Unpacking the Puzzle of the Swedish-South African JAS Gripen Deal

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Abstract

The 1999 JAS Gripen Deal was a seminal event in both South Africa and Sweden's recent history. The aim of this article is to examine this foreign affairs puzzle both theoretically and empirically. The rational actor model has traditionally been the most desired approach to understand foreign policy decision-making. The purpose of its application in this article is to account for both the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. In order to provide an improved explanation of the case, the article explores an alternative approach, entitled as the transnational power elite model. This analysis aims to add to our current state of knowledge by focusing on Swedish-South African transnational power elite configurations. It provides insights into Swedish-South African post-apartheid relations, which researchers have largely ignored since 1994. It also draws critical attention to those elites who are located in sectors often overlooked for their strategic importance and influence on arms procurement processes.

Introduction

On 3 December 1999, the government of South Africa signed an historic arms deal with the Swedish aerospace and defence company, Saab AB (hereafter Saab). This was one of the most expensive foreign arms deals in both South Africa and Sweden's history[1]. The so-called JAS Gripen Deal was one component of a larger Strategic Defence Procurement Package—known colloquially as the Arms Deal—and included, *inter alia*, the purchasing of sophisticated weaponry such as fighter jets, warships, helicopters, and submarines from Germany, France, Italy, Britain, and Sweden by the South African government. The purchase of 26 Advanced Light Fighter Aircrafts (ALFA) JAS Gripen from Saab was the most lucrative and expensive of all the Arms Deal's contracts.

Few events in South Africa's recent history have generated such controversy as the 1999 Arms Deal. Yet, despite numerous studies examining the broader Arms Deal, many central questions regarding the most expensive package—the JAS Gripen Deal—remain unsatisfactorily answered. The most important albeit elementary questions that have eluded

satisfactory answers are: why was a decision specifically made for the JAS Gripen aircrafts, how did this decision come about, how can we understand the actions of those involved, and how should we interpret the procurement process? I argue that such questions essentially require that we think in conceptual terms about this case. We ask ourselves: how do we understand such an event theoretically, what conceptual frameworks can inform our deeper understanding of the case, and which of the events that led up to this deal should we consider?

The JAS Gripen Deal straddles the boundary of external and internal political and economic affairs, and it raises a host of deep and complex questions. The objective of this article is to engage with some of these complexities by focusing on three interrelated aspects. First, the aim is to find a possible rationale for the JAS Gripen Deal. Second, an attempt is made to unearth the decision-making structures of this historic procurement process. Third, the article aims to provide an analytical framework that is representative of both actors and structures. The purpose is thus to explore both the 'why' and 'how' aspects of this case. For the past fourteen years, there has been a conspicuous lack of systematic macro-level conceptual analyses, as well as middle range theory, that can help explain the intricacies of this event.

Since the JAS Gripen Deal is essentially a foreign affairs puzzle, the inquiry is situated within a broader framework of foreign policy decision-making. Approaches that focus on decision-making usually provide valuable insights and 'comprehensive understanding of foreign policy behaviour'(Mintz & DeRouen, 2010, p. 7). The rational actor model has traditionally been the most desired approach to foreign policy decision-making and it serves as our theoretical point of departure. The purpose of its application in this context is to account for both the strengths and weaknesses of this traditional approach. Theory testing is a valuable exercise for assessing the 'validity and scope conditions' of a conceptual model (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 75). However, in order to provide an improved explanation of the case, this article also attempts to build theory.

In addition to the rational actor approach an alternative approach is explored, entitled here as the transnational power elite model. By focusing on transnational power elite relations, the analysis aims to add to our current state of knowledge. It provides insights into Swedish-South African post-apartheid relations, which researchers have largely ignored since 1994. It also draws critical attention to those elites who are located in sectors often overlooked for their strategic importance and influence on arms procurement processes. Moreover, the article builds on previous Arms Deal research by incorporating data obtained through interviews conducted in Sweden and South Africa between October 2012 and June 2014. Most accounts to date have examined the domestic political and socioeconomic effects of the Arms Deal. This study

instead focuses on the origin of the JAS Gripen Deal, and it engages with theoretical models that can help us understand this foreign affairs puzzle.

The Rational Actor Model

In Allison and Zelikow's study on the Cuban missile crisis the authors observe that 'when we are puzzled by a happening in foreign affairs the source of our puzzlement is typically a particular government action or set of actions' (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 2). To overcome the complexities of political life, most laymen have traditionally thought of foreign affairs events in this straightforward manner. Consequently, when searching for an explanation of an event 'one typically puts himself or herself in the place of the nation, or national government, confronting a problem of foreign affairs, and tries to figure out why one might have chosen the action in question' (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, pp. 2-3).

When analysts aim to explain the behaviour of national governments, they typically make use of the Rational Actor Model (Allison, 1969). According to the Rational Actor Model (RAM), national governments deal with matters of foreign affairs or foreign policy, and these governments—assumed as unitary rational actors—make important strategic choices for the nation. The analyst's focus lies in the logic of their action, and he/she aims to explain how and why the government—as a monolithic entity—chose a specific strategy (Allison, 1969). The government in this model is therefore treated as if it were a single individual (Breuning, 2007).

At the core of the RAM lies the concept of *homo economicus*, which assumes that actors are self-interested and goal-orientated individuals who calculate the costs, benefits, and possible losses of a situation (O'Conor & Sandis, 2010). Actors are primarily interested in value maximisation and they tend to rank preferences, which influences the behaviour and actions of national governments. The actions of governments are calculated solutions to a problem (usually a strategic problem), and these actions have purpose and intention. The aim of the analyst is to explain what goal the government was pursuing and what the objective was at the time (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Most analysts of the Arms Deal, and the JAS Gripen Deal for that matter, have implicitly proceeded in this fashion by arguing that country 'X' did this and country 'Y' did that. These assumptions are habitually based on the logic of rationality.

