

Summary

Keeping the People in a Good Mood: Dissemination of Information, War Propaganda and Mobilisation in Sweden, 1655–1680

Starting around 1500 a period of state formation changed the European map. The scattered medieval principalities were replaced with more centralised and better organised states with permanent armies. Sweden was quite successful in competing with these states and experienced a period of expansion. The price, however, was high. Since both the nobility and the burghers in Sweden were relatively poor, the means for warfare were drawn, to a large extent, from the peasantry. It has been estimated that between 1620 and 1720, 500,000 Swedish soldiers died in war. The peasants, who, in a general sense of the word, constituted approximately 95% of the population, paid for the wars by way of high taxes and elevated conscription rates. In fact, it seems that Sweden was able to put a higher proportion of its own population under arms than any other European country during the 17th century. Nevertheless, the virtually constant warfare was highly unpopular among the inhabitants.

When it came to claiming taxes and soldiers, the state always had the possibility of using violence to impose its will, but when it came to deciding upon these matters the situation was different. Decisions about taxes and conscriptions were made at the diet, where the Swedish peasants were represented. The rulers also commonly asked for additional burdens of war, and these were subject to local negotiations. In spite of their right to say no, the fourth estate normally accepted the state's propositions. Even though different kinds of obstructions were commonplace when the taxes or soldiers were to be collected, the state managed to extract a high level of resources from the population. Still, the rulers were concerned about public opinion. The government was well aware of the balancing act it had to perform in order to acquire the maximum amount of soldiers and taxes while avoiding discontent and uprisings. In their minutes and letters they often discussed how to keep the subjects "in a good mood" or how to avoid "the bad opinion that resides within the peasant".

It was evident to the leading groups in society that the wars were controversial and that the public had to be influenced using words. This meant that the government had to convince its subjects, the common people, of the necessity of war in order to obtain resources, i.e., it had to use propaganda in order to pursue its expansionist ideas. The rulers had the possibility of using violence, but always tried to avoid it. Unknowingly, they acted in accordance with the

theories of sociologist Walter Korpi, who has argued that a holder of power has everything to gain in trying to minimise the use of costly power resources to resolve a conflict. The best way of minimising the cost is, on a long-term basis, to invest the power resources in expanding the ideologies or the institutions that either reduce or resolve the conflicts. In 17th century Sweden the wars were legitimised by long-term propaganda. Furthermore, there were institutions for conflict-solving, but those were not fully developed. The long-term investment in resources was not sufficient to prevent conflict from arising.

If a conflict arises, power resources can, according to Korpi, be divided into three different kinds. To use coercion can be effective, but it is normally expensive and increases the risk of further conflict. Another possibility is to pay the counterpart, but that is costly as well. The cheapest way is to influence the contracting party's norms and values, i.e., to use normative power resources. The 17th century Swedish state always tried to use normative resources as its first choice.

In this thesis, the dissemination of information, war propaganda and mobilisation during the period 1655–1680 have been investigated. An important assumption has been that information is a power resource. The possession of information, the control of the circulation of information by censorship and the access to channels, which enable the dissemination of information, are all different kinds of power resources. The Swedish state had a huge advantage in all these areas if compared to its subjects.

How did the Swedish state use information as a power resource during the period 1655–1680? The purpose of this thesis has been to examine how war propaganda aimed at the common people was organised in Sweden between 1655 and 1680. This period is interesting since it includes both offensive wars (under the reign of Karl X Gustav), a period of peace (under the regency) and defensive warfare (under Karl XI). How was information disseminated in Sweden during this period and what arguments were used? What means did the rulers use to keep the people in a good mood? Using various sources the purpose, the media, the message and the recipients of the propaganda have been discussed. The most important sources have been the minutes and correspondence of the kings, the regency and the council of the realm, along with the sources from the diet and the provincial meetings. In particular, the prayer days and thanksgiving days, in both manuscript and printed sources, have been studied. To investigate the actual dissemination of information the sources in the regional archives of the counties of Uppsala and Kopparberg as well as the archives of several bishoprics have been examined.

