

The Swedish Armed Forces värdegrund Doctrine, Ethos or Culture

by Victor Strömgren

Resumé

Artikel avser att undersöka vad Försvarsmaktens värdegrund är genom en begreppsdiskussion, där värdegrunden analyseras utifrån ett doktrinärt perspektiv. Artikeln är av en begränsad natur, men hoppas kunna öppna upp för en mer djupgående diskussion av ämnet. Är värdegrunden att betrakta som en doktrin, ett etos, ett kulturellt uttryck, eller något helt annat? Utgår man från Harald Høibacks (2013) definition landar man i att Försvarsmaktens värdegrund är en form av doktrin. Elizabeth Kiers (1995) diskussion om doktriners ursprung pekar på att värdegrunden snarare är ett uttryck för svensk militärkultur, och uppbackat av Kjell Inge Bjergas och Torunn Laugen Haalands (2010) så kallade konstruktivistiska teori om doktriner, således en viktig utgångspunkt för den svenska militära doktrinen.

THIS ESSAY WILL analyse the so-called värdegrund (“foundation of values”) of the Swedish Armed Forces’ (Försvarsmakten) from a doctrinal standpoint. Värdegrund is a Swedish concept without a clear international translation, but the closest translation would be “foundational values”. This essay will however use the Swedish word, due to it being a Swedish concept without a clear international equivalent.

The Swedish Armed Forces started the process of adopting a värdegrund in 2004, after the Defence Act of 2004 (Försvarsbeslutet 2004).¹ This was an era of transformation within the Swedish Armed Forces, from a territorial defence force to an armed force capable of participating in large, multinational peacekeeping and enforcement operations far away. The Armed Forces Headquarters, together with unit commanders and the trade unions, saw the need for a värdegrund to make this transformation as smooth as possible, while also making sure that all employees shared the same view of the world.²

Today, the värdegrund is taught during basic training and referenced in most of the everyday work of the Armed forces. It has also led to the creation of a code of conduct³ and a document about the military profession.⁴ Everyone in the Armed Forces, both civilians and armed personnel, from volunteers and full-time employees to reservists and conscripts, are expected to follow the värdegrund.

As well as it being present in the everyday operations of the Swedish Armed Forces, the värdegrund is also referenced in two of the main doctrines of the Swedish Armed Forces, the military-strategic doctrine (*Militärstrategisk doktrin*) from 2016⁵ and the doctrine for joint operations (*Doktrin för gemensamma operationer*) from 2020.⁶ The värdegrund is a very important policy instrument regarding the Swedish Armed Forces, and as such it is very important to study in order to understand the Swedish Armed Forces.

This essay will try to approach this subject from an interdisciplinary perspective, and be part of a conceptual discussion about

whether the värdegrund should be understood as a doctrine, an ethos, or something completely different. This essay will, in respect to limitations in word range and size, only aim to answer the question of whether the Swedish Armed Forces' värdegrund is a doctrine. Hopefully this short essay will facilitate further conceptual debate.

Doctrine or ethos?

Harald Høiback defines doctrine as “authoritative documents military forces use to guide their actions containing fundamental principles that require judgement in application”.⁷ The värdegrund says in its opening lines that it “helps the personnel of the Swedish Armed Forces make the right decisions, even in difficult situations”⁸ (my translation from Swedish). This fits quite well into Høiback's definition.

However, Høiback also writes about something he calls *ethos*, which is a “common commitment to ‘the same set of values, beliefs, and norms’”,⁹ and a military ethos being “the characteristic spirit of and the prevalent sentiment, taste or opinion of a people, institution, or a system”.¹⁰ This is a description quite close to what a värdegrund is.

Høiback does separate ethos from doctrine with what he calls “the four A's: articulation, authority, action, and anticipation”.¹¹ The most important difference, according to Høiback, is that a doctrine is articulated, usually in writing, while an ethos is not. An ethos is more of a “shared feeling”.¹² The Swedish Armed Forces' *värdegrund* is a document that is articulated, which, according to Høiback's definition, separates it from an ethos. Jerker Widén and Thomas Olsén have described doctrines as being either formal or informal, meaning that they can either be formalised, published texts, or a series of collective and/or cultural expres-

sions spread mainly internally and verbally.¹³ The värdegrund would here be considered an informal doctrine, but this view is challenged by the fact that it's a published and formalised text.

Høiback also defines doctrine, apart from ethos, as being backed up by formal authority, whereas ethos is “carried by inner motivation and peer pressure”.¹⁴ The Swedish Armed Forces' värdegrund is backed up by formal authorities, and every commanding officer, from the supreme commander down to lowest level unit commander, is expected to uphold it among their subordinates.

Høiback's last two A's, action and anticipation, separates doctrine from ethos in that doctrines are usually created to get something done (action) in the future (anticipation). Høiback does however mention that many doctrines have a present-centred perspective and try to handle current issues.¹⁵ The Swedish Armed Forces' värdegrund was, as described earlier, developed to help the Armed forces transform from one type of force into another. This makes the värdegrund an even better fit for Høiback's definition of doctrine. To further the case, the värdegrund has also been referenced as a tool to help promote equality and deal with issues such as harassment and victimization in the workplace, for instance after Me Too in the autumn of 2017.¹⁶ This shows that the värdegrund is still used to get something done; even though it might not have an explicit goal or timeframe.

Even though ethos might, in a sense, be a better description of värdegrund than doctrine, Høiback's definition of the words clearly make doctrine a better fit than ethos. The Swedish Armed Forces' Doctrine for joint operations 2020, also describes the ethos as something separate from the värdegrund.¹⁷

As such, if we use Høiback's definitions, we arrive at the conclusion that the värde-

grund is a doctrine. However, if we look at other definitions, we might get another answer to our question.