Rationality is a contested and elusive concept (Stein, 2012), but in the context of the RAM, rationality is something that is intentional, and 'what rationality ads to the concept of purpose is *consistency:* consistency among goals and objectives relative to a particular action; consistency in the application of principles in order to select the optimal alternative' (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 17). To choose in a rationally consistent manner is to choose the most

efficient alternative in a well-defined situation. Rationality requires that the decision-maker have a purpose in mind, and the choices that are made are designed to achieve specific ends (Breuning, 2007).

Explaining the JAS Gripen Deal with RAM

The main objectives of the nation according to the RAM are national interests, and the principal category in which strategic goals are often realised is national security (Mintz & DeRouen, 2010, p. 6). Those using the RAM as an analytical framework would therefore assume that the South African government purchased 26 JAS Gripen aircrafts from Sweden for national security purposes. Realists in particular rely on rational actor assumptions when they examine international affairs. They contend that national security is the most important aspect for state survival, which is a fundamental motive of state behaviour (Herz, 1951; Mearsheimer, 1995; Morgenthau, 1948, 1951; Waltz, 1979). Realists would argue that this explains why the South African government prioritised conventional security matters above all others.

Following this logic the assumption is that it was important for South Africa to upgrade defence equipment because we live in a world in which unforeseen security threats can rapidly materialise. Uncertainty reigns when one state is unaware of another's intentions. The national defence force should therefore be well equipped and technologically advanced in order to thwart any security threats that may occur. An advanced Air Force in particular could be a strategic deterrent to possible aggressors, or alternatively, it could act as a valuable tool in coercive diplomacy (Murray, 2012). Since South Africa is a regional hegemon[2] (Adebajo, 2003; Alden & Soko, 2005; Kornegay & Bohler-Muller, 2013), it should strengthen its capabilities to ensure regional security and stability. A strong and technologically advanced defence force would keep the regional balance of power in South Africa's favour. The state would gain more security and boost its material power—the hallmarks of Realism—when it acquires advanced military equipment.

From a Neorealist perspective[3], the analyst would assume that the structure of the international system had a more salient impact on the decision-making process. In short, because there is no global central authority, states can only rely on their own security means. The international system is anarchical, and this system of anarchy shapes the motives and actions of the state. Survival is the primary goal in such an insecure and unpredictable world, and, as a result, the state must ensure that there is sufficient material power to defend the nation. Trust and international cooperation is limited in a system where a state does not know

what their neighbours' intentions are from one day to another (Mearsheimer, 1995; Waltz, 1979).

An important underlying assumption of the RAM is that governments in an anarchic and volatile system are black boxes that speak with one voice (Allison, 1969). If the analyst had a deeper historical understanding of South Africa's defence decision-making structures, then he/she would find this assumption fitting. However, in the case of South Africa, the analyst would have to concede that it was artificially driven. Although the end of apartheid brought a raft of new political reforms, defence planning still operated on apartheid era logics and procedures. The former South African Defence Force (SADF) developed the most advanced computer programme in the world for defence planning. The programme was simply known as the 'Black Box'. Defence strategists would enter special criteria into the programme such as type of threats, geographical dimensions, and the national defence budget. With this information, the programme would produce results for the most suitable and affordable national force design by means of a complex algorithm. These outcomes were considered to be scientifically rational, and by implication logical. The results were presented to Parliament that would effectively base decisions for national force design and defence strategies on the recommendations of the Black Box (Holden & van Vuuren, 2011, p. 110).

Laurie Nathan (the main contributor to the 1996 South African Defence White Paper, and a staunch anti-militarist who championed demilitarisation in post-apartheid South Africa) and Len le Roux (a national defence planner) have explained how the Black Box still had a profound impact on defence planners in the post-apartheid era (Holden & van Vuuren, 2011). In a series of extraordinary interviews with Paul Holden, the aforementioned tell a story of a defence system deeply affected, even paralysed, by a computer programme. From these accounts, we learn that defence planners in South Africa were unable to separate their opinions and recommendations from the logic of the Black Box. The analyst would thus conclude that the decision for the JAS Gripen Deal was based, at least in part, on the suggestions of the Black Box.

Since it is implicitly assumed that the South African government was a unitary rational actor who made a decision to purchase advanced fighter aircrafts, the analyst would similarly assume that Sweden, as a unitary rational actor, was willing to sell the aircrafts. On closer inspection one would be hesitant to think otherwise. Most political parties in Sweden have traditionally put their differences aside when it concerns issues of security and foreign policy (Bjereld & Demker, 2000; Brommesson & Ekengren, 2013). In terms of arms exports one would likewise be hesitant to think on the contrary. Despite some opposition to arms exports

from the Communist Party, the Left Party, and the Green Party, the majority of the political parties in Sweden tacitly supported arms exports in 1999—especially the governing Social Democratic Party.[4] The majority of Swedish politicians have generally been indifferent to arms exports,[5] which provided the ruling party with *carte blanche* to pursue the interests of the state. As the people of Sweden and South Africa essentially lived in dominant one party states, the analyst would be inclined to think of defence policies as status quo *consistent* policies of a unitary actor.

