

ABSTRACT: “THE SWEDISH ARMS TRADE”



Linda Åkerström (2016) Stockholm: Leopard

How is it that Sweden, a small nation with a peaceful image, came to be one of the biggest arms exporting states per capita in the world? How did it happen, for what reasons and what are the consequences? *The Swedish Arms Trade* is an attempt to address these complex questions by providing a historically rooted and multifaceted take on the Swedish arms trade. Although the Swedish arms trade is an issue that has figured frequently in the Swedish media and been the epicentre of several political scandals, a comprehensive guide to the issue did not exist before this release.

The Swedish Arms Trade aims at delivering insight into a field characterised by complex legislations, informal structures, secrecy and misconceptions. This is done through a detailed account of the actors, policies and events which have shaped the course of the Swedish arms trade. The book brings up contemporary dilemmas, debates and controversies and explains why the arms trade is an issue that often gives rise to strong and conflicting opinions. It addresses these contested elements and clarifies why and how different actors benefit from different arms related policies, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the current debate as well as of the paths available for political change. Systematically, the book follows different overlapping processes linked to the Swedish arms trade, from political decision making and lobbying to the means of production and marketing. It also contains a catalogue presenting a selection of the broad range of military materiel that Sweden is and has been exporting.

Although Sweden is a minor player compared to large exporters like the US and Russia, Sweden has developed a very broad and large arms industry in relation to its size. With the intention of illustrating how this came about, *The Swedish Arms Trade* brings us back to the 1950's, when *Neutrality* became the official term to describe Sweden's security policy and an essential component of the Swedish image and identity. Sweden became known as a peace-nation, dissociated from armed conflicts and unbound by military alliances. In order to be neutral and true to the principle of non-alignment, without endangering the national security, the conclusion reached was that Sweden had to develop a strong and self-sufficient military, equipped with Swedish arms. But developing the necessary amount and variety of up to date military materiel is costly. Approving arms trade became the solution to this equation, closing the financial gap between the industry's need to supply and the limited demand from the Swedish national defence. This security policy is usually referred to as *armed neutrality*. The book argues that the armed neutrality approach, aiming at creating independence by means of arms trade, has been and still is an impossibility. First, because of the paradox that exporting arms to foreign powers engaged in conflict made, and makes, Sweden part of the conflict. Second, because Sweden never could be fully independent in arms production. An increasingly internationalized global arms industry as well as the fact that most 'Swedish' arms consist of a large percentage of international parts and components have rendered the national independence argument even less viable. The book describes how collaboration and international mutual dependence, over time and in some regards,

have replaced neutrality as key elements of the Swedish security policy and how this has affected the approach towards arms trade. The book investigates and questions arguments and topics that recurrently has figured in the debate about Sweden's stance in relation to arms trade, such as Sweden's national security, its need for independence in arms production, the role of arms trade in international relations and in generating national income and jobs.

The Swedish Arms Trade provides a chronological account of the complex aspects of the arms trade process, from the initial stages of establishing an industry and marketing the products to the final stages of making a deal and receiving the permission to export. Information about this process is often difficult to access due to the element of confidentiality, but also because of the intricate convergence of several parallel procedures carried out by a range of different actors. Both state and non-state agencies are involved in and responsible for different stages of the arms trade process, which comprises regulation, control, import, development, production, sales, marketing, finance and transport. A rare feature of the Swedish arms trade machinery is that the approval procedure of arms exports is carried out by a specific state agency and not by the government. Another unique aspect is that a parliamentary council takes an active part in the licencing process. The call for approval is preceded by an assessment of different legal frameworks and, often conflicting, political interests. Respect for human rights, peaceful conflict resolution, development and democracy are all aspects present in the Swedish national regulation. Arms trade is, though, still possible. The Swedish arms trade has gone from being seen as a strictly national to an increasingly international issue and is today restrained by laws and regulations on the national, regional and UN levels. One aspect of the arms trade process which illustrate the intricate relationship between different conflicting interests and public and private actors is the marketing process. The book engages in a critical discussion about the role of celebrities, royalties and Swedish national symbols in international marketing campaigns as well as the role of financial solutions such as state export credits, loans and offset deals.

The Swedish Arm Trade is both a source of knowledge and a base from which further questions about the arms trade and contiguous topics can be raised. As the book shows us, the Swedish arms trade is neither entirely about Sweden, arms nor trade - it is an interdisciplinary issue at the crossroads of the national and the international, the private and the public, the political and the economic.

The Swedish Arms Trade is written by Linda Åkerström, political scientist and Head of Disarmament at the *Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society*. Åkerström has published several books and articles during and has over ten years of experience of working on arms trade, disarmament and security policy issues in the Swedish peace movement. *The Swedish Arms Trade* was released in 2016 and published in a revised second edition in 2018.

The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society (Svenska Freds/SPAS) is the world's oldest and Sweden's biggest peace organization, mostly known for its advocacy, research and campaigning against the Swedish arms trade. www.svenskafreds.se