



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Separation and immersion: the changing role of the armed forces in Northwestern liberal democracies

Vark, A. van

Citation

Vark, A. van. (2025, October 17). *Separation and immersion: the changing role of the armed forces in Northwestern liberal democracies*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4270680>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4270680>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will describe the research methodology used for this dissertation. The next section will explain the research design, including the choice for qualitative research based on case studies and will elaborate on the selection of the cases chosen. Section 3.3 will then discuss the process of data collection, followed by a section on the operationalization of the research question and the conceptual model developed in chapter 2. Subsequently, section 3.5 will focus on data analysis and validation and section 3.6 contains a personal reflection on the research process.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative research

This dissertation is based on qualitative exploratory case study research. One of the main characteristics of qualitative research is the open and flexible methodology, which allows for the research design to be adjusted during the research based on the data (J. Evers, 2016). Typical of an exploratory approach is its flexibility and openness towards the phenomenon that is being studied. No hypotheses are formulated in advance and research decisions follow the data. In following this bottom-up approach, a theory can be developed. Glaser and Strauss call this a 'grounded theory' (Glaser, 1967). Grounded theory has the following characteristics (Strauss, 1998; Swanborn, 2010):

- A rejection of thinking in terms of variables and instead a preference for holism.
- Data collection and data analysis are not separated in time.
- Insights develop because of a constant comparison between cases.
- There is a strong emphasis on an inductive, exploratory approach.
- The assumption that in studying a case one or a few central concepts 'arise from the data'.
- 'Theory' refers to the elaboration of aspects and relations of a central concept.

However, in this specific study, certain existing concepts from civil-military relations literature are used, such as the dichotomy between separation and immersion and the concept of civilian control over the military. In that sense, this research project combines both deductive and inductive elements and can in fact be characterized as abductive (Gioia et al., 2013). Timmermans and Tavory have defined abductive research as "...a creative inferential process aimed at producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence." (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 167) The approach "...rests on the cultivation of anomalous and surprising empirical findings against a background of multiple existing sociological theories and through systematic methodological analysis."

(Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 169) The abductive method considers the position the researcher has in the world they study, that will inevitably influence the way they perform the research. Abductive analysis rests on the researcher's position and his or her theoretical background, that help to identify surprising observations in the research data. (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) In the words of Reichertz, the challenge is to create *"a state of preparedness for being taken unprepared."* (Reichertz, 2009, p. 221) New concepts can subsequently be developed to account for these surprises. Timmermans and Tavory prefer this method over grounded theory as they state *"not taking current scholarship into consideration risks not only ignorance but also the rediscovery of a well-developed domain."* (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 181)

This study uses well-established concepts from civil-military relations theory to study new empirical developments (hybridization of the armed forces and the police, the immersion of civil and military domains) in a changing context (democratic backsliding instead of democratic consolidation) and a changing threat environment. This makes the abductive method an appropriate method for this study.

It should be emphasized that with only a few cases as a starting point, the researcher should be very careful in generalizing findings since the concept of representativeness has a different meaning in qualitative research than in quantitative research (Swanborn, 2010). Qualitative research aims to paint a complete picture of all the possible variants in opinions, attitudes, and behavior in a certain population (Dinklo, 2006). Another point of attention in exploratory research is that because of continuously adjusting the research design, the risk for the researcher's biases influencing the research result is increased (see paragraph 3.6).

Case study research

This qualitative study follows a case study design. Swanborn (Swanborn, 2010) has defined a case study as the study of a social phenomenon:

- In one, or only a few, of its manifestations.
- In its natural surroundings.
- During a certain period.
- That focuses on detailed descriptions, interpretations, and explanations that several categories of participants in the system attach to the social process.
- In which the researcher starts with a broad research question on an ongoing social process and uses available theories but abstains from pre-fixed procedures of data collection and data analysis and always keeps an eye open to the newly gathered data to flexibly adjust subsequent research steps.
- That uses several sources of data (informants, documents, observatory notes).

- In which sometimes the participants in the case studied are engaged in a process of confrontation with the explanations, views, and behaviors of other participants and with the resulting preliminary results of the researcher.

Swanborn states that case study research is a fitting approach if the impetus for the research project lies in broad questions on a social process (Swanborn, 2010). As described by Yin, case studies have a distinct advantage over other research methods when a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control (Yin, 2018). This dissertation's research question on the possible contribution of the armed forces to the stability of liberal democracy in Northwestern Europe is a broad question that contains both 'how' and 'why' elements, it concerns the present and future, over which the researcher has no control, and therefore the case study method was chosen for this research.