The analyst's assumptions are further strengthened when he/she learns that the Swedish government proposed increased support and marketing for defence industry products in the 1990s. 'The bill on the Renewal of Swedish Defence unambiguously instructed the government and Swedish authorities to actively and in a structured way support the export endeavours of the defence sector' (Davis, 2002, p. 195). Although the JAS Gripen Deal was essentially a deal between the South African government and Saab, the assumption would be that the interests of Saab and the Swedish government were inseparable. In other words, because this is primarily a foreign policy, security, and trade matter, the government of Sweden acted in the national interest. Policies at the time were consistent with such assumptions, and Davis (2002) explains how it was implemented:

> First, a group for defence industry matters and exports of military equipment was formed at state secretary level in 1996 with the aim of promoting exports of military equipment to approved countries. Second, an ambassador was appointed within the Ministry of Trade (Handelsdepartementet) as a 'marketing supremo' for major systems such as the Gripen and submarines…Third, although Swedish embassies were specifically told in the past not to play a marketing role, following the appointment of the marketing supremo they have now been asked to play a support role and, more specifically, have been told to go out and find partners for Swedish Projects. In many respects the Gripen project is an illustration of this change of thinking (Davis, 2002, p. 195)

When the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, travelled to Sweden in the mid 1990s (in his capacity as Deputy President) to meet with former Swedish Prime Minister, Göran Persson, his meetings often included high-level discussions with leading members of the Social Democratic Party, the Swedish Metalworkers Union (Metall), and Saab (Resare, 2010). The principle aim of these meetings was to discuss the purchasing of the JAS Gripen, which at the time was presented as the key component of an economic development project (Resare, 2010). There was little opposition to these talks in Sweden[6], and in South Africa the stage was

being set for a procurement process led by the Executive's office (Feinstein, 2009; Taljaard, 2012).

The ineffective role that the South African bureaucracy played during the Arms Deal, and Parliament's inability to hold the Executive to account, further strengthens the RAM's assumptions. Feinstein (2012), Holden & Plaut (2012), and Taljaard (2012) all draw attention to the overwhelming power of the Executive in the procurement process. The South African parliament failed to hold the Executive to account despite overwhelming evidence that the Arms Deal was marred by irregularities. Such failure essentially provided the Executive with *carte blanche* to pursue its own interests. Taljaard's study in particular demonstrates how those in the highest political offices were insulated from scrutiny and ultimately not accountable to the masses. Moreover, she provides a rare glimpse into this usually unknown political world by including 90 pages of official Arms Deal documents in her 2012 book *Up in Arms: Pursuing Accountability for the Arms Deal in Parliament*. These documents demonstrate, with unusual clarity, how the Executive considered itself as a unitary rational actor who aimed to make calculated decisions, and who pursued specific goals for the nation.

From a Swedish perspective, the JAS Gripen Deal appears to have been a rational decision. 'The rational actor assumption is a hallmark of microeconomics. Individual economic decision makers want to…sell high, and maximize wealth' (Mintz & DeRouen, 2010, p. 7). Sweden would benefit enormously from the South African procurement process. At the time of the signing of the deal, Sweden's defence industry was financially struggling.[7] This lucrative contract worth 17 billion Swedish Kronor (SEK),[8] plus projected economic offsets that would generate more than double that amount, would bolster the Swedish economy as well as the sluggish defence industry. Moreover, it would create and preserve many industrial jobs.[9] An estimated 30 thousand people are employed in industries connected to the Swedish defence sector.[10] The bulk of the industry is located in towns outside of metropolitan areas, and these factories are often the largest employer in the region (Sullivan, 2014). In RAM language, the JAS Gripen Deal would maximise utility. For Sweden's large defence industry to survive and make profits it has traditionally relied on arms exports. According to a 1996 government report, one third of Sweden's industrial defence production is exported (SMFA, 1996). The Gripen programme was the most expensive project the defence industry ever undertook. By 1999 the development of the aircraft had cost the Swedish taxpayers 100 billion SEK (Resare, 2010). This enormously expensive industrial project, the largest in Sweden's history, needed a foreign buyer.

When the South African government announced in 1997 that it intended to upgrade some of the country's conventional defence equipment, the timing could not have been more fitting. Sweden seized the opportunity to start negotiations with the post-apartheid establishment, and for reasons that will become clear subsequently, Sweden took full strategic advantage of its relationship with the African National Congress (ANC). The JAS Gripen Deal was a defence project that would not only settle Sweden's defence industry debt; it would also settle a much older debt, the one made during the apartheid years. Sweden was, after all, the largest single financial supported of the ANC during the liberation struggle (Sellström, 1999, 2002). Sweden's so-called altruistic commitments to South Africa's freedom created an opportunity in the post-apartheid years for the Swedish government to enter into an arms deal with its historical ally. This deal was essentially a return on investment and Sweden used its moral leverage to actively promote and secure the largest and most lucrative procurement process in the country's history.

Was the JAS Gripen Deal Rational for South Africa?

After the fall of the apartheid regime in 1994, South Africa faced numerous socio-economic and internal security challenges. Chief amongst these was the spread of HIV, which together with widespread poverty continues to be a serious threat to Southern African regional security (van der Westhuizen, 2005). Arms Deal analysts have argued that the money that was spent on weapons procurement should instead have been invested in desperately needed socio-economic development. Alternatively, the money should have been invested in public health initiatives aiming to combat HIV—a virus that has claimed the lives of millions of South Africans (Crawford-Browne, 2004, 2007; Feinstein, 2009; Holden, 2008; Holden & Plaut, 2012; Sandahl, 2008).

