



**Linnæus University**

Sweden

Bachelor Thesis

# Instability in the Arctic

Sweden's Security Discourse on China in the Arctic  
before and after the outbreak of the Ukraine Conflict



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## Abstract

This thesis examines the official Swedish security discourse on China's role in the Arctic, focusing on how the discourse has evolved in response to the geopolitical shifts in the region and with the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This thesis examines the discourse from before Russia's invasion of Ukraine and compares it to the discourse after the invasion of Ukraine. Key themes such as security, militarization, strategic partnership, sovereignty, economic opportunity, and research have been identified through a qualitative discourse analysis of official documents, policy papers, and security reports.

The findings reveal a dual nature in Swedish discourse, on the one hand diplomatic and encouraging cooperation, on the other critical. The discourse was examined in two parts, before and after the invasion of Ukraine, leading to a comparison of the divided time period. Pre-invasion, the discourse was more centered on economic investments and research activities. Post-invasion, it was more critical and focused on security. China's partnership with Russia and the dual use of Chinese research is of special interest.

Through Luke's dimensions of power, the analysis further builds upon the findings and presents the power-based actions of both China and Sweden.

This thesis contributes to understanding how Sweden navigates power dynamics in the Arctic, the implications of China's ambitions in the Arctic, and their effect on Swedish national security.

## Key words

Sweden, Security, Discourse, Arctic, China, Power



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## **List of Abbreviations**

UNCLOS - United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

PRC - People's Republic of China

EU - European Union

FOI - Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut (Swedish Defence Research Agency)

MUST - Militära underrättelse- och säkerhetstjänsten (Swedish military Intelligence and Security Service)

BRI - Belt and Road Initiative

MSS - Ministry of State Security (China)

SSF - Strategic Support Force (China)

MID - Military Intelligence Department



# 1 Introduction

Previously jointly governed by the Arctic states —Canada, The Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, The Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States— along with indigenous groups, observers, and working groups, the region has now become a focal point for global security, not only in terms of getting ahead of climate change, but for the strategic position, emerging trade routes, and resource extraction. These groups comprise the Arctic Council, which has spearheaded governance by balancing environmental protection with sustainable development (The Arctic Council, 2023). However, the arctic has now become a focal point for global security, not only in terms of climate change but also due to its strategic position, emerging trade routes, and resource extraction opportunities.

The melting ice caps have brought new challenges and opportunities as many countries show interest in the region and its trade routes, resources, and strategic positions. China is only one example of a non-Arctic state interested in the Arctic. It has declared its interest and named itself a “near-Arctic state,” as it wants more influence over the development and governance of the Arctic (Crawford, 2021).

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine further complicates the geopolitical situation. Sweden and Finland have joined NATO, making Russia the only Arctic state and member of the Arctic Council that is not also a NATO member. In addition, Sweden’s membership in NATO signals a reconsideration of regional security, making the country turn from a historically neutral stance. As NATO expands its territory and Russia deepens alliances, further inviting China to be a partner within the region, geopolitics is transforming unlike anything seen in years (Werfelli, 2024).

As growing militarization and increased interest in the Arctic region transforms the geopolitical landscape, new challenges and threats emerge. The environmental and geopolitical change in the area is both a driver and evidence of the growing tensions between the involved states. While China seeks to further its presence in the region, and Russia is at war with Ukraine, aligning interests has created a partnership between the two, allowing the Chinese presence to expand (Conley et al., 2024).

This thesis will be structured into 7 chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents a review of existing literature on the Swedish discourse on China in the Arctic, identifying gaps in current research. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical approach of this study och explain the use of the theory. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology, describing the qualitative



approach used for data collection and analysis, as well as ethical considerations. Chapter 5 presents the findings gathered from the chosen sources and gives concrete examples upon which the analysis and conclusion will be built upon. Chapter 6 discusses these findings in relation to the theory and literature, exploring their implications. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by discussing and summarizing the main findings, answering the research questions, and suggesting directions for future studies.

## 1.1 Objective and Relevance

The objective of this study is to analyze the Swedish security discourse regarding China's growing influence in the Arctic, particularly in relation to China's partnership with Russia and its potential impacts on Swedish regional stability and security perceptions. This will be achieved by examining the government's view and information posted by official institutions. The aim is to compare Swedish security discourse on Chinese Arctic involvement before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and apply Luke's (2005) theory on power to investigate if any national security concerns are framed in this discourse.

This study's relevance lies in exploring the Swedish perspective on China's presence and the evolving Arctic security discourse. Sweden is a recent NATO member and Arctic nation in the face of Russia's aggression on Ukraine, and Russia is also an Arctic state. It explores the possibility of a spillover of the conflict into the Arctic region. The study will focus on the geopolitical change, the power behind it, and its implications by looking at China, a non-Arctic actor interested in the Arctic and in a partnership with Russia. Russia is on the opposite side of the new Swedish NATO alignment. Hence, the relations between China and Russia are highly interesting, especially since this study will compare the Swedish security discourse before and after the Russia-Ukraine war.

The relevance of this study extends beyond Swedish national security concerns to broader geopolitical and strategic considerations. The Arctic is a region of increasing global importance due to climate change, new trade routes, and natural resources. As China actively seeks to establish itself as a key player in the Arctic region, its presence challenges existing governance frameworks and may reshape power dynamics within the region. By examining Sweden's perception of China's Arctic ambitions, this research provides valuable insights into how small and mid-sized arctic nations might respond to major geopolitical shifts and external influence.





Furthermore, understanding how Sweden frames China's presence in security discourse helps clarify how democratic arctic nations balance cooperation, competition, and conflict prevention. The relevance lies in understanding the larger discussion on power dynamics, national security and the complex dynamics of international actors.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The following questions have been developed to act as a guide for the study:

- How has Sweden's security discourse on China's presence in the Arctic evolved over time, particularly before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine?
- What specific security concerns does the official Swedish security discourse address and associate with China's growing influence in the Arctic?

## 2 Literature Review

The Arctic Council (2024) has several documents and reports on important Arctic work with China playing the part of an Arctic observer and partner. Some of these documents outline the observer reports China has filled out, explicitly stating their official stance on Arctic environmental questions and development work. One of the points they outline is that they will continue "To support the work of the Council [...] and intensify policy exchanges and cooperation with Member States and other observers of the Council" (The People's Republic of China and Arctic Council, 2021:6).

The quote above adheres to development work in the Arctic region and follows China's official line before 2022, when their activities were primarily economic and environmental. Their strategic approach to the Arctic before the Russia-Ukraine conflict is discussed by Andersson (2021), who dives deeper into "China's Arctic interests" and "two such classifications – 'important maritime interest' and 'strategic new frontier,'" a view that also is highly economic (Andersson, 2021). This provides a structural base for the argument of China's prospective involvement in the Arctic before the Ukraine war.

To understand the Swedish security discourse in 2020, a report published by the FOI (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut) mentions China's expanding interest in the region and the territories that could provide trade routes in the



area, along with the US and Russia's growing military presence. They further question how Swedish national security will be impacted if a war between these three great powers occurs. It contextualizes the Swedish state's view on China and how it has grown as a possible security threat. This, too, is relevant as it points to what the Swedish state finds important and its values regarding national security (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2020).

Sweden is open to China as a partner in the Arctic. They are monitoring the situation due to the proximity of three international players and the possible security concert that may come from this. "Regarding collaboration that [occurs] between Swedish and Chinese actors, it is essential to consider the risks that such collaboration may pose from a national security and [defense] perspective; this applies equally to business and innovation investments, technological cooperation, academic exchange and research, and other forms of cooperation between Chinese and Swedish actors" (Löfven and Dahlgren, 2019:14). This source shows the discourse on China, where the Swedish-China relation is outlined, provided by the Swedish government, and argues for the Swedish security discourse before the Russia-Ukraine war. This provides a foundation to contextualize Swedish security discourse on Chinese presence in the Arctic.

Following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, China's Arctic stance has shifted as it aligns more with Russian interests, especially since Sweden joined NATO (Conley et al., 2024).

The Swedish government published a summary from Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat in 2023, which states that China's military presence in the Arctic is viewed as a security threat that has grown with Ukraine's invasion and will be relevant to argue the official Swedish security discourse on China's Arctic presence after the Ukraine-Russia war (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

The book *Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic* by Tamnes and Offerdal (2014) provides context to the situation in the Arctic regarding the Arctic nation's security. It gives a picture of the Russia and NATO conflict, Arctic politics, security studies, and the international context in general. The text is relevant to the underlying arguments that will be made in the study regarding the importance of previous geopolitics in the region and can be used to compare how the current situation has changed since 2014. It can then be connected to the rest of the literature by understanding and arguing for the interconnectedness of the actors that this study will scrutinize. It can also be used to argue for the significance of the current geopolitical situation of the Arctic and the evolving power dynamics (Tamnes and Offerdal, 2014).



In a memo published by FOI in 2019, there is further information about how China seemingly increased its interest in the Arctic region. Although Russia and the US are the major powers, China has increased its activity. This is important for the argument of China's increasing activity, but it also shows that the three major powers in the area are beginning to be noticed. The implications for Sweden are that the security threat against the Swedish nation is further questioned due to the closeness of Russia, the US, and China, and China is not singled out. The report emphasizes the deteriorating security environment and the importance of drafting security policies and strategic responses (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019).