Principles about fighting and waging war

Barry R. Posen defined doctrine as “a set of institutionalized principles about how to fight”.¹⁸ The värdegrund might not be explicit about this, but it is a set of principles that all personnel in the Swedish Armed Forces are expected to follow, even during the conduct of operations and combat. The värdegrund expects armed forces personnel to be “flexible in order to face new situations”¹⁹ and “be creative and act on their own initiative”.²⁰ It also expects “[a]ll parts of the organization to have the ability to operate in different cultural and social environments”,²¹ and that “resolving tasks should not happen at any price. Risks of the operation should always be considered”.²² All the translations above are my own. This essay argues that these principles are clear examples of how the värdegrund is related to how the Swedish Armed Forces is going to fight and conduct operations.

Barry R. Posen did expand on his definition back in 1984, in his book *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*, where he defined doctrine as a subcomponent of strategy, or grand strategy to be precise. Posen argued that military doctrine was to describe two things in relation to strategy; what [military] means were to be used, and how they were to be used. According to this definition, doctrines had several sources, such as technology, capabilities, geography, etc. Posen meant that a doctrine was for deciding how forces were organized, deployed, and to what ends the means were to be deployed. Posen described doctrine as

being one of three ideal types: offensive, defensive, and deterrent. Posen argued that an actor’s military doctrine could be studied by looking into force posture, weaponry, etc.²³

From this perspective, the värdegrund is not considered a doctrine. In the beginning of this section, this essay did show that the värdegrund contains expectations on how the organization and its personnel is to act during operations and combat. It does not, however, contain anything related to the factors described by Posen, 1984, such as how the armed forces are to be used, organized, or to what ends they are to be deployed.

Military Culture and appropriate behaviour

Posen’s view of doctrine²⁴ was used by Elizabeth Kier in her 1995 essay “Culture and Military Doctrine: France between the Wars”. Kier expanded on Posen’s sources of doctrines, and argued that military culture was an important part of these sources. Kier wrote that culture had an “independent explanatory power”,²⁵ especially in the choice between defensive or offensive doctrines. Kier defines military culture as “the collective beliefs held within a particular military organization”.²⁶ This point of view, together with Kier’s definition, would argue that the värdegrund is in fact an expression of the military culture within the Swedish Armed Forces, and as such an important source for Swedish military doctrine.

This is a viewpoint that would be supported by Kjell Inge Bjerger and Torunn Laugen Haaland in their 2010 paper on the development of the Norwegian Armed Forces’ (*Forsvaret*) joint doctrine of 2007. They argue there are three theories on the sources of military doctrines: rational response to external threats; organizational factors; and what they call the “constructivist” theory, which argues that doctrines are the result

of what is perceived to be “‘appropriate behaviour’ among networks of professional officers educated in the same organisations, working the same organisations, and sharing a distinct view of the world”.²⁷

This constructivist theory supports the claim that the värdegrund is not a doctrine in itself but does play an important part in its creation, as the värdegrund also regulates what would be argued to be “‘appropriate behaviour’ within the armed forces, such as “[a]ll parts of the organisation [...] respects cultural and religious differences”²⁸ (my translation) or “[a]nyone contributing to the function of the Swedish Armed Forces, no matter their form of employment, gender, age, ethnic background, religious belief, sexual orientation, political views, or disabilities, are to feel welcomed and respected”²⁹ (my translation). It also expects the personnel of the Swedish Armed Forces to “‘care about their physical and mental health”³⁰ (my translation) and that all “‘employees of the Swedish Armed Forces actively dissociate from drug use and the illegal handling of drugs”³¹ (my translation). These expectations about “‘appropriate behaviour’ are motivated by rational arguments, related to combat and operational efficiency; “‘In military operations, these are crucial qualifications to be credible”³² (my translation), and “[The personnel of the Swedish Armed Forces] care about their physical and mental health, and thus the safety during the assignments”³³ (my translation).

Conclusion

This essay had the ambition to open up for further debate concerning what the Swedish Armed Forces’ värdegrund is, by discussing it from a doctrinal perspective.

If we use Harald Høiback’s definition, the answer is yes, the värdegrund is a doctrine; mainly because it fits quite well into

his “four A’s”, that he uses to differentiate ethos from doctrine. The Swedish Armed Forces also makes an explicit difference between ethos and värdegrund.

Barry R. Posen’s definition from 2016 could also be used to argue that the värdegrund is a doctrine. Posen’s definition from 1984, however, would imply it is not. If one recognizes Elizabeth Kiers argument, 1995, about military culture, the värdegrund would be considered an expression of Swedish military culture, and as such an important contributor to Swedish military doctrine.

However, no matter the definition, the värdegrund is an important policy document within the Swedish Armed Forces, and one that is important to study and understand, in order to fully understand the Swedish Armed Forces.

According to Widén and Olsén, the Swedish Armed Forces considers doctrines only as documents mainly concerning the strategic and the operational levels of war.³⁴ This of course raises the necessity of further discussion about how the värdegrund functions in regard to the doctrines of the Swedish Armed Forces. A basis for further discussion could be the description by Jan Ångström and J.J Widén of four “tools” that a doctrine can be used for: as a tool of education, a tool for command, a tool of change, and a tool of signalling.³⁵

There is of course lots of room left for a conceptual discussion regarding what the värdegrund is, and hopefully this short essay has helped stimulate and open up for an expanded discourse on the subject.

The author is a student at the Swedish Defence University’s master’s program in Politics, Security, and War, and has a bachelor’s degree in political science.

Noter

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