57} referred to, is very contradictory to, and not very useful for advancing the debate on, IR-realism. The idea of the will as the essential driving force was further developed by Nietzsche who turned the idea into the concept of the will to power.\textsuperscript{58} Even a shallow understanding of the concept allows a direct link to be made to Mearsheimer’s arguments on power. It would however be an misunderstanding to interpret Nietzsche’s idea as crude as it is usually done. There are more possible dimensions of the concept that can be useful. In a discussion on states and world politics the will to power does not only need to manifest itself through military and economic strength and ruthless coercion over less powerful states. State's, or individual's, will to power can also be realized by achieving self-control, a greater understanding of oneself, and of gaining recognition and prestige.\textsuperscript{59} This can be tied directly to both constructivist theories on identity and classical realist claims on the importance of prestige. This possible connection should be kept in mind in the later discussions on the possibilities of combining realism and constructivism.

\subsection*{4.2.1 Human Nature and its Role in Realism}

The question of in what extent human nature influences world politics has been answered in many different ways by realists. The dividing line between classical realism and neo-realism has in large part to do with this issue. The central difference between these different strands of realism stems from the classical realists focus on human nature and the neo-realists focus on the structure of the international system.\textsuperscript{60} The classical realists, beginning with Thucydides, partially explained the foreign policy of a state as an expression of the driving forces of its citizens and leaders.\textsuperscript{61} Therefore the relations between states will never escape the influence of human nature

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Morgenthau (1948), p.5
\item \textsuperscript{56} Kennedy (1987)
\item \textsuperscript{57} Hedin (1996) p.48-52
\item \textsuperscript{58} Nietzsche (1886) p.158-159
\item \textsuperscript{59} This argument mirrors one way of interpreting chosen aspects of some of Nietzsche's ideas.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Baylis, Smith & Owens (2005), p.95-102
\item \textsuperscript{61} Thucydides (431 BCE)
\end{itemize}
or the shortcomings of its citizens. A central aspect of Thucydides reasoning that persists throughout all later realist arguments is the focus on fear. He identified and categorized fear as one of three driving forces behind foreign policy and also explained it to be a deciding factor in the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war.\(^2\) Fear was equally, if not more, central to Hobbes who is also considered an important theorist within the classical realist tradition.\(^3\) The persistent role of fear in realism is tied to the insecurity that the anarchical international system is claimed to inevitably create among states. The most influential classical realists of the early twentieth century, most notably Carr and Morgenthau, also took into account aspects behind state behavior that concerns human nature.\(^4\) The first of Morgenthau’s six principles of realism has to do with this.\(^5\) He stated that “political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature”.\(^6\) What also should be mentioned here is that Morgenthau and Carr both discussed the role of morality in world politics at length. They both discussed morality in terms of its influence over human behavior.\(^7\)

Beyond the discussion on the role of fear, insecurity and morality there is something else that have been discussed by the classical realists but that have been largely forgotten in the current debate on realism. The need for recognition and status is something that Thucydides and Morgenthau saw as essential to the state. Honor is one of the major driving forces that Thucydides claimed that a state pursues. Honor is arguably not the best way to define the pursuit of recognition and status today since the meaning of the concept varies between different cultures and different historical contexts. Morgenthau, on the other hand, constructs an argument around a concept that is less dependent on culture, so it is therefore more useful for a realist theory than honor. This concept in Morgenthau’s theory, which is important to his overall reasoning and that I argue has been largely ignored by later realists, is prestige. Morgenthau bluntly claims that a state can pursue three types of policies: status quo, imperialism and prestige.\(^8\) Instead of viewing the pursuit of prestige as a specific policy I would argue, contrary to Morgenthau, that it should be understood as being part of all different policies that a state pursues in the international arena. This argument is further developed later in this paper. What needs to be stated here is not only that human nature do play a major role in classical realism but

\(^{62}\) Thucydides (431 BCE)
\(^{63}\) Hobbes (1651)
\(^{64}\) Carr (1939), Morgenthau (1948)
\(^{65}\) Morgenthau (1948), p.4
\(^{66}\) Ibid. p.4-5
\(^{67}\) Carr (1939), p.146-169, Morgenthau (1948), p.240-264
\(^{68}\) Morgenthau (1948), p.27-97
also that there are lots of possibilities to reinterpret and revitalize many of the realist arguments on human nature.

Neo-realism, which focuses on the structure of the international system in its explanations of state behavior, is generally not considered to include any aspects of human nature. However, even the most clear-cut system-focused neo-realist theories do inadvertently take human nature into account in one important way. Neo-realists, like classical realists, do talk about emotion as a crucial aspect behind a state’s foreign policy-making. The fear of other states and of the unpredictability of the anarchical international system is central not only to the classical realists but also for neo-realists like Waltz. The same is true for the competing sub-theories within neo-realism. Walt’s defensive realism and Mearsheimer’s offensive realism both discuss fear at length. The type of rationalist premise that is used by these scholars, especially Mearsheimer who endorses the rational choice theory, is in fact being undermined by invoking a vocabulary of human emotions to describe world politics. This can be claimed to be a vague argument but it still serves the purpose of illuminating how even neo-realists blurs the line between structural explanations and human nature. Neo-classical realism, which draws upon insights from both classical realism and neo-realism, is subjected to the same arguments that have been made for classical- and neo-classical realism.