Stefan Lundqvist wrote an article in *Officertidningen* in 2023 with the title *Maktspelet om Arktis Ökar Spänningarna i Nordkalotten* (Lundqvist, 2023). Although the discourse analysis will not be made with media sources, this contributes to the understanding of what the surrounding situation in the Arctic currently looks like. The focus is on North Calotte, but as it is part of the Arctic region and the article mostly mentions events within the Arctic, it is still relevant, especially in the context of Swedish security. The article outlines how and why Russia and China have explored a deeper relationship, as it is becoming increasingly beneficial for both. It evidentiates the increased military focus after the Russia-Ukraine war and contextualizes the relations between the major powers (Lundqvist, 2023).

Another source important in regard to the current context and which presents the instability of the region's governance is brought forth by Allan Cunningham (2024). After the invasion of Ukraine, the members of the Arctic Council (except Russia, which was currently holding the rotating chairmanship) decided to boycott all future meetings. This effectively ended cooperation at the detriment of governance and geopolitical stability, although the Council has since decided to continue many of its projects without Russia. This is important because it sets up the different political sides, specifically in the Arctic Region. On one side, Russia, and the other, the rest. This might be important, especially when arguing why new alliances are made and why a new discourse has emerged, and in relation to the previous article by Lundqvist (2023), as China and Russia are getting closer and closer (Cunningham, 2024).

To counter the previous argument and shift focus to the time before the war, the *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security* (2020) shows the effectiveness of the Arctic Council and how well cooperation worked in many security spheres. The book outlines the interconnectedness between peace and development (Hoogensen Gjørsv, Lanteigne, and Sam-Aggrey, 2020).



The *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security* (2020) also serves as a base for the arguments on China's involvement in the Arctic region before the Ukraine-Russia war. The authors bring forth the argument made by Lanteigne "that increasing cooperation between Russia and China is contributing to the debate about the securitization of the Arctic and asks whether it is proper to consider the Arctic to be a security region" (Hoogensen Gjørsv, Lanteigne and Sam-Aggrey, 2020:9). This points to that China as a non-Arctic state has had a continuous curve of interest in the Arctic region and that interest has deepened. In 2018, they announced their Arctic Silk and Road initiative, which would also call for deeper cooperation with Russia, tying this argument back to Lundqvist (2023), who outlined the benefits for China and Russia in their cooperation. These sources fail to mention the Swedish perspective on China's presence in the region, further arguing for the reliance of this study.

To bring this back specifically to the Swedish security discourse, FOI released *FOI:s underlag inför nästa försvarspolitiska inriktningsbeslut*, which was presented the same year the Ukraine-Russia war broke out. China's influence has already grown in the Arctic region, and its scientific presence can be described as a soft power strategy that expands its influence and legitimizes its activities. This document could be used to highlight the role of framing, and even though there is little information on China in the Arctic, there is a broader perspective to find here on the Swedish security discourse on China. With that said, the information on China's Arctic is not irrelevant. The country's relationship with Russia is described as political, economic, and military in nature, and they have the common goal of weakening the US, liberalism, and the West (Ottosson, 2022).

One academic work specifically important to mention is done by Risfelt (2024). Her work *The Arctic Front: A study using the Securitization Theory to analyse in which way the Arctic region is perceived a security and defence concern within Swedish Arctic discourse* is the closest research done to my study, however the main difference, and further proof of the research gap, is the lack of focus on China. Using the official Swedish security discourse on China in the Arctic as a case study, this study will provide a new perspective and expand upon the arguments made by Risfelt (2024).

## 3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter will present the theoretical framework on which the thesis analysis will be based. It will rely on Steven Luke's work *Power: A Radical*



*View* (2005) and present the three different dimensions of power, which will be used to gain a deeper understanding of the security situation and power dynamics in the Arctic region.

### 3.1 Luke's Dimensions of Power

In this study, Luke's (2005) concepts of power serve as the primary theoretical framework for analyzing the Swedish security discourse on China in the Arctic. It provides a multidimensional understanding of power and offers a lens through which it is possible to examine how Sweden's national security concerns are framed and articulated. The theory also provides a broader perspective on how the discourse reflects the geopolitical changes in the Arctic, specifically how the different actors use the different dimensions of power. It also provides perspective on how and why the Swedish security discourse has changed. It has the potential to capture both overt political statements and more subtle societal influences. To clarify, the theory was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of which dimensions of power are implemented by China in the Arctic, and how they are perceived as possible security threats. The theory will also explain the broader context of China's actions and Sweden's official security discourse towards them.

Luke's (2005) dimensions of power are categorized into three separate dimensions: The first dimension, decision-making power, can also be defined as visible power, which focuses on how individuals or groups make direct decisions in a setting of conflict, defined by one party influencing the outcome of another. This dimension is observable, and in the context of this study, it could be used to explain Sweden's joining NATO or the implementation of official policies and steps Sweden takes to ensure national security.

The second dimension is agenda-setting power or hidden power. Hidden power influences which issues are prioritized and addressed in public discourse and policymaking. It reflects the ability to decide what is on the agenda, what should be discussed, and what is not. Exercising this power aligns with how narratives influence perceptions, as the selected topics shape what is discussed and what people find important and relevant. Identifying the actors and how they influence the agenda will be a central part of understanding the current discourse on China's involvement in the Arctic and their intentions and objectives in framing the agenda the way they do (Luke, 2005).

The third dimension of Luke's (2005) power is ideological power or Invisible power. This dimension mirrors how people's perceptions, ideology, culture,



and societal norms can be influenced, often without conscious awareness. These perceptions usually align with the interest of those in power and are indirect and more subtle than the other two dimensions. This dimension picks up on the more subtle terms of power and societal influence. The actor exercising this power maintains dominance through cultural and societal norms and shapes compliance through shaping assumptions, ideology, and structures rather than coercion.

The Swedish security discourse on China's Arctic presence is highly relevant at this point, as this dimension of power is exercised through the normalization of certain values or concepts. If China were to succeed in naming themselves as a "near Arctic state," their presence in the Arctic might not be as questioned or seen as a possible threat. Still, Swedish security discourse has a long-standing aversion to certain Chinese values and ideologies. This places China as a possible geopolitical adversary in the Arctic due to the incompatibility in values. As the Swedish policy discussions continue subtly reinforcing this view on China, they also use the discourse to paint it as neutral for the collective.

Language and framing are central in this dimension, as certain words hold heavier implications and meanings than others. Terms like "militarization," "military strategic," and "authoritarian" are charged in a way that reminds the reader of security threats and can be used to emphasize the discourse the actor wants to promote. Frames like these influence both policymakers and the general public, creating the narrative that, in this case, strengthens Sweden's strategic choices regarding China, and the Swedish security discourse will reflect that. By shaping the discourse subtly in this way, the alternative to increase militarization or to collaborate with NATO as a response to a perceived threat becomes a necessity rather than a choice, as seen with the discourse regarding the threat from Russia. By shaping preferences and ideologies in ways that often go unnoticed, invisible power strengthens and compliments Sweden's geopolitical stance while discounting other perspectives as not as important (Luke, 2005) (Johnstone and Andrus, 2024)(Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019).

## 4 Methodology

Due to the nature of the information gathering, this research is most suitable as a desk study. The methodology consists of qualitative research and data gathering through articles, official reports, and literature published by relevant sources. Due to the lack of academic publications that intersect the specific themes this thesis will focus on, the information will largely be



gathered around articles and official reports (Bryman, 2016). It is important to contextualize the gathered information to ensure that the conclusions are as accurate as possible. Since Russia and China are more secretive about their information than Sweden, the Swedish government might have a diplomatic agenda to maintain ties with the other parties.

It is also important to view the discourse from as many viewpoints as possible to portray it as accurately as possible. However, as this thesis focuses on Swedish security discourse, it will mainly be viewed from what Sweden perceives as their interests. Complementing information about the Chinese and Russian objectives in the Arctic might be interpreted through different agendas, which is precisely what discourse analysis aims to explore (Bryman, 2016). As it is a highly politicized subject, this study focus on how biases are constructed and framed. The discourse analysis and theoretical framework will act as a lens through which the gathered information will be viewed, and through the very nature of these analyses, it will be possible to understand the underlying causes and motives to paint certain matters in certain ways. While separating the information from manipulation is interesting for the study, it might be even more important to understand why an actor tries to manipulate the discourse first and what the actor in question is trying to achieve by manipulating or misrepresentation. The underlying factors will be revealed by comparing sources and analyzing the language, words, and framing (Bryman, 2016) (Luke, 2005).

In total, over 50 official Swedish documents and statements were analyzed, with an aim to include an equal number from before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In the end, less than 20 sources were relevant for the study. These include publications and policy statements from: Försvarsmakten (Swedish Armed Forces), Regeringen (the Government of Sweden), Försvarsberedningens sekretariat (Defence Commission Secretariat, Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut, FOI, (Swedish Defence Research Agency), official speeches and papers available through government portals and institutional archives.

Documents were accessed via official institutional websites and public governmental databases. When relevant information was found, efforts were made to locate similar documents for each year under analysis to ensure a balanced representation across the set timeframe.

By comparing the sources, this thesis aims to analyze their bias and find patterns that reveal how narratives evolve and how power is exercised through discourse. The sources can also be used to fact-check each other, providing a more accurate depiction of the subjects (Bryman, 2016). This



study will use official websites, institutes, think tanks, speeches, and peer-reviewed work to ensure reliability and credibility. The “Swedish” discourse is defined as the official Swedish security agenda and stance. Swedish government, officials, institutes, defense, and military. This study will not consider the opinions of the media or the Swedish population but will strictly follow official sources.