With the inauguration of the liberation struggle's largest and most popular political party in 1994—the ANC—there was little reason for the post-apartheid government to fear conventional regional threats (Harris, 2002). This was primarily due to favourable relations cultivated by political leaders. During the apartheid and Cold War years many leaders of the various liberation movements fostered strong relations based on the notion of Pan-Africanism. Some of these leaders went on to become the heads of states and leading voices in the Southern African Development Community and the African Union. The maintenance and strengthening of these relations during the post-apartheid era decreased the animosity in the region. Melber (2009), for example, has observed a specific historical variable juxtaposing a sense of camaraderie between Southern African leaders born out of the liberation struggles. Smith

(2012) additionally highlights the tendency of African states not to interfere in each other's affairs, and Clark (2001) notes how post-colonial African countries generally do not seek domination over their neighbours.

Despite these reassuring aspects, the post-apartheid government still sought to further galvanise its non-aggressive attitude. Those who drafted the 1996 *White Paper on Defence* opted for a non-offensive defence strategy keeping in mind South Africa's destabilising legacy in the region. This strategy championed a non-threatening posture, one that aimed to build amicable and positive regional relationships. It was principally a military doctrine focusing on the capacity to defend yourself without posing a threat to your neighbours. In International Relations theoretical terms, it is closely related to the notion of Defensive Realism. This moderate policy still meant, however, that South Africa could maintain its regional military dominance (cf. Harris, 2002).

South Africa's overwhelming defensive and offensive capabilities at the time raises many suggestive questions about the strategic rationality of the JAS Gripen Deal. First, if the real threat to South Africa's national security was HIV and widespread poverty, then the purchasing of conventional military equipment does not make sense form a strategic national security standpoint. Second, from a Realist perspective, would the arming and upgrading of South Africa's armed forces not raise alarm among some of its main contenders who in return would scramble to arm themselves as well? Third, did conventional security threats outweigh other more credible security challenges in Southern Africa? The threat of terrorism was, for example, noticeably absent from the discussions leading up to the JAS Gripen Deal.

There also seems to be inconsistencies between South Africa's new policy framework and its actions. When one examines the post-apartheid government's progressive security and foreign policies, the rationale for the JAS Gripen Deal appears perplexing. The new South African National Defence Force (SANDF) 'committed itself to an enhanced conception of security, ostensibly privileging human security over traditional, narrowly defined military conception thereof' (van der Westhuizen, 2005, p. 278). This broader security framework differed sharply from the apartheid era's narrow and conventional security policies. The 1996 *White Paper on Defence* clearly highlighted the importance of human security in post-apartheid South Africa, and a far lesser importance was placed on military-related security matters. The subsequent 1998 *Defence Review* echoed similar sentiments.

But not only did the post-apartheid government focus on a new and improved conception of security, its new security planning also specified increased involvement in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations on the African continent. Yet, the purchase of

highly advanced fighter aircrafts is at odds with this rationale as well. Fighter aircrafts such as the JAS 39 Gripen do not provide a valuable function in humanitarian operations. It is therefore puzzling that larger cargo planes with specific logistical functions in humanitarian operations were sidelined. Greg Mills has correctly observed that the problem with such high-tech weaponry in the African context is not only 'their exorbitant price tag but their inappropriateness in meeting the modern threat, which is largely low-tech both at home and abroad' (Mills, 2011, p. 15). This point is particularly relevant because ever since the end of the Cold War most conflicts in Africa have predominantly involved small arms (Bourne, 2007).

More important for our consideration is the fact that the South African Air Force (SAAF) rejected the JAS Gripen aircrafts. Several leading fighter pilots and Air Force commanders opted for a more practical and feasible option (Holden & van Vuuren, 2011). The JAS Gripen, according to SAAF, was 'unaffordable' due to its high purchasing cost, and the majority of the fighter pilots in SAAF were unfamiliar with the JAS Gripen's operating systems. Of the list of shortlisted planes, the JAS Gripen was the least preferred by SAAF's top structure (Holden & van Vuuren, 2011). Nevertheless, despite SAAF's reservations, the JAS Gripen Deal was approved. From this it is clear that a military-industrial complex does not threaten South Africa (cf. Southall, 2013). That is to say, there is a distinct lack of influence from the Armed Forces on the strategic decision-making procedures of the state.

This matter also raises another and more suggestive question: can the South African 'Black Box' theory be a suitable explanation for the JAS Gripen Deal? It was indicated earlier that the Black Box computer programme's decisions were based on several factors, of which affordability was a key component. Since the JAS Gripen was not fulfilling the needs of SAAF, and since its costs were double that of its rivals (Resare, 2010), it is safe to assume that this was a non-Black Box decision.

Considering the enormous costs involved one would assume that the JAS Gripen Deal was irrational for South Africa. From a political perspective, however, the motivation for the deal warrants rethinking. In 1999 South Africa was gearing itself for only the second democratic elections in the county's history. The ANC was on the verge of bankruptcy at the time and it struggled to muster a coherent nationwide election campaign due to a significant lack of capital and resources. Moreover, the ANC-led government could not afford the weapons they requested (Feinstein, 2009). In order to do so the government conditioned financing. The financing component of the separate arms deals became an important selection criterion for the acquisition process, especially in the case of the aircrafts. Financing meant that the government could take out a loan with the country providing the weapons systems in

advance of the actual procurement process. This loan would be paid back with South African taxpayers money, including interest, and based on currency fluctuations. Saab and the Swedish government offered generous financing. The Social Democrats in particular pushed for such a loan agreement to be accepted by the Swedish parliament. It ultimately resulted in Sweden using development aid money to grant the South African government a loan of 10 billion SEK (Resare, 2010), which assisted in the financial (and possibly political) survival of the ANC.