A distinction has been made between long-term and direct propaganda and, based on empirical data, the latter has been divided into four phases. At the beginning of the thesis the hypothesis was made that war propaganda was disseminated both during times of war and peace and that the main arguments did not change over time. The assumption was also made that because of the notion of the king as protector and the idea of a just war, the state representatives would never publicly argue in favour of aggressive warfare. An interesting aspect of this question is whether the more pragmatic humanist view of the just war had prevailed over the scholastic ideals. Considering the widely held belief that it was the duty of the king to defend his subjects, the way this ideal affected the propaganda has also been investigated. Finally, how long-term and direct propaganda were interrelated has been examined.

During the 16th and 17th century the construction of the “system of information” took place. The most important information channel was the church. The pulpits were used for reading the law, and for public announcements of all kinds, including declarations of war. The church also hosted two kinds of ceremonies, in which the state and the church took a shared interest: prayer days and thanksgiving days. The prayer days took place three or four times a year, and were held with the idea that prayers could prevent the Lord from sending the divine punishments: war, plague and famine. At the beginning of each year, an explanatory proclamation, probably written by the king and his closest advisors, was read to the subjects, describing the political situation. Often this meant picturing the enemies threatening the country, and the people were urged to pray for peace. The context of the thanksgiving days was different: they were held to celebrate military victories. During these occasions detailed accounts of the battles were read by the priest, followed by the singing of Te Deum - Oh Lord we praise Thee. These feasts had much in common with the Te Deum celebrated in Europe since the Middle Ages. For the inhabitants of Sweden, the thanksgiving days were the most important sources of information about the wars. The pulpits were also used to spread news such as the Swedish violation of the peace treaty in 1658, and the defeat at the Battle of Öland in 1676. Furthermore, it was through the pulpits that information about enlistments and inquiries about escaped soldiers were made public. Examining the county of Kopparberg has shown that the county governors and bailiffs also demanded the services of the priests in order to exhort the peasantry at times when negotiations were being held. The priests were expected to lecture the subjects about their duties to the state, and this was also mentioned in their oath.

The second channel of information was the Swedish Riksdag (diet), where the peasants were represented. Before the time of absolutism, it was the Riksdag that decided on wars and taxes, and this made it an arena for persuasion and arguments for war. Both the kings and the council of the realm often emphasised their will to inform the estates of political matters, but it should be noted that they chose, in a highly pragmatic way, what matters to inform them about. The aim of the diet was to persuade the estates not to initiate debate or to listen to the opinion of the participants. In 1655, the picture portrayed by the Riksdag about relations with Poland was distorted. Threats were described that had no basis in real life, and the possible consequences of a Swedish attack were never discussed. In fact, the diet was used as a tool to legitimate decisions that already had been made by having acquired the estates' approval.

Thirdly, the regional administration proved important: the county governors and their bailiffs spread information by word of mouth, travelling the countryside or calling meetings. Both county governors and bailiffs also played an important role when it came to mobilisation.

The fourth part of the information system was the printed press that issued the state newspaper and printed pamphlets. Some of them were distributed via the church and the county governors, while others were sold to the wealthier groups in society, and others aimed at readers abroad.

In conclusion, it can be said that the state had several media, with which to reach its subjects, and they were sometimes used simultaneously. Three different pamphlets were printed about the new war with Denmark in 1658, of which one was read both from the pulpits and by the bailiffs. When the council of the realm wanted to spread news of the defeat at Öland, both the pulpits and the bailiffs were again employed. During the 25 year period, which this thesis examines, no important changes took place regarding the system of information. It should be underlined, however, that the system was far from perfect. The dissemination of information could be slow, some information never reached its target audience, and some information was simplified. Information disseminated by the church normally reached both men and women, whereas the messages conveyed at diets and provincial meetings reached only men. Even so, these institutions proved valuable to the Swedish state, and they made it possible for information to be widely disseminated.

