



# Constructing “Society’s Soldiers”: Identity Work, (Total) Defence Willingness and the Swedish Home Guard

JENNY MALMSTRÖM

JOAKIM BERNDTSSON 

\*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

RESEARCH ARTICLE

SCANDINAVIAN  
MILITARY STUDIES

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of how military organizations become involved in meaning-making and processes of identity-building as they seek to engage individuals in defence work. To this end, we focus on a specific understudied organization: the Swedish Home Guard (SHG), a key component of the country’s total defence, often seen as the epitome of defence willingness. The study addresses the following question: How are constructions of collective identity in Swedish Home Guard communication interlinked with larger political strategies to increase (total) defence willingness? The study is designed as a qualitative, exploratory case study of SHG communication based on a wide range of mainly textual and interview-based sources in which we analyse communication directed at both internal and external audiences. Analytically, we draw on theories of organizational, military, and collective social identity to probe identity-building strategies and how they relate to the idea of defence willingness. Addressing SHG communications, the study shows that being “willing” is associated with a number of desirable social, organizational and professional identity traits serving to widen the SHG role outside the boundaries of the traditional soldier identity. Further, we conclude how elements of Home Guard communication strategies, among them the construction of the “society’s soldiers” trope, act to prepare the Swedish public for defence participation by diminishing thresholds dividing military and society at large, introducing military defence as a concern and possibility for “anyone”.

## CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Jenny Malmström

Swedish Centre for Studies  
of Armed Forces and Society  
(CSMS), Sweden

[jenny.malmstrom@csms.se](mailto:jenny.malmstrom@csms.se)

## KEYWORDS:

Defence willingness; Swedish  
Home Guard; Total defence;  
Collective identity; Identity work

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Malmström, J., & Berndtsson, J. (2025). Constructing “Society’s Soldiers”: Identity Work, (Total) Defence Willingness and the Swedish Home Guard. *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 8(1), pp. 1–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.290>

## INTRODUCTION

For many countries, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 accentuated the need to strengthen national defence, societal resilience, and readiness. In the Nordic and Baltic regions, the deteriorating security situation has seen an increasing focus on restoring total defence or comprehensive security capabilities (Ericson et al., 2022). Essentially, these are whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches to national security whose strength depends on the ability to mobilize civil and military defence in the event of a severe crisis or war (e.g., Wither, 2020; Lallerstedt, 2021). While concepts differ between countries, all rely on the active participation of the population in the (total) defence system. Hence, a current concern for political leaders and defence institutions is ensuring the population's ability and willingness to participate in activities that bolster readiness and resilience, and, ultimately, to defend the country in the event of war. This concept is known as *försvarsvilja* – defence willingness (Swedish Armed Forces [SAF] & Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency [MSB], 2023; Deschamps-Berger & Oksanen, 2023).

Sweden is a prime example of a country currently striving to re-invent total defence in the face of both conventional and “transboundary” or “hybrid” threats (Boin, 2019; Angstrom & Ljungkvist, 2023), and to engage the wider population through legal, coercive, moral, and voluntary means. In the Swedish context, increasing defence willingness could be challenging due both to past changes in military recruitment styles and national ideas of non-alignment and neutrality. Further, the switch to an all-volunteer force during the years 2010–2016 increased the distance between military institution and society, affecting levels of public trust and interest in the SAF (Berndtsson et al., 2015). As defined in the SAF's Military Strategic Doctrine (MSD) of 2022, Swedish defence willingness depends on trust and support between the military and society, and ultimately manifests itself through engagement in military or civilian defence organizations (SAF, 2022b). Thus, re-establishing military or civilian engagement among the population demands a rebuilding of the relationship between the military organization and the population, reintroducing the expectations of the former to the latter.

In the process, Swedish political leadership and civil and military defence organizations have each taken on more active roles in communicating the idea of total defence as a collective and individual responsibility. Through these communications, individuals, groups, and organizations throughout the total defence system become involved in different forms of “identity work” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), constructing understandings of threats to Swedish or international security and communicating roles, responsibilities and images of the “willing” (or “responsible”) citizen. For instance, in the 2023 report *The Demands of War [Krigets krav]*, the SAF and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) conclude that a “strong total defence is a concern for all” (SAF and MSB, 2023, p. 2). Further, tropes and slogans such as “Total Defence – All of Sweden Together” or “It starts with you and me. Together we are total defence” have started to appear on websites, in campaigns, and in factsheets (MSB, 17 November 2022; SAF, 2023a). Through such communications, the perceived role and identity of the Swedish military is informed by an interplay of military organizations, national politics, and expectations of the home society in the context of the international environment (Kümmel, 2018).

This article aims to contribute insight into how military organizations become involved in meaning-making and identity-building processes as they seek to engage individuals in defence work. To this end, we focus empirically on the communication of the Swedish Home Guard (SHG), an organization that bridges the civilian-military divide and address the following question: “How are constructions of collective identity in Swedish Home Guard communication interconnected with larger political strategies to increase (total) defence willingness?”

## BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The SHG consists of just over 22,000 voluntary part-time soldiers and officers, mainly tasked with crisis response and territorial defence (SAF, 2023a). When founded in 1940, the SHG attracted 90,000 men to volunteer, making it an early symbol of Swedish defence willingness (SAF, 2022a). From the 1990s, considerable military downsizing meant that the SHG became associated mainly with societal support functions such as disaster relief and search and rescue rather than with military operations. However, in the spring of 2022 – and most likely as a direct

result of the invasion of Ukraine – the SHG received over 27,000 new applications, equalling the number received in 10 normal years (SAF, 2023b, p. 12), reintroducing the SHG as a central actor in the Swedish military and political discourse. The increase in applications, described as showing “great commitment and defence willingness in society” (Dahlin, 2022, Nov. 9), was followed by a marketing campaign in 2023 introducing the SHG as “society’s soldiers” (SAF, 2024a), underscoring both its unique function and apparent close connection with the Swedish population, while re-establishing the organization’s military relevance.

As the SHG relies on part-time soldiers and officers serving a certain number of days per year, members are predominantly civilians with “regular” jobs. This model of civilian-military identity and part-time employment is similar to that of other reserve forces which, like the SHG, have received limited academic attention in the past. Described as “double-visioned” and “transmigrant”, reserve forces have been seen by scholars as personnel both possessing a unique dual identity and being a medium for the constant flow of knowledge, identities and ideas across civilian-military boundaries (see, e.g., Ben-Ari & Connelly, 2022; Connelly, 2020; Higate et al., 2021; Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008; Vest, 2013). Consequently, aside from being terra incognita in academic discourse, the possibilities of the boundary-crossing dual identity make the SHG relevant to an analytical study of identity, communication and, by extension, defence willingness.

By analysing identity work in SHG communication and its connection to Swedish (total) defence willingness, our study makes two valuable contributions.

First, the study contributes to research on reserve forces, institutions generally understood as being understudied (Ben-Ari & Connelly, 2022). Several authors have emphasized the need to improve our understanding of the role of reserve forces in relation to issues of readiness in defence organizations (see, e.g., Bekesiene et al., 2022; Druck, 2023). Following previous work on reserves (e.g., Connelly, 2020; Danielsson & Carlstedt, 2011; Griffith, 2009; Higate et al., 2021; Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008; Vest, 2013), we focus on the role of identity in relation to the group, specifically how identity work in the SHG relates to political and military efforts to explain and create defence willingness. Thus, this study provides insight into the role of the reserve force in civilian-military identity construction and communication, whilst also showing how processes of (military) identity construction relate to issues of defence engagement and organizational change (see, e.g., Johansen et al., 2014; Berndtsson, 2021).

Second, we add a novel take on defence willingness as a variable and dynamic concept. In previous research, defence willingness has often been approached as an individual characteristic that can be measured (e.g., Persson & Wideman, 2023; Jonsson & Wedebrand, 2021; ABDI, 2024; Kantar Public, 2022). While these studies provide useful insight into levels of (self-reported) defence willingness among various groups in society, our study adds to this body of work by focusing on the political and organizational construction of defence willingness. Thus, instead of focusing on the perceptions and motivations of *individuals*, we analyse how defence willingness is also defined through *organizational* identity work in the case of the Swedish Home Guard. Analytically, we draw on theories of organizational, military, and collective social identity to probe the identity-building strategies of the SHG and its relation to Swedish defence willingness. Using a wide range of mainly textual and interview-based sources we analyse SHG communications aimed at both internal and external audiences.

The article proceeds as follows.

Immediately below, we outline our theoretical framework, focusing on the concepts of organizational and collective social identity. This paves the way for a more detailed description of our research design and methods. We then analyse SHG communication using a thematic analytical approach guided by four aspects of collective identity. Finally, the conclusions summarize our results and point to several avenues for future research into this important topic.

## **THEORETICAL APPROACH: ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY WORK**

Support and collaboration between the military defence and society is foundational for the development of a functioning total defence system (SAF, 2022b, p. 71). To achieve this, a wide

range of total defence actors, the SHG among them, are involved in efforts to explain the need for resilience, preparedness, and, in the last instance, resistance or active participation in war-fighting. In the process, images of what it means to be part of the total defence system are constructed and communicated to the public – in terms of allegiance to certain beliefs, goals or norms, for instance, or in terms of personal characteristics and responsibilities. These strategies can be usefully understood as processes of “intentional” organizational identity work (Kreiner & Murphy, 2016), where defence organizations communicate certain institutional images in a conscious effort to create a cohesive internal identity and influence individuals to join or support the organization.

In military studies, ideas about social, organizational, and professional identity have long been used to probe issues of belonging, cohesion, culture, and morality among regular and reserve forces, or among defence civilians (see, e.g., Gazit et al., 2021; Griffith, 2009; Goldenberg et al., 2019; Kümmel, 2018; Kaspersen, 2023; Kouri, 2023; Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008; Meharg, 2023; Vest, 2013). In this article, we analyse how a military organization performs identity work to achieve certain intended goals, such as increasing (total) defence participation. In doing so, we see identity as socially constructed, variable, and relational, where the idea of “identity work” includes activities through which the meanings and contents of identities are reformed, maintained, repaired or negotiated (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). Following Kümmel (2018), we also recognize the distinction between “me-” and “we-” identities, capturing both self-images of the individual, and shared identity traits among groups, constructed through social interaction or role expectations. As such, in organizations, identity work can be initiated at the managerial level where the construction of a cohesive “we” identity works as a strategy to guide individual members to align their own interests and self-images with the interests and ideas of the organization – a process known as (organizational) *identification* (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Brown, 2017).

In a similar way, Kümmel (2018) shows how, in the military context, identification processes are initiated through means such as official, formal documents, military laws and regulations, or codes of conduct, establishing role expectations for soldiers and a shared “we”-identity; the organization’s cohesion is derived from its members identifying with the goals, values, and aspirations that define it (Brown, 2017).

The ways in which organizations perform identity work, often through means such as presenting themselves as being aligned with certain values in marketing or strategic communication, are also instrumental to the recognition of the group by outsiders (Brown & Toyoki, 2013; see also Jackson, 2019). However, identity work is not an isolated one-way process; it also occurs in relation to processes of collective identification. For example, as Kümmel (2018, p. 481) concludes, the identities of military organizations and their “soldierly subjects” are also shaped by influences from national politics, norms, expectations, and ideas of its “home society,” as well as the international and global environment in which they operate. Thus, in the case of the Swedish Home Guard, identity work may be initiated by recent policy shifts and decisions at both the political and organizational level, with the intentions of recruiting and retaining members, and of strengthening the population’s identification with certain defence-related ideas and goals. Ultimately, this connects ongoing processes of (collective and individual) identification in and by the Home Guard to conscious political endeavours to strengthen total defence capabilities, popular resilience, and the larger goal of increasing defence willingness.

We analyse the *content* of collective identity – that is, the ideas, norms and beliefs that the SHG want their (current or prospective) members to align with. To this end, we draw on Abdelal and his colleagues (2006), who argue that collective identity can be understood as a social category that varies along the two dimensions of content and contestation; the former is understood as the meaning of identity, the latter as reflecting the level of agreement over that content within the group or collective.

Further, content comprises four interrelated “types”: *constitutive norms*, *social purposes*, *relational comparisons*, and *cognitive models* (Abdelal et al., 2006, p. 696). “Constitutive norms” refers to formal and informal rules that define group membership, obligations, and roles; they “appear to fix meanings and set collective expectations of members of the group”. Focusing on the SHG, we study how such constitutive norms are defined and communicated as they tell stories about how the organization perceives itself and its members, and the role-expectations

conveyed to outsiders. Second, “social purposes” refers to goals attached to the group; these create obligations among members to engage in practices to achieve these goals. In the case of the SHG, we focus on how the overarching purposes and goals of the organization (and, by extension, Swedish total defence) are bestowed with meaning and how they are communicated to internal and external audiences. Third, “relational comparisons” refers to things that define the group or collective in relation to significant “others”. Here, the civilian-military nature of Home Guard members becomes relevant: the organization defines itself and its members as a ‘hybrid’ of the two. Finally, “cognitive model” refers to a group’s ontology and epistemology, a shared worldview or understanding of the social and political present and past (Abdelal et al., 2006, pp. 697–699). For the SHG, communicating a certain understanding of the world can be one way of establishing a connection with out-groups or non-members in order to attract potential recruits.