The discourse is further defined by a security perspective and will, as such, aim to gather information only from relevant sources. Security will be defined through a realistic perspective as described by Kenneth N. Waltz in *Theory of International Politics* (Waltz, 1979). By prioritizing power balancing, it is up to each state to help itself and ensure survival. The perspective frames security as the state’s survival, sovereignty, and independence in an international system in constant competition (Waltz, 1979).

## 4.1 Discourse Analysis

Using discourse analysis, the study will delve deeper into the Swedish security discourse on how China is perceived in the Arctic. The aim is to find Swedish national security concerns in the Arctic and understand the possible narratives created in Swedish security discourse to respond to the changing power structures within the area by analyzing and assessing how the language and framing have changed (Johnstone and Andrus, 2024).

Discourse analysis is a tool for understanding how language shapes perceptions and societal narratives. Ideology, social norms, and power structures are embedded in our language, and by framing topics along with the language and words used, it is possible to discern underlying agendas or changes in perception (Johnstone and Andrus, 2024).

Contextualizing this with the study, discourse analysis provides a deeper understanding of Swedish narratives regarding China’s involvement in the Arctic. Language is not neutral and will be applied to understand better how the geopolitical changes in the Arctic area and the involvement of non-Arctic states have changed the Swedish perception of regional changes. This approach would allow for examining what is said and the implication of the words and language itself. It will point to changes within the set time frame and highlight underlying agendas within the Swedish security discourse (Johnstone and Andrus, 2024).

The scope and data selection will focus on systematically analyzing official Swedish sources such as government reports and policies, speeches by





policymakers, official documents by the government, and publications from defense and research institutes such as FOI (Bryman, 2016).

The sources will be selected to represent the official Swedish security discourse defined by the state, government, defense, and official institutes. It will not include public opinion or media to stay as close to the official line as possible and within the research questions.

By examining the Swedish security discourse on China in the Arctic from before the invasion of Ukraine and comparing it with the current discourse as the conflict is ongoing, this study will strive to find how the language, narratives, and power dynamics might have changed along with China's partnership with Russia and Sweden's joining of NATO (Johnstone and Andrus, 2024).

The information gathered may be in Swedish and English. Where necessary, Swedish texts can be translated into English to ensure a coherent study and analysis while maintaining the integrity of the nuances of the original language.

The gathered data will be continuously analyzed and compared to identify underlying themes, words, language, context, and framing before and after the invasion of Ukraine. The themes will relate to the research questions and be built upon during the findings and analysis. The themes are security, militarization, strategic partnership, sovereignty, nation capture, and research. It is interesting to see how many sources relate to these themes and what the discourse surrounding them looks like to answer the research questions. The themes of China's presence in the Arctic before and after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 will be examined. The two time periods will then be compared to find how the discourse is involved (Bryman, 2016).

## 4.2 Ethical Considerations

As the study examines several ethnic regions in Eurasia and the Arctic, it is important to remain unbiased. However, due to the nature of the study, there are few ethical considerations. As this is a desk study, no unofficial sources have been used, and no interviews have been conducted. Therefore, there is little risk of breaking ethical boundaries within this research. I have strived to stay neutral and objective to avoid promoting biased narratives towards any particular actor or culture. Even though the nature of the study is to examine the bias of official Swedish security discourse, the findings and conclusion will be presented as objectively as possible.



## 4.3 Limitations and Delimitations

Continuing to the last paragraph on ethical considerations, it is also important to note that the discourse analysis is my interpretation of the sources and information. This might be considered a limitation despite my best efforts to remain objective. In addition, some information might be interpreted differently since this is a discourse analysis, and the language used to present information will be translated between Swedish and English. The study also becomes reliant on the information published by the official sources. As such, it can be difficult to access the information that is most relevant to Sweden's national security (Bryman, 2016).

This study's delimitations are that it will focus solely on the official Swedish security discourse and not the entirety of the Arctic region, the Nordics, or NATO. This will be done to make the work more manageable and structured. It also narrows the research gap, making the study's contribution more impactful. For the same reasons, the study will also focus on China as the only non-Arctic actor. In this case, the delimitation also provides the angle of investigating Sweden as a NATO member vs. China as allies of Russia (Bryman, 2016).

As mentioned, this is a security discourse, and therefore, it will solely focus on the security aspect. Although the context as a whole will also be analyzed to provide depth and clarity, examining the discourse from different perspectives, such as economic or environmental, could lead to different interpretations and conclusions (Bryman, 2016).

Another delimitation is that this thesis will be done as a desk study, requiring me to rely on already published works. No interviews or surveys will be conducted to gather new information; all new reflections will be based on conclusions drawn from already published works (Bryman, 2016).

## 5 Findings

This chapter examines the official Swedish security discourse on China in the Arctic and aims to answer the research questions by studying themes, framing, narratives, and intertextuality. The findings are presented through analyzing sources such as government reports, policies, speeches by policymakers, official government documents, and publications from defense and research institutes. The chapter seeks to identify any changes in the discourse surrounding China in the Arctic before and after the beginning of the Ukraine-Russia war, assess how these reflect on Swedish security, and



what the specific security concerns that arise look like. The period before and after the invasion of Ukraine will be analyzed separately, and the findings from each period will then be compared to draw further connections and understanding.

## 5.1 Pre-Invasion of Ukraine

To examine the changes in the official Swedish security discourse before and after the invasion of Ukraine, the study aims to find key themes that can lead to a deeper understanding of the discourse. The study will also examine the framing and seek context as to why the discourse is presented the way it is.

### 5.1.1 Context and Framing

The official Swedish security discourse surrounding China in the Arctic must be contextualized through the broader political landscape. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the security situation escalated, and some of the Arctic countries expanded their military capabilities as a response to protect their territory from potential threats. Although the distrust and tension were high, “the overall picture in the Arctic remains an almost shining example of proper state behavior over contested claims” (Wezeman, 2016:22). Most Arctic states expanded their military presence in the Arctic yet remained far from what SIPRI regards as militarization due to increased interest in resources, the changing environment, and the Arctic states’ concern for Russia’s more aggressive foreign policies. The fear of the tensions between NATO and Russia spilling over into the region was significant enough for the SIPRI to take notice in 2016 (Wezeman, 2016).

China was already an observer in the Arctic Council 2016, and its interest was mainly perceived as economic and research-oriented. Its Arctic activities, including scientific research and interest in trade routes such as the Polar Silk Road as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, framed its involvement in the region in diplomacy rather than through security concerns. The official Swedish security discourse seems to have mirrored this narrative until China declared itself a “Near Arctic State,” showing its increased interest in the region and attempt to gain more influence. This led to a reevaluation of China’s role in the area and signaled to Sweden that China’s involvement in the Arctic might come to challenge Swedish interests, especially in the context of their cooperation with Russia (Klimenko and Sørensen, 2017).

The more time passes, the more the discourse shows a disillusioned Swedish narrative regarding China’s role in the Arctic. The MUST yearly reports were



increasingly becoming weary of China. In 2017, they were barely mentioned at all. In 2018, China was mentioned in connection to the Arctic region through its initiative to have a Polar Silk Road as part of its Belt and Road initiative. It is mentioned that the Arctic region is becoming increasingly important to China and that the Chinese presence in Sweden's nearby area will likely increase (Försvarsmakten, 2018) (Försvarsmakten, 2019).

In 2019, the MUST report thoroughly accounts for China's actions in the Arctic and global regions. It shows a deeper understanding of Chinese interests and their influences on Swedish security. The report outlines how Chinese investments have increased in Europe and the Arctic and how China creates dependency relationships where one part becomes dependent on China (Försvarsmakten, 2020). Whether the activities done by civilian businessmen or the Chinese state have no value since all Chinese citizens are compelled to aid and comply with the Chinese state if required (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019).

China's framing as a "Near Arctic State" is not picked up by the Swedish narrative and is seemingly not by others. The Swedish security discourse makes it clear that Sweden aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), "which provides rules concerning maritime boundaries, claims to an outer continental shelf, sovereign rights over resources and the protection of the marine environment," which does not grant China rights to the Arctic (Arctic Portal, n.d.) (Försvarsmakten, 2020).

It is also possible to discern that tensions between China, Russia, and the US are rising, and the relationship between China and the US is pointed out as the leading factor for what geopolitical and geoeconomic development will look like globally. Although not stated, this implied that the Chinese interest in the Arctic might complicate the situation as the great powers get closer in proximity (Försvarsmakten, 2020).

By 2019 and 2020, the Swedish framing became more critical. China was continuously pointed out as a potential security risk, and actual actions are listed, such as purchasing land, mines, and abandoned naval bases in Greenland and Iceland (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019). The discourse has evolved from viewing China as an investor in economic and research endeavors to actively taking part in activities that directly affect Sweden. The stark differences in values and the security risk those differences pose are seen in the way Russia and China actively try to influence Swedish interests to align more with theirs. Russia and China are both named as part of the expanding security threat to Sweden and Swedish interests in the economic, military, politics, technology, and infrastructure



spheres. Simultaneously, the Chinese Ministry of State Security (MSS), Military Intelligence Department (MID), and Strategic Support Force (SSF), which makes up China's Communist Party's intelligence and security service, have become more active on a global scale, especially in the Arctic. Their activity is sometimes directly aimed at Sweden (Försvarsmakten, 2021).