Realpolitik vs. Moral Considerations: Swedish Doublethink

Historically the Social Democrats in Sweden have taken a strong ideological stance on third world solidarity. This culminated in spectacular fashion between the 1960s and 1980s when they embraced several liberation movements in the so-called 'third world'. Their willingness to support and champion such movements, along with other Swedish organisations and political parties, was considered unusual outside of the Scandinavian context (Bangura, 2004). This progressive agenda found a foothold in the ANC's struggle against apartheid in South Africa. The ANC's struggle captured the imagination of an entire generation of Swedish politicians, union workers, and activists (Sjölander, 2011; Thörn, 2006).

Apartheid policies, and the ANC-led liberation movement that became the symbol of resistance against it, befitted a rallying point for those in Sweden who were willing to provide substantial material and logistical support for third world emancipation. Many of these activists later advanced into positions located at the apex of power in Sweden. The relations they forged with their ANC counterparts and other leading figures in the liberation movement would aid in post-apartheid reconstruction and development in South Africa (Country-Strategy, 1999, 2004, 2009). More specifically, Swedish support of the *de facto* ANC government in waiting proved to be vital during the planning phase of the post-apartheid programme known as PASA (Sellström, 2002). Swedish politicians and bureaucrats were instrumental in mapping out the future for a post-apartheid South Africa. Their input on a wide range of social, economic, and political reforms proved to be invaluable for ANC officials who otherwise had little experience and knowledge of democratic political rule.[11]

The relationship between the Social Democrats and the ANC cannot be fully understood outside of its historical framework, and the ongoing ideological process that it engenders. Merle Lipton has argued that history is important to the extent that it forms an 'important part of our consciousness, contributing to our beliefs', and shaping our understanding about society and the world (Lipton, 2007, p. 4). South Africa has historically occupied a special place in Sweden's foreign policy. Carl Tham, a former head of the Swedish International Development

Agency (Sida), echoed this sentiment when he argued that the funding of the ANC during the liberation struggle was 'one of the most important foreign policy and cooperation efforts carried out by Sweden' (cited in Sellström, 2002, p. 869).

In the post-apartheid era, this strategy became more holistic, and the Swedish government pursued a foreign policy based on development cooperation. This approach was geared primarily towards poverty alleviation, the strengthening of democracy, support of civil society, and the improvement of healthcare (cf. Country Strategy, 1999; 2004; 2009). Sweden also proposed several strategies for increased employment opportunities, as well as broad-based educational programmes amongst previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa. Development cooperation has also coincided with increased efforts to bolster bilateral trade agreements, which, it was suggested, would reduce the need for aid (cf. Country Strategy, 1999; 2004; 2009). These initiatives have been largely constructed on a normatively driven ideological foundation, moulded by decades of struggle against apartheid.[12]

Coinciding with these progressive policies was the growth of what Paul Holden terms the 'Shadow State' in South Africa (see Holden & van Vuuren, 2011). Soon after the 1994 transition in South Africa, cracks started to appear in the foundation of the post-apartheid ANC-led establishment. The ideals championed during the years of oppression were gradually sidelined, and ANC-backed policies and actions started to vacillate between principled (Idealist) and pragmatic (Realist) stances (Alden & LePere, 2004; Sidiropoulas, 2004; Spence, 1996, 2001, 2007; Welsh & Spence, 2010). The JAS Gripen Deal was the watershed event that highlighted this dichotomy.

From the outset the JAS Gripen Deal was plagued by allegations of corruption between South African and Swedish elites. Several politicians, economists, and academics have argued that the deal was suspiciously expensive, irrational, and even reckless. Saab, the Social Democrats, and Metall, among others, have been implicated in the corruption scandals plaguing the deal (Resare, 2010). Economic offsets in particular have been a point of controversy. The Social Democrats and Saab argued that South Africa would benefit financially from offset projects that would be generated through a joint Gripen programme. The beneficiaries of this wealth would be the poor masses in South Africa—especially black South Africans. There is scant evidence to support such claims, and the lion's share of the wealth, it must be assumed, has been distributed amongst those who vigorously campaigned for the deal.

The post-apartheid ANC-Swedish alliance has effectively upheld an awkward balancing act. On the one hand they have advocated ideals of solidarity, socioeconomic development, and equality, and on the other courting and promoting interest-driven strategies that uphold the

desires and aspirations of the most powerful elements in society. Analysts have hitherto failed to address so-called altruistic Swedish commitments to South Africa's post-apartheid socioeconomic development. In fact, the literature pertaining to Sweden's relations with the ANC-led government is remarkably quiet. Such contradictory actions raise suggestive questions, and one cannot help but wonder whether this is indicative of the tensions within most societies—developed and developing—between realpolitik and moral considerations?

Actors and Structures: A Base for Improved Explanations

Christopher Hill importantly observed that foreign policy is 'at the hinge of domestic politics and international relations' (Hill, 2003, p. 23). This makes the task of analysing and conceptualising the role of actors and structures extremely challenging in foreign policy analysis. A transnational arms deal usually involves a number of actors on both sides, and many of these actors have an impact on decision-making (cf. Feinstein, 2012). There are also different domestic structures on both sides, which along with international structures shapes and affects the actions of actors.