A crucial point that needs to be made here that is not necessarily obvious but very important, for both the discussion on realism in general and for this paper in particular, is that the realist premises on human nature are in large part built upon loose assumptions that has not been thoroughly studied or theorized. When realists, particularly neo-realists, talk about fear and its role in world politics it is usually not directly discussed as an emotion in the same way as a sociologist or psychologist would have done. Instead it is used as an assumption of a predictable rational response to perceived threats, which is also supposed to stem from a rational understanding of the international system. This also ties back to the earlier discussion on how rationality should be understood.

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69 Waltz (1979)
70 Walt (1987), Mearsheimer (2001)
71 See the discussion on prescriptive vs. prediction earlier in this paper
4.2.2 Defining the Nation & the State

In order to conceive of a national interest it is important to understand what the term national means in this context. The two concepts state and nation are frequently confused as synonyms both within and outside the academic community, which also is apparent when national interests are discussed. When no distinction is made between the state and the nation the main arguments in this thesis cannot be comprehended. To distinguish these concepts from each other is important, which is why it is discussed here.

The state is a political construct and the nation is a cultural community. There are many competing definitions of both the state and the nation. The ideas on what constitutes a state are, even though there are many different definitions, part of a discussion that is based upon roughly the same basic premises. The major question is how narrow the definition of a state should be. Some theorists prefer to see empires, nation-states, federations and city-states as entirely different types of entities. This type of reasoning is not very useful for a discussion on IR-realism. All types of realism are based around the premise of the centrality of the state, while also claiming that realist theories are just as valid now as they were thousands of years ago. A definition of the state that is more inclusive is needed. In this paper Tilly's definition of the state as "...coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories" is used as a definition of the state.

This definition is already widely used and is also useful here due to its inclusiveness of many different types of political organizations. The Greek polis and the modern nation-state is therefore both considered simply to be states in the in this paper. Tilly's definition is also largely compatible with Weber's, frequently cited and widely used, definition of the state which sees sovereignty over territory and monopoly of the legitimate use of violence as crucial capabilities for a state.

The concept of the nation has proven to be very hard to define and there is no single understanding of the nation that has been agreed upon within the academic community. The concept is surrounded by even more discord that the debate concerning the definition of the state. Many theorists view the nation as a living entity that in some ways can be seen as a single

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72 Hutchinson & Smith (1994)
73 This is however not the most common view and is not shared by the most widely used definitions of the state.
74 The most obvious example of this was Thucydides intent to write his book as a "possession for all time"
75 Tilly (1990), p.1
76 Weber (1978), p.54
77 Hutchinson & Smith (1994)
unique individual. This view of the nation as a living being lends itself very well to the later discussion on identity and prestige. Other theorists instead see the nation as an expression of a community of individuals that shares a collective identity based on a common history and culture. Ethnic homogeneity is something that was seen as central to a nation by many theorists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This view has however proven to be ahistorical since nations often have formed across ethnic divides. Other attempts to claim one factor as the central one to a nation includes arguments surrounding a common: language, history, state or ideology among other ideas. No one of these arguments has been accepted by any large part of the academic community. Other theories focus on explaining how a nation emerges and how it perseveres and changes. One theory that does not explicitly define the nation but that helps to distinguish nationalism into two different categories is Hutchinson's theory of political- and cultural nationalism. Hutchinson argues that there are essentially two different types of nationalism, one political and one cultural, that "...must not be conflated, for they articulate different, even competing conceptions of the nation". Political nationalists claim their allegiance to be towards the state and its institutions while cultural nationalists see the common heritage of the nation as most important.

Even though no consensus has been reached, in the discussion on the concept of the nation, some common general ideas can be observed among the many different definitions. The nation can be understood as a community of people that have some essential things in common. It is not necessary to formulate a more precise definition of the nation for this paper. The important thing is to understand how the core of the concept differs from the state. Whether or not the nation should be understood as a single living entity or as an expression of a fluid cultural community the possibility to claim the existence of a shared national interest can still be argued for by extending the arguments that have been briefly presented here. An important question that yet remains, now that the nation and the state have been discussed, that is central to this thesis is how the state and the nation relate to each other. To claim the concept national interests to be a central driving force behind a state’s foreign policy in IR-realism can be problematic if it is not formulated properly. Something that is clear is that the world does not consist of only homogenous nation-states, and have never done so. A variety of different types of states and other complex political entities exists alongside nation-states. Many states are formed across

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78 Hutchinson & Smith (1994)  
80 Hutchinson, in Hutchinson & Smith (1994) p.122-132  
81 Ibid. p.122  
82 Ibid. p.122-132
national lines and many nations exist without any state. This fact has, even though it has been clearly acknowledged, been brushed aside in the realist debate. The elusiveness of the two concepts state and nation poses a challenge for the realist theories, and particularly for this thesis. In order to claim that all states pursue a supposed self-interest, which is termed as a national interest, the whole concept needs to be defined in such a way that it is applicable to many different types of states. To use the nation-state as a template for the general definition of a state in realist explanations of world politics is not optimal and it is also not necessary. The core insights of Thucydides explanations of how international politics works have been continuously cited for a reason. Realists have always tried to identity patterns and created explanations that are supposed to be timeless. However, even if the premise of the pursuit of power can be claimed to have been one of the central aspects behind international relations throughout the history of human civilization the concept of national interests may have had a more limited role. In order to talk of a national interest and to argue for the applicability of the concept an inclusive definition of the concept needs to be constructed. I suggest that the best approach is to start from the realist principle of the primacy of the state. Something that can act as a crucible is Hutchinson's two concepts of political- and cultural nationalism. It shows how there is room for different, and overlapping, reasons behind the pursuit of national interests within the same state. Whether or not the dominant type of nationalism in a particular state is cultural or political it is through the state itself that the nationalist drive materializes itself. The state continues to be the necessary actor for any national interest to fully have an impact. This view does not necessarily perfectly describe the reality but it can serve as a useful realist argument.