These four dimensions of collective identity function as guiding themes in our analysis of SHG communication. Here we are interested in how aspects of collective identity are conveyed through internal and external communication, including messages targeting the personnel of the SHG and relational others such as the home society and potential recruits. For example, as a military organization with members and strategic needs, the SHG may perform or initiate identity work among its own members to create internal cohesion. In such efforts, communication can define common norms and purposes for the group, creating a stronger “we”-identity within the organization. However, aspects of shared identity are also communicated externally – for instance, to increase organizational legitimacy, strengthen public support, or ultimately to inspire individuals to act on their defence willingness by joining the organization. Thus, our differentiating between the communication’s internal and external value is not to be interpreted as indicative of any strict separation between the two spheres, merely a way of illustrating their overlapping character.

Having thus outlined our main theoretical points of departure, the following section will describe our research design and methods for data analysis in more detail.

## **METHODS, MATERIALS, AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

This study is designed as an in-depth, exploratory case study of Swedish Home Guard communication focusing on the construction of collective identity in and by the organization. As noted above, identity formation and identity work in the military takes places on many levels and across multiple domains (Kümmel, 2018). Hence, although the SHG is a separate branch of the Swedish Armed Forces, it operates under, and is influenced by, centrally formulated policies, norms, and ideas. Thus, to fully understand the communication by the SHG, understanding the SAF’s larger “we-identity” (Kümmel, 2018), to be important. Therefore, we have collected data from a wide range of (mainly textual and open) sources on both the institutional (SAF) level and a more focused Home Guard level.<sup>1</sup>

As our aim is to capture instances of organizational identity work, our sources are limited to communication material either produced by the organization itself or at a higher institutional level. Our analysis does not include sources from outside of the military organization, which clearly affects the analytical outcome. Naturally, then, our single study of SHG communications cannot capture every possible aspect of identity work (individual experiences, for example); nevertheless, we believe our study contributes new and important insight into how military organizations intentionally perform and initiate identity work and how such processes help inform the meaning of who the “willing” citizen is.

In the initial phase of our analysis, and to capture key aspects of the larger “we” of the Swedish Armed Forces (of which the SHG is an integral part), we analyse strategic manuals: the Military Strategic Doctrine (SAF, 2022b) and the appended policy on Military Strategic Communication (SAF, 2023b). These policies were chosen as they both outline role expectations and personal characteristics of military personnel and provide guidance for communications and marketing strategies for all parts of the military organization, including the SHG. Additionally, the policies both outline the political aim of strengthening defence willingness and provide descriptions of how such willingness is to be created and achieved.

---

<sup>1</sup> All translations from Swedish to English by the authors unless otherwise stated.



In the second part of the analysis, we narrow our focus to the Home Guard. Here, we draw on recruitment and marketing material available through the SAF and SHG websites, such as descriptions, slogans, and marketing videos; notably, we analyse 11 out of 12 published “testimonials” (one was excluded due to lack of relevancy). These are interviews by the organization with serving members of the SHG where they are asked their reasons for joining and the benefits of serving, telling stories of who the Home Guard soldier is and the character traits they embody. While data from such interviews are clearly limited in terms of scope, representativeness, and the level of control over questions, etc., previous studies have shown how similar forms of regulated communications can be used as sources revealing important aspects of identity construction in military and private security recruitment (Stern & Strand, 2024; Joachim & Schneiker, 2024).

To supplement the data collected from open and published sources, we have conducted three semi-structured interviews (R1–R3) with key SHG representatives, all involved in communication and recruitment at the central level. Interview questions revolved around who the “willing” citizen is, how one creates such willingness, and the role played by the SHG plays in such efforts. The interview guide covered the following themes: the role of the SHG; the “willing” citizen/the SHG soldier; how to create the “willing” citizen; and what defence willingness means for the SHG. Before the interviews, all participants were informed of the study’s aim and ethical considerations regarding their participation and the data collected. Further, all participants signed a consent form clarifying their anonymity and voluntary participation. They were also given the option to consent to be quoted directly in the study, which one representative (R-3) did not agree to; consequently, only summaries of their statements appear in the text. After the interviews, one of the representatives (R-2) elaborated some of their answers through email communication with the authors; this will be referenced as “personal communication”.

We coded our data according to a thematic analytical approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), where the four dimensions of the content of collective identities by Abdelal et al. (2006) functioned as key themes guiding the analysis (see coding frame in Table 1 and example of coding in Table 2 below).

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY	DEFINITION (ABDELAL ET AL., 2006)
Constitutive norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Who we are”</li> <li>• Boundaries and distinctive practices of the group</li> <li>• Formal and informal rules</li> </ul>
Social purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What we do” and “What we want”</li> <li>• The purposive meaning derived from a particular identity</li> </ul>
Relational comparisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The identification of the group contrasting it to what it is not</li> <li>• Action is relational to the existence of ‘Others’</li> </ul>
Cognitive models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The worldviews and contemporary understandings of the group</li> <li>• Group membership defined by explanations of how the world looks</li> </ul>

**Table 1** Thematic coding frame based on Abdelal et al., 2006.

Constitutive norms	<p>“To fit in the group, you have to be solution-oriented, adaptable, and a team player. It is physically challenging, and you must engage in regular exercise to be a good rifleman, says Christoffer.” (I-3)</p> <p><b>COMMENT:</b> Characteristics for the SHG soldier to fit the role. The importance of physical fitness for the task, at least for the more “soldierly” jobs in the SHG.</p> <p>→ (Soldierly mental and physical strength)</p>
--------------------	--

**Table 2** Example of coding table for “constitutive norms”. Each relevant quote was added to the table under the appropriate theoretical theme (constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons, cognitive models) allowing for the authors to comment on its identity-constructing content. Afterwards, a suitable sub-theme was either formulated or reused.

As mentioned above, the four dimensions described by Abdelal and his colleagues are interrelated. Our goal was not, then, to strictly point out where constitutive norms or social purposes were being communicated, for example; the four themes functioned, rather, as instruments to recognize the ways in which the SAF and the SHG perform collective identity work through their communication. Our mainly deductive approach allowed for a certain flexibility as several sub-themes emerged from different sections in the material, affording the possibility of additional interpretation of their identity-constructing potential and, by extension, their potential impact on (total) defence thinking in Sweden. Because of the interrelated nature

of the four dimensions, however, and to avoid numerous repetitions, our analysis and findings are not organized strictly according to these. Instead, the analysis is structured around key aspects of collective identity and defence willingness, and moves from the larger context of the SAF to a narrower focus on the SHG.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this section, we analyse expressions of organizational identity work in and by the Swedish Home Guard and how they interconnect with ideas of Swedish defence willingness. In the first section of the analysis we aim to understand the larger institutional “we”-identity of the SAF. Here, we identify and analyse key traits of the role and characteristics of the SAF and their members as outlined in their Military Strategic Doctrine (MSD; see SAF, 2022b) and the appended policy on strategic communication, DTLG Milstratkom (SAF, 2023b). In the section following, we target the Home Guard’s own communications, analysing how they translate these larger institutional goals into civilian-military communication for the Home Guard and external audiences, and how this relates to ideas about defence willingness.

### COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN SWEDISH ARMED FORCES DOCTRINE

Addressing both internal and external audiences, the MSD can be perceived as one source of organizational and collective identity work for the military organization. When referring to SAF members, and in particular uniformed personnel, the doctrine states:

We [members of the SAF] do not only exercise our right and duty to use deadly force against an attacker, we also accept the risk to our own lives in the defence of Sweden. (SAF, 2022b, p. 81)

The statement speaks to both organizational constitutive norms related to obligations and expectations for members of the group while underscoring the fundamental social purpose of the organization: the (military) defence of Sweden. Here, being willing to defend Sweden is expressed as a central part of membership in the larger “we” of the SAF, entailing a readiness to use force and, indeed, the expectation that the member will accept the risk of death. Expanding on this, the doctrine also states: “In the armed forces, the willingness to defend Sweden translates into military training and thus contributes to building Sweden’s war-fighting capabilities” (SAF, 2022b, p. 70). Here, being committed and “willing” is repeated as a central norm for those engaged in the defence, and contributing to the country’s military strength is formulated as a central purpose deriving from that.

Elaborating on wider *social purposes* of the military organization, the doctrine explains:

Sweden’s security policy aims to guarantee the country’s autonomy and independence, to protect sovereignty, Swedish interests, fundamental values, and to safeguard freedom of action in the face of political, military, or other forms of pressure. (SAF, 2022b, p. 19)

However:

We cannot take our democracy, peace, and freedom for granted. It must be defended and won every day. The Armed Forces must therefore conduct active defence under normal circumstances, in security crises, and in case of armed attack. (SAF, 2022b, p. 69)

These statements may be directed at both SAF employees and external audiences (relational others such as the political leadership, the wider population, the outside world). Here, the “active defence” – identified as one of the corner stones of Swedish defence – is described with constitutive norms as readiness, capabilities, competencies, and vigilance, laying out what is expected of this part of the group. Meanwhile, with these messages certain cognitive models are constructed: external audiences are informed of the importance of an active defence, both during times of peace and in a crisis. With this, the role of the SAF is conditioned by certain cognitive ideas according to which universal values can no longer be taken for granted. In addition, by describing how the military defence is needed for the protection of those values,

the doctrine narrates a worldview where there are threatening “others”, so coupling the necessity of the military defence with the safety of Swedish society and beliefs. Further elaborating on cognitive models for current members of the group, the “active defence” is presented as “a way of thinking, feeling and acting” (SAF, 2022b, p. 69): a construction of military engagement as a way of life, a calling rather than a profession.

In sum, one may interpret elements of both internal and external organizational identity work in the doctrine. On the one hand, it constructs a certain image of the military organization regarding relational others such as civilians. By describing the role and purpose of the SAF and their members, out-groups are reminded and informed of the overall necessity of the military organization; further, by describing the SAF as the protectors of certain values that out-groups may identify with – democracy, peace, and freedom, for example – the doctrine connects the goals of the organization with those of society. The doctrine also constructs a cohesive internal organizational identity for the SAF and its members. By describing military engagement as something honourable, necessary, and selfless, members of the group are reminded of their task while also gaining recognition from relational others, increasing the status of the soldier role.

### **THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND (TOTAL) DEFENCE WILLINGNESS**

From the doctrine, one may interpret the role played by processes of identity work in political strategies of (total) defence willingness. Described as a wider societal concern, defence willingness is defined as “an expression of the population’s collective opinion about the need to make armed resistance in case of an attack against the country and a willingness to accept the necessary sacrifices” (SAF, 2022b, p. 70). Further, for the wider population (civilian and other relational others), being “willing” is construed with both constitutive norms of support and trust, and social purposes such as voluntary participation in the country’s defence:

Defence willingness is based on trust between the political leadership, authorities, and the population. Both defence willingness and spirit of resistance requires popular support and is exhibited in the form of engagement in and positive attitudes towards our defence, for instance through a willingness to join the Home Guard or other voluntary defence organisations. (SAF, 2022b, p. 70)

This definition of defence willingness clearly harmonizes with the larger idea of Swedish total defence, described as a “national concern” that requires “the engagement of the whole of society” and based on a “widespread defence willingness and spirit of resistance” (SAF, 2022b, p. 71). Thus, elements of identity work become important in the task of total defence planning and increasing defence willingness in Sweden: such processes evidently rely on constructing ideas of a collective “we” with shared responsibilities, purposes, and understandings of the world. In the 2023 SAF strategic communication policy, the DTLG Milstratkom, the connection between identity work and the larger political goal of strengthening defence willingness is emphasized further:

Through military strategic communication, the Armed Forces create their own narrative, theme and main message to achieve the desired effects and to strengthen our own population’s defence willingness and counteract the opponent’s potential influence. (SAF, 2023b, p. 39)

From this perspective, communicating both SAF roles and mandates, as well as the constitutive norms and social purposes that govern their work, is clearly linked to the endeavour to increase defence willingness and resilience among the population. Further, the importance of having a cohesive collective identity is described as equally important both the organization and general society:

The Armed Forces’ narratives, our main messages, and themes, shall be well known among staff throughout the organisation. Other parts of the total defence need to have knowledge of the Armed Forces’ narratives, themes and messages. (SAF, 2023b, p. 39)

A nation with a strong, communicated, established and clear will has a deterrent effect. It contributes to establishing defence willingness among the Swedish



population, which is fundamental to achieve a threshold effect. A determined, clear, and persevering resistance will be mobilised. We will never give up. (SAF, 2023b, p. 5)

Thus, increasing defence willingness by spreading knowledge about the SAF in general and instilling confidence in its war-fighting capabilities, both within the organization and for relational others, emerge as important parts of the SAF's goal. As argued by Abdelal and his colleagues (2006), the way in which collective groups recognize the world and their social surroundings depends on the cognitive perceptions of that group. Thus, by communicating certain purposes of the military defence and notions about the values they are protecting, the SAF informs external- and internal audiences' understanding of not only the social and political present but the past, also, thus prompting certain individual beliefs, attitudes, and actions. By, for example, encouraging voluntary defence work, showcasing civilian-military collaboration, or explicitly supporting societal norms and ideas such as democracy, LGBTQ rights and human rights more generally, the "we" of the military organization is aligned more closely with "the home society" (Kümmel, 2018, p. 481, 484f), ultimately building trust, support, and understanding between the two. This is fundamental for the reinforcement of defence willingness.