The most important message of the propaganda was that the people were sinful, and that it was not likely to change. As a consequence, God would always have a reason to punish the inhabitants of Sweden with war, plague and famine, and during this military period the focus

was normally on the first alternative. War and peace was a divine affair, and the only thing that people could do to obtain peace was to change their lives and pray. Another important message was that the enemies were invariably evil and that they were always striving to destroy Sweden. According to the propaganda, the enemies had no political agenda; their only motive was malice. This also meant that it was impossible to negotiate a peace with them, since their goal was war. This dehumanisation of the enemy also meant the depoliticisation of the war. In this thesis, it has been revealed that the image of the enemy originated from the Old Testament, but it had come to assume a life of its own in the propaganda. According to the propaganda, the best protection against war (except prayer) was a good king. It was also stated that, in the event of war, it was the duty of the subject to contribute.

The conclusion that could be drawn at the time from the long-term propaganda was that the threat of war was constant. Despite the fact that Sweden enjoyed peace between 1660 and 1674 (with the exception of a short war in Bremen), the threat of war was still mentioned in every proclamation that preceded the prayer days. When peace was celebrated with the special thanksgiving days, it was stressed that peace was an exceptional privilege. During these years of peace the threats from the Ottoman Empire were also mentioned in a disproportionate fashion. As has been shown by previous research, the people of the 17th century saw a parallel between Sweden and Israel. According to this ideal, the Swedish people had a covenant with God, as Israel once had. It should be emphasised, however, that this identification was negative rather than positive. It was not used to justify aggressive warfare, but to explain the misery of the people. For the inhabitants of Sweden, the comparison with Israel helped to explain the wretchedness of war, plague and famine rather than success in war.

The hypothesis of this thesis has been verified: war propaganda was also disseminated in peacetime. Comparing the results of Ingvar Kalm, Sverker Arnoldsson, Peter Ericsson and Martin Linde with my own empirical data, has also proven that the most important messages remained the same during Sweden's Age of Greatness.

The direct propaganda was conducted in four different phases. The first phase was about explaining the outbreak of war, the second phase was about mobilisation, the third phase was about disseminating information in order to uphold the morals and the fourth and last phase was about explaining the peace. What arguments were used in the different phases, what was their function, and how did they differ?

The outbreak of war was always explained primarily by the sins of the population, regardless of whether it was an aggressive or defensive war. This explanation was often associated with the idea of the evil enemy. Alongside these explanations, more worldly interpretations, however, existed. When Sweden attacked Poland in 1655, Denmark in 1658, Bremen in 1665, and Brandenburg in 1674, it was always claimed that the other party constituted a threat, and that warfare was the only feasible way to achieve peace. The fact that both Karl X Gustav and the regency used these arguments reveals that the humanist interpretation of the just war had been accepted. Arguing for offensive warfare, on the other hand, was never an option.

When the hostile Danish attacks were explained to the subjects in 1657 and 1675, the state stressed that Sweden was innocent and that the enemy's attack was unjust. During the Scanian War the vilifying of the Danish king was a more prominent trait than it had been in the wars between 1655 and 1660.

The second phase of the direct propaganda consisted of the mobilisation of resources. In the negotiations held at the diets and the provincial and local meetings, the urgency of receiving contributions was explained to the subjects, and the great peril was emphasised. It was maintained that the threats to Sweden were everyone's concern, and that the enemies were likely to invade the country if nothing was done to prevent them. Furthermore, the duties to the king and the fatherland were a common theme. The subjects were occasionally also promised rewards if they contributed, but the state also put pressure on them by playing one parish off against another. Especially during the Scanian War the patriotic argument was frequently used. It is noteworthy that the subjects were expected to have an emotional bond with their country, and that the state representatives assumed that this rhetoric would be efficient.

The third phase of the direct propaganda aimed at upholding morals by disseminating information. Most important in this context were the proclamations of prayer days, and even more so, the thanksgiving days. When needed, more subtle messages could also be communicated to the inhabitants. The purpose of spreading good news was to keep the people in a good mood, and the state also meticulously supervised that no negative news was circulated. The messages in the proclamations of prayer days and in the texts that were read to the congregations at thanksgiving days differed in tone. The proclamations were dark and pessimistic, focusing on human sin, whereas the detailed thanksgiving texts described success in war. Even so, it was very difficult to understand the war situation merely by listening to proclamations of prayer days and thanksgiving texts. The former were too abstract, and the

latter too detailed. Nothing was said, in either of them, about the political or diplomatic context and it was difficult for a listener to tell whether peace was at hand or not. Defeats and setbacks were normally kept secret. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the people listened quite carefully since this was the best information available.