4.2.3 Agency in Realism & the Logic of the Social

In order to theorize the pursuit of national interests in world politics it is crucial to define who or what it is that pursues these interests. The question of how agency should be understood in realism boils down to a basic argument. One of the central ideas that are shared among all strands of realism is the view of the state as the main actor in world politics. This is sometimes also called the statist principle of realism.\(^{83}\) While liberal theories sees a lot of potential for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to play a major role in international relations, and to overcome many of the problems inherent in the international system, realists are much more

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\(^{83}\) Baylis, Smith & Owens (2005), p.92-93
skeptical. Something that should be noted, since it is frequently misinterpreted, is the fact that a system that is state-centric does not exclude other types of actors.\textsuperscript{84}

Even though the centrality of states is agreed upon by all realists, the question of agency is a source of discord among the different realist theories. Neo-realists who primarily focus on the structure of the international system in order to explain political outcomes can be, and have been, criticized for giving to little room for agency in their theories.\textsuperscript{85} This is especially true for Waltz, who almost entirely leaves agency out of the equation. Classical and neo-classical realists, on the other hand, do give more room for agency in their explanations. Since classical realists, and in some extent also neo-classical realists, takes human nature into account when trying to understand the actions of states the importance of the structure of the international system is not as dominant. Regardless of which theory that gives agency the right amount of explanatory power over world politics the important question is how agency should be understood. Even though states are defined by realists to be unitary actors the idea rests on an indirect premise. With the possible exception of Hobbesian Leviathans, i.e. strictly totalitarian monarchies, the foreign policy of states emerge from the cooperation of many individual policymakers. Few, if any, realists would claim otherwise. Carr explicitly says that it would not make sense to discuss world politics without acknowledging the corporate actorhood within states.\textsuperscript{86} Even though states are loosely described as unitary actors it is important to make this distinction; States can be viewed as acting as unitary actors even though they are not truly individuals. The issue of whether or not states can be claimed to have personalities is, according to Carr, “… not only misleading, but meaningless. To deny personality to the state is just as absurd as to assert it.”\textsuperscript{87} He goes on to say that the concept is a necessary fiction and an indispensable tool for the human mind to understand world politics.\textsuperscript{88} This argument reflects the early classical realists unwillingness, or inability, to create a thorough explanation for how state agency should be understood. They developed a state-centric premise without fully defending it. A great paradox, which helps to validate the central argument of this thesis and that is presented later in discussion on constructivist theories on national identity, is that the most comprehensive arguments that have been developed in defense of a state-centric premise comes from constructivists.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{84} An elegant explanation of this can be seen in Waltz (1979), p.38-41
\textsuperscript{85} This is most accurate for the purely structural theories
\textsuperscript{86} Carr (1949), p.147-150
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid. p.148
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid. p.148-149
\textsuperscript{89} One of the most comprehensive arguments can be seen in Wendt (1999)
Beyond the arguments concerning the centrality of the state there is one closely related aspect of the discussion on agency that is rarely acknowledged but crucial to this thesis. States do, just like people, always exist within a social context. In order to predict and to understand the actions of state's the characteristics of the international society must always be taken into account.\(^90\) This is part of a constructivist argument that also applies to realism. The logic of the social has however been stated as standing in opposition to a rationalist logic.\(^91\) The idea that individuals are power-maximizes that pursue their own self-interests which can, on an ontological level, be seen as existing prior to any external social context, is plausible for a pure rational choice theory.\(^92\) As have been clarified earlier however, realist theories in general does not subscribe to an individualist rational choice theory. Even though there are ways of arguing for a compatibility between the two different logics the discussion does not become relevant here. It is sufficient to clarify that the realist theories that does not claim states to be rational actors are compatible with the constructivist arguments surrounding the logic of the social. In the later discussion on the role of identity this issue is important to take into account as part of the foundation for the argument of merging realism with parts of constructivism.

5. INCORPORATING IDENTITY INTO THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The discussion so far has shown how the concept of national interests has been used in realist theories. In this section the possibilities of re-defining the concept by incorporating arguments from constructivist theories are explored. Textbooks and undergraduate courses on IR-theory generally start the discussion by explaining realism, liberalism and constructivism to be the major traditional approaches to studying world politics.\(^93\) As have been observed and pointed out by some scholars, this way of approaching and defining the foundations of the IR-debate is potentially misleading since it implies that constructivism is an IR-theory just like realism and liberalism. Constructivism is not, however, a theory of international politics.\(^94\) It is a social theory that is concerned with the relationship between structures and agents.\(^95\) It is open-ended and applicable to any social form. Even though the line of separation between realism and constructivism has been claimed by many to be clear and distinct, a number of scholars have

\(^90\) Barkin (2010), p.50-51
\(^91\) Ibid. p.51
\(^92\) Ibid. p.50-51
\(^93\) Baylis, Smith & Owens (2005)
\(^94\) Wendt (1999), p.193
\(^95\) Baylis, Smith & Owens (2005), p.162
argued otherwise. Something that is worth mentioning is that this argument surfaced in the debate decades ago but it did not manage to overturn the general understanding of realism and constructivism. The arguments that have been presented so far in this paper show that realism is in many ways directly compatible with constructivism. The constructivist theories and arguments that concerns identity and could be useful to realism are discussed next.