Our analysis of these doctrine-level policies has shown how the construction of collective identity – by describing soldiers with norms such as competence or combat-readiness, and by framing the SAF as the protectors of universal values against threatening others – serves as a strategy to improve defence willingness and encourage total defence participation. This is understood to be central purpose for the military organization. The organizational level is included in the analysis on the understanding that military identity is constructed in the interplay between different actors, including the military organization itself and the instruments of political influence (Kümmel, 2018). Thus, the political and strategic goals for the SAF and the military organization shape the organizational identity of the SHG and the ways in which they perceive themselves and their goals.

We now turn to a consideration of the ways in which the Home Guard's constructions of collective identity align with SAF narratives and, in turn, imbue defence willingness with specific meaning.

## COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN THE SWEDISH HOME GUARD

What distinguishes the women and men who engage in the Home Guard is an immense commitment and defence willingness. (SAF, 2024a)

Echoing the constitutive norms communicated in the doctrines, the SHG website introduces the organization's soldiers as the material realization of defence willingness, setting them apart from those who are not (yet) members. As we shall see, defence willingness is a recurring trope in SHG communication, and its meaning is closely connected to how the organization constructs certain elements of collective identity. As described in the methods section, this part of the analysis draws on interviews with SHG representatives, as well as "testimonials" and other communications directed at both internal and external audiences.

Recently, the SHG has become a more visible part of the SAF. Commenting on this, one representative interviewed expressed a hope that "the SHG will be a foundation of sorts in the Swedish defence" (R-1). Further, there is a new ambition of the Supreme Commander to clarify the SHG's role within the SAF (R-2), possibly making it into a branch equal to the Swedish Air Force, Army or Navy (R-3). This new role requires a "rebranding" of the organization where a more accurate and modernized image of the SHG and their personnel must be communicated by "shifting the image away from it being old men barbequing and shooting in the woods, to showing who they actually are" (R-2). Here, issues include presenting a more relevant image and improving the perceived professionalism of the SHG (R-3), distancing themselves from past ideas of the Home Guard as a hobby or social club – a common prejudice against reserve forces (see, for example, Connelly, 2020; Higate et al., 2021). In doing so, the organization may prompt out-groups to both reconsider the organization and its purpose, and to provide current members with a justification to rethink, or rebrand themselves, into more serious soldiers of society (see Bury, 2017).

Thus, seeking to attach new values to the organization and their members while breaking down old prejudices, the SHG is in the active process of reconstructing its identity. As part of this shift,

new purposes are outlined for the SHG designed to attract the “right” recruits, meaning well-informed individuals willing to participate in Swedish (total) defence for the long term (R-1), in turn shaping both the organization’s internal and external communication. Here, the SHG needs to inspire identification among out-groups, mainly civilians, to attract individuals to join the organization; here, internal communication will be equally important for the establishment of a cohesive organizational identity, resonating with the strategies mentioned in the doctrines. An example of this is seen in the establishment of constitutive norms such as “inclusivity” and “camaraderie”, according to which the SHG is described as an organization where anyone may find a place (I-5) and engagement in the organization is presented with benefits such as new-found friendships (I-4; I-9; I-10) and companionship (I-3; I-6; I-11). In this, the SHG constructs a narrower “we” identity in which membership is attached to values of openness and friendliness, lowering the threshold between the in-group and out-groups and simultaneously establishing expectations of what membership entails:

According to Marie, the best part of the Home Guard is the camaraderie. Through the Home Guard she has taken part in several long-distance marches, in Sweden and abroad, and got to know other soldiers in, among others, Belgium and Norway. ... “I have met several close friends through the Home Guard. ... The Home Guard gets more and more fun with the years.” (I-4)

The group [the unit within the SHG] have put immense work into basic values in the last 10 to 15 years and [the Home Guard soldier] Lorenzo recognises a big change in the language and attitude among the soldiers in the group. ... “We do not differentiate between boys and girls, or your ethnicity. We are all soldiers and today we share really good basic values. People who cannot adapt to those values are not allowed to stay – people are supposed to be comfortable with us,” Lorenzo says. (I-5)

Other constitutive aspects of the group are characteristics such as “mental strength”, specifically the need for Home Guard soldiers to tolerate stress and to be able to remain calm and be determined (I-2; I-8; I-7). In one statement, the medic Elin alludes to the importance of these, adding empathy and mental resilience:

“Necessary characteristics are that you are tolerant to stress, empathic and nurturing, as well as being able to handle people when they are in extreme pain. Also, you cannot be afraid of large amounts of blood either,” says Ellen. (I-2)

Moreover, the importance of mental strength is combined with the need to be physically capable (I-1; I-2; I-3; I-10):

“To fit in the group you have to be solution-oriented, adaptable, and a team player. It is physically challenging and you must engage in regular exercise to be a good rifleman,” says Christoffer. (I-3)

It is both physically and mentally challenging. You must drag, slither and pull people that are much heavier than yourself. It is necessary for you to be in good physical shape, otherwise your back and your knees will break. (I-2)

Here, the constitutive norms signifying the Home Guard soldier reconnect to traditional soldierly characteristics of mental and physical control, according to which the soldier is construed as someone in control of their bodily responses rather than victim to them (see, for example, Stern & Strand, 2022). Internally, such constructions highlight the Home Guard soldier as an equal to the regular soldier, increasing the figure’s perceived status within the military institution – a well-known struggle for reserve soldiers (see Connelly, 2020; Higate et al., 2021; Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008). However, characteristics such as “empathy” and “being nurturing” expand the Home Guard-role beyond those traditional confines, presenting membership as more accessible to outsiders while distancing the “new” SHG soldier from past ideas of the “old man shooting in the woods” (R-2). This is further reflected in the SHG soldier being described as “anyone in society” (SAF, 2023, 8 Feb) and as an “(un)extraordinary person” (SAF, 2024a), inviting literally anyone to become part of the group, making military engagement non-exclusive to the traditional soldier identity.

Establishing the SHG as an accessible option is central to the recruitment of new members, specifically due to the dual civilian-military identity of the Home Guard soldier. According to SHG representatives, engagement in the organization must be perceived as do-able and citizens must be made aware of how they can contribute to the defence of Sweden without giving up their civilian job or identity (R-3). Further, those engaged in the SHG are described as deeply committed to the task (R-3) and engagement is described as something lasting rather than temporary:

We want those [recruits] who are willing to be part of this and engage in this for five or ten years, maybe longer. Not just those willing to jump in when there is a crisis. But those who ... have the right willingness to be part of this for a long time. (R-1)

Ask yourself if you're ready to take the necessary responsibility. It is serious now and you need to be aware of that the moment you step into the Home Guard. I have informed my family that I might have to leave them if a critical situation occurs. (I-6)

Consequently, the communication construes the identity of the SHG-soldier with constitutive norms of being both mentally and physically capable and of being committed to the main social purpose of the group: to defend Sweden. Meanwhile, the communication also presents cognitive models according to which the organization is welcoming and accessible to all (if one is mentally and physically capable, that is). Presenting the SHG as a platform for individuals seeking self-development, service in the Home Guard is further described as “an opportunity for personal growth, individual responsibility offering a unique sense of community” (SAF, 2024a).