The focus on Russia is more heavily leaning on its militarization, and the focus on China is mainly about the furtherment of their economic and strategic goals globally and in the Arctic. Despite this, the stark difference between the West's values and the values of the East (e.i., China and Russia) is concerning. "Russia and China are acting to create or exploit division within and between the countries in the West" (Försvarsmakten, 2021:12. Translation by author).

Sweden's official stance on Arctic governance and security is outlined in *Sveriges Strategi för Den Arktiska Regionen* (2020). While Sweden strives to reach cooperation in compliance with UNCLOS to achieve environmental, economic, and security goals, it also highlights the complexities of non-Arctic states, "like China," staking their claim in the region. In addition, China's increased presence in the region to focus more on its economic strategies and scientific research and the country's strategic policies are moving forward. The government is aware that other countries view China as a risk, especially in the context of buying infrastructure and land, but also within technology, with the Arctic as their arena and state to monitor the situation (Löfven and Hultqvist, 2020).

The Armed Forces (Försvarsmakten) added to the discourse in 2021 that it is not only the visible military tools of power that pose a threat but also actions within cyber- and information spheres, technology, science, investment, and culture. The warning is that even though it might not replace the threat of military means, it is important to look at the context and the larger picture. With increasing competition between China and Russia, the US and the West, security is increasingly being questioned, which is favorable for the Chinese and Russian agenda (Försvarsmakten, 2022b).

In a motion sent to the Swedish parliament in 2021, representatives of the Swedish Democrats argued that China might very well have a military presence in the Arctic and an interest in resources and trade routes. Russia's activities regarding the expansion of its energy supply are also mentioned, an activity which has already been established as an important part of their Chinese partnership. The motion frames the Chinese presence as filled with risks, as they can get hold of technology and monopolize communication in



the region. The sentence begins by saying that Chinese investment could be positive. Still, the framing and subtext suggest otherwise, especially with the following paragraph, which calls China's role in the Arctic Council “problematic” and questions if China is performing the requirements tied to holding observer status. Although the parliament, where the Social Democrats held the majority, did not accept the motion—which also speaks to the Swedish security discourse—it shows the narrative of some official Swedish actors, such as some government parties. Despite not being accepted, the motion shows concern regarding the Chinese presence.

To summarize, the official Swedish security discourse before the invasion of Ukraine was split into two sides: the side where China is investing in research, development, and the economy and the security side, which becomes increasingly skeptical of China's endeavors as time passes. Sweden's Arctic policy discourse reflects the balance of fostering cooperation and navigating the evolving security dynamics in the context of power competition.

## 5.1.2 Themes

During the discourse analysis, a number of themes repeatedly emerged. These themes will be presented at the end of the themes chapter and used to argue what the official Swedish security discourse looks like and how it relates to power and Swedish national security.

### *Swedish concerns over security*

Sweden's discourse on China in the Arctic region changed during the latter half of the 21st century, becoming more security-oriented even before the invasion of Ukraine. As Sino-Russian cooperation changed from stagnation to mutual quid pro quo, and as competition between powers gained a foothold to claim Arctic resources, trade routes, and control of strategic locations, so did the view of Swedish security change.

The framing of China's expansion in the Arctic region is complex but centers around China participating in the race for power, resources, and claims to territory. As the Arctic, Antarctica, Space, and the bottom of the deep sea are seen as unclaimed land and are thus still conquerable, the great powers race to “stake their claim.” The strained relations between East and West become even more exhausted, and countries who disagree with either significant power risk actions that ensure little to no resistance. “States in the region shall be influenced with different methods and be made to support, or at least not oppose China's ambitions” (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019:24. Translation by the author).



The Swedish Armed Forces (Försvarsmakten) warn of China's non-visible power tools. Intelligence and security forces try to influence Sweden and Swedish interests to align more with the Chinese interests and agenda. This is framed as a component of China's broader strategic agenda. As the security and stability in the region weaken, the evolution is directly connected to China and Russia. "This development is linked to the fact that the rule-based international order is under pressure. Norms, institutions, and collaborations are weakening and moving in a direction that is overall more favorable to China and Russia, a development that these countries are systematically driving forward" (Försvarsmakten, 2022a:4. Translation by author).

The official Swedish strategy so far has been to monitor the activities of great powers, such as China, and adjust to the evolving security dynamics in the region. The Swedish government has strived to cooperate to promote peace and sustainability, but it also seeks to protect international law (Regeringskansliet, 2020).

The discourse shows a balance between peaceful cooperation on one side and an emerging threat in the form of great powers like China competing for resources in Sweden near the vicinity. These powers directly affect Arctic policy with their attempts to drive a wedge between powers in the West. The most notable of these strategies, which are not strictly military means, include economic, diplomatic, informational, and technological influences (Försvarsmakten, 2021).

### ***Swedish concerns over Arctic militarization***

A majority of the Arctic states were already in the process of expanding their military in the region prior to the annexation of Crimea and continued to do so after the Russian aggression. Still, the levels of militarization were not yet high enough to cause concern (Wezeman, 2016).

By 2020, the militarization in the Arctic had increased, and there was concern about the military arms race. The region is strategically a key area, especially regarding keeping the nuclear balance and Russia's militarization and strategic positioning of submarines extra concerning. Almost all texts this study examined have mentioned the threat from Russia in one regard or another, mostly as one of the militarizing great powers and as on the opposite side of the West. There is an "us" vs. "them" context where China and Russia are counted as on the opposite side of the Swedish narrative and the West, including most of Europe and NATO (Löfven and Linde, 2020).

"The military dimension of China's actions in the region is so far limited, but China is slowly building naval forces with global reach, including



submarines” (Löfven and Linde, 2020:14. Translation by author). China is, thus, already expanding its military possibilities in the region. Although the expansion might not cause alarm in and of itself, it is important in their relation with Russia and in them not being an Arctic state and operating in waters not in their territory.

China has strategic goals globally, and is actively building defense and offense. Although it is hard to know exactly how well-prepared China’s military is, they quickly seem to have gained abilities that rival the US and Russia. “Qualitative advancements in Chinese capabilities in the nuclear domain primarily consist of developing a strategic submarine fleet and technology enabling missiles with multiple warheads that can be directed at different targets. Cyber and space are other prioritized areas for capability development” (Löfven and Hultqvist, 2020:51. Translation by author). The question of how cyber and space play into militarization will be brought up in the theme regarding research.

Although Russia has a strong military presence in the Arctic, China remains trying to gain Arctic regional influence. However, the cooperation has deepened and seems to have become more militant, according to the Swedish government. “The military cooperation between China and Russia requires increased attention, particularly regarding potential military collaboration focused on the Arctic” (Löfven and Linde, 2020:14. Translation by author).

### ***Russia-China Strategic Partnership***

After Russia annexed Crimea, Russia sought alternative partnerships due to the sanctions imposed by the Western powers. China’s capital and interest in collaboration to reach its strategic goals made it the perfect candidate (Klimenko and Sørensen , 2017).

For a long time, Russia has been the dominating partner, holding control of the Arctic, both as an Arctic nation, part of UNCLOS, and in terms of aggression in foreign policy. Their shared interest in the region has been connected to the trade routes and the energy sphere, and there has been a mutually beneficial exchange between the two, even though the relation might have stagnated at times (Klimenko and Sørensen , 2017).

Swedish security discourse paints both powers as challengers to Western dominance and NATO’s influence in the Arctic region. This discourse also sheds a concerning light on the increased military activities and the dual nature of China's research and technology, such as satellite navigation systems. Both nations also seem to have a skepticism towards UNCLOS. In official Swedish security discourse, China is criticized for picking and





choosing when they see the law fit their purposes and strategic plans (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019).

As the years passed and the closer to the invasion of Ukraine, the more Chinese Russian collaboration also seem to have taken on an ideological form. The partnership has become more calculated, something that drives the rising worry about their relationship in official Swedish security discourse (Försvarsmakten, 2022a).

### ***Swedish concerns over Arctic sovereignty***

Sweden's official position is in accordance with UNCLOS, which emphasizes the rule-based approach to Arctic sovereignty. There are several different zones outlined in the UNCLOS treaty, but coastal states as the primary stakeholders, are recognized as holding sovereignty to territorial and maritime claims. "Jurisdiction and sovereignty of coastal states varies, depending on the maritime zone described in the Convention. Full sovereignty and maximum jurisdiction is given to the coastal state in its internal waters. However, the right of innocent passage for foreign vessels is recognized in a historic regime of shared sovereignty over the area." In addition, "UNCLOS states that coastal countries have exclusive sovereign rights to explore their natural resources, mineral, and other non-living resources." (Arctic Portal, n.d.).

The official Swedish security discourse seems skeptical of the term "Near Arctic State," which shows another issue with China's presence in the Arctic region: imposing sovereignty under the UNCLOS treaty. As China is not a coastal state nor a landlocked state within the Arctic region, it is not protected by the rights of UNCLOS. The subtext is that China undermines the protection of the rights UNCLOS provides and thus the sovereignty by redefining who has a right to the region (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019).

Further implications on the region's sovereignty will be followed up on in the next theme.