5.1 Constructivist Theories on National Identity
Identity is something that have been thoroughly studied and debated within many different academic fields. There is a vast array of theories and frameworks that have been developed within psychology, sociology and anthropology aimed at understanding identity. Identity, and its impact on politics, have always been acknowledged and discussed in one way or another within the fields of political science and IR. It is however only recently that the role of identity in foreign policy has been theorized and studied in a large extent. Constructivist scholars have developed a number of frameworks and theories that incorporates ideas from other academic fields. The usefulness of these theories for this thesis varies. Many of the identity-related constructivist theories are directly pitted against the main principles of IR-realism. Some of the theories are, however, largely compatible with realism in some crucial aspects and do address the concept of national identity. Two main arguments are developed here: That the realist principle of state-centrism can be defended from a constructivist perspective; and that the state can be understood as a unitary actor with a sense of identity. Then the theory of ontological security, which is one of the most useful theories for this thesis, is presented and discussed.

The realist principle that states should be understood as unitary actors has been the target for frequent criticism from many competing IR-theories. Even though many of the core arguments behind constructivism are commonly understood as being in opposition to this principle some of the most influential constructivists have defended the idea, but with other type of arguments than those that realists have provided. Wendt develops, in his seminal work from 1999, a social theory of international politics that is partially constructed around an argument that states can be understood as unitary actors with a form of identity. On the question on whether or not the state

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96 Williams (2005)
97 It should be noticed that the articles and books on this subject that is included in this paper was published a decade ago but have not yet overturned the debate.
98 Compared to the other academic fields.
99 Xavier (2011) and Finnemore (1996) are two prominent examples.
100 This critique has also been leveled against liberal theories.
101 Wendt (1999)
should be considered to be not only an actor but also a unitary actor, Wendt answers that it is a non-issue since "...it is not clear how something can be an actor at all if it is not unitary".\footnote{Wendt (1999), p.195} It is certainly possible to disagree with this seemingly simple way of answering the question. It can, however, instead be viewed as an elegant and valid argument that provides a sufficient foundation for the wider discussion on the centrality of the state. He also claims that “…states are also purposive actors with a sense of Self” and that “…states are real actors to which we can legitimately attribute anthropomorphic qualities like desires, beliefs, and intentionality”.\footnote{Ibid. p.209} One of the main arguments for this is that states consist of structures with political authority over a society which in turn means that a state presupposes the society that it rules over.\footnote{Ibid. p.209} The state can be conceived of as ontologically independent. There are a few theories and arguments that show how an identity can be ascribed to a state. One concept that have spawned a long academic debate and some comprehensive theories is ontological security. Ontological security is a concept that emerged within the field of psychology but was later introduced into the IR debate by Huysmans\footnote{Huysmans (1998)}, who slightly altered the theory in order to study security.\footnote{Zarakol (2010), p.6} The definitions and arguments surrounding the concept of ontological security that however remained central to IR-constructivists were those that Giddens developed.\footnote{Giddens (1991)} Giddens defines ontological security as "the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action".\footnote{Giddens (1990), p.92} According to the theory\footnote{There are many versions of this theory but they are all based around the same basic concept} of ontological security individuals, and states, do not only pursue physical security, material gains and recognition. They also strive for a stable identity. The need for a stable and clear identity can in some cases be prioritized over physical security, which is why the foreign policy of some states can seem erratic and irrational when the pursuit of ontological security is not properly acknowledged. An example of this is Iran’s relation to the U.S. It is hard for the Iranian leadership to dampen its harsh rhetoric towards the U.S. since the hostility between the two states has become an important part of how Iran, and particularly the regime, sees itself.\footnote{Firoozabadi (2011)} To uphold this ontological security of the Iranian national identity some risks to the states physical security can therefore be deemed as necessary. This type of argument shows how conventional realist theories are insufficient to explain the security-related aspects behind the foreign policy of states.
The arguments that have been presented here fit very well together with some of the earlier mentioned theories on nationalism, which views the nation as a living entity with an evolving identity. There is, as have been shown here, other types of arguments that can be used to defend the statist principle within realism beyond the ones that are provided by realists.

5.2 Combining Identity and Realism - an Overlooked Potential

The influence of identity over foreign policy has not been included in any major theory or framework within the realist tradition of IR. Even though identity has not explicitly been included in realist theories many central arguments from classical realists comes very close to the identity-related debate among constructivists. The fact that classical realists focus on the role of human nature in their explanations of state behavior should inevitably lead to a discussion on identity since human behavior is closely linked to a search for identity. This is not a controversial stance within sociology or psychology but it has yet to be taken into account in classical and neo-classical realism. The aspects of realism that can, and arguably should, be augmented to include arguments on identity is briefly presented and discussed here.

I would argue that many realists have incorporated arguments in their theories that have a striking resemblance to a discussion on national-, or alternatively state-, identity. The threatening growth of Athens power in the fifth century B.C.E. that Thucydides saw as the main reason behind their eventual confrontation with Sparta and the Peloponnesian League is often interpreted only as an argument concerned with the structure of the international system. Something that however also was crucial to Thucydides, was the context in which the Athenian increase in power took place. The Spartans saw Athens as excessively arrogant and expansionistic in nature due to the Athenians elevated view of themselves. Thucydides did not only point to the changes in the regional balance of power as his explanation of the outbreak of war but also the character of the states involved. It is, with this in mind, very easy to interpret his reasoning as taking national identity into account. Thucydides did not use the terminology that is available today and it would, in some ways, be anachronistic to talk of national identities in the case of classical Greece but Thucydides core arguments show that there is room for a reinterpretation