The mixture of negative and positive news was consistent with the religious doctrine and also with the aim of the propaganda. The state wanted the subjects to be anxious enough to contribute to the war effort, but not so frightened that they would panic and succumb to defeatist thoughts.

The last phase of the direct propaganda consists of explaining the peace, and the reason was always the same: it was God who gave peace, regardless of whether it had been won on the battlefield or at the negotiation table. According to early-modern beliefs, war was caused by people's sins, but peace was never interpreted as an improvement on their part. Thinking that one's conduct could influence the actions of God was sinful in itself. Still, God could receive a little help on the way. Surprisingly enough Karl X Gustav was portrayed as a contributor to peace after his death. The fact that the advantageous peace obtained at Fontainebleau in 1679 was as a result of the involvement of Louis XIV was, however, never mentioned in the domestic propaganda.

The aim of the long-term propaganda was to make the people internalise certain values that could be activated by the direct propaganda. For this to work, it was important that the messages were reasonably coherent. Even if the two kinds of propaganda did not correspond completely, they, nevertheless, offered an explanation for the outbreak of war and for the role of the subjects. The main messages of the long-term propaganda were:

1. Man will always sin, and the enemy is eternally evil;
2. There will always be wars;
3. The best protection against wars (next to God) is a good ruler;
4. To be able to protect the country, the ruler depends on the support of the subjects in the form of taxes and conscriptions.

The first two of these messages were the ones most emphasised in the long-term propaganda. The above listed arguments were disseminated in peacetime as well as in times of war, and they had their equivalents in the direct propaganda:

1. You have sinned and the enemy is evil;
2. War is here;
3. You have a good ruler;
4. Now it is time for taxes and conscriptions.

Ideally this activation of the long-term propaganda would lead to the complete and unproblematic mobilisation of the subjects, but this was not always the case. The state's representatives were often forced to elucidate and reinforce the message. A great part of the direct propaganda consisted of proving that the ruler was managing his tasks. It was especially stressed that the king was making an effort to achieve peace, and that he was courageously defending the fatherland when peace was impossible to obtain. When Sweden was the aggressor, this picture was quite problematic. Still, it was always stressed that the king had done his best during the negotiations, and that the enemy was to blame for the failure.

Karl X Gustav, the regency and Karl XI all claimed that they had protected the inhabitants from dangerous enemies. How was it possible to combine such an idea with the offensive wars of the 17th century? The idea about the ruler as a protector was far from new; Gustav I had justified his possession of power precisely with the argument that he was protecting his subjects, and the same idea had been used to raise taxes. His successors chose the same line of argument by creating images of protectors. According to historian Jan Glete, it was by selling protection to the population that the Vasas managed to come to the Swedish throne. In the 17th century warfare became more aggressive, but the rhetoric prevailed. When asking for the means to finance offensive warfare, Gustav II Adolf usually highlighted the threats of invasion. An idea that once helped to establish the royal power was now useful for justifying wars abroad. The participants saw the state formation process as a zero-sum game, and this conception was true to some extent. It should, nevertheless, be stressed that the Swedish state consequently used false threats to give legitimacy to its foreign policy.

For the Swedish peasants, who only had limited and state regulated information at hand, it was not possible to tell whether the threats were real or not. Most likely it appeared rational to them to support their king in his wars, since the world was filled with evil, irrational enemies, who were intent on destroying Sweden.

The aims of war propaganda were, therefore, manifold. It made it possible to mobilise great resources from the population in times of war. It enabled Sweden to take part in power politics while talking about defence. The ideas of human sin, evil enemies and constant threats of war contributed to the legitimacy not only of a permanent army and offensive

warfare, but also of the power of the king and the social order at large. The emphasis on the threats possibly also contributed to the growth of a national identity.

The study of Swedish war propaganda has proved a fruitful way to enrich our understanding of the early-modern period. The state saw the peasants as rational counterparts in the ongoing negotiations, and used arguments as its first tool. Neglecting the will of the common people was not an option and the rulers tried to avoid the use of violence. Keeping the people in a good mood was a cornerstone of Sweden's war policy.