When we think of foreign policy decision making the first question that intuitively comes to mind is: who are the most important actors that make decisions regarding matters of foreign policy? Our assumption is typically that it is the leaders of the state, the head of the government, foreign ministers, the parliament, dominant political parties and so forth. One assumes that these actors act internationally on behalf of the societies they represent. The second question that arises concerns structural factors and how they affect foreign policy. The dominant Neorealist view has traditionally suggested that we look at the international system of anarchy as a type of organising principle (Waltz, 1979). On closer inspection, however, one finds that it is not only the international system that is important for our deeper understanding of foreign affairs. Walter Carlsnaes reminds us why there are other less narrow aspects to consider as well:

> Political, cultural, psychological, economic, national, regional, global, technological, ideational, cognitive, and normative… are omnipresent in societies everywhere, existing in various degrees on all levels from the most isolated tribal groupings to the global system as a whole. Not all are equally important to foreign policy making, but many are vital and central to understanding and explaining its manifestations (Carlsnaes, 2012, p. 114).

Given this empirically complex landscape it is important to have an analytical framework as a starting point. The latter will provide a context in which the object to be analysed can be examined. The JAS Gripen Deal, like all foreign affairs matters, is a complex case that cannot be easily modelled. So far we have analysed the case by using the traditional RAM approach to foreign policy decision-making. The RAM approach provides valuable theoretical insights into the JAS Gripen Deal. Nevertheless, when one assesses the particulars of the case, it becomes clear that this theory does not accommodate the complexities of the JAS Gripen Deal in its entirety. In other words, this model does not succeed to fully explain the curiosities of this event. In this section I will draw attention to alternative units of analysis for an improved explanation of the case. In the following section I will provide a theoretical framework that can accommodate this empirical reality.

By only focusing on structural aspects one loses sight of the power of human agency. Human agency can affect and change foreign affairs as well. Valerie Hudson argues that humans are located at the intersection of 'material and conceptual factors. The point of intersection is not the state, it is human decision-makers…[because] all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups' (Hudson, 2007, p. 3). This actor specific and agent-orientated approach provides an alternative understanding of foreign policy decision-making. It places the onus on actor accountability and provides a base for building middle-range theory. It is from this basic premise that I construct an alternative approach to understanding the JAS Gripen Deal. For an improved explanation, however, I draw on the work of Walter Carlsnaes (2012), who draws our attention to an important aspect in the study of foreign affairs: analysts have a tendency to focus either on structures or actors. Those examining policies either consider actors as the main unit of analysis and the cause of policy actions, or they maintain that structures are the focal point of focus. This, according to Carlsnaes, is problematic:

> When both are present (as in decision-making analyses), they are essentially treated as separate factors not interacting with each other. The problem is that it is generally recognized that in real life actors and structures do not exist in such a zero-sum relationship but, rather, that human agents and social structures are in a fundamental sense dynamically interrelated entities, and that hence we cannot account fully for the one without invoking the other (Carlsnaes, 2012, p. 124).

So what particular aspects of the JAS Gripen Deal invoke a rethinking of the traditional RAM approach? I argue that one should consider those actors who had an impact on the decision-making process. To that end I argue that the decision-making process of the JAS Gripen Deal was steered by a tripartite alliance. This alliance involved stakeholders who had vested interests in policies that concerned arms manufacturing. On the Swedish side this included the relationships between the ruling Social Democrats (with their leader as Prime Minister of Sweden), Metall and Saab. On the South African side the tripartite alliance[13] consisted of the ruling ANC party (with their leader as the President of South Africa), the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), and elements of the defence procurement and development industry (Armscor and Denel). These three groups, it is suggested, cooperated domestically and transnationally in order to secure the JAS Gripen Deal.

All three groups have had a substantial influence on the policymaking architecture of their respected countries. Elites within this tripartite alliance also enjoyed a high level of mobility between the three groups—a practice that is known as the 'revolving door policy.' For example, in Sweden leaders from Metall would move into politics and obtain strategic positions in the Social Democratic Party[14] and *vice versa*; and members of the Social Democratic Party have traditionally secured top positions at Saab. This process was equally fluid in South Africa. Numsa, the largest single trade union in South Africa, which is also part of the largest trade union affiliation, Cosatu, has had significant political influence in the post-apartheid government. Neither Numsa nor Cosatu contest national elections, but they have traditionally fielded candidates through their political partner the ANC. Many of these candidates hold senior positions in the ANC, and similar to Saab and Metall, they ensure that their constituent's interests are upheld. Moreover, ANC officials have moved into top positions in the weapons manufacturing industry, and some have founded companies closely aligned to the arms industry in South Africa (Resare, 2010). It was not only the Social Democrats and the ANC who shared transnational relations; Metall and Numsa have also shared similar relations—a legacy that was forged during the struggle against apartheid. Saab's interests in South Africa's weapons industry, and its proposal to launch a joint industrial Gripen programme from the outset, further supports the notion of a transnational tripartite alliance that influenced policies.

Alternative Model: The Transnational Power Elite

In the previous section it was argued that a base for improved explanations of this case is needed. I argued that one should focus on those actors who had an impact on the decision-making structures in order to gain a better understanding of the JAS Gripen Deal. The aim of

this section is to provide a theoretical framework that can facilitate such assumptions—one that can accommodate the suggested alternative units of analysis. The argument here is that it was not Sweden and South Africa—as monolithic states/countries—that entered into an arms deal, but instead actors within those countries who did. For the purpose of this study, these actors are referred to as power elites. Elites who have the power to influence and steer large-scale procurement processes are assumed to be in command positions and located at the apex at power. Elite configurations at the apex of power do not only function domestically and/or in isolation, they also have the capacity, and tendency, to form transnational networks of power elites (Kauppi & Madsen, 2013).