### ***Swedish concerns over increased physical presence***

China's economic strategy in the Arctic is also called in for scrutiny in Swedish security discourse. An FOI report from 2019 shows how parallels can be drawn between China's investment behavior and "nation capture," which is seen as a real possibility. According to the MUST report 2019, China is increasing its access to and investing in agriculture, mines, and infrastructure in Europe, like in other parts of the world. The Arctic region is



no exception, and contracts, business deals, and other influences bind states into situations that make them dependent on China or that China is the only one profiting. China has “tried to buy an abandoned Danish naval base on Greenland which was up for sale, opened an iron malm mine on Greenland and tried for purchase of land on Iceland with unclear purposes” (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019:24. Translation by the author). As the FOI report points out, this gives China even more influence over the region, potentially both for civilian and military purposes (Försvarsmakten, 2020) (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019).

To connect this back to the theme of sovereignty, “Nation Capture” would allow sovereignty to be called into question as the state legally might have acquired control over strategic points. This leverage would allow an even stronger claim for China, and the official Swedish security discourse shows that there is unease regarding this, especially as China continues its attempts to buy more land and influence in the region (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019).

### ***Swedish concerns over economic opportunity***

China’s economic opportunities have a security dimension, partly explained by the previous discourse analysis, encompassing most of its activities and strategic plan. Their investment in Russian energy, their push for a Polar Silk Road as part of the BRI, and their actions led to the worry of “Nation Capture.” (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019).

The discourse shows a development from 2016 to 2021, where the skepticism of Chinese investments has developed. The discourse underlines the need to minimize security vulnerabilities tied to economic dependence. Although there is an underlying criticism in the way the official Swedish security discourse discusses the way China is trying to acquire strategic points in the Arctic and the economic dominance is pointed out as a security risk, the overarching discourse is diplomatic, and the context of when these things are discussed is the base for interpreting it as critique in most cases (Löfven and Dahlgren, 2019).

### ***Swedish concerns over security related research***

China’s role in the Arctic region is often portrayed as primarily scientific and research-focused. The scientific areas relevant to Sweden’s official security discourse before the Ukraine invasion include climate, cyber, space, navigation and shipping routes, communication, and technology. While China does a lot of research and is content with that framing, the official



Swedish security discourse increasingly emphasizes the intersectionality of security and research development (Löfven and Hultqvist, 2020).

The fact that the research initiatives are brought up in multiple of the sources examined in this study is telling, although it is important to note that it is not always done in a negative light. Those times are pointed out as security threats within the broader geopolitical tensions, the race between the great powers, China's strategic ambitions, and China's relation to Russia. "China increase their presence and resources in the region, for now, focusing on economic and research-related cooperation" (Löfven and Hultqvist, 2020:39. Translation by author).

China's intelligence services, MSS, MID, and SSF, are active in the Arctic region and associated with intelligence gathering and technology acquisition, especially within cyber, space, and advanced communications. This does not mean that the research goes to the Chinese state to be exploited, but the official Swedish security discourse seems cautious rather than dismissive (Försvarsmakten, 2021).

It is important to have control over trade routes and secure resources, energy, technology, and information to have power over the strategic key elements of the security in the Arctic region. "The well-developed expertise in maritime operations, natural resource extraction, climate, and natural science research, as well as civilian and military activities, forms a solid foundation for long-term engagement in and control over the region. The developments of the past decade, with an increasing realization that the region is becoming more accessible, have led to formulating strategies for developing the Arctic. Military and civil security, shipping, and energy extraction have been at the forefront" (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019:24. Translation by author). This quote is especially interesting in the context of research as a theme. It identifies the aspects needed to gain control of the region, and as evidenced, China has engaged in all the mentioned aspects. In addition, the same FOI memo (2019) mentions that China's space program is both for civilian and military purposes (Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2019).

### **5.1.3 Language**

The language used in the examined sources can be summarized as cautious, diplomatic, analytical, and strategic. While the official Swedish security discourse often portrays a split view of the non-Arctic state, a growing security concern exists. The discourse recognizes the research and investments made, but the language often reflects what can be connected to a watchfulness towards China in the Arctic region. The themes outlined above



are recurring in many of the texts, but especially closer to the invasion of Ukraine as time moves. While the first sources are less concerned with security, the latter show a definite shift.

## 5.2 Post-Invasion of Ukraine

This part of the chapter will examine the official Swedish security discourse post the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and how it differs from the discourse before 2022. The same themes will be addressed again to gain a complete picture of possible changes.

### 5.2.1 Changed Context and Framing

There is a clear shift in the official Swedish security discourse, both as the security risks have continuously been building up, as seen in the sources examined from before the invasion of Ukraine, but also since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which consequently made Finland and Sweden apply to join NATO. The Swedish Security Service highlights Russia and China as security risks in the Arctic. Important to mention is also that there has been no mention of China in the Arctic from the Swedish Security Service pre-invasion, but were mentioned as security threats on other areas and spheres (Säkerhetspolisen, 2023) (Säkerhetspolisen, n.d.).

Sweden increasingly frames China as an adversary and a power influencing Arctic politics within and outside Swedish borders. The threat from China is continuously underlined in most of the examined sources after 2022. “China's security-threatening activities in northern Sweden primarily involve intelligence gathering and influence operations targeting political decision-making and objectives within Sweden's research and development sector. This is due to Sweden's expertise, advanced technology, and research relevant to the Arctic.” (Säkerhetspolisen, 2023:51. Translation by author.) The essence of these sentences is repeated in more sources that have been examined, e.g., the Swedish government, FOI, and the Swedish Armed Forces.

Ukraine's invasion heightened Europe's security concerns, bringing the Arctic into clearer focus and the collaboration with Russia in all Arctic forums paused. Sweden's new NATO membership has also changed the discourse and focus, creating security with assurances of support and defense in case of conflict. Still, it also changed the perspective from where Sweden might view security issues as they now are part of a broader context. Sweden has picked a side that does not favor Russia and China, which are adversaries to the Western powers. Additionally, the membership has put the Arctic



region into a further divide. Despite previously being made up of both NATO members and non-NATO members, it is now exclusively NATO and Russia, and the council paused all collaborations with Russia (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

While official Swedish security discourse was diplomatic and careful in labeling China before the invasion of Ukraine, Sweden now explicitly labels them as a threat and hostile operations have been pointed out as coming from China. China is framed as a state that is actively challenging Swedish security, targeting Swedish decision-making and research sectors (Försvarsmakten, 2023).

While China's role in the Arctic region is increasingly questioned from a security perspective, the broader context of the official Swedish security discourse shows a more critical view of the state as a whole. *Allvarstid* (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023) explains not only China's activities in the Arctic and their relation to Russia but also other actions China is partaking in towards Swedish security. "China conducts systematic and extensive intelligence operations and security-threatening activities against Sweden and Swedish interests. The Chinese intelligence threat to Sweden has broadened and deepened, and the Swedish Security Service identifies China as a growing and long-term security threat to Sweden" (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023:101).

The competition between China, Russia, and the US has been one of the biggest concerns since the invasion. The tensions accumulated as Russia and NATO gained territory adjacent to one another, increasing the polarization (Försvarsmakten, 2023). Although not speaking directly about the Arctic region, the tensions and the discourse's increasing focus on China as a security threat can be discerned from the Swedish prime minister's speech at the Stockholm China Forum 2023. Although staying diplomatic and promoting continued cooperation, he is marking Sweden as allied to the US and that the country shares the security concerns of the rest of the EU, too. The framing of his speech makes it clear that Sweden does not stand alone and that we have protections in place in case China continues to act in a manner going against Swedish values (Regeringen and Regeringskansliet, 2023).

As Sweden joined NATO, the security perspective changed as well, and the official line adopted NATO's security perspective as well. Additionally, it has led to the Nordic and Baltic countries being able to share security platforms. Through NATO, the border for Swedish security changes from the Swedish border to the NATO border. This is important not only through protection



against Russian attacks but also to states like China, which are seeking to “Change the global playing field [...] and create economic and political dependency relationships to strengthen their positions.” (Billström and Utrikesdepartementet, 2022). As mentioned, this kind of influence is already happening in the Arctic region.

## 5.2.2 Themes

The themes emerging from the examined sources before the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 will be addressed and followed up on, as well as how the surrounding discourse might have changed after 2022.

### *Swedish concerns over security*

China’s surveillance and intelligence gathering are mentioned as an increasing threat from China in the Arctic. A CSIS report from 2024 states that China most likely will not “establish a significant presence in the Arctic” (Vidhammer Berge and Bergmann, 2024), which is also backed by Swedish government sources stating that even though China has the largest military in the world, their military intentions are drawn to other regions. Contrary to this, the discourse shows that the biggest worry does not lie with a “significant presence” but the presence in and of itself, especially in combination with Russia as a partner (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023) (Vidhammer Berge and Bergmann, 2024).

The Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson held a speech at the Stockholm China Forum 2023, stressing how important it is for China and EU relations, and thus China and Sweden's relations, that China does not support Russia’s war effort. He states that China and Russia’s relationship “has a direct impact on our interests and security. Let me stress the obvious – increased Chinese support for Russia’s war effort would have very negative consequences for EU–China relations” (Regeringen and Regeringskansliet, 2023).

The changed security view on China can be seen in *Allvarstid*, where China and Russia are mentioned as security threats. “Russia has long considered itself to conflict with the entire Western world. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, along with China's increased territorial claims, demonstrates that conflicts over territory using military means are once again a reality” (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023:11. Translation by author).

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and dependency on China, in the context of the race for power in the Arctic region, have further changed the geopolitical arena in the Arctic. China has an opportunity to increase its strategic



operations and activities in the Arctic (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

### ***Swedish concerns over Arctic militarization***

China's militarization in the Arctic, and the official Swedish security discourse mostly worries about China's capabilities as an ally to Russia in this aspect. Although China has the opportunity to advance its strategic plans with its military, it has not. Some sources attribute this to having commitments elsewhere, such as in the Indo-Pacific Ocean. Others state that the military interest for China in the Arctic is low. That does not mean that China is not conducting military operations through different means or not supporting other actors (Regeringen, 2023).

For further context, Chinese and Russian warships have been increasingly present together and have been seen conducting military exercises in the Arctic region, e.g., outside the coast of Alaska and China has economically supported Russia during its war on Ukraine, and new American think tanks like CISI state that Russia uses Chinese satellite imagery of Ukraine (Commander Rachael Gosnell and Jensen, 2024) (Vidhammer Berge and Bergmann, 2024).

The discourse shows potential for future militarization as the tensions between the great powers intensify and Russia and NATO continue to compete. China has a formidable military, and although not active in the Arctic, there are some concerns about what might happen if China does get a stronger foothold in the Arctic and take the opportunity they have with Russia's dependence on them (Regeringen, 2023).

### ***Russia-China Strategic Partnership***

One of the biggest security risks with China in the Arctic is its current relationship with Russia, which poses such a direct military threat to Sweden that the government abandoned its neutrality to join NATO. China and Russia's biggest point of cooperation has always been in the energy sector, and China extracts liquified natural gas from the Russian Yamal. The relationship has shifted to China's advantage as the years have passed since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. China is economically supporting Russia through its war, but Swedish security discourse also points out that Russia is an essential ally for China in the competition against the US. This might have further increased the reasons behind the cooperation, and it is predicted to continue to deepen (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023) (Försvarsmakten, 2023).



The discourse on China's role in the Arctic and its relation with Russia hints at China as the more ambitious and stronger of the two in their partnership. While Russia continues to be a skeptic of aspects of China in the Arctic, as it has the potential to undermine the Russian role in the region, they are also not in a position to turn them away as partners as it is mutually beneficial, especially as Russia has a lot of war expenses. China is predicted to continue to be the leading part in the relationship, and the official Swedish security discourse points out that further military presence between the two great powers might have big security implications not only for Sweden but for Europe as a whole (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

China is, to some degree, seen as Russia's enabler, where they have the chose to stop economic cooperation with Russia, which could lead to Russia having to retreat from Ukraine. "China's deepening partnership with Russia and enabling of Russia's offensive war on Ukraine contribute to the serious security situation in Europe" (Ankarberg and Jonson, 2024:9).

### ***Swedish concerns over Arctic sovereignty***

Once again, the framing of China as a "near Arctic state" is called into question and used in a way to explain the security issues the phrase brings. A motion was presented by the political party Swedish Democrats to the government, where they expressed concerns about China's role in the Arctic Council. The discourse shows a concern for the sovereignty of Sweden and the Arctic states and although the Swedish Democrats are a political party, it might not follow the "official discourse"; on the other hand, they are, at the time, also part of the Swedish government and represent issues that are brought up and discussed within the parliament and governing institutions (Giertz et al., 2022).

The motion address how China is leveraging its role in the Arctic Council to further its regional agenda, undermining the sovereignty and governance of the rest of the Arctic states. Although it is pointed out that the Chinese presence might be positive for Sweden as it brings economic benefits and opportunities, it is more heavily implied that China might get technology and a position of monopoly if allowed to continue freely. Their position in the Arctic Council is presented as "problematic," and it is said to be "unclear if China reaches all requirements" to be an observer for the Arctic Council (Giertz et al., 2022).

### ***Swedish concerns over increased physical presence***

Although many sources mention activities related to nation capture, none use the term explicitly. Some examined sources mention events related to nation





capture, such as economic and strategic leveraging. The activities around Russia attempt to form a dependency relation, where Russia ends up in an unfavorable position and has no choice but to allow way for China. However, this might not be possible since Russia maintains significant leverage in the Arctic region, its established military presence, and vast natural resources. Yet, the pattern is discernible (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

MUST's yearly report for 2022 also mentioned Chinese investment in digital and physical infrastructure. Although the report briefly passes over the Arctic, it is in relation to China, its investments, the space industry, and its attempts to change Swedish opinions (Försvarsmakten, 2023).

### ***Swedish concerns over economic opportunity***

China's economic investments in the Arctic remain similar to before the Ukraine invasion. China still intends to create a Polar Silk Road with the BRI, and they continue to invest in the region. The discourse after the invasion dives a bit deeper into the consequences and context of why the economic progress of China in the Arctic region might be important to the security dilemma. China is combining several of the tools at its disposal to drive its agenda forward. "The promotion of the country's strategic interests, where political, economic, and military tools are coordinated. With increasing confidence, China employs various power instruments, exploits dependencies, and competes using legal and illegal methods (Regeringen, 2023:11. Translation by author).

The strategic implications are becoming clearer, and the concerns are growing with the destabilization of the great powers operating in the Arctic region. The Swedish government has pointed out that China poses security threats in multiple spheres, yet they still promote economic cooperation with China. Chinese investments and economy provide opportunities that might not have been possible without them (Commander Rachael Gosnell and Jensen, 2024) (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

### ***Swedish concerns over security related research***

One of the biggest changes in the discourse since the invasion of Ukraine is the great quantity of information about the security risks of China's space research in the Arctic region. The Arctic is in a strategically beneficial position to have reliant infrastructure on the ground for space technology that could be used for warfare and other purposes (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).



China's interest in space extends to Sweden's space industry and the Estrange Space Center in the north of Sweden, within the Arctic region. From 2000 until 2020, China had access to the antenna, but as security risks were discovered, Sweden chose not to extend the contract to allow China access. The concerns regarded how satellite imagery could be used for military purposes. Estrange has also become a point of security concerns and defense opportunities for the NATO alliance (Almén, Weidacher Hsiung and Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2022) (Ankarberg and Jonson, 2024).

The texts regarding China's space activities in the Arctic constantly concern intelligence gathering and nuclear abilities. China has clear goals with its space research and capabilities to further its strategic goals, which do not align with the West's strategic plans (Ankarberg and Jonson, 2024).

Where the official Swedish security discourse previously cautioned against the dual use of research as it could be both military and civilian, it has now proved that the caution was justified. As there is a continued dual use of research from China, the discourse has shifted to analyze each sphere's military or security purposes. While the space and cyber sphere were mentioned in some texts before the invasion of Ukraine, they are now mentioned in most of the examined texts. China continues to build its capabilities within these areas and is now reported to have an "advanced cyber espionage to promote its economic development and enhance its military capabilities" (Regeringskansliet and Försvarsdepartementet, 2024:211. Translation by author).

### 5.2.3 Language

The language used regarding China in the Arctic region and China, in general, has become harsher since before the war. Sweden has a different security perspective than before the Ukraine invasion. Words and phrases like economic and military tools, militarization, military-strategic, intelligence gathering, influence, and security are reoccurring, while words like dangerous and serious occur with less frequency but do still appear.

While the tone is continued diplomatic, it is also more skeptical and security-oriented. Security risks are highlighted, and the sources are more assertive than previously.

## 5.3 Summary of Findings

China is framed as an actor using "all tools at its disposal" to further its agenda, making it appear dual-natured in the official Swedish security discourse. The framing and view of them shift between economic



investments furthering research and technology and the security strategic perspective, highlighting the differences between China's agenda and the Swedish one (Försvarsmakten, 2021) (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

Sweden acknowledges China's role as a strong investor but cautions against dependency relationships. Sweden continues to be diplomatic and pushes for good relations and cooperation with China, but it continues to monitor how the greater state might infringe on and influence Swedish opinion, the Arctic agenda, and security (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

Before the invasion of Ukraine, China was framed as diplomatic and rather oriented towards economic investment and research possibilities in the Arctic. Still, there was a shift after 2018 when China declared itself a "near Arctic State" and released its intentions of becoming more involved in the Arctic region. The security perspective further deepened after the invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Sweden reevaluated its security due to the risks posed by Russia and began the process of joining NATO. Although already monitored, China's relationship with Russia became an even larger security question within the discourse, especially in the context of economic support and alignment against Western interests (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

After the shift in security perspective, the Swedish security discourse also gained a deeper security perspective on the Chinese research, finding that China has dual use for their research. While this was monitored before the invasion of Ukraine, the use of China's gathered data became even clearer after the invasion, where China's Arctic space research is especially called into question as their satellite imagery of Ukraine is reportedly used by Russia (Vidhammer Berge and Bergmann, 2024) (Försvarsdepartementet, 2024).

Sweden has maintained a firm line of international cooperation as a counterbalance to the great powers in its near proximity and stresses the need for deeper connections between the EU and NATO. The official Swedish security discourse also wants to maintain Arctic governance systems and frameworks, conforming to UNCLOS and organizations such as the Arctic Council. This is interpreted, along with the language and context of the discourse, as an unwillingness to reshape the region's dynamics and give up sovereignty in favor of making room for China (Almén, Weidacher Hsiung and Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2022) (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).