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111 The concept of a national identity is not used as a part of any major realist theory.
112 The impact of identity on human behavior has been argued for among many academic fields outside of IR.
114 Thucydides (431 BCE)
that bridges some of the supposed lines between realism and constructivism. Morgenthau, who is also considered to be a classical realist, discusses at length the influence of, what he calls, national character over international politics.\footnote{Morgenthau (1948), p.140-141} He points out that it is an elusive concept but that it is also very important, which is made clear by his statement that “National character cannot fail to influence national power”.\footnote{Ibid. p.140} National character is something that is unique for every state and that is resistant to change and influences many levels of the society.\footnote{Ibid. p.145} The concept does have some striking similarities to the concept of national identity. The discussion surrounding this concept in Morgenthau’s publications has not, with some notable exceptions\footnote{It is however part of Griffiths argument that Morgenthau should be considered to be a nostalgic idealist}, made any big impact on the later interpretations of his work. I would however argue that this part of Morgenthaus theory provides an excellent starting point for a discussion on identity within classical realism and a cross-fertilization with constructivism.

The strictly structural theories of world politics that is provided by neo-realists does not easily lend themselves to a discussion on identity. The concept of a national identity is not useful to the theories presented by realists like Waltz and Mearsheimer, since any form of inclusion of the concept would contradict the main principles behind neo-realism. There is however possible, but slightly farfetched, to make the argument that Walt’s neo-realist theory on alliance formation is open for an inclusion of identity in one specific aspect. Among the factors that lead states to ally with other states has to do with the intentions of other states.\footnote{Walt (1987), p.25} To estimate how big threat that a state constitutes its intentions plays an important part in Walt’s theory. Even though it is obvious that hostile intentions play a big role in how other states react against a state it is not part of other neo-realist explanations beyond Walt’s.

### 5.3 Augmenting the Concept of National Interests

The arguments that have been developed in this paper have shown that there are many possibilities to partially incorporate constructivism into IR-realism and that national identity is something that is particularly useful. What have been argued for throughout this paper is that the understanding of state’s pursuit of national interests can, and should, be augmented to take the pursuit of a stable national identity into account. To construct a fully developed realist theory for this would be beyond the scope of this paper. What has to suffice here is a more general
understanding that is based on the arguments that already have been presented. A way of using this together with an existing realist theory is done in the case study in the next section.

Something that is evident but needs to be repeated here is that all models are by definition insufficient. All models take only a limited amount of factors into account when explaining something. This is also true for the many IR-theories. Even Mearsheimer, who offers maybe the most clear and confident explanation of the behavior of great powers, acknowledges that his theory has a limited validity by saying that “it is true in about seventy percent of the time”. The reason behind the argument that the concept of the national interest should be broadened is not to point out that the current realist theories are flawed, since this is already obvious and impossible to avoid. The point is that the explanatory power of the extensive arguments provided by realism can be greatly enhanced by relatively limited means. To take national identity into account is not a way to force different theories together just for the sake of it, it is instead a way of unlocking an unexplored potential.

One thing that is important to clarify, that is tied to the earlier discussion on prediction vs. prescription, is that a concept of national interests that takes identity into account is more useful to predictive realist theories. It is hard, and not particularly relevant, to construct a prescriptive theory that emphasizes the need for foreign-policymakers to focus more on national identity. It is rather in theories that try to reveal how the world actually works that an augmented concept of national interests can be suitable. To examine the influence of the national identities in a certain case does not necessarily make it easier to directly predict any future outcome but it helps to correctly assess the current situation, which in turn can lead to conclusions that that can be generalized to similar situations. It is hard, if not impossible, to accurately predict the future foreign policy of a state. A state may act in surprising ways that may seem strange and erratic to outside observers. This does not however mean that the state in question should be deemed as acting irrational. There is always ways of making sense of a state’s actions in retrospect. Instead of quickly condemning a state for acting irrational, a greater understanding of the forces behind the foreign policy decisions should be pursued.

As have been shown in this paper the role of the national interest has varied, in some aspects, among the different schools of realism. To augment the concept to take national identity into account would inevitably impact the realist theories in different ways. Even more importantly, it

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120 Mearsheimer said this in a lecture at the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law on March 26, 2013
would be useful in some theories more than others. Strictly structural realist theories, that don’t give room for agency, are not particularly suitable for taking national identity into consideration. Some of the theories that are considered to be neo-realist do however diverge from this extreme stance slightly and by doing so, even they are partially affected by the arguments in this thesis. This is shown in the following case study that illustrates this point.

6. ILLUSTRATING THE USEFULNESS OF AN AUGMENTED CONCEPT

There are many possible ways to augment the concept of national interests by incorporating national identity. To conduct a comprehensive study that could make major scientific claims is not possible within the confines of this paper. To fully explore the possible implications of a re-conceptualized understanding of national interests would require many extensive studies. In this final part of the thesis, a study is conducted that is strictly limited in nature. The goal is to illustrate one way in which a widened understanding of the concept of national interests can be used as an extension to an existing realist theory. Instead of examining the material conditions of a particular case and creating a full realist explanation, the task is limited to showing how identity can be used together with realism. The case that is studied is one in which an application of conventional realist theories are insufficient to fully explain the issue. As have been argued earlier in this thesis, an inclusion of identity into realism is most doable in classical and neo-classical realism. In this narrative study it is neo-realism however that serves as a starting point. The study can accordingly be considered a least likely scenario. If it is possible to augment a neo-realist theory it should also be possible to augment a classical- or neo-classical realist theory.

6.1 Sweden and the NATO-Membership Question

There are always cases in which IR-realism can offer a useful approach to studying a particular issue in world politics. There are also many cases where an application of a realist theory or framework proves to be problematic. This is not only true for realism but also for all theories and models. Even though this is not a particularly controversial statement there is, in connection to this, a peculiar problem with realism. Even when realist theories are applied in circumstances that are optimal there are still cases in which major problems occur. One example of this, which

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121 This can be argued for in most theories with the possible exception of Waltz and Mearsheimer’s theories
illustrates the point that there is room within realism to take national identity into account, is Walt's realism. When Walt’s theory is referred to it is usually only mentioned as defensive realism but the actual theory that he constructed in his most important work is specifically a theory on alliance formation. One might think that this theory should be the optimal one in explaining why states enters into alliances with other states. There is however cases in which the theory proves to be insufficient. One of these cases is Sweden and the question of a potential NATO-membership. According to Walt’s theory on alliance formation it would have made perfect sense for Sweden to already have joined the NATO-alliance. Since this has not yet happened, and the resistance against a potential future membership is still strong, it is evident that there is something beyond the factors mentioned in Walt’s theory that has played an important role in Sweden’s foreign policy. In the following study I identify and examine a crucial missing component; Sweden’s pursuit of a stable national identity. This is done by conducting a brief narrative study. The aim of the study is to identify and describe three competing perspectives of Sweden’s national identity. The examination of these narratives is followed by a discussion on how they can provide a useful insight for Walt’s theory on alliance formation. Before the study is conducted the narrative method is presented.

6.1.1 Narrative Analysis
This case-study is conducted as a narrative analysis. The choice of using a narrative analysis is far from obvious and can in some ways be potentially problematic. Some highly praised studies that focuses on identity and its role in world politics, which have used narrative analysis’s, has however been conducted.

A narrative analysis can be used in different ways depending on what type of study it is used for. There is no clear definition of the concept ‘narrative’ that has been agreed upon within the academic community. This poses a problem since there is no clear foundation to start from when constructing a narrative method. However, at the same time it also provides the study with some freedom and room for creativity in formulating a method. What is worth mentioning is that narrative analysis is not commonly used in studies with rationalist theoretical frameworks, which realist theories are considered to be. I would however argue that narrative studies can be a very

129 Walt (1985)
130 Even though the reasoning behind this premise is not fully explained it would be hard to argue against it
131 Bergström, Boréus (2005), p.219
132 One example is Ringmar (1996)
133 Bergström, Boréus (2005), p.222
useful method for studies with rational theories, by acknowledging the success of the few rationalist studies that actually have been conducted.\textsuperscript{134} Constructivism, post-constructivism and post-modernism provides theoretical arguments and premises that can be used in efficient ways to construct methods for studying policy through a narrative approach.\textsuperscript{135} It has been argued that narrative analysis is usable for studying politics in this way since “…social actors are more conceivable as ‘narrative beings’ than as ‘rational actors’”.\textsuperscript{136} The earlier discussions on realism and the idea of states as social actors do however show that even though IR-realism is in one sense a rationalist framework it can also be interpreted as being compatible with constructivism in more ways than is usually recognized. There are distinct advantages of using narrative analysis for the study. The augmented concept of national interests, which combines the pursuit of a stable national identity with ideas from IR-realism, can be used in a very elegant way in a narrative analysis. Narratives are in large part directly tied to the drive to understand oneself, ones place in the world and also what should be strived for. This can also be applied to the state.\textsuperscript{137}

A crucial part of a narrative study is how the narratives are identified and defined. The studies that apply a narrative analysis are relatively vague on this point. The process of identifying narratives can in many cases only be explained as a direct result of the reading of the empirical texts. This is an inherent problem with narrative theory that needs to be acknowledged. The way in which this process is conducted here is based on the method that is used in Wagnssons article from 2011, which also uses a narrative method for studying a NATO-related question. In the study she says that the four different narratives that she identified were “crystalized from a reading of” the official strategies and statements of the organization that she studied.\textsuperscript{138} A similar process is also used by Ringmar in his seminal study from 1996.\textsuperscript{139} This means that the initial ideas behind each narrative emerge in the mind of the researcher as a result of reading the empirics. This process can be criticized for being arbitrary and unscientific. I acknowledge the inherent weakness of this aspect of the method of narrative analysis. It is however important to point out that narrative studies can still provide valid results.

Three narratives are identified in this study. These narratives do overlap with each other in many ways but as long as they are separate in some crucial aspects from each other it should be relevant.

\textsuperscript{134} For example Kiser (1996)
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid. p.226
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid. p.260
\textsuperscript{137} This can in extension be argued for by applying Wendt’s theories
\textsuperscript{138} Wagnsson (2011), p.485
\textsuperscript{139} Ringmar (1996)
to discuss them as distinct narratives. The process of tracing these different narratives is done by studying secondary sources in the form of academic publications that covers the subjects of Swedish history and politics. The historical context and the many crucial events that have shaped Sweden's foreign policy are studied. There is no reason in this case to try to construct any objective presentation of Sweden's history. What is important is how these events are interpreted and remembered within the different narratives. In contrast the usual way to present and frame a study, with the help of a brief historical background meant to introduce and educate the reader on the subject, this study can include the historical context within the presentation of the narratives.

An important question for any study is how it should be restricted in time. While many studies can be focused on studying events within a clearly specified time period a narrative analysis is much harder to limit in this regard. A wide historical context needs to be included. To understand Sweden’s skepticism against joining international alliances the current policies can only be fully understood with hundreds of years of history in mind. There is however a vast array of works, which covers the subject of Sweden’s history, that identifies and summarizes the most important events and historical developments. This number of texts that is used for this study can therefore be limited. This does however make the validity of the study highly reliant on the authors of these texts and these authors’ interpretations of Sweden’s history.