As the research focuses on liberal democracies in Northwestern Europe, the armed forces in three countries from this region were selected as cases. This is the only unit of analysis. Therefore, a holistic multiple-case study design as defined by Yin has been chosen (Yin, 2018). The advantage of a multiple-case study design is that the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, which makes the overall study regarded as being more robust.

To gain a deeper insight in the possible contribution of the armed forces to the stability of liberal democracy, a total of three cases were selected, instead of just focusing on the Netherlands. As Yin suggests, multiple-case studies should ideally follow a "replication" design (Yin, 2018). In this research, a replication design was used, although there were some small differences in data collection between the three cases (see section 3.3).

A small part of the research is based on quantitative data: in chapter 4, the stability of liberal democracy in the three cases is explored. This research is based on an analysis of relevant existing databases on the stability and quality of liberal democracy.

Case selection

According to Swanborn, there are four methods to select cases (Swanborn, 2010):

- No selection at all (include all cases in the targeted domain).
- Random selection (mostly applicable to survey research).
- Pragmatic grounds (available time, budget, personal interests, etc.).
- Substantive criteria (criteria related to the substantive properties of the cases themselves).

Normally, not more than four or five cases are selected (Swanborn, 2010).

In this research, the cases were selected based on a combination of substantive criteria and pragmatic grounds. The cases are the armed forces in The Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland. As for substantive criteria, the armed forces of these specific three countries were selected because they are sufficiently similar to be compared, but when looking at the position of their armed forces in society they are at the same time sufficiently different.

Similarities:

- All three countries belong to the top of the most stable countries in the world and have been liberal democracies for a long time. This distinguishes them from relatively new liberal democracies on the European continent, such as Poland, Hungary or Spain.
- However, in all three countries, the stability of liberal democracy has declined in recent years.
- The three countries share cultural similarities in the way they view the domestic role of their armed forces, being reluctant to using the armed forces in public order management, to patrol the streets, etc. This distinguishes these countries from countries in southern Europe, such as France or Spain, or even Belgium, that have used the armed forces, for example, to patrol the streets and railway stations after terror attacks.
- The three countries are similar in the way they view the role of the police as well, with all three countries using a community policing model.
- In all three countries, there appears to be a tendency to enlarge the role of the armed forces in a domestic context, although they differ in the position of their armed forces in society.
- The armed forces of all countries have participated in stability operations in recent years and they can therefore be expected to have developed certain policing capabilities during those operations.

Differences:

- The Netherlands has a hybrid force (the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee), Sweden and Finland do not, although Finland does have a Border Guard with hybrid elements.
- In Finland, the armed forces are actively involved in society, in Sweden and the Netherlands they are not.
- The threat perception in Sweden and Finland has been different from the threat perception in the Netherlands, with the first two countries feeling threatened by Russia much more. This has resulted in a 'total defense' model in Finland and Sweden, which has implications for the domestic role of the armed forces. Consequently, the 'willingness to fight for your country' in these countries is much higher than in the Netherlands.

- Finland has a conscription system and Sweden has recently decided to partially reinstate a conscription system, while the Netherlands does not.

These similarities and differences will be considered in the analysis.

As for pragmatic grounds, because of time constraints the research was limited to three cases. Other practical considerations were the availability of contacts in both Sweden and Finland and the availability of enough documentation in these countries, either in English, or easily translatable.

With the benefit of hindsight, the selection of cases turned out to be highly relevant. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Netherlands has increasingly looked at the Swedish and Finnish models to learn from in building its own version of a whole-of-society approach, in which all of society (not only the government, but also businesses, NGO's and individual citizens) has the responsibility to contribute to national security (see also the Epilogue to this dissertation).

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

Ideally, case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin, 2018). A major reason to use several sources of evidence in case study research is related to the reason for choosing case study research as a method in the first place: to gain in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon in its real-world context. Being both in-depth and contextual means collecting a variety of relevant data and thus relying on different sources (Yin, 2018). In this research, the following sources were used:

Document analysis

In addition to scientific articles and books, relevant reports, policy documents and articles from the media from all three countries were collected. These documents were found through a search on government websites, through recommendations by respondents and using search engines. For Sweden and Finland, some reports and policy documents were only available in the original language. Where possible, these documents were translated with Google Translate. In other cases, only a summary in English was used. For each country, around 35-40 sources were used, including 15-20 policy reports.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews with respondents from all three countries were carried out.⁶ The interviews took on average between 45 and 60 minutes. Before starting each interview, the purpose of the research and the respondent's rights were explained to the respondent, based on an information sheet that the respondent received before the interview took place. The respondent filled in the consