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Swedish Intervention and Conduct in the Thirty Years' War

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Cover Page Footnote

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude for Dr. Cristian Cantir's mentorship throughout my undergraduate career at Oakland University, particularly as I created, revised, and presented this paper.

The Thirty Years' War was a set of loosely connected European conflicts that stretched from the Defenestration of Prague in 1618 to the set of peace treaties that ended the conflict in 1648. In general, the alliance between Sweden, France, and the Dutch rebels consistently opposed the Habsburg kingdoms of Spain and Austria. This paper focuses on Sweden's role in this conflict, paying particular attention to its decision to militarily intervene in 1630. Past research overlooks Sweden's position as a consolidated nation-state, ignoring the implications for Sweden's more coherent foreign policy and effective projection of power. Sweden constituted a proto-sovereign state prior to its contemporaries, providing two key advantages over its rivals. First, the term proto-state means that Sweden was able to consolidate itself into a fledgling state similar in structure to those that exist today, in that it achieved a relatively centralized government able to engage in uniform policy and exert control over its territory. As a result, Sweden was more successful in marshaling its material capabilities to pursue its specific national interests. Second, Sweden recognized normative constraints within the international society it inhabited and articulated Swedish policy to comply with the broader social structure of that time. Realism and constructivism both offer useful paradigms to explain Sweden's actions, though neither theory entirely explains this event. Recent scholarship, however, suggests that these theories are more complementary than first assumed, providing a useful theoretical framework that incorporates key contributions from each perspective. Realist concerns of anarchy, power politics, community, and national interest coincided with a constructivist recognition of international norms, values, and ideas to influence Sweden's intervention. In analyzing Sweden's role in the Thirty Years' War, a combination of the theoretical contributions of realism and constructivism thus provides the most accurate depiction of empirical reality, showing that Sweden navigated the dangerous international system and normative parameters of acceptable actions to marshal its limited resources and amplify its power on the international stage.

This paper begins with a brief summary of Sweden's intervention as a portion of the larger conflict of the Thirty Years' War. It then highlights the work of previous scholars on this subject and identifies area for further research. An account of both realism and constructivism follow, with an additional section demonstrating commonalities of these perspectives and the opportunity for an integrated theoretical paradigm to interpret this event. Following this is an analysis of Sweden's position as a proto-sovereign state in the pre-Westphalian system, paying particular attention to the important advantages this provided. This means that Sweden became an early state before the Treaty of Westphalia, an event generally marked as the beginning of our current international 'Westphalian' system comprised of sovereign nation-states. As political units, states have historically been able to achieve more coherent foreign and domestic policies than earlier forms of political organization such as feudal kingdoms because governments were better able to centralize power. As an early, proto-state before its rivals, this translated into unique benefits for Sweden that strengthened its position during this conflict. The brief case studies of Denmark and France provide further evidence of Sweden's comparative advantage as a consolidated state prior to its contemporaries. This paper then applies realism and constructivism to Sweden's intervention, demonstrating that both perspectives provide valuable theoretical contributions to explain this event.

A History of Sweden's Intervention

The Thirty Years' War consisted of four to five distinct phases, because some historians separate the initial revolt with the early conflicts in the Palatinate, Bohemia, and other kingdoms contained within the Holy Roman Empire (HRE).¹ The first phase began in 1618 as the Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand II, attempted to reassert imperial control and Catholicism in the empire, both of which had weakened following the Reformation. The Palatinate, Bohemian, and other German principalities, led by the Palatinate elector Frederick V, sparked the initial conflict when they declared independence from the Emperor and threw his representatives out a window, an event known as the Defenestration of Prague.² The revolt and the "German" phase of the war witnessed the Holy Roman Emperor's quick victory and forcible conversion over the kingdoms of the Palatinate, Bohemia, and a few northern principalities as the Catholic armies, led by General Tilly, soundly defeated the Protestant forces at the Battles of White Mountain and Wimpfen.³ Ferdinand then imposed a system of fines, economic measures, and a removal of Protestant rights to induce the Protestant nobles within his lands to convert to the Catholic faith.⁴

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Combatants</u>	<u>Key Events and Battles</u>
The Bohemian Revolt	1618-1620	Bohemia, Dutch rebels, England, Palatinate, various German principalities vs. Emperor (Austrian), Spain, Bavaria	Defenestration of Prague, White Mountain*
The German Phase	1621-1624	The Palatinate, Dutch rebels, various German principalities vs. Emperor, Spain, Bavaria	Wimpfen*
The Danish Phase	1625-1629	Denmark, Palatinate, England, Dutch rebels vs. Emperor, Spain, Bavaria	Lutter*
The Swedish Phase	1630-1634	Sweden (with French subsidies), Saxony, Dutch rebels, Hesse-Kassel vs. Emperor, Spain, Bavaria	Breitenfeld [^] , Lützen [^] , Nördlingen*
French-Habsburg War	1635-1648	France, Sweden, Savoy, Dutch rebels vs. Emperor, Spain, Bavaria, Saxony	Wittstock [^] , 2 nd Battle of Breitenfeld [^] , Tuttlingen*, Rocroi [^] ,

*Table of the various phases and major combatants of the 30 Years' War.*⁵

*denotes Imperial Victory, ^denotes Protestant Victory

¹ Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War: Europe's Tragedy* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 53.

² Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years' War: 2nd ed.* (London: Routledge, 1984), 43.

³ William P. Guthrie, *Battles of the Thirty Years War: From White Mountain to Nordlingen, 1618-1635.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), 64-66, 89-92.

⁴ Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War*, 357-361.

⁵ List of principle combatants derived from: Parker, *The Thirty Years' War*, 139.

The Danish King, Christian IV, initiated the “Danish Phase” of the war in 1625 by invading the HRE to aid fellow Protestants within the empire. The Catholic armies, led by the mercenary general Wallenstein, quickly destroyed the Danish army at the Battle of Lutter and extracted the Peace of Lubeck to end the conflict in 1629.⁶ In addition, Ferdinand’s *Edict of Restitution* in March 1629 legally recovered all ecclesiastical lands within the empire.⁷ This left the Protestant cause on the brink of collapse, with only England and the Dutch rebels as ostensible opposition to the armies of the Holy Roman Empire.⁸ England, however, proved hesitant to intervene on the continent, and the Dutch remained an irritant confined to the Spanish Netherlands. Present-day Germany, therefore, fell almost entirely under Habsburg control.

It was at this stage that the Swedish King, Gustavus Adolphus, invaded the Holy Roman Empire. Sweden’s intervention on the Protestant side in 1630 sparked the fourth phase and a key turning point in the war because it extended the conflict and saved the Protestant cause that was on the verge of collapse. Sweden’s intervention also presented a useful convergence of interest with France, which remained embroiled in its own goal of limiting Habsburg power and agreed to provide Adolphus with an annual subsidy of 400,000 talers to maintain an army in the conflict.⁹ After consolidating his position across the Baltic, Adolphus led a stunningly successful campaign, culminating in the battle at Breitenfeld in 1631. This battle destroyed an imperial army under the command of General Tilly, gave Adolphus a dominant position in northern Germany, and inflicted the first stunning defeat to the HRE.¹⁰ Adolphus then consolidated his position and conducted a lightning campaign to re-conquer much of present-day Germany from imperial control. His success and the war’s fourth phase, however, met an abrupt end with Adolphus’ death at Lützen in 1632, having fought Wallenstein’s army to a draw in the process.¹¹

Critique of Previous Historical Analyses

While there is some research on Sweden in this period, previous historical narratives have failed to place these events in a theoretical framework. As a result, the existing literature records Sweden’s actions but is weaker at explaining how and why it justified its behavior during the Thirty Years’ War. In addressing this gap in the literature, this paper presents a more nuanced account of Sweden’s actions and motivations through a combination of realist and constructivist theories, which recent scholarship suggests are more complementary than first assumed.¹² This provides a new lens to understand Sweden’s intervention as an early proto-sovereign state prior to the creation of other European nation-states following the Treaty of Westphalia. Its position as a more centralized political unit rationalized and coordinated its foreign policy vis-a-vis its rivals, enabling the country to more coherently pursue its interests in the anarchic international system. Thus, Sweden intervened after a careful appraisal of the power realities and normative framework of the international society in which it resided, and then it formulated and articulated its policy to operate within these constraints.

⁶ Guthrie, *Battles of the Thirty Years War*, 134-136.

⁷ Wilson, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 446.

⁸ Wilson, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 424.

⁹ Wilson, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 464.

¹⁰ Parker, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 113.

¹¹ Wilson, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 507-511.

¹² J. Samuel Barkin, “Realist Constructivism,” *International Studies Review* 5 (2003): 325.

In addition, previous historical analyses focus too heavily on individual factors that preceded and influenced this intervention and fail to look at the larger transformation of the fledgling Swedish state during this period. Instead, they should take a broader view, recognizing the importance of Sweden's early position as a nation-state prior to the Treaty of Westphalia and its implications for Swedish foreign policy. Historian Franklin D. Scott demonstrates that Adolphus' predecessors made significant improvements to Swedish society and the military, laying a foundation for his military success and the reforms he introduced in his reign.¹³ Others, such as Peter H. Wilson, provide an insightful view of the capabilities of Sweden's contemporaries.¹⁴ Michael Roberts also presents an accurate description detailing many Swedish improvements, yet fails to attribute it to the early development of a consolidated Swedish state. He recognizes that Sweden made great reforms in its finances, administration, industry, economy, society, and the military prior to its invasion in 1630.¹⁵ Roberts also notes the immense fiscal challenges the Thirty Years' War posed for Sweden, and that in response, Adolphus improved his country's finances and system of taxation.¹⁶ Of course, such reforms were partially responses to short-term crises, yet these achievements were crucial to Sweden's ability to maximize its resources and pursue a coherent foreign policy throughout its intervention.

It is important to determine the origin of Sweden's more rational and consolidated foreign policy. As with many monarchies, the kingdom's fortunes were due in part to the strength of the individual monarch. However, rather than merely a centralization of the monarchy's power to effectively control the aristocracy and direct policy, Sweden's success in the war was due to its formation as a proto-sovereign state. Adolphus achieved these aims, yet his ability to do so and Sweden's increasing power originated from a strengthening of institutions across Swedish society, rather than remaining isolated to a growth in the monarchy's power. A useful way to test the validity of this claim is to consider the regency period following Adolphus' death. Contemporary rivals typically viewed regencies as a nadir of a nation's power, both domestically and internationally, due to the lack of a single, charismatic monarch to dictate policy. We would thus expect a collapse of Sweden's power and coherency in its foreign policy if its success was largely due to the efforts of Adolphus alone. The continued diplomatic, economic, and military skill of Sweden's foreign policy following Adolphus' death, however, provides an important demonstration of the true endogenous source of Sweden's power in this period.

Prior historical narratives on Sweden and the Thirty Years' War also provide some explanations for Sweden's intervention. This previous historical research recognizes that Sweden pursued a diverse set of national interests when it invaded and utilized propaganda and religious imagery throughout its intervention. This data, however, lacks a larger conceptual framework to understand this decision. Individuals such as Geoffrey Parker gloss over Swedish justifications as a confusing mix between Protestant ties, "German liberties," and "security," yet they fail to elaborate further on the details of security beyond a Habsburg threat to Sweden's power in the

¹³ Franklin D. Scott, *Sweden, the Nation's History* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 118-161.

¹⁴ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 178-192.

¹⁵ Michael Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus: A History of Sweden, 1611-1632, Volume 2 1626-1632* (London: Longman's, Green, and Co., 1958), 67-304.

¹⁶ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 65-66.

Baltic.¹⁷ They also fail to reconcile Lutheran Sweden's sectarian ties with its apparent ambivalence during the Catholics' earlier victories. Roberts also analyses Sweden's interests in its intervention, specifically its goal of preventing Habsburg domination on the Baltic's southern shore and protecting Protestants in the HRE.¹⁸ He notes further that these two main perspectives characterized much of the previous debate on this topic.¹⁹ There is also a valuable body of work analyzing the propaganda distributed and promoted by Sweden during this time and its efforts to legitimate its intervention. Pärtel Piiramäe, for example, provides a detailed account of the various policies Sweden pursued to legitimate its policy.²⁰ Even these assessments, however, lack a broader conceptual framework through which we can understand how and why Sweden supported a particular image of its actions throughout this conflict. They also lack a more thorough examination of how Sweden simultaneously formed, articulated, and executed policy during its intervention.

Realism

Prior to examining the realist justifications for Sweden's invasion into the HRE, it is helpful to examine the perspective itself. Realism, particularly classical realism, is an international relations theory that seeks to understand why conflict exists in the world. Classical realism's response to this question is to look at human nature and the international system it creates. It recognizes that "*all* politics is an expression of the same human drives and subject to the same human pathologies".²¹ It argues that human nature possesses an instinctual will to survive and to dominate those around them. This theory recognizes, however, that other factors mitigate these inclinations. While individuals possess harmful impulses, they also have reason and rationally pursue their self-interests. Classical realism also realizes that individuals are capable of surprising amounts of altruism for those within their perceived community. Individuals therefore form groups to provide order and form a stable society. The construction of these communities can therefore mitigate violence and conflict at the societal level, though they cannot fully remove these instincts.²²

Given its focus on material capabilities and the competition of states in an anarchic, self-help system, realism is particularly useful in explaining why states engage in conflict and interstate wars. It is thus a particularly useful perspective to analyze cases like Sweden's, where concern over a rival's increasing power presents a threat to their own security. France faced a similar situation at this time, alarmed over the risk of encirclement by the combined Habsburg might of Spain and Austria.²³ Once again, realism as a theory can provide a useful lens to understand this event because France recognized that the Habsburg's growing power potentially threatened its own ambitions and security. Even more contemporary examples, such as the formation of NATO in response to members' concerns over the Soviet Union, demonstrate a realist recognition by weaker European states that they had to band together if they hoped to

¹⁷ Parker, *The Thirty Years' War*, 109.

¹⁸ Michael Roberts, *Essays in Swedish History*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), 82-86.

¹⁹ Roberts, *Essays in Swedish History*, 82.

²⁰ Pärtel Piiramäe, "Just War in Theory and Practice: The Legitimation of Swedish Intervention in the Thirty Years' War," *The History Journal* 45.3 (2002): 517.

²¹ Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 61.

²² Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, *International Relations Theories*, 62.

²³ James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 35, 69.

counter the greater material power of the USSR. Therefore, the realist perspective can provide a number of useful insights when examining conflicts in international society throughout history.

According to the realist perspective, the organization of international society into distinct national communities with no higher authority present to police their actions inevitably leads to conflict between these separate groups. International society consists of a set of distinct communities that are ultimately self-reliant and concerned for their survival and that seek to expand their own power and maximize their self-interest.²⁴ This enduring international system of anarchy, wherein international relations is a self-help system of states each seeking power and security with no higher organization to mitigate conflict or punish a community, only intensifies the potential for conflict.²⁵ States frequently strive for hegemony and greater security in the international arena, yet the other states recognize this and oppose their actions to protect their own security. Each state seeks to maximize its power, often determined by economic and military might, while limiting that of its rivals. Expanding one's own military capabilities and economic strength then becomes a tangible deterrent against actions of other states from seeking to accrue too much power within the system.²⁶ This demonstrates the realist claim that states are generally rational actors, able to look at the anarchic system which they inhabit, analyze their own capabilities, and make a decision based off of a cost-benefit analysis. Some states, however, fall prey to hubris and accumulate too much power, which then compels other states to counterbalance its greater perceived threat. For example, this often prompts the other states within the system to form a balancing coalition, combining their resources to constrain the aspiring hegemony.²⁷ The system thus perpetuates itself and inevitably provides an endogenous check on the actions of the states that comprise it.

Classical realists view the state as a unitary actor that rationally pursues its self-interest. They also believe that those states that are able to more rationally pursue their foreign policy, despite possible weaker material power, possess an advantage over their more irrational rivals in the anarchic system. Barkin notes this centrality of rationality to a state's power, claiming that "If national policymakers want to make a difference ... in international politics, they must rationally marshal their power resources."²⁸ In addition, the inequality of economic, technological, and military power between states creates a power spectrum along which each nation falls, yet every state still possesses some capacity to harm any other state within the system.²⁹ The state's ability to rationally operate within the anarchic system can offset the systemic constraints of a weaker geostrategic position in international society. Classical realists also note that material capabilities still exist within the social conventions of the international system. In order to be effective, a state must employ its power in ways that comply with these expectations so that its material capabilities are translated into recognized deterrents and

²⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1932), 93.

²⁵ Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, *International Relations Theories*, 69.

²⁶ Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, *International Relations Theories*, 62.

²⁷ Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, *International Relations Theories*, 62-63.

²⁸ Barkin, "Realist Constructivism," 328-329.

²⁹ Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, *International Relations Theories*, 62-63.

acknowledged modes of foreign policy.³⁰ Interstate interaction, therefore, consists as much with psychological understandings of a nation's power and influence as brute force.³¹

Constructivism

Realism is a useful perspective in understanding the military, economic, and political factors that influenced Sweden's pragmatic behavior. It even provides an explanation for Swedish rhetoric and its use by Sweden's leaders as a veneer over their *realpolitik* ambitions. This theory, however, is less useful in explaining the type of language and imagery used by Swedish leaders in conjunction with their intervention. In analyzing Sweden's conduct in the Thirty Years' War, we must not only understand the causes for intervention, but also recognize how Sweden articulated its policy and that of its rivals to achieve legitimacy.

Constructivism is a theory better equipped to address this question. Rather than focusing on material power and the state's concern over security, constructivism focuses on the social interactions of peoples, states, and how these exchanges influence country decisions. Why, for example, are human rights violations so rare amongst western democracies? Clearly, many of these states hold enough power to commit these crimes and deter outside interventions yet decline to do so. This can instead be explained by the norms that have developed through the interaction of these countries to collectively denounce this type of state behavior. In addition, one might wonder why Germany and Japan imposed constitutional limits on their exercise of military force in the second half of the twentieth century. From a realist perspective, a nation would seek to increase its security if given the opportunity, yet even after these nations have been given the ability to rearm, they have continued to show a high level of restraint.³² From the constructivist perspective, it becomes clear that Germany's and Japan's militaries have remained restrained because its people have developed and perpetuated an image of anti-militarism internally and in their interactions with other states.³³ Moreover, this theory can also account for the evolution of these social identities and norms in their foreign policies. As Harnisch claims, "the very norms that informed Germany's culture of military restraint" shifted its foreign policy toward a greater number of humanitarian interventions following unification in 1990.³⁴ Constructivism presents a useful lens to understand events like Sweden's intervention and clarifies how and why Adolphus utilized specific language over others during this conflict. As a result, this theory provides additional insights into Swedish behavior that are otherwise poorly explained when analyzed solely through the realist perspective. The presence of a Swedish identity, simultaneously created and recreated by Sweden and the European society of this period, is another important element that constrained and shaped Swedish intervention.

³⁰ Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, *International Relations Theories*, 64-65.

³¹ Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, *International Relations Theories*, 64.

³² Sebastian Harnisch, "German Foreign Policy: Gulliver's Travails in the 21st Century," and Akitoshi Miyashita, "Japanese Foreign Policy: The International-Domestic Nexus," in Ryan Beasley, Juliet Kaarbo, Jeffrey S. Lantis and Michael T. Snarr, *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences on State Behavior* (Los Angeles, CQ Press, 2013), 82, 153.

³³ Harnisch, "German Foreign Policy" and Miyashita, "Japanese Foreign Policy" in Beasley, Kaarbo, Lantis and Snarr, *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective*, 82, 153.

³⁴ Harnisch, "German Foreign Policy," 81.

Constructivist theorists recognize an intersubjective ontology exists apart from the material world.³⁵ Wendt refines this concept, asserting that this interaction creates a number of identities that guide state behavior. He claims, “Each identity is an inherently social definition of the actor grounded in the theories which actors collectively hold about themselves and one another and which constitute the structure of the social world.”³⁶ This means that while the physical world still exists, it is only given meaning through social interaction. For example, if in a state engaged in the killing of noncombatants or civilians the physical death of these individuals of course occurs, the meaning behind these events are not pre-existing. Instead, these concepts are only recognized and condemned as war crimes through the social interaction of states as they collectively determine to vilify this type of behavior. States still have interests within this system, yet as Emanuel Adler notes, these “collective understandings provide people with reasons why things are as they are and [give] indications as to how they should use their material abilities and power.”³⁷

Constructivists therefore focus on how states use language and their unique identities to articulate this socially constructed reality as they collectively understand events and apply meaning to them.³⁸ Language, rather than realism’s stark appraisal of economic and military tabulations of power, influences how states perceive such actions as legitimate. State behavior is not merely a result of what it has the power to accomplish, but also its concerns over how its actions will be interpreted by other states. As a result, these international actors operate in a social environment constrained by a “logic of appropriateness,” which provides a set of acceptable behaviors for states within their foreign and domestic policies. Of course, the actor’s intentions are also a key facet of interstate relations. Events, rather than resulting merely from a causal standpoint, remain inextricably tied to the state’s intentions and its reason for action. As K.M. Fierke explains, events are not merely a result of a state exploiting its greater power, but instead occur as conversions between the various actors involved trying to persuade the other and “legitimate [their] action in terms that can be understood and accepted.”³⁹ The constructivist perspective not only reveals the social construction of the international system, but also various patterns and strains of accepted, appropriate actions within that commonly interpreted social environment.

Realist-Constructivism

Recent scholarship on constructivism and classical realism suggests that the two theories are far more complementary than they first appear. The ability to reconcile realism’s appreciation of power politics, community, and national interest with constructivism’s recognition of the normative framework in which states employ that power offers a more accurate picture than either theory alone provides. Indeed, even the previous case mentioned above regarding Japanese self-restrictions on its military demonstrates important facets of both perspectives. As Miyashita notes, while Japan’s refashioned identity following its defeat in WW2 resulted in a strong

³⁵ Barkin, “Realist Constructivism,” 326.

³⁶ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization* 46.2 (1992): 398.

³⁷ Emanuel Alder, “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics,” *European Journal of International Relations* 3.3 (1997), 322.

³⁸ Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, *International Relations Theories*, 183.

³⁹ Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, *International Relations Theories*, 189.

identity of anti-militarism, realist concerns over China's rising power and the North Korean threat have also led to some reorientation on this policy in recent years.⁴⁰ While this does not imply these theories are completely compatible, the discovery of greater common ground between the two is a fruitful topic for further research and offers a valuable lens to view events in which both national interest and societal norms play a key role. Barkin, for example, notes, "postmodern constructivism is generally more accepting of the centrality of power."⁴¹ This appreciation of the importance of material capabilities, however, does not ignore the implications of the social constraints of other states on what constitutes acceptable foreign policy. Morgenthau and other classical realists also recognized the importance of perception and social conceptions of justice and ethical norms alongside the pursuit of national interests, claiming that "[success resulted] when power was exercised in accord with the social conventions." This echoes Barkin's claim that "classical realism views the art of international politics as the practical balancing of the demands of power on the one hand and morality on the other."⁴² While not disputing the presence of power, Wendt notes that constructivism focuses more on the social structure of international society and its articulation of various intersubjective identities that influence state behavior. He claims, "the distribution of power may always affect states' calculations, but how it does so depends on the intersubjective understandings and expectations, on the 'distribution of knowledge,' that constitute their conceptions of self and other."⁴³ This realist-constructivist paradigm thus recognizes both the material projection of Swedish power and its effective propaganda campaign. It explains Sweden's rational reasons for intervention as well as the specific language it used to legitimate its actions in the international society it inhabited.

Proto-Sovereign State

Realism is a particularly useful viewpoint for countries that are internally consolidated, modern states. A relatively undeveloped feature of Sweden's intervention in this period regards Sweden's position as a proto-sovereign state before the formation of other European nation states following the Treaty of Westphalia, which allows it to act more in accordance with realist principles and pursue a more coherent foreign policy than its contemporaries. Previous research initiatives identify numerous advancements for the early Swedish kingdom, yet they have not recognized these improvements as facets of Sweden's position as an early, consolidated state. Sweden remained a strong state in this period because it is able to maintain a coherent economic policy of tariffs, early forms of mercantilist monopolies, rational foreign policy, and govern a set of territories spread out from Finland and Estonia to Pomerania along the opposing shore of the Baltic Sea.⁴⁴ This position enabled Sweden to marshal its limited resources, focus its foreign policy, and punch above its weight in the anarchic international system.

Administrative reforms were crucial in setting Sweden's position as a proto-sovereign state in a system comprised of pre-Westphalian political entities. Taxation, for example,

⁴⁰ Miyashita, "Japanese Foreign Policy," 153.

⁴¹ Barkin, "Realist Constructivism," 327.

⁴² Barkin, "Realist Constructivism," 333.

⁴³ Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of it," 397.

⁴⁴ John Roger Paas, "The Changing Image of Gustavus Adolphus on German Broadshets, 1630-3" (*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 59, 1996), 208.

improved over this period, leading to an increase in actual revenues.⁴⁵ The Swedish state's accuracy in estimating its finances also improved during this period, reducing the difference between expected and actual revenues and increasing its ability to operate within its budgetary constraints.⁴⁶ Sweden also shifted its taxes to more hard cash payments and insured a greater proportion of taxation applied to all segments of society.⁴⁷ Such actions were novel for the age and achieved a more equitable tax structure and greater revenue for the state. It also developed an intricate toll network to extract revenue from the trade that passed through Sweden's newly won territories, effectively controlling the trade outlets of Eastern Europe and amplifying its economic power.⁴⁸ The state monitored these revenues and its expenditures in an increasingly accurate budget to insure that a Sweden with tangible strategic limitations operated within its constraints.⁴⁹ More importantly, when the Swedish government ran low on funds it refrained from debasing the coinage or selling offices to balance the budget.⁵⁰ It is noteworthy that Sweden maintained such fiscal discipline in a period when France undermined shifts toward meritocracy by selling offices through the *Paulette* and only introduced these improvements later on.⁵¹ These measures expanded Swedish revenue and facilitated its intervention, yet they represented crucial, innovative advances that suggest Sweden was an early state far ahead of its time.

The Swedish bureaucratic apparatus also possessed aspects that were exceptionally innovative for seventeenth century Europe. These reforms consist of those directed toward developing the domestic environment and those that consolidated and centralized the implementation of Swedish foreign policy. Adolphus was fortunate to have Axel Oxenstierna as his chief foreign minister, principal internal administrator, and finance minister. Together they initiated numerous reforms of the fledgling Swedish state.⁵² A Swedish aristocrat, Axel Oxenstierna served as "Swedish chancellor from 1611 to 1654 ... [and] played a central role in the diplomacy of the Thirty Years' War" and the domestic affairs of state, particularly during the regency following Adolphus' Death.⁵³ Palmer notes that Oxenstierna's system "gave Sweden greater political cohesion during Gustavus' years of territorial expansion than in the previous half-century of chronic war and confusion."⁵⁴ In addition, "[Gustavus] stabilized the finances of Sweden, centralized the administration of justice, organized hospitals, and developed education".⁵⁵ Such reforms are emblematic of Sweden's position as an early state and facilitated its intervention into the Holy Roman Empire.

The Swedish economy and infrastructure was another area in which Adolphus and Oxenstierna demonstrated considerable skill and foresight for their time. The commerce of Swedish towns and the country's trade increased throughout this period and expanded farther afield. Domestic industries exploited Sweden's rich deposits of iron, timber, and copper, while

⁴⁵ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 83

⁴⁶ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 84.

⁴⁷ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 64, 73, & 84.

⁴⁸ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 83.

⁴⁹ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 65.

⁵⁰ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 65.

⁵¹ Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 213-214.

⁵² Alan Palmer, *The Baltic: A New History of the Region and its People* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2006), 96.

⁵³ Erik Thomson. "Axel Oxenstierna and Books" (*The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 38.3: 2007), 706.

⁵⁴ Palmer, *The Baltic*, 97.

⁵⁵ C.V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1938), 272).

others manufactured and traded weapons, hardware, sheet brass, tar, and grains.⁵⁶ The government facilitated this process by attracting foreign investment, encouraging industry and prospecting, and monitoring the production, marketing, and consumption of goods within the state.⁵⁷ Oxenstierna further enhanced Sweden's infrastructure by improving its system of roads, expanding the locks at Lilla Edet, and building the Hjelmare canal to connect Sweden's cross-country ports.⁵⁸ Such infrastructure improvements possessed the dual benefit of aiding the internal transportation of goods and circumventing the Danish monopoly and tolls on the sound, thereby saving money and reducing the revenue to their regional rival for Baltic hegemony. Lastly, the government developed a dual postal system for public and government mail to distribute news throughout the country.⁵⁹ These advancements insured Sweden remained a strong state in this period, a state that was able to maintain a robust economy, a rational foreign policy, and govern a set of territories spread across the Eastern Baltic.⁶⁰

Sweden's troops were another highly effective tool of the Swedish government, one that was usually a match for any other European army. Its initial invasion force consisted of only 19,000 troops able to fight. Although this number grew in the following months, it appears miniscule compared to the emperor's 50,000 troops positioned along the Baltic coast.⁶¹ This Swedish force, however, was an elite unit, and Adolphus himself was the foremost military commander of his day.⁶² His military expertise, gained in earlier wars against the Poles, complemented numerous advances of Sweden's military, making it the match for any foreign army. Adolphus instituted extensive training and maneuvers for his troops, insuring they remained sharp prior to the invasion.⁶³ Discipline also improved, with strong punishment meted out for blasphemy, dueling, and the consumption of alcohol.⁶⁴ Adolphus and Oxenstierna also went to great pains to standardize the army's equipment, including its gunpowder and armor, and they introduced newer and more effective muskets to his troops.⁶⁵ These developments represent the material advantage facet of power that exists within realist theory, improving the Swedish army's effectiveness and therefore the state's impact in international politics.

Sweden's military branches and tactics also improved during this period, borrowing and significantly improving on earlier military tactics.⁶⁶ The artillery, for example, shifted to lighter, more maneuverable guns whose firepower Adolphus concentrated to great effect during Sweden's intervention.⁶⁷ Indeed, many historians view Adolphus as the first commander to create field artillery.⁶⁸ Adolphus also improved his infantry, employing a greater combination of arms between the various units within his army and organized troops into regiments with thinner,

⁵⁶ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 88-89, 122-123.

⁵⁷ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 66, 88, 93, & 109.

⁵⁸ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 145.

⁵⁹ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 145.

⁶⁰ Paas, "The Changing Image of Gustavus Adolphus on German Broadsheets," 208.

⁶¹ Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War*, 459.

⁶² Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War*, 186-187.

⁶³ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 239.

⁶⁴ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 242, 245.

⁶⁵ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 226-227.

⁶⁶ Clark, Butler, Bury, and Benians, *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 216-221.

⁶⁷ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 260.

⁶⁸ Clark, Butler, Bury, and Benians, *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 218.

salvo fire tactics that would later become the norm.⁶⁹ The cavalry's tactics also advanced in this period, trading the heavy sword for the saber, making them far more effective in the charge.⁷⁰ These reforms were innovative for the age, and many other nations only began copying them in latter decades.⁷¹ Each of these improvements combined to strengthen the army and amplify Sweden's impact in the international community of seventeenth century Europe.

Internal reforms within the bureaucracy towards foreign policy also played a key role in solidifying the early Swedish nation-state. For example, Oxenstierna organized a set of institutions to complement its military improvements, such as a skillful intelligence-service in Germany to provide accurate information for Adolphus' military forces.⁷² In addition, Oxenstierna developed "an elaborate and successful conscription scheme," insuring the core of the Swedish army remained national troops, rather than depending too heavily on foreign mercenaries.⁷³ In fact, Sweden was "the first country in Europe to possess an entirely national army, recruited on the basis of compulsory service."⁷⁴ In an age where mercenaries constituted the majority of the combatants' armies, this solidly Swedish contingent created a reliable and motivated fighting force to achieve Sweden's interests.⁷⁵ Foreign mercenaries then augmented this force, aiding Sweden while not making it dependent on exogenous military forces. Adolphus also insured the soldiers' lasting effectiveness and loyalty through the provision of adequate food, standardized equipment, and "proper clothing ... [including] cloaks, stockings, gloves, and waterproof boots."⁷⁶ This created a more dependable army and facilitated the projection of Swedish power in the Thirty Years' War as a proto-sovereign state in the pre-Westphalian system.

Another aspect of Sweden's innovation and early position as a proto-sovereign state is visible in the active propaganda campaign initiated by the Swedish government to articulate its behavior in the HRE. In addition, actions by the Swedish government in response to positive propaganda, even if said material originated abroad, demonstrate its keen interest in and recognition of propaganda's growing impact as a mode of dissemination and legitimating behavior. The use of Adler Salvius as Adolphus' personal Swedish agent and spin-doctor in the Holy Roman Empire, for example, helped Sweden to construct and influence foreign opinions.⁷⁷ Adolphus also benefited from broadsheets spread throughout northern Europe which were "sometimes encouraged by the Swedish agents," who tried to shape public perceptions of the conflict.⁷⁸ He also recognized that using terms such as 'German liberties' could win him an advantage, particularly in pacifying average Germans over whose lands Adolphus expected to march and draw extra revenue to fund the war.⁷⁹ This demonstrates that while Adolphus maintained an active recognition of Sweden's core national interests, he also remained cognizant

⁶⁹ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 254, 258.

⁷⁰ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 256.

⁷¹ Geoffrey Treasure, *Louis XIV* (London, England: Pearson Education Unlimited, 2001), 142.

⁷² Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 265.

⁷³ Palmer, *The Baltic*, 98-99.

⁷⁴ G.N. Clark, J.R.M. Butler, J.P.T. Bury, E.A. Benians, *The New Cambridge Modern History: Volume IV, The Decline of Spain and the 30 Years War, 1609-48/59* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 217.

⁷⁵ Wedgewood, *The Thirty Years War*, 275.

⁷⁶ Wedgewood, *The Thirty Years War*, 276.

⁷⁷ Wedgewood, *The Thirty Years War*, 276.

⁷⁸ Piiramäe, "Just War in Theory and Practice," 521.

⁷⁹ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 463.

of the international environment in which he lived. The presence of such a dynamic propagandistic pursuit demonstrates the foresight and skill of the Swedish state during this period.

Each of these improvements is good individually, but if taken in sum, they show that Sweden possessed numerous aspects of the contemporary nation-state prior to their formation following the Peace of Westphalia. Sweden therefore became a consolidated state prior to its contemporaries, and consequently, its internal structure allowed it to behave more like a realist than its rivals and act more coherently abroad. In addition, Sweden's proto-sovereign state status facilitated its efforts to better develop propaganda and articulate its actions through specific language that legitimated its policy. Such developments allowed Sweden to martial its limited resources within the normative constraints of that era to maximize and project its power at the international level. This led to an increasingly consolidated and cohesive state, one that possessed an important advantage over the decentralized, amorphous Holy Roman Empire.

Sweden's Pre-Westphalia Contemporaries

It is important to consider Sweden's contemporaries to place its position as an early nation-state in context. There were two contemporary kingdoms that each possessed individual attributes of the Swedish state, but neither one boasted such a combined and cohesive domestic environment. Denmark provides a useful comparison vis-à-vis Sweden because they both possessed limited resources at the international level and remained rivals for regional hegemony in the Baltic. Both nations remained roughly equal in population throughout this period and possessed respectable militaries.⁸⁰ Denmark controlled the lucrative dues on trade leaving the Baltic through the sound, thus providing a relatively consistent and profitable source of income to the Danish state similar to Sweden's control over Baltic ports in Eastern Europe. Its ruler, Christian IV, then used these funds to develop the navy, creating new designs and increasing the total tonnage from "11,000 in 1600 to 16,000 in 1625," mirroring the rearming also underway in Sweden.⁸¹ The navy was able to project Denmark's power in the region, protect its coasts, and control passage into the Baltic.⁸² Denmark's lack of strategic depth, however, compelled it to use its limited resources to fortify the sound, develop its navy, and maintain a foothold in southern Sweden as a buffer zone to protect its key interest. Like Sweden, control over part of the Baltic led Denmark to pursue regional hegemony, and just as Sweden could control the trade leaving the merchant ports of Eastern Europe, Denmark remained able to block transit in and out of the sea until Sweden captured the sound's northern shore. Control over this strategic seaway remained vital to Denmark's position in the Baltic.

Denmark, however, also possessed disadvantages that limited its international impact compared to Sweden. Wilson notes, "Denmark's tolls obscured underlying economic and fiscal weakness".⁸³ For example, overreliance on sound dues was as much a curse as a blessing once Denmark lost its control over the sound and the undiversified state lost its greatest source of revenue. Moreover, Sweden's domination of the eastern Baltic placed it in an ideal position to disrupt trade from Eastern Europe, effectively crippling Denmark's greatest source of revenue.

⁸⁰ Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War*, 169-173.

⁸¹ Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War*, 166-168.

⁸² Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War*, 166-168.

⁸³ Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War*, 172.

Unlike Sweden, Denmark's tolls left the country's economy undiversified and did not coincide with the development of natural resources and industry. It instead presided over a poor domestic economic base with little grain and few natural resources of timber or minerals.⁸⁴ In addition, its economy remained one based on barter, rather than shifting to a more cash-based economy like its Swedish rival.⁸⁵ Therefore, while both countries possessed some similar characteristics, the broad-based improvements of the Swedish state, rather than Denmark's impressive, though limited reforms, aided the former in its pragmatic pursuit of regional hegemony.

France provides another valuable comparison in light of its great power status and size within Europe. France represented a heavyweight fighter on the international stage, able to employ a lot of force once it mobilized, as opposed to Sweden, an international lightweight, yet one able to act more coherently, maximize its resources, and rationally pick its punches in its foreign policy. Like Sweden, France shifted toward an early form of the sovereign state, though it remained a society in transition. French historian James B. Collins notes that while it shared numerous similarities with Sweden, France's transformation to a proto-sovereign state took significantly longer to develop.⁸⁶

France possessed far greater material and strategic reserves than Sweden, yet it often failed to translate this advantage into an effective projection of power in its foreign policy. It boasted a population of around 18 million, and while 80 percent of the populace lived in the countryside, Paris and other cities within the country were quite large.⁸⁷ It also possessed strong military and economic assets, at least on paper, and initiated numerous reforms during this period. For example, France shifted toward cash payments and brought the military more firmly under government control.⁸⁸ In addition, French leaders "expanded the use of administrative and judicial competence of the treasurers of France."⁸⁹ These improvements strengthened the French monarchy, yet failed to create a consolidated state or a more rational pursuit of foreign policy.

It is important to recognize that France lacked many of the other advantages of the Swedish state. Religion and sections of the nobility remained alternative loci of power during this period and threatened the coherence and scope of French foreign policy. The military also remained partially outside the state's control and in the hands of the nobility, weakening the execution of the nation's power abroad. The rebellion of the duke of Montmorency from his governorship in Languedoc in 1632, for example, presents a particularly salient case of the subversive threat internal concentrations of power posed to the centrality of the state.⁹⁰ France also lacked a religiously cohesive populous, losing a vital rallying force and creating an enduring foreign policy distraction for the French monarchy. The siege of Protestant La Rochelle by French troops in 1626-27, after the marked decline of French Protestantism as a domestic faction, demonstrates the disarray that plagued French foreign policy.⁹¹ In an age where the threat of Habsburg encirclement remained the central threat to French security, attacking a

⁸⁴ Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War*, 172.

⁸⁵ Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War*, 172.

⁸⁶ Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*

⁸⁷ Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 38-39.

⁸⁸ Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 50, 56.

⁸⁹ Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 64.

⁹⁰ Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 62.

⁹¹ Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 60.

French city on the Atlantic represented a strategic oversight of the first degree. Responding to these domestic threats to the centrality of the French state significantly diluted the cohesion of France's foreign policy and mitigated its projection of power in the international system.

France also possessed stronger domestic economic potential and fiscal resources than Sweden, though this remained regionally based and varying degrees of economic dynamism existed between the provinces.⁹² Despite its apparently strong economy, however, France chronically "lacked the ability to obtain cash income on short notice" and struggled to exploit the substantial assets within its borders.⁹³ In addition, while it generated substantial annual revenue, its poor credit rating and its clumsy system of outsourcing the collection of taxes made the government's actual revenue far below what it could otherwise obtain. In contrast to Sweden, France followed detrimental economic policies that hampered its economic growth, government revenue, and state power. It continually operated outside its budget, accumulating a large state debt and then frequently succumbed to selling offices to try to balance its budget.⁹⁴ This was useful way to reward loyal supporters and obtain cash, but rapidly selling these offices led to their devaluation and undermined any attempt at a meritocratic bureaucracy. Therefore, while France possessed some Swedish advances and enjoyed far greater economic and military resources, it lacked the breadth of Sweden's improvements, and thus suffered a comparatively weaker and less coherent foreign policy throughout this period.

A Realist Explanation of Sweden's Intervention

The realist perspective is useful in understanding many of the events surrounding Sweden's military intervention into the HRE, particularly those that deal with Sweden's recognition of the national interests, power politics, community divisions, and anarchic system that existed in early seventeenth century Europe. First, Swedish foreign policy throughout this period rested on fundamental national interests that influenced its decision to intervene. Like any nation, Sweden and its leader possessed a will to power, desiring to increase its security through amassing power within the region. As mentioned above, Sweden was a strong medium power that recognized its slender resources and lacked the strategic depth to achieve a pan-European empire. It instead strove for regional hegemony within the Baltic and rationally pursued limited objectives in its foreign policy and throughout its invasion. The continuity of this rational appraisal remained even after Adolphus' death and the HRE's resurgence in 1633. Oxenstierna recognized that while Sweden desired peace, it was best to do so from a position of strength. He instead waged a proxy war, recalling most Swedish armies to protect the beachhead and key Swedish conquests from surrounding enemies, leaving much of the further fighting in Germany to the various German states.⁹⁵ Oxenstierna clearly recognized that Sweden faced even greater limitations following the death of Adolphus, and in response, the combination of his skillful diplomacy, rationality, and strategic cleverness with Sweden's institutions marshaled its scant resources to maintain its power and hard-won position within the Holy Roman Empire.

In order for Sweden to maintain its status as a regional hegemony, its future power and security rested on its ability to control the southern and eastern Baltic shores. Palmer reiterates

⁹² Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 52.

⁹³ Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 60.

⁹⁴ Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 60, 90, 93, & 219.

⁹⁵ Parker. *The Thirty Years' War*, 140.

this fact, noting, “Sweden’s future—military, political, and commercially—depended on naval command of the inland sea.”⁹⁶ Though Denmark controlled passage out of the Baltic, Sweden dominated the sea’s eastern portions by controlling most of the southern and eastern Baltic coasts, in addition to its territories in Finland. This not only gave Sweden bases and friendly shorelines in case its ships needed repairs or haven from storms, but it also gave it a monopoly on the trade dues at the river mouths and the lucrative port cities on the Baltic. This provided markets for Swedish goods, control over the commercial port cities and river outlets giving Sweden a lucrative toll monopoly over inland trade, and territory in depth to solidify its position and provide a buffer for its territorial holdings.⁹⁷ In addition, control of the river mouths allowed Sweden’s lighter vessels to conduct fast, mobile amphibious operations farther inland.⁹⁸

As a logical result of its goal of Baltic hegemony, Sweden vigorously opposed other nations obtaining too much power for fear that they would dominate the region. This applied to regional rivals, such as Denmark, Poland, and Lithuania, as well as to foreign powers such as the Holy Roman Emperor. This was a crucial influence on Sweden’s intervention because imperial domination of the southern Baltic coast and a naval presence on the sea threatened Sweden’s position in the region.⁹⁹ Adolphus himself claimed that the “Habsburg’s ‘Baltic design’ [opposed] the maritime supremacy [of Sweden].”¹⁰⁰ An imperial presence and navy in Pomerania not only represented a new rival in the region, but also threatened Swedish control over the terminals of river trade and was a direct threat to its continued preeminence in the eastern Baltic.

As a Protestant nation, Sweden’s neighbors assumed that Sweden would join the Protestants as they combated the opposing Catholic community. As the case of Catholic France providing covert funds to Sweden to oppose the Hapsburgs demonstrates, power politics and national interests could supersede these communal cleavages. Sweden did not intervene solely on religious grounds. In general, though, the battle lines often paralleled sectarian divisions. In addition, apart from the broader Protestant community, Sweden itself appeared to be a consolidated and cohesive community that focused much of its loyalty to the state. The core lands within Sweden during this period, as remains true today, were likely highly homogenous and all perceived themselves to be Swedish, rather than subscribing to regional identities as in many other countries. As a Lutheran nation conducting “foreign policy in which obvious national interest went hand in hand with championship of the Protestant cause, the intervention was therefore understood and approved by the nation at large.”¹⁰¹ In addition, “as in Spain, [Sweden’s Lutheran identity represented] a monolithic religious structure [that] gave [Sweden] strength in an age of religious strife.”¹⁰² More importantly, Sweden’s religious homogeneity, as compared to the diversity that existed within France or the HRE, likely gave its people common cause and reduced opposition to the war effort compared to its contemporaries. Moreover, Adolphus quickly “[became] the undisputed head of the Protestant Party in the Holy Roman

⁹⁶ Palmer, *The Baltic*, 105.

⁹⁷ Palmer, *The Baltic*, 105.

⁹⁸ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 279.

⁹⁹ Palmer, *The Baltic*, 105.

¹⁰⁰ Parker. *The Thirty Years’ War*, 109.

¹⁰¹ Clark, Butler, Bury, & Benians, *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 397.

¹⁰² Clark, Butler, Bury, & Benians, *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 397.

Empire.”¹⁰³ The wealth of Protestant propaganda lauding Adolphus demonstrates that the German peoples perceived Sweden as part of a broader religious based community that it was obligated to defend. In an age dominated by and inextricably intertwined with religion, Sweden’s cohesiveness and the European people’s connection to a broad-based realist perception of community, when many lacked a strong state-based identity, partially explains Sweden’s invasion of the HRE. Therefore, while Sweden invaded with key national interests in mind, it nevertheless on some level maintained recognition of common cause with the Protestants of the HRE.

Sweden also recognized a set of vital national interests in its invasion of the HRE, yet only intervened after a careful appraisal of the international system and Sweden’s capabilities vis-à-vis its rivals. For example, Gustavus Adolphus identified and exploited domestic and international realities of power politics to pursue Sweden’s national interests. Domestically, Adolphus recognized the tangible constraints under which Sweden conducted its foreign policy. Sweden apparently lacked the strategic depth that could sustain a long intervention and continue to project the state’s power in the international arena. As Alan Palmer notes, “Sweden lacked the manpower and money to found and sustain a territorial empire stretching across the continent.”¹⁰⁴ Sweden at this time only ruled over 1.2 million subjects within Sweden and its Finnish holdings, a very small number compared to even the “thinly populated” Poland-Lithuania and its 11 million inhabitants.¹⁰⁵ These scant resources limited Sweden’s tangible sources of realist power, restricting the extent of any short-term expansion it could achieve and maintain in the long-term.

Sweden’s recognition of external factors of power that existed outside its borders was also an important facet of its decision to intervene. True to realist assumptions, Sweden analyzed the anarchic system in which it resided and adapted its capabilities to maximize its power on the international stage when the opportunity for intervention arose. In short, Sweden intervened as a rational response to a disadvantageous balance of power and marshaled its military and economic resources for that purpose. It recognized that if it hoped to attain regional hegemony and restrict other nations’ presence in the area, it had to intervene, alone if need be, to prevent a dominant imperial presence on the southern coast.

Sweden recognized, of course, that risks still accompanied its invasion. It lacked overt allies to balance the HRE, since the latter’s armies under General Tilly soundly defeated the Protestant forces at the Battles of White Mountain, Wimpfen, and Lutter.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the 50,000 imperial troops far outweighed the initial Swedish invasion force, and the combined Habsburg might of Austria and Spain possessed economic and manpower depths far more extensive than Sweden could hope to muster. A closer analysis, however, reveals that the initial environment was not as bleak as it first appeared. The HRE, for example, redeployed most of its troops to aid the Spanish in Italy and against the Dutch just prior to Sweden’s invasion, and the dispersed 50,000 troops guarding the Baltic lacked strong leadership.¹⁰⁷ Sweden also concluded a favorable peace with Poland in the Treaty of Altmark prior to its invasion, allowing it to focus

¹⁰³ Paas, “The Changing Image of Gustavus Adolphus on German Broadsheets”, 28.

¹⁰⁴ Palmer, *The Baltic*, 105.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 169, 162.

¹⁰⁶ Guthrie, *Battles of the Thirty Years War*, 64-66, 89-92, & 134-136.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 459.

solely on the HRE with a well-trained, battle-hardened force. Its new Polish conquests and its annual subsidy of 400,000 talers from the French government also expanded its financial resources.¹⁰⁸ These factors amplified Swedish power and the scope of its potential operations on the international stage. Therefore, while the international environment initially appeared severely disadvantageous to Swedish intervention, a closer realist analysis reveals that Sweden possessed a far stronger position, which influenced its decision to intervene and facilitated its success.

Sweden also possessed crucial internal realist factors that mitigated its socio-economic limitations. First, Sweden possessed important economic resources that proved invaluable to its intervention. For example, Sweden, while not an economic giant, possessed crucial natural resources such as iron, timber, steel, and copper that were necessary to the war effort. As C.V. Wedgewood notes, “[Gustavus] encouraged commerce and developed the natural resources of his country, her mineral resources especially.”¹⁰⁹ Rich reserves of copper, iron, and steel generated funds from export and gave Sweden an internal, consistent armament industry able to supply the army’s requirements with occasional surpluses for sale or for arming allies.¹¹⁰ In addition, strong and effective fiscal measures, such as tolls and improvements in taxation, increased the financial resources available for Adolphus’ campaigns. These domestic economic assets were therefore crucial to Sweden’s intervention and success in the Thirty Years’ War.

Adolphus also commanded a seasoned army and navy with high morale that was used to tough conditions. It is important to recognize that state power consists of more than economic or military tabulations and incorporates administrative, technical, and other factors that give a nation a material advantage over its rivals. As mentioned above, the recent reforms and the skill of its military amplified Swedish power on the international stage. Sweden sported a robust navy of 31 warships by 1630, though the fleet’s lighter oared vessels and deep-water craft raise this figure significantly higher. This fleet provided both an offensive and defensive power to the Swedish state, alternatively protecting its coastlines, maintaining blockades, supporting Swedish troop movements and sieges, protecting Sweden’s merchant marine, and engaging other navies to maintain their control in the eastern Baltic.¹¹¹ The officer corps and military hierarchy of the navy also improved during Adolphus’ reign, which increased the branch’s efficiency and coordination in Sweden’s intervention.¹¹² Sweden would need this military if it hoped to realize its ambitions along the southern and eastern Baltic shores. As the realist perspective would expect, Sweden invaded the HRE after a careful appraisal of its own national interests, a cost-benefit analysis of its decision to intervene and its ability to marshal its limited strategic assets facilitated its projection of power to great success in the Thirty Years’ War.

A Constructivist Explanation of Sweden’s Intervention

The constructivist perspective provides key insights into the Swedish intervention, specifically on the extensive propagandistic efforts of the Swedish government. As noted above, these propagandistic attempts were on some level a justification for Adolphus to expand Sweden’s power, yet they also represented a crucial attempt to legitimate Sweden’s actions and

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 464.

¹⁰⁹ C.V. Wedgewood, *The Thirty Years War*, 272.

¹¹⁰ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 88-89.

¹¹¹ Wilson, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 185.

¹¹² Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 296.

motives through ideas, norms, and the perceptions of individuals abroad and his own people. Indeed, Parker clearly notes, “the king well knew the value of fighting a war that contemporaries considered to be ‘just.’”¹¹³ Adolphus actively sought to organize and assist foreign printing presses while simultaneously modeling himself on the image they depicted. As previously mentioned, he even sent his personal spin-doctor, Adler Salvius, to be his representative in the German lands and coordinate all of this propaganda to shape international opinion and ensure that the German peoples viewed Sweden’s actions in the best possible light during the intervention.¹¹⁴ The state’s ability to articulate its actions to comply within these constraints by utilizing specific language legitimated Swedish policy even as it projected its power abroad and pursued its own national interests. Consequently, even though Sweden was acting in his own self-interest by invading the HRE, it remained rooted within a particular social context that perceived and judged his actions.

Protestants throughout Germany helped create and perpetuate a multifaceted image of Adolphus through a surge of pamphlet literature that highlighted the popularity of the ‘Lion of the North’ and his role as the perceived defender of the Protestants from the machinations of the Holy Roman Empire. These prints demonstrated how and why Adolphus helped create and perpetuate a particular image of himself as a virtuous hero by trying to model himself on these expectations. For example, Protestants soon began circulating portraits of Adolphus who quickly became a common icon across Europe.¹¹⁵ In addition, Protestant print shops throughout Germany lauded him as the savior of the Protestant cause. The propaganda broadsheet from 1631 (Figure 1) depicts Adolphus as a Swedish Hercules followed by his legions, clearly showing him as a hero of the Protestant cause. The Nemian Lion pelt wrapped around him also alludes to both his moniker as the ‘Lion of the North’ and associates him with the hero of classical antiquity. Another print from the time (Figure 2) reinforced this image as Adolphus, presented as a lion holding a sword aloft, steps off his boat to battle the dragon. This theme of the victorious Protestant warrior continues in a later broadsheet as Adolphus forces the emperor to disgorge the German territories he previously conquered (Figure 3). This print also hinted at the theme of Adolphus as the protector of prerogatives of German princes as he liberates towns previously conquered by the Catholic armies. Even after his death, Protestant broadsheets continued to lionize Adolphus and his Swedes as champions against the Habsburgs. “Gustavus Redivivus,” for example, places a smiling Adolphus above the turbulent waves, setting him apart from the ongoing battle behind as angles crown him with laurels of victory (Figure 4). The legacy of his earlier efforts to shape and project this multifaceted image thus appears to have continued to strengthen the Swedish moral position in the conflict for a short period even after his death.

However, “The Saxon Sweetmeats” in Figure 5 presents a unique variation on this imagery. In this broadsheet, Adolphus appears as the protector of Saxony from the avarice of General Tilly. Like previous works, the picture of Adolphus chastising Tilly strengthened pre-existing narratives of the Swedish monarch as a victorious general. However, his position between the other men also suggests an image of Adolphus as a mediator without national interests in the conflict. Adolphus thorough attempt to legitimize his intervention by distributing the Swedish manifesto makes it clear he strove to portray himself in this guise throughout the conflict. For example, he claimed that the emperor had violated the HRE’s constitution and that

¹¹³ Parker, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 109.

¹¹⁴ Wedgewood, *The Thirty Years War*, 276.

¹¹⁵ Wedgewood, *The Thirty Years War*, 270-280.

he merely sought the restoration of its semi-independent princes' traditional prerogatives.¹¹⁶ This simultaneously legitimated Swedish policy while weakening the normative supports of the HRE's actions. Sweden distributed these justifications in a manifesto in two versions and five languages, demonstrating the extensive interest the state held in propaganda and its effect on legitimating policy to international opinion.¹¹⁷ The versions even contained "small, but significant differences... depending on how Sweden wished to present itself to other countries."¹¹⁸ Wary of offending Protestants in the lands he entered, Adolphus was no doubt ready to portray himself in this imagery to downplay Sweden's own ambitions in the Holy Roman Empire. This corresponds with his use of the medium of propaganda to make the claim that he intervened for Sweden's self-defense, as well as to protect the people of the HRE. Indeed, he frequently stressed, "[he] held German Liberties in great respect and was deeply committed to the Protestant cause."¹¹⁹

Foreign Protestant propaganda itself frequently depicted Adolphus' campaign as divinely inspired, even though Sweden was still a foreign presence on Germanic soil. "Landing in Germany" (Figure 6) shows a devout Adolphus kneeling upon his first step on Pomeranian soil. A later broadsheet, as depicted in Figure 7, shows divine providence guiding his advance in imagery that harkens to Egyptian and Classical motifs as he rides to save religion and the bound "true church." He went to great pains during the campaign to play to this image as a religious savior, enforcing public prayer and hymns in the army prior to each battle.¹²⁰ Paas also notes this fact, claiming, "Gustavus Adolphus [tried] to portray himself as the protector of German Lutherans."¹²¹ In so doing, he consciously perpetuated the existing perceptions of his reasons for intervening in the conflict, thereby legitimizing his actions in the eyes of some of the populous over whose lands his armies marched. Throughout Sweden's intervention, Protestant propaganda and Swedish support thus played an active role in crafting and reinforcing the image Adolphus and his ministers sought to portray.

Sweden recognized that it operated within a social framework, and its leaders actively sought to comply with common norms, values, and ideas that pervaded the international society at that time. Palmer notes that "Gustavus Adolphus valued manipulative propaganda," and many of his actions demonstrate a persistent attempt to comply with constructivist perceptions and the importance of social norms as constraints on the conduct of state behaviors.¹²² Sweden's consolidation as a proto-modern state in the pre-Westphalian system demonstrates the importance of incorporating a constructivist conceptualization of its intervention. Adolphus therefore conducted a robust propaganda campaign to influence the perception of Sweden's intervention and garner foreign Protestant support behind his invasion. The state's ability to analyze the normative constraints on actors within the anarchic system allowed it to articulate its policy in terms deemed acceptable in the European society in which it existed. In response, Sweden embraced an identity as a Protestant savior, capitalizing on this asset to circumvent the limitations of foreign policy based solely off material capabilities. Its promotion of the traditional

¹¹⁶ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 463.

¹¹⁷ Palmer, *The Baltic*, 106.

¹¹⁸ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 462.

¹¹⁹ Paas, "The Changing Image of Gustavus Adolphus on German Broadsheets," 107.

¹²⁰ Paas, "The Changing Image of Gustavus Adolphus on German Broadsheets," 107.

¹²¹ Paas, "The Changing Image of Gustavus Adolphus on German Broadsheets," 210.

¹²² Palmer, *The Baltic*, 106.

liberties of the HRE's princes and the safety of its protestant peoples effectively legitimated Swedish behavior while undermining the policies of the Holy Roman Emperor as Sweden pursued its national interests in the international system.

Conclusion

Threatened by the situation developing in Central Europe, Sweden recognized it needed to act if it hoped to protect its interests and insure its long-term survival. A realist analysis demonstrates that concerns of community, anarchy, power politics, and national interest coincided with key international factors to reduce the risks of Sweden's intervention. A constructivist perspective, moreover, provides convincing evidence to explain the wealth of propaganda that flourished during this period and Adolphus' efforts to comply with the broader societal norms, values, and ideas in which the conflict occurred. This combination of realism and constructivism echoes the work of Barkin and seminal constructivist and classical realist scholars on the greater compatibility of these theoretical frameworks. This further explains Sweden's position as a consolidated nation-state, thus rationalizing its foreign policy and increasing its power vis-à-vis its rivals in the Thirty Years' War. Sweden's intervention remains an important example for large and medium states that interact in the dangerous international system constrained by the realities of power dynamics and normative structures. It thus represents an intermediary between the political systems of medieval Europe and the sovereign states of the current Westphalian System, one that skillfully navigated within its strategic and normative constraints to astounding success in the Thirty Years' War.

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Appendix



Fig. 1 - “The Swedish Hercules”- Paas, “The Changing Image of Gustavus Adolphus,”(219).

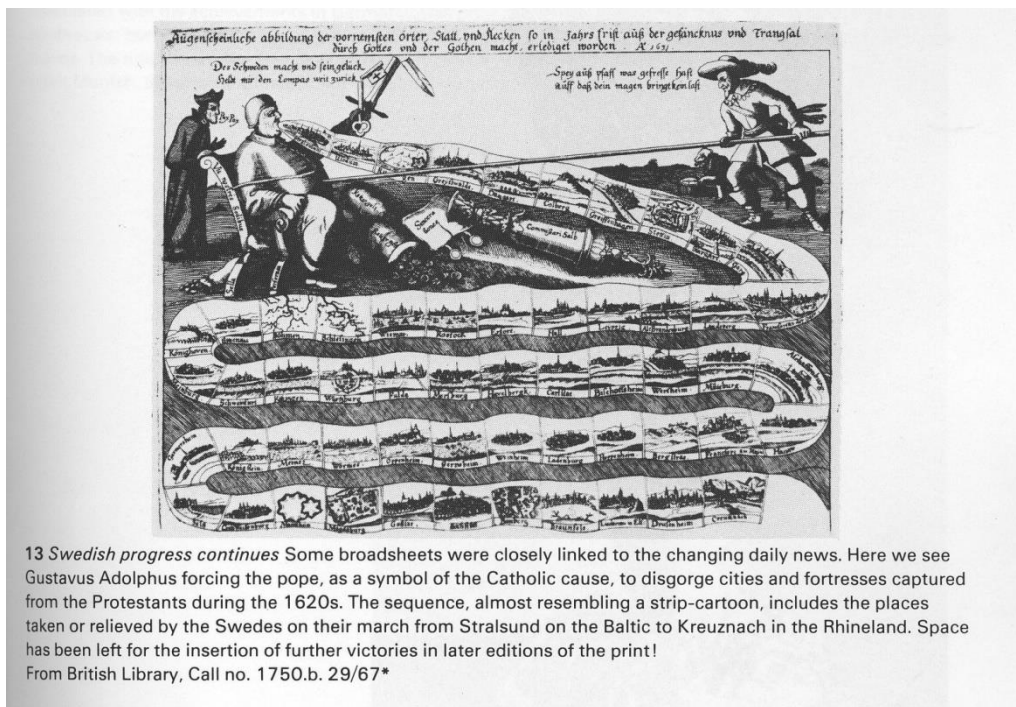


Figure 3: “The Swedish Progress Continues” - Parker, *The Thirty Years’ War*

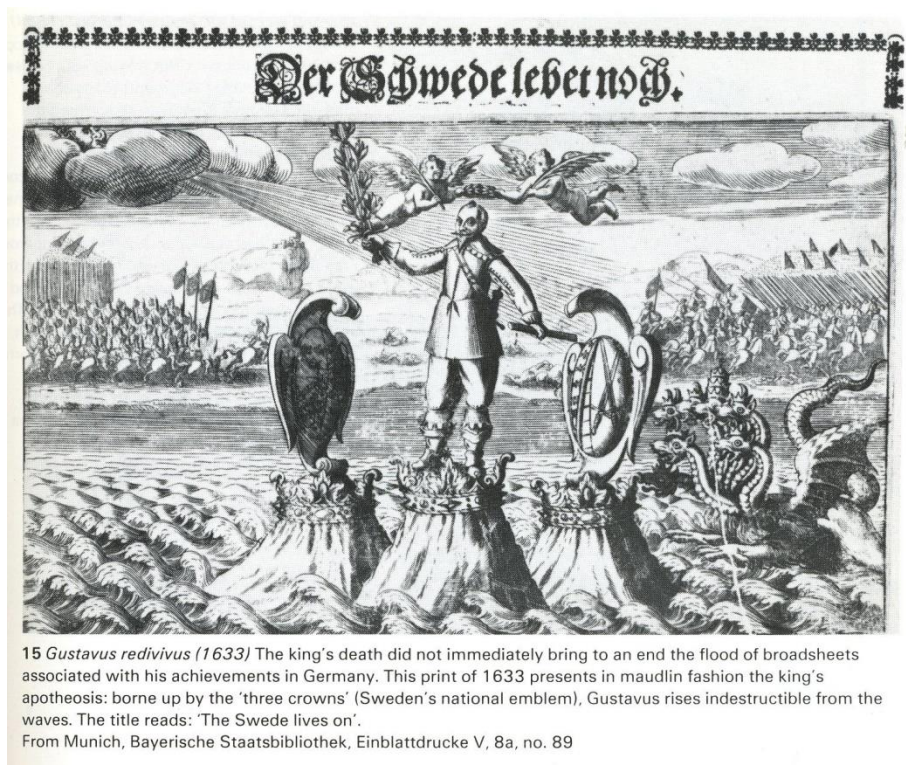


Fig. 4: “Gustavus Redivivus” - Parker, *The Thirty Years’ War*



Fig. 6: “Landing in Germany” – “Discerning History”



Fig. 7: “The Swedish Progress Continues (1630-1632)” - Parker, *The Thirty Years' War*