6.1.2 Three Competing National Identities

Here three meta-narratives are presented and discussed. They are defined as: the great power; the neutral sovereign; and the postmodern state. These different narratives are discussed in the order that they emerged historically. It should be noted that few, if any, individuals would use this particular terminology to describe their view of the Swedish national identity. These terms are instead aimed at describing three different ways of conceiving of Sweden’s national identity in a way that is useful for keeping the different ideas apart.

The first narrative that can be found behind Sweden's foreign policy, the identity as a great power, has long historical roots. The way in which some individuals want to define Sweden’s identity refers back to events in the seventeenth and eighteenth century that took place during a
period when Sweden where recognized as a great power.\textsuperscript{140} The, partially constructed\textsuperscript{141} and refurbished, memories from this period can provide a much more clearly defined identity than the other alternative identities and therefore provide comfort and a stable ontological security to some. This identity can be seen as a latent idea that persists within the national psyche\textsuperscript{142} but that has fallen out of fashion and that also has direct counterparts in many other nations who also preserve their memories of certain historical events. Since the Swedish nation and the Swedish state has slowly evolved in symbiosis during the course of many centuries Sweden is today among the few states that comes very close to the concept of a homogenous nation-state.\textsuperscript{143} The interests of the state do therefore become very intertwined. A nostalgic pursuit of a perceived former glory could in this sense also bring respect to individuals within the nation. People who see the world through this perspective see traditional power-politics as an inevitable way of furthering the national interests. This also has consequences for how alliances with other states are viewed, which is highly relevant for attitudes against a potential NATO-membership.

The second narrative is based on Sweden’s identity as, what could be termed, the neutral sovereign. The emergence of this national identity is a direct result of a number of policies and crucial foreign policy decisions that can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. It was however during the first half of the twentieth century, during the two world wars, that the policies of neutrality and non-alignment fully became an explicit doctrine.\textsuperscript{144} It was also then that this new kind of national identity started to take shape.\textsuperscript{145} Sweden also received international recognition for its diplomacy and ability to mediate between opposing factions.\textsuperscript{146} At the onset of the superpower rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union after the Second World War Sweden’s policies were reinforced. Throughout the Cold War Sweden continued its foreign policy of non-alignment and neutrality. This also shaped the defense planning and structure of armed forces. The idea was that the military and the state as a whole should be able to be self-sufficient in times of crisis or impending war. Sweden’s experience from the Second World War and the Cold War was that it was possible to stay out of war and to protect its territorial integrity by armed neutrality.\textsuperscript{147} This is significant to point out since it has had a great effect on the later attitudes on a potential NATO-membership. In the nineteen nineties, following the collapse of

\textsuperscript{140} Weisner-Hanks (2006)
\textsuperscript{141} See the main argument that is presented in Cubitt (2007)
\textsuperscript{142} Hutchinson & Smith (1994)
\textsuperscript{143} Gustafsson (2010)
\textsuperscript{144} Nilsson (2009)
\textsuperscript{145} This is however a point that only makes sense in retrospect.
\textsuperscript{146} This was also due to Sweden’s actions during the first world war.
\textsuperscript{147} It is worth to note the difference between the experiences of the other Scandinavian states and their later policies.
the Soviet Union and Sweden's eventual membership in the European Union (EU), the policy of Swedish Neutrality effectively ceased to be the major guiding principle behind Sweden's foreign policy.\textsuperscript{148} The policy of non-alignment is however still being seen as central, by many, despite Sweden’s clear commitment to aid other EU-member states in case of war.\textsuperscript{149} It is important to understand that the policy of neutrality have had a deep and lasting impact on the national identity. The national identity of Sweden as a neutral sovereign state still persists as a narrative through which many Swedish citizens make judgments on how Sweden should conduct its foreign policy.

The third narrative that is discussed here is what could be seen as an identity of Sweden as a postmodern state. Following the rise of liberal idealism\textsuperscript{150} in the twentieth century, which fully emerged with the founding of the United Nations in the wake of the Second World War, the international community and the perceived role of the state changed.\textsuperscript{151} The idea that states should work together, not only to further their own interests but also, to minimize suffering and make the world into a better place for everyone is a firm principle within the foreign policy of many states and international organizations today.\textsuperscript{152} The emergence of this radical new view can also be observed within parts the academic community where many ideas and theories have been developed to interpret the changes that could be claimed to have happened to world politics. In this new world, which is conceived of in this discourse, states are not as influential or powerful as they once were. The importance of international organizations is more crucial. The major threats to security and international stability come not from expansionist states but from terrorism and failed states.\textsuperscript{153} This discourse has led to a new way of interpreting the role of the state. This can in extension be seen as having laid the foundation for the creation of a type of Swedish national identity that sharply differs from the two previously mentioned identities. Those who mainly see Sweden through this perspective do not focus on the cultural heritage or history in order to make sense of what the Swedish identity is. Instead it is Sweden’s international recognition as a modern progressive society with a commitment to upholding human rights that is essential.