Perhaps the clearest illustration of identity (re-)construction is the “society’s soldiers” trope introduced in a marketing campaign in 2023 (SAF, 2024a). Through this slogan, the SHG is presented as the protector of Sweden and its values; by claiming to be composed of “society’s soldiers”, meanwhile, the SHG is understood as representing a larger “we”, that of society, thereby aligning the organization’s interests to those of the “home society” (Kümmel 2018). Besides repeating the main social purpose for the organization – to protect Swedish society – the trope also functions as a cognitive model that expands beyond the organization, influencing external audiences to view the Home Guard as their defendants. This civilian-military relationship is further developed in the SHG’s first official video commercial, in which images of regular citizens at their civilian jobs are contrasted with images of the same individuals as SHG soldiers. In the background, the following monologue plays:

We’re like anyone else. We think about what to have for dinner. We do laundry and leave the kids at school. We’re someone’s sister, brother, mother, or father. We go to work and then we go home – and defend Sweden. We stand up for our democracy. In peace and in war. Everywhere, always. (SAF, 2023, 8 Feb)

Here, the larger institutional directives to spread knowledge of the purpose and function of the SAF is developed through the introduction of a collective identity of the SHG member as a hybrid of civilian and soldier. By showing actual “society’s soldiers”, the commercial makes relational comparisons between the Home Guard and Swedish society, between the civilians and the soldier. However, the two are not presented as opposites; the Home Guard soldier is presented, rather, with a dual identity, a “migrant” across civilian-military boundaries (Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008) – at once a completely ordinary citizen and an extraordinary protector of society. With that, the distinction between the two spheres weakens, again acting as a strategy of accessibility. However, by also including norms such as importance, capabilities and empathy in the communication, the SHG emphasizes the traditional role and status of the soldier, ultimately opening the identity of soldier to anyone in society seeking camaraderie, self-development or purpose.

## THE HOME GUARD IDENTITY AND (TOTAL) DEFENCE WILLINGNESS

One may identify two general directions of identity work in SHG communication. Arguably, both relate to issues of defence willingness.

First, the communication establishes a coherent identity for the SHG and its members. As mentioned by the interviewees, the SHG are in the midst of an organizational change; the organization’s rebranding must be done through both internal and external communication,

where old norms and prejudices are replaced by those of an active, growing, and professional force. With the formulation of collective goals and purposes, a stronger sense of “we” is constructed, and the SHG is presented as an important organization to be part of, for Sweden and for democracy. The external communication describing the SHG as an important part of the active defence (echoing the SAF strategic narrative) also sends messages internally, providing members with recognition and status. In doing so, membership becomes associated with patriotic values such as duty, pride, and sacrifice. These communication efforts directly connect to strategies of strengthening defence willingness, as the transboundary identity of Home Guard personnel provides them with roles as ambassadors for the organization:

Within the Home Guard, ambassadorship has always been an important part and will remain being important in order to recruit to the Home Guard units. That is, that those who are involved [in the SHG] talk about our mission to others in their surroundings and in that way creates an interest and engagement for others to contribute. One example of how to use ambassadorship is what we call “uniform at work day”, which is a day where active personnel in the Home Guard may wear their [military] uniform at their civilian place of work. It usually generates a lot of attention. (R-2, personal communication)

I think that those who are already in the Home Guard, or who have joined, feel a sense of pride and speak about [their engagement] in a different way with their friends and acquaintances. When I look on social media, like LinkedIn or whatever, there are some who write like “Doctor” or “Lawyer every day”, and “Home Guard soldier when necessary”. ... I think that you can recognize a pride in that, and that also feeds engagement. (R-2)

This is in line with the other direction of identity work in SHG communication – namely, the creation of a narrative in which engagement in the organization is seen as accessible to all, rather than as something exclusive to the soldier. By expanding the boundaries of the soldier identity and narrowing the gap between the in-group and out-groups, the SHG invites others to join the group, presenting (active) defence willingness as something attainable. Further, the SHG’s messaging serves to establish the organization as a natural part of the Swedish defence while showing how anyone may join:

If you want to be part of the military defence in Sweden, even if you are a civilian, then the Home Guard, if one is aware of it, makes a natural place to apply. (R-2)

Overall, I know that defence willingness exists in a lot of people. So, in many cases, to be able to attract more people to [the SHG], you must try to trigger that willingness. ... And show them the way in, show them “this is a way to make something out of your defence willingness, you have these possibilities, you can do these different things”. (R-1)

Returning to the strategic doctrines, total defence is founded on the principle that the whole of society is involved; informing the public of the function of the military defence in turn serves to build support for the institution. Further, defence willingness, according to strategic doctrine, is exhibited through commitment to defence organizations such as the Home Guard (SAF, 2022b, p. 70). Hence, in the current phase of rebranding the SHG, the introduction of the new soldier identity – society’s soldiers – is instrumental, as the interviewee notes above, for “triggering” defence thinking and participation in Sweden (R-1). By presenting a new and modern image of the Home Guard soldier, the SHG maintains certain traditional soldierly traits connoting duty and honour, combining them with softer values such as attainability and self-development. In doing so, broadening the meaning of the concept of defence willingness, the organization “triggers” a willingness for military participation while presenting engagement in the Home Guard as something honourable and accessible to every member of society.

And so, through their communication, the Swedish Home Guard both invites identification and lowers the threshold for military engagement while informing the public of what is expected of them in a time of increasing uncertainty. Thus, instead of separating soldiers from civilians, the SHG merges the two under the rubric of “society’s soldiers”, echoing the overall political goal of making defence willingness a societal concern.

This study has aimed to contribute to our understanding of identity work in SHG communication and how this relates to larger political and institutional interests of furthering (total) defence willingness. As stated in SAF doctrine, defence willingness requires popular support and positive attitudes towards defence efforts, manifesting itself through popular engagement in total defence. In our study of the Swedish Home Guard, frequently seen as the epitome of defence willingness realization, we have shown how the construction of different “desirable” organizational identity traits influences these foundational elements of (total) defence willingness. By describing itself and the soldiers protecting society as strong, committed, and self-sacrificing, the SHG constructs a cohesive “we”-identity within the group, creating organizational pride while reinforcing an understanding of the organization as necessary for Swedish peace to both members and relational others. Further, by describing SHG members with traditional soldierly traits such as mental and physical strength, and combining them with norms of openness and friendliness, the organization widens the soldier identity to include “anyone in society”, welcoming “(un)extraordinary” others to identify with them. Thus, with collective identity work, the civilian-military organization actualizes the political strategies of increasing (total) defence willingness by presenting defence engagement as something desirable, doable, and necessary, narrowing the civilian-military gap.