To conclude, there has been a security-oriented shift in the official Swedish perception of China's role in the Arctic region. While the discourse was more widely spread before the invasion of Ukraine, it began to align into one interconnected security perspective after the invasion. The official discourse paints China as a strategic competitor and highlights the need to protect Swedish and Arctic sovereignty (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

## 6 Analysis

This chapter will analyze the findings through Luke's concepts of power as a theory (Lukes, 2005). The findings will be contrasted with one or more of the three dimensions Luke's power theory presents to explain the underlying powers that move the discourse, perception, and actions of the states in question. It will provide further context to the security perspective and help answer the research questions with a background of the findings.

The chapter will start with the first dimension, then the second, and lastly the third, providing a thorough analysis of how each of Luke's (2005) dimensions contextualizes and adds perspective to the findings and China's involvement in the Arctic.

### 6.1 The First Dimension of Power

The first dimension of power outlines visible power, i.e., the power that is observable and made through direct decisions. Applying this dimension to Sweden's official security discourse on China in the Arctic addresses the power of this sort through China's actions.

Throughout the themes, it is possible to identify visible power from China. The fact that China is investing in all areas is pointed out as strategically important to hold power in the Arctic, which is an active and visible power spread out on more fronts. Perspective is important in this question, as viewing each aspect separately might give a more fragmented picture, but viewed collectively; it shows a cohesive picture of China's use of the first dimension. In a broader perspective, this can also be linked to China's global ambitions, and their intention to create a Polar Silk Road as a part of the BRI is also a visible power. It can, therefore, be argued that the Arctic activities are a case study for China's global strategy and a more localized use of the first dimension of power (Försvarsmakten, 2021) (Lukes, 2005:16-19).

In the context of China's Arctic activities, the first dimension of power can be found when examining how China directly seeks to influence policy-making in the region. At first, becoming an observer in the Arctic



Council in 2013, then further on through their investment and strategic partnership. Their attempt to create dependency relationships in the region to gain a more stable footing can also be viewed through the lens of Luke's first dimension of power. The Chinese investments often have dual uses, like many of the Chinese activities in the region, meaning that investments might not only serve the businessmen making them or the economic contracts but could also be used for military purposes. The dependency relations combined with dual-use investments led to China gaining access to strategically important locations. Creating dependency relations and making investments to gain influence show that China uses its power as is and creates more power in the region. The Swedish state worries that China's actions infringe on Sweden's sovereignty and Sweden's rights to the Arctic, in other words, to lose visible power. Sweden's countermeasures to further scrutinize foreign ownership of critical infrastructure and bringing light to the Chinese activities are ways to keep power and sovereignty, thus protecting national security. Putting China's activities on the agenda is a sign of a deeper dimension of power and will be discussed further in the analysis (Lukes, 2005:16-19) (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

China's increasing presence in the Arctic through investments in critical infrastructure and resources has been one of Sweden's biggest concerns. The Swedish security discourse has underlined investments as a security concern as they can be used for strategic purposes. The dual picture of China's Arctic activities continues to be contrary. While China's investments can be used for civil and military purposes, the risks for their military use are also brought to light, as mentioned above. By emphasizing the risk of the investment, Sweden is actively exercising its power to warn off and prevent foreign ownership, which can lead to questions of sovereignty. The dual nature of the discourse comes from Sweden's attempt to maintain good ties with China and to have a healthier, more balanced trade. To counter what could be a dependency relationship, Sweden aligns with larger collaborative powers such as the EU and, most recently, (unrelated to China specifically and rather due to Russia's aggression on Ukraine) NATO (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023) (Lukes, 2005:16-19).

The question of Chinese research in the Arctic region is another instance where Luke's first dimension of power is seen. On multiple levels of the research conducted by China in the Arctic region, concerns have been raised about Chinese espionage and intelligence collection. Even before the invasion of Ukraine, when Sweden had collaborated with China at the Swedish Space Center Esrange, Sweden terminated their contract with China at the center as there came questions of security issues of foreign power's



ability to use the satellite as a tool for espionage and information gathering, in 2020. The consequence of Sweden scrutinizing research partners, warning of China's information gathering, and consequently not extending the contract with China is another show of visible power through policy decisions to ensure the security of sensitive information. Decisions like this seem to follow a coherent strategy to limit Chinese interference and influence in Sweden and the Arctic. It also follows a line that more Arctic countries adhere to (Funaiolo et al., 2023) (Lukes, 2005:16-19).

## 6.2 Two-Dimensional Power

The second dimension of Luke's power is the agenda-setting power. It explores who controls the agenda and or the scope of discussion, shaping the decision-making process. In the case of the Arctic, Sweden's focus on Chinese investments, research initiatives, and political framing suggest that China is perceived as a growing concern. However, it is important to note that the agenda is largely set by Swedish and Westerns institutions in respons to China's actions, rather than by China itself. FOU's repeatedly underline national security risks posed by China indicates a reactive discourse, suggesting that China's influence agendas, but not necessarily that they have control over it.

China is trying to label themselves as a "near Arctic state," an attempt to insert themselves in discussion and shift the agenda in favor of granting them more influence and leverage in the Arctic, despite not being included by the UNCLOS rights of the region. The term attempts to reframe China to fit a position they seek influence in and show their aspiration to shape the Arctic agenda, even when efforts are not fully successful. By changing the narrative, China attempts to put itself on equal level as the Arctic states, especially when debates and discourses occur. It has worked to some degree since their labeling began to appear more in the Swedish discourse, however, it is more in light of their interest in the region. The sources mention the Arctic states and often later bring up other countries with interests. China, with this label, is a perfect example. Although their status is not recognized by law and somewhat frowned upon by the Swedish security discourse, it has the effect of considering non-Arctic states in policy and decision-making by influenceing what others prioritize and effecting it indirectly. As mentioned in the findings chapter, the Swedish security discourse shows little recognition of the actual title or phrase, but it still has effect as it is continuously brought up (Lukes, 2005:19-25).

Another example of China's use of the second dimension of power is through their research and cooperation. This is one of the reasons why the security



discourse on China and Sweden's response to China's activities in the Arctic is divided. By funding research, China presents itself as a partner in the region, positioning itself in a way that invites collaboration and an interest in preserving the environment. The Swedish security discourse has presented a different side to this, and the two sides seem to go against each other within the official spaces, creating a dual perspective. Although both versions might be true simultaneously, and China uses their research for multiple purposes, they highlight different perspectives. China wants others to focus on their collaborations, research results, and research investments, while the official Swedish security discourse focuses on military use and purposes. The power of each nation puts both sides of the discourse on the agenda (Lukes, 2005:19-25).

The official Swedish security discourse has also brought up China's attempt to influence Swedish opinion and shape the narrative of its role in the Arctic. Both previous arguments, China's labeling of a near-Arctic state and the framing of China as a research partner and economic investor, are part of their attempt to shape opinion and narrative. Their use of agenda-setting power allows them to directly and indirectly influence and affect Swedish narratives by promoting or suppressing what they regard as favoring themselves. Sweden, in this case, has the upper hand. The official Swedish security discourse is driven by official Swedish actors and toward the Swedish population, government, and parliament. Therefore, Swedish ideologies and values will weigh more heavily than those of a foreign power like China, which has ideologies and values that are very different from those of the Swedish and West. However, Sweden wants China's cooperation and economic investment to further the Swedish economy, and as China is a great power, there is caution in the discourse against critiquing China. Remaining good ties is continuously important, adding another layer to the complexity of power (Lukes, 2005:19-25).

Another perspective that has emerged through the official Swedish security discourse and the analysis of Luke's (2005) theory of power is how Sweden tends to paint itself as safeguarding the Arctic. The narrative is important for the security discourse for Sweden to gain legitimacy and trust from the government, parliament, and the Swedish people. The official Swedish security discourse underlines the need for cooperation, and the Swedish narrative paints a picture of Sweden as the perfect partner. Similarly, it promotes the narrative of Sweden as "the good guys," and though not explicitly painting China as "the bad guy," the discourse that points out Chinese power excretion does little to state the opposite. More on this will be discussed in the part with the third dimension of power (Lukes, 2005:19-25).



China's Arctic strategy exemplifies the second dimension of power and agenda-setting power. It shows how China used narrative and framing to further its influence and aided the first dimension of power, economic leverage, and strategic manipulation. Sweden needs to know not only its discourse but also China's intentions for its actions and the discourse it is purchasing to get to the root driver and intention behind China's actions (Lukes, 2005:19-25).

### 6.3 Three-Dimensional Power

The third dimension of power relates to invisible power and power to influence perceptions and ideology. In the context of the official Swedish security discourse on China's role in the Arctic, this dimension reveals changes in framing, which are partially outlined under the second dimension of power, but it also relates to norms, ideology, social constructions, and language. This is the hardest power to identify as it is not overt or as visible as the other dimensions, hence the term "invisible power" (Lukes, 2005:25-28).

China's declaration as being a "near-Arctic state" is the clearest related to the third dimension. The change of label, and reframing subtly challenged the Arctic governance norms by suggesting that proximity and interest of the regions should justify influence. This normalization could lower the resistance of Chinese involvement in the Arctic, especially if economic partnership and research cooperation are presented as mutually beneficial for both parties (Lukes, 2005:25-28).