What is germane to our broader understanding of the JAS Gripen Deal is the fact that the origins of elite pacts go back to before the Arms Deal took place. These pacts were both national and transnational in nature. Within South Africa, these pacts first emerged between former enemies. The militarised build-up in Southern Africa between enemy forces during apartheid paved the way for the continuation of conventional security structures and logics in a post-apartheid South Africa. When the apartheid state disintegrated in the 1990s, the ANC's military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the SADF found mutually beneficial ground for strategic cooperation after international arms embargoes were relaxed on South Africa (Cawthra, 2003; Cilliers & Reichardt, 1996; Frankel, 2000; Mills & Wood, 1993; Williams, 2004). Within MK and the SADF 'there existed, at an elite level at least, a considerable similarity in organisational culture… both of which were comfortable with the idea of large militaries with political clout, run in secrecy and with personal enrichment as an inducement' (Holden & van Vuuren, 2011, p. 31).

Cloaked in the rhetoric of national defence interests, some of these elites aimed to further the natural state of affairs (cf. van der Westhuizen, 2005). This prompted many Western governments, and in particular the Swedish government at the time, to cosy up to officials who were in strategic positions to steer such decisions in the political realm in South Africa (Holden & van Vuuren, 2011). Coalescing with these hawkish elements were elites located in sectors previously overlooked for their strategic influence on procurement processes. These primarily included elites of South Africa and Sweden's largest metal workers unions, many of whom had close relations with those in the highest echelons of government (Resare, 2010).

The Power Elite

Power elite theory assumes that there are major concentrations of power that rule the masses. The 'elite' is considered as a social force in society and not only a category. Power elite

scholars are sympathetic to Marxist assumptions but are simultaneously influenced by the basic premises of the Machiavellians. That said, however, this approach is careful to embrace Marxist metaphors and prefer the concept of 'elite' instead. The American political sociologist C. Wright Mills was one of the first to develop an explicit power elite theory. Although his work mainly focused on the United States of America during the Cold War, his underlying assumptions are instructive.

Mills was extremely critical of American democracy in his pioneering 1956 book *The Power Elite*. He suggested that a class of military, political and business elite—driven by mutual interests—constitute the power elite. The power elite is ultimately at the apex of power in society. Underneath the power elite is a middle-level elite that comprises of members of congress, legislators, interest group leaders and local opinion leaders. At the bottom of the pyramid is the mass of the population. They are considered unorganised, apathetic, and mostly uninterested in political life, which makes them easy to control and manipulate.

Although Mills was sympathetic to Marxist class analysis, he was critical of orthodox Marxist's assumptions of a ruling class. Mills maintained that the notion of the ruling class failed to capture the complexities of power because rule is essentially a political concept and class is an economic concept. The notion of a ruling class is misleading since it conflates two different levels of analysis. Gergei Farkas lucidly explains the main difference between Mills power elite and a Marxist notion of a ruling class.

> A ruling class encompasses a broad segment of society and includes a large number of individuals who in effect lack direct power and influence over political decision-making… the power elite is a considerably smaller and more tightly knit, in class terms perhaps even elusive, core of executive decision-makers in key positions (Farkas, 2012, p. 17).

Mills' power elite theory assumes that those at the apex of power are highly interconnected across different sectors of society. This is what he identified as the 'uneasy coincidence of economic, political and military power' (Wright Mills, 1956, p. 276). He emphasised that the power elite is a far more apt concept to use than Pareto's governing elite or Mosca's political class. The power elite captures the idea of political power that stretches beyond the institutions of government, and it represents a far more elucidatory notion than that of class. Mills fundamentally differed from Weber's individualistic conception of power, because for him power is essentially institutional.

The strength of power elite theory is its ability to draw critical attention to those small groups of individuals at the apex of power who are connected across several sectors of society by common interests. This article proposes a similar conceptual framework for understanding the JAS Gripen Deal by revealing the mechanisms of institutional power, the relationships formed by elites across different sectors, and historical links maintained across national boundaries by influential elites. By focusing on transnational relations, it essentially adds an important variable that is often lacking in the traditional approaches to elites. The latter have predominantly focused on national processes, often overlooking transnational elite configurations (cf. Dahl, 1967; Mosca, 1939; Pareto, 1935; Veblen, 1994[1899]). Valuable insights can be gained by analysing evolving power structures through a transnational lens.

The Transnational Power Elite

Dogan (2003) suggests that binary comparisons should be used to investigate elite relationships since the aim is not to generalise but instead to understand elite configurations and actions. He proposes that countries should be paired when elites are examined in order to gain a deeper understanding of these configurations. This inquiry of the JAS Gripen Deal pairs two countries by default and provides a good opportunity to generate such an understanding. In order to provide some clarity on the concept of transnational power elites, a definition is required. Carl Von Clausewitz reminds us that 'not until terms and concepts have been defined can one hope to make any progress in examining the question clearly and simply and expect the reader to share one's views' (von Clauswitz, 1989[1832], p. 132).

Elites in command positions are individuals, or groups of individuals, who have unique access to, and control over resources. The ability to control resources provides these elites with distinct social power and advantages (cf. Giddens, 1972; Scott, 1990; 2003). Elites in command positions have more exclusive access to resources and possess more power than others. Only a small number can have authority in any group, and although elites in command positions are a minority group, their decisions and actions can influence and also affect large proportions of the population. This segment of society have the capacity to make the decisions that shape the continuations of a particular structure, which demands that we examine positions in institutions and not only the means of production (Southall, 2013).

Clustering occurs due to specific interests or functions of the elements in the system (Coetzee, 2013). The clusters of elites that this study is particularly interested in are those that have substantial influence on, and power over national defence decision-making. Such elites are considered to be at the apex of power, and although these clusters are typically small, their interactions are often dynamic and strategic. Such clusters essentially form a social network of

clusters that are connected nationally and transnationally. Although some domestic elements in Sweden and South Africa opposed the JAS Gripen Deal, it was precisely their lack of cooperation—domestically and transnationally—that reveals their lack of power to have opposed the deal. It is therefore suggested that those who championed the deal connected domestically *and* transnationally, whilst those who opposed it did not. Transnational power elite configurations effectively illustrate agents of new forms of power, that is, agents of a new post-apartheid transnational power elite configuration.

Cerny (2010) has maintained that one should be cognisant of actors who act both locally and transnationally, and take into account the transformation of the state. The structural changes that have taken place after apartheid calls for a framework that is more suitable to theorise transnational power dynamics. The latter, in conjunction with actor-orientated explanations, is essential for understanding why the JAS Gripen Deal took place and how transnational power elites in the post-Cold War era in Sweden and South Africa accommodated and championed such a deal.

Transnational power elites is 'an object of study that is both sufficiently specific and broad enough' to deal with questions related to social transformations of power (Kauppi & Madsen, 2013, p. 2). The JAS Gripen Deal offers an important case study for understanding the restructuring of such power nationally and transnationally. The relations between Swedish and South African political, industrial, business, and civil society leaders has primarily aided in the acceleration of political and social transformations in South Africa since 1994 (cf. Country Strategy, 1999; 2004; 2009). Those who were closely connected to such evolving national and transnational processes have therefore been considered for this analysis. These close relations united individuals and groups in Sweden and South Africa primarily for moral purposes. But coinciding with these progressive aspects was a hawkish element driven by strategic political, economic and military interests. The rise of a group of transnational power elites in the mid 1990s constituted a new form of power in Swedish-South African post-apartheid relations.

Conclusion

This article has simply scratched the surface of a seminal event in both South Africa and Sweden's recent history. There is much more work to be done both theoretically and empirically in order to satisfy the curiosities of this case. This article was a modest attempt to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the decision-making process of the JAS Gripen Deal. It was stated at the outset that the JAS Gripen Deal is essentially a foreign affairs puzzle, and most traditional accounts have attempted to explain foreign affairs with one basic

conceptual model, entitled here as the RAM. The latter was applied to an analysis of the JAS Gripen Deal, and although it provides a rigorous model of action, it does not capture the complexities of the case. That said, however, it does provide a base for understanding strategic choices, aims, strategies, goals, and interests of the transnational power elites.

An alternative conceptual model was suggested in order to provide a framework for improved explanations of the JAS Gripen Deal. Drawing on the pioneering work of C.Wright Mills, and considering alternative units of analysis for generating middle-range theory, I argued that valuable insights could be gained by analysing the actions and motivations of the various actors involved in the decision-making process. It was suggested that a unitary actor did not necessarily make the decision for the JAS Gripen procurement process. Instead, it was an alliance of powerful individuals inside of these countries who acted transnationally to champion this historic arms deal. A so-called tripartite alliance collectively pursued a set of shared goals, and the elites in charge of this alliance are considered to be at the apex of power since they maintain the structural determinants of the military system. By examining the roots of these relationships, the analysis gave added depth to the theoretical assumptions.

Notes:

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1. The final payments for the deal will conclude in 2018.
2. The South African government is reluctant to accept the title of regional hegemon. It refers to itself instead as a pivotal state. However, given South Africa's overwhelming material power in the region, it qualifies as a regional hegemon (see e.g. Nathan, 2010).
3. Kenneth Waltz never intended for his Neorealist systemic theory of international relations to explain foreign policy decision-making. Criticism of this 'straw man' setup in the analysis is thus warranted. That said, however, Waltz's theory still provides a rigorous framework for understanding the strategic actions and decisions of states.
4. Anna Ek, President of the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society, (personal communication, October 2012).
5. Swedish Government Official (personal communication, May 2014).
6. Magnus Walan, Senior Policy Advisor at Diakonia, (personal communication, October 2012).
7. Nils Resare, (personal communication, October 2012).
8. The price of the aircrafts is based on exchange rate fluctuations (see e.g. Holden, 2008). The estimated total cost in 2018, including the economic offsets, are projected to be several billions higher due to exchange rate fluctuations. According to the 1999 exchange rate, 1.3 Swedish Kronor (SEK) was equal to 1 Rand (ZAR).
9. Saab Aerospace Official (personal communication, June 2014).
10. Saab Aerospace Official (personal communication, November 2013).

11. Paul Trewhela (2009) provides a rare insight into the undemocratic practices of the ANC elites during their time in exile. Trewhela explains that the ANC's elites did not install a democratic culture in the ranks of the liberation movement, and this legacy has had a profound impact on the party ever since.
12. Lennart Wohlgemuth, former Director of the Nordic Africa Institute 1993-2005, (personal communication, April 2013).
13. This should not be confused with the post-apartheid tripartite alliance. The latter is an historic alliance between the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP), and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).
14. The recently elected Prime Minister of Sweden, Stefan Löfven, was a former vice-chairman of the Swedish Metalworkers Union. In 2005 he was elected Chairman of the newly formed IF Metall. Löfven contested the Swedish national elections in 2014 as leader of the Social Democratic Party.

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