Our study shows how a civilian-military organization such as the SHG plays a key role in identity-building strategies seeking to strengthen the bonds between society and the defence institution – something foundational for defence willingness. Thus, despite its limitations in terms of empirical scope, we believe future research can draw on this study to probe the issue of collective (and individual) identity and any effects they might have on the development of total defence. Specifically, by focusing on the previously understudied Home Guard, we hope our study can pave the way for research on the organization and its role in Swedish (total) defence policy and organization. Future studies on the organization’s shifting role in society and defence should include wider questions about popular support and trust, as well as perceptions of the Home Guard among regular force members and civilian others.

Further, as our analysis is based on the controlled narratives and communication from the SHG and SAF, a natural development would be to investigate “the other side”, focusing on what is *excluded* rather than included, or to what extent organizational identification is embraced by (current or prospective) members. This is particularly interesting in relation to the recently decreasing numbers of applications and contract terminations: the organization evidently has issues retaining both existing and potential recruits (SAF, 2023b, p. 14; 2024b, pp. 13–14). Here, factors that motivate individuals to join or leave, and personal and social consequences of serving in the Home Guard, become central with regard to strategies of retention and recruitment and to (total) defence engagement and willingness in Sweden. Finally, to further our understanding of identity formation and communication in (total) defence organizations, future research would also benefit from cross-country comparisons –in the Nordic and Baltic regions, for instance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank Sanna Strand and Vincent Connelly for their generous and helpful comments on previous drafts. We also want to thank the anonymous reviewers and editors for pushing us to improve the text.

## FUNDING INFORMATION

The authors’ work with this article has been funded by the Modern Military Profession Project at the Swedish Centre Studies of Armed Forces and Society (CSMS) and the Institute for Management of Innovation and Technology (Swedish Armed Forces Technical Development Grant no. AT.9225360). Berndtsson’s work has also been supported by the Total Defence for the 21st-century project at the School of Global Studies (Swedish Research Council, project no. VR2021–06292).



The authors have no competing interests to declare.

## AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

**Jenny Malmström**

Swedish Centre for Studies of Armed Forces and Society (CSMS), Sweden

**Joakim Berndtsson**  [orcid.org/0000-0003-1352-1158](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1352-1158)

University of Gothenburg, Sweden

## REFERENCES

- Abdelal, R., Herrera, Y. M., Johnston, A. I., & McDermott, R.** (2006). Identity as a variable. *Perspectives on Politics*, 4(4), 695–711. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592706060440>
- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H.** (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5), 619–644. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00305>
- Angstrom, J., & Ljungkvist, K.** (2023). Unpacking the varying strategic logics of total defence. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 1(1), 1–25.
- Bekesiene, S., Kanapeckaite, R., Smaliukiene, R., Navickiene, O., Meidute-Kavaliauskiene, I., & Vaicaitiene, R.** (2022). Sustainable Reservists' Services: The Effect of Resilience on the Intention to Remain in the Active Military Reserve Using a Parallel Mediating Model. *Sustainability*, 14(12048). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141912048>
- Ben-Ari, E., & Connelly, V.** (2022). *Contemporary military reserves: Between the civilian and military worlds* [E-book]. Taylor & Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003306399>
- Berndtsson, J.** (2021). Sweden and our military profession: Building a common identity or creating friction? In A. Roelsgaard Obling, & L. Victor Tillberg (Eds.), *Transformations of the military profession and professionalism in Scandinavia* (pp. 28–48). Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies Press. <https://doi.org/10.31374/book2-b>
- Berndtsson, J., Dandeker, C., & Ydén, K.** (2015). Swedish and British public opinion of the armed forces after a decade of war. *Armed Forces and Society*, 41(2), 307–328. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X13516616>
- Boin, A.** (2019). The transboundary crisis: Why we are unprepared and the road ahead. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 27(1), 94–99. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12241>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V.** (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Brown, A. D.** (2017). Identity work and organizational identification. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 19(3), 296–317. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12152>
- Brown, A. D., & Toyoki, S.** (2013). Identity work and legitimacy. *Organization Studies*, 34(7), 875–896. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840612467158>
- Bury, P.** (2017). Recruitment and Retention in British Army Reserve Logistics Units. *Armed Forces & Society*, 43(4), 608–631. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X16657320>
- Connelly, V.** (2020). Understanding and explaining the marginalization of part-time British Army reservists. *Armed Forces & Society*, 47(4), 661–689. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X20948591>
- Dahlin, J.** (2022, November 9). Så hanterar Hemvärnet strömmen av ansökningar. *The Swedish Armed Forces [SAF]*. Retrieved from <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se>
- Danielsson, E., & Carlstedt, B.** (2011). The Swedish reserve officer: Filling vacancies or using competences. *Armed Forces & Society*, 37(2), 284–300. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48608995>; <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X10368012>
- Deschamps-Berger, J., & Oksanen, P.** (Eds.). (2023). *Ryska krigsskepp, dra åt helvete!* Fri Tanke.
- Druck, D.** (2023). The rise, fall and rebirth of territorial defense. *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 6(1), 69–85. <https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.173>
- Ericson, M., Svenbro, M., & Wester, M.** (2022). Total defense as a happy object: Gendering mobilization of civil defense in Sweden. *Critical Military Studies*, 9(4), 497–512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2022.2156837>
- Gazit, N., Lomsky-Feder, E., & Ben-Ari, E.** (2021). Military covenants and contracts in motion: Reservists as transmigrants 10 years later. *Armed Forces and Society*, 47(4), 616–634. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X20924034>
- Goldenberg, A. M., Österberg, J., James-Yates, S., Johansson, E., & Pearce, S.** (2019). Integrated defence workforces: Challenges and enablers of military–civilian personnel collaboration. *Journal of Military Studies*, 8(2019), 28–45. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jms-2019-0004>
- Griffith, J.** (2009). Being a reserve soldier: A matter of social identity. *Armed Forces & Society*, 36(1), 38–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X08327819>