Additionally, China leverages scientific diplomacy to build cooperation and with Arctic nations, and thus integrating itself into non-security discussions. These efforts operate under the radar of direct political confrontation and aim to reshape how Arctic states, including Sweden, view China's presence. While China is described as a security threat, the sources used also point out the value in maintaining good relations (Löfven and Dahlgren, 2019).

Sweden's discourse constructs China as a potential threat by consistently using language like "strategic alignment" with Russia, "intelligence gathering," and questions of sovereignty. Terms and language like this create a view that China's actions are not merely economically and research-driven but that there is a strategic element behind them, making each move calculated and intentional. Phrases like "great power competition" also create unease and a narrative that China disturbs the "rule-based" order that reigns in the Arctic. Sweden also frames itself as a protector of Arctic sovereignty and regional cooperation. While the security discourse is supposed to





highlight the security perspective, it is also painting China as overtly different from Sweden both regarding ideologies and values. This legitimizes Sweden's decision to align further with the Western powers. As cooperation with the EU is mentioned as a direct response to China's activities in Sweden and the Arctic, the alignment with NATO is driven by Russia's aggression. As China continues its relationship with Russia and is yet to condemn their invasion, it can also be argued that while China is not a driver to push Sweden further towards NATO alignment, it is certainly not halting the decision despite China's aversion to the Sweden-NATO cooperation (Lukes, 2005:25-28) (Regeringskansliet and Försvarsdepartementet, 2024).

China is attempting to influence the Arctic region through all their tools of power; hence, the use of themes to identify the essence of the use of power, to get a picture of the important areas, and to understand how the Swedish discourse identifies these power uses. The Swedish discourse holds more power in Sweden. It is both more established and relatable for the Swedish actors and population. This is also why attempts to influence Swedish discourse have been so important. A more favorable Swedish discourse can shape the perception of China in Sweden and, therefore, allow them more influence and footing in the Arctic. That is why it is so interesting to see how dual the discourse is through the more political documents. In contrast, reports and documents presented to the parliament and government are more diplomatic (Lukes, 2005:25-28) (Regeringen, 2023).

The shaping of ideologies and perceptions of China cannot only be based on the Arctic case study, but China's actions as a whole also shape its perception. Although their Arctic actions reflect their global ambitions, some parts are brought up throughout the examined documents that show a more full and complex picture of China. The discourse brings up China's actions in the Indo-Pacific sea, where they are increasing military presence, Taiwan, the human rights violations within China's borders, and more. In addition, Sweden has generally evolved closer toward political rights while China is ruled by the CCP (The Chinese Communist Party) (Lukes, 2005:25-28) (Försvarsberedningens Sekretariat, 2023).

Sweden's alignment with NATO could show that Chinese influence has failed while Western influence has succeeded. It could show that there has been a silent war between the East and the West. Although unrelated to the Arctic as a whole but still important to the context of gaining an Arctic state's favor and China's influence on Sweden in general, it is important to bring up the last few years' increasing misinformation, digital campaigns, and use of AI. These tools have been pointed out to be used by China against Sweden to further their agenda and to shape Swedish perception. By spreading



disinformation or highlighting certain narratives, these tactics create confusion and mistrust in institutions and can potentially redirect attention to more favorable views on China's role in the world and the Arctic region. The addition of AI and digital tools adds another layer of how to exploit vulnerabilities, and the official Swedish security discourse points to activities and power used in dimensions like this as a growing threat. Activities like this undermine the state's autonomy and values, further underscoring the importance of ideological power and perceptions (Lukes, 2005:25-28) (Försvarsmakten, 2023).

## 7 Discussion and Conclusion

The role of China in the Arctic and its implications for Swedish security has been framed within a complex and evolving geopolitical landscape in light of the shifting dynamics following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This thesis has explored the official Swedish security discourse by examining relevant sources through the lens of Luke's three dimensions of power and identifying several key themes.

The findings reveal that the official Swedish discourse had been evolving for some years before the invasion of Ukraine and that it began to intensify when China declared itself a "near Arctic state" in 2018. The tensions in the Arctic have since then intensified, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 escalated the situation, forcing the official Swedish security discourse to shift to a more critical note. While the pre-Ukraine invasion era mostly focused on China's economic investments, research, and great power competition, the post-Ukraine era focused more on how China's actions in the Arctic directly affected Sweden and Swedish interests. It became more focused on the China-Russia relationship and the dual nature of China's activities. It has been continuously important for the Swedish government to promote cooperation within the economic and research spheres. Yet, it has been done in the same texts cautioning about dependency relations.

Through the identified themes (security, economic opportunity, sovereignty, militarization, strategic partnership, and research), the discourse highlights opportunities for collaboration and concerns over strategic manipulation and dependency. China's economic investments have the potential to be used as leverage against states and to gain deeper influence in the Arctic region.

The study found that Sweden portrays itself as following the rule-based order and laws of the Arctic region, while it describes China as breaking those rules and norms, driving its strategic agenda. China and Sweden's ideologies



are very different, giving the discourse a “we vs. them” perspective or a “good guy vs. bad guy,” where Sweden safeguards the Arctic.

One of the interesting findings was how the discourse changed from the beginning of the studied period when it was splintered and varied despite being examined from a security perspective. The official security discourse on China in the Arctic region began to take form before the Ukraine invasion, which points to the escalating tensions in Sweden’s proximity. The most drastic change occurred after the invasion of Ukraine when it was clear that the security perspective in Sweden had become more important. Whether the increased information and discussion about China in the Arctic reflects an increase in activity or an increased interest from the Swedish government and defense in knowing what China’s actions in the Arctic were is unclear but could be a subject for further research.

The shift can be seen in the context, narrative, and language used in each text and through the sources put together into a broader context. The Russian invasion of Ukraine seems to have served as a turning point where the Swedish security discourse intensified and became more scrutinizing. The relationship between Russia and China is one of the bases of the discernable security concerns.

The change in discourse was most obvious with the research theme. From the chronological start of the sources, China’s research was seen in a positive light, while it became increasingly called into question as time went on. After the invasion of Ukraine, several incidents were brought up to show how China influenced the research for military and strategic interests. Additionally, China leverages scientific diplomacy to build cooperation with Arctic nations, integrating itself into Arctic discussions. These efforts happen under the radar of direct political confrontation and aim to reshape how Arctic states, including Sweden, view China’s presence.

This study found that China is exercising power and influence throughout the three dimensions of Luke’s power. Through the first dimension of power, visible power, China’s economic opportunities and investments are a good example. They gain access and leverage through investments in Arctic infrastructure and research to decide terms and leverage for policymaking. While these actions are civilian and thus not inherently a threat, the discourse also scrutinizes them as they can be used by the Chinese government and military.

The second dimension relates to agenda-setting power; here, too, China holds power. China’s attempt to change the discourse surrounding itself in the



Arctic and gain more influence can be seen as it labels itself a “near Arctic state.” China’s research and cooperation are other ways that could be used to explain the second dimension. As the discourse shows that there is a dual use for these actions, and it too could be used for military purposes, this study has argued that China attempts to shine the light on the cooperative side of the discourse and actions rather than the parts Sweden might view as a security threat, such as the space research. This dimension can also explain Sweden’s alignment with the EU and NATO as a response to the increasingly deteriorating security during the time of Russia’s aggression on Ukraine and China’s continued strategic partnership with Russia despite this.

The third dimension highlights the invisible power and exemplifies it by aiming to explain how the change in narratives, language, and framing of China and Sweden’s actions shape the values and ideological alignment of each nation. It contrasts the framing of the official Swedish security discourse by critically looking at how Sweden perceives itself, how it perceives China, and how that view legitimized Sweden’s alignment with the Western powers rather than with the East powers such as China.

In a broader context, this thesis contributes to the study of how small and medium powers engage with global geopolitical tensions through language and strategic discourse.

To answer the research questions;

*What is the official Swedish security discourse on China’s presence in the Arctic, and how does China’s presence affect Swedish national security?* The official Swedish security discourse presented in the findings outlines a diplomatic and critical discourse simultaneously. China is framed both as a potential partner and a potential threat.

*Has the official Swedish security discourse on China’s role in the Arctic and its effect on Swedish national security changed since the Russia-Ukraine conflict?* Yes, the discourse has become more security-oriented and highlights concerns about China’s alignment with Russia and China’s dual interests in the Arctic region. One example is the narrative, framing, and language used when discussing China’s research in the Arctic. The current discourse is more critical, especially since China funds Russia and has yet to condemn the invasion of Ukraine.

*What specific security concerns does the official Swedish security discourse address and associate with China’s growing influence in the Arctic?* The most essential concerns are regarding the great power competition in the



region, China's partnership with Russia, and the strategic use of economic investments and research, which are consistent and recurring themes.

To conclude, many aspects of the official Swedish security discourse are complex and interlinked. The evolving geopolitical dynamics in the Arctic region make it a constantly changing case study. By applying Luke's (2005) dimensions of power, it becomes evident that Sweden uses its discourse as a dimension of power to address security concerns, shape perceptions, and safeguard Swedish national security from outside threats. The evolving discourse shows an interplay of economic, strategic, and ideological challenges posed by China's presence in the Arctic.

For future research, it would be beneficial to explore how other Arctic states manage the tension in the region in the context of other non-Arctic states, such as India's involvement, or the broader geopolitical tensions and security perceptions between the Arctic nations themselves—especially with the context of Donald Trump coming to power in the US and officially state his interest in getting control of Greenland.



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