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\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[148] Lewin (2001) p.390-398
\item[149] Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
\item[150] The usage of term is meant to be very inclusive
\item[151] Sweeney (2005)
\item[152] This pattern can be clearly seen in both official documents and statements in many states
\item[153] Kaldor (2006)
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6.1.3 Explaining Sweden’s Resistance against NATO

The previous discussions on the three Swedish national identities show that there are many ways in which a Swedish national identity can be conceived of. Here the narratives, together with the earlier arguments in the thesis, are used to show how an expanded interpretation of Walt’s theory on alliance formation can explain Sweden’s resistance against a NATO-membership. Since there are different competing narratives of Sweden’s national identity, the following discussion offers a few different ways in which the issue can be interpreted. What makes Walt’s defensive realism special, compared to earlier realist theories, is the concept of balance of threat. He does not agree with the conventional realist argument that states band together in order to balance against powerful states. Walt claims instead that states balance against perceived threats. This is where the constructivist concept of ontological security can be included to create an optimal explanation. Walt only discusses threats as coming from other states. Balancing coalitions emerge as a result of external threats. I would however argue, by applying arguments from the theory of ontological security, that the focus should also be on how a potential balancing coalition would impact the national identity of its members. What the discussion on Sweden’s identity as the neutral sovereign shows is that a military alliance would actually be threatening to the national identity. A NATO-membership is threatening to the Swedish citizens and policymakers that still conceive of Sweden as a neutral sovereign state. This is threatening to them since this identity mirrors a deeply held belief and understanding of what Sweden actually is. It should still be acknowledged that if any major external threat would appear it might still take precedence over a stable national identity, in accordance with Walt’s theory.

The identity of Sweden as a postmodern state offers another possible, or rather complementary, explanation of the resistance against a NATO-membership. If seen from the perspective of Sweden as a postmodern state, any thoughts on the NATO alliance conjures up images and memories of the Cold War and of the old Westphalian world order. To people who have the worldview that Europe and the western world have moved beyond power politics, the question of a NATO-membership may seem both awkward and irrelevant. If the usefulness of a traditional military alliance would be acknowledged by someone who conceive of Sweden through this narrative it would potentially destabilize their idea of the national identity and

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154 Walt (1987)
155 Ibid. p.1-16, p.18-49
156 This theory is discussed under the section “Constructivist Theories on National Identity”
157 See the definition of the basic trust system in Firoozabadi (2011), p.38-39
158 This is based on the theory on ontological security
159 An example of this is can be seen in Cooper (2003)
therefore be threatening on an ontological level. The influence of world politics and the respect that Sweden is able to get in a post-Westphalian world would be greatly undermined in case of a return of traditional power politics. Also, according to this narrative the threat of a military invasion is extremely low so a resistance against a NATO-membership also makes sense from Walt’s definition of threat.\textsuperscript{160} This does however only make sense when Walts theory is augmented to take national identity into account.

The two previously discussed conceptions of Sweden’s national identity and role in the international community have illuminated some aspects for why there is a resistance against a NATO-membership. The narrative of Sweden as a great power does however offer an explanation for why a membership should be pursued. As have been explained earlier, according to Walt’s theory it would make sense for Sweden to ally itself with the most powerful military alliance in the world.\textsuperscript{161} This could be a very useful way of achieving greater power relative to other, potentially threatening, states. Even more important, a membership in NATO could help Sweden to achieve greater respect and recognition from other states.

What this brief study shows is that an IR-theory that focuses on threat, which Walt’s theory on alliance formation does, can be greatly enhanced by also recognizing the importance of identity and ontological security. The question of exactly how the role of identity should be understood, and how one identity becomes dominant, does however remain. Nietzsche once claimed that the greatest mistake of mankind is to see the individual as a single being.\textsuperscript{162} The point behind this reasoning could also be applied to the concept of a national identity. Even though it makes sense to speak of one national identity it is important to recognize that every identity is itself a result of a fluid discourse. The reason for why any conception of the national identity becomes the deciding factor behind a foreign policy decision can and should be theorized in much greater extent that what is possible in this paper.

\textsuperscript{160} Walt (1987) p.21-27
\textsuperscript{161} This reasoning is based on the premise that was discussed earlier.
\textsuperscript{162} Nietzsche (1878)
7. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION
When the idea behind this thesis was conceived I was convinced that there was a great validity to the main argument. In the process of further researching the subject and writing the paper I was still surprised to see the extent in which this actually was correct and how useful many of the constructivist theories are. Even though some recently published articles and books have presented well written and convincing arguments, that shows that the point that a cross-fertilization between realism and constructivism is possible, I would claim that many of the best arguments can actually be found in the most important constructivist works. Wendt’s book from 1999 was unexpectedly useful in advancing the argument. As have been noted earlier in the thesis the fact that Wendt has provided an excellent defense of the statist principle which have not been fully acknowledged by realists is very interesting. Something that is also worthy of further reflection is that it is always possible to reinterpret the works of the early realists in new ways. Even though Morgenthau's realist theory may see ridiculously blunt, there are many complex and sublime aspects of his reasoning that deserves to be acknowledged and further discussed.

It should be noted that the discussions in this paper of the many complex concepts only scratch the surface of much wider debates. The main argument that is developed throughout the paper does trespass onto many different subjects. Many of the points that have been summarized in a few sentences in the paper have been the subject of a vast amount of research, that could not possibly be fully covered here. The thesis, and the main argument that is being presented, does however have the advantage of being easy to survey and comprehend due to its briefness.

Some remarks should be made concerning the case study. The narrative study shows that there are ways that even Walt’s defensive realism can be augmented by taking national identity into account. As have been mentioned, the motivation for using Walt’s theory was that it could be seen as a least likely case since it primarily offers a structural explanation. However, when identity is taken into account, and when the non-structural aspects of Walt’s arguments are focused upon, the theory looks more like a neo-classical realist theory then a neo-realist one. The success of the illustrative case study does therefore inadvertently prove an ironic point. Neo-realism is not suitable for including national identity, because if identity is included then the theory becomes, by definition, a neo-classical theory which stresses the importance of agency and non-structural factors.