- Higate, P., Dawes, A., Edmunds, T., Jenkins, K. N., & Woodward, R. (2021). Militarization, stigma, and resistance: Negotiating military reservist identity in the civilian workplace. *Critical Military Studies*, 7(2), 173–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2018.1554941>
- Jackson, S. T. (2019). 'Selling' national security: Saab, YouTube, and the militarized neutrality of Swedish citizen identity. *Critical Military Studies*, 5(3), 257–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2017.1395675>
- Joachim, J., & Schneiker, A. (2024). Public or private? Blurring the lines through YouTube recruitment of military veterans by private security companies. *New Media & Society*, 26(1), 7–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211047951>
- Johansen, R. B., Laberg, J. C., & Martinussen, M. (2014). Military identity as predictor of perceived military competence and skills. *Armed Forces & Society*, 40(3), 521–543. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X13478405>
- Jonsson, D. K., & Wedebrand, C. (2021). *Svenskarnas Försvarsvilja* (FOI-R-5206-SE). Research Institute of the Total Defence [FOI].
- Kantar Public. (2022). *Försvarsvilja: Rapport till MSB*. <https://www.msb.se/contentassets/fb825222399f4306a419f4f1ffee9ab4/kantar-msb-forsvarsvilja-oktober-2022.pdf>
- Kaspersen, I. S. (2023). The moral career of soldiers' identity: A Norwegian case. *Armed Forces & Society*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X231162019>
- Kouri, S. (2023). Finnish military officer identities and micro-political resistance. *Armed Forces & Society*, 49(1), 160–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X211054116>
- Kreiner, G. E., & Murphy, C. (2016). Organizational identity work. In M. G. Pratt, & others (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of organizational identity*. Oxford University Press (online edition). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199689576.013.4>
- Kümmel, G. (2018). Military identity and identity within the military. In G. Caforio, & M. Nuciari (Eds.), *Handbook of the sociology of the military* (2nd ed., pp. 477–493). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71602-2\\_25](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71602-2_25)
- Lallerstedt, K. (2021). Rebuilding total defense in a globalized deregulated economy. *Prism*, 9(3), 90–105.
- Lomsky-Feder, E., Gazit, N., & Ben-Ari, E. (2008). Reserve soldiers as transmigrants moving between the civilian and military worlds. *Armed Forces & Society*, 34(4), 593–614. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48608791>; <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X07312090>
- Meharg, S. J. (2023). The hybrid civilian. In J. Berndtsson, I. Goldenberg, & S. von Hlatky (Eds.), *Total defence forces in the twenty-first century* (pp. 173–193). McGill-Queen's University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.9992396.12>
- Persson, T., & Widmalm, S. (2023). Upon entering NATO: Explaining defence willingness among Swedes. *European Security*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2023.2294078>
- Stern, M., & Strand, S. (2022). Periods, pregnancy, and peeing: Leaky feminine bodies in Swedish military marketing. *International Political Sociology*, 16(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olab025>
- Stern, M., & Strand, S. (2024). The aspirational promise of soldiering: An analysis of military recruitment testimonials. *Critical Military Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2023.2300023>
- Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human Relations*, 56(10), 1163–1193. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267035610001>
- Swedish Armed Forces [SAF]. (2023b). *Försvarsmaktens årsredovisning 2022*. Supplement 1&2. Personalberättelse och Materielberättelse. FM2021-22412:41.
- The Advisory Board for Defence Information [ABDI]. (2024). *Finns' opinions on foreign and security policy, national defence and security* [ABDI 2024:3]. Ministry of Defence.
- The Swedish Armed Forces [SAF]. (2022a). *Hemvärnets historia*. <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/var-verksamhet/det-har-gor-forsvarsmakten/hemvarnet/hemvarnet-historik/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces [SAF]. (2023a). *Totalförsvaret*. <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/om-forsvarsmakten/totalforsvaret/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces [SAF]. (2024a). *Home guard: Society's soldiers*. <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/about/organisation/home-guard/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces [SAF]. (2024b). *Försvarsmaktens årsredovisning 2023*. Supplement 1&2. Personalberättelse och Materielberättelse. FM2023-9091:34.
- The Swedish Armed Forces & The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency [SAF & MSB]. (2023). *Krigets krav: En samlad bedömning av förmågan inom totalförsvaret*. FM2021-17683:6; MSB2022-08173-31-3.
- The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency [MSB]. (2022, November 17). Great conditions for increased willingness to defend. <https://www.msb.se/en/news/2022/november/great-conditions-for-increased-willingness-to-defend/>
- Vest, B. M. (2013). Citizen, soldier, or citizen-soldier? Negotiating identity in the US National Guard. *Armed Forces & Society*, 39(4), 602–627. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X12457725>
- Wither, J. K. (2020). Back to the future? Nordic total defence concepts. *Defence Studies*, 20(1), 61–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2020.1718498>

- The Swedish Armed Forces [SAF].** (2022b). *Militärstrategisk doktrin – MSD 22* [eng. *Military Strategic Doctrine*]. FM2022-14281:1.
- The Swedish Armed Forces [SAF].** (2023b). *Doktrintillägg Militärstrategisk kommunikation – DTLG Milstratkom* [eng. *Annexed policy on Military Strategic Communication*]. FM2019- 25996:1.
- The Swedish Armed Forces [Forsvarsmakten].** (2023, 8 feb). "Vi är helt ovanliga människor" Hemvärnet 36 sek, *Forsvarsmakten reklamfilm 2023* [Video].
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Anders – Fältkock i Hemvärnet [I-11]. <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/anders-faltkock/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Anna – Underrättelseassistent i Hemvärnet [I-8]. <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/anna-underrattelseassistent/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Christoffer – Skyttesoldat i Hemvärnet [I-3]. <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/christoffer-skyttesoldat/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Ellen – Hemvärnssjukvårdare [I-2]. <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/ellen-hemvarnssjukvardare/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Emma – Hundförare i Hemvärnet [I-1]. Retrieved from <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/emma-hundforare/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Fredrik – Båtförare i Hemvärnet [I-7]. <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/fredrik-batforare/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Lorenzo – Lastbilsförare i Hemvärnet [I-5]. <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/lorenzo-lastbilsforare/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Marie – Motorcykelordonnans i Hemvärnet [I-4]. <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/marie-motorcykelordonnans/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Monika – Stabsassistent i Hemvärnet [I-6]. <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/monika-stabsassistent/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Roger – Bandvagnsförare i Hemvärnet [I-9]. <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/lorenzo-lastbilsforare2/>
- The Swedish Armed Forces.** (n.d.). Staffan – Signalist i Hemvärnet [I-10]. <https://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/jobba-i-forsvarsmakten/verksamhetsomraden-arbetsomraden-och-forband/verksamhetsomraden/vo-hemvarnet/mot-vara-soldater/staffan-signalist/>

## INTERVIEWS

- Home Guard Representative 1 [R-1].** (2023, April 25). *Interview, Regional recruitment coordinator, The Swedish Home Guard* /Interviewer: J. Malmström.
- Home Guard Representative 2 [R-2].** (2023, April 25). *Interview, Communication/Recruitment official, The Swedish Home Guard* /Interviewer: J. Malmström.
- Home Guard Representative 3 [R-3].** (2023, April 25). *Interview, Communication/Recruitment official, The Swedish Home Guard* /Interviewer: J. Malmström.

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Malmström, J., & Berndtsson, J. (2025). Constructing "Society's Soldiers": Identity Work, (Total) Defence Willingness and the Swedish Home Guard. *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 8(1), pp. 1–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.290>

**Submitted:** 30 April 2024  
**Accepted:** 09 December 2024  
**Published:** 02 January 2025

## COPYRIGHT:

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

*Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Scandinavian Military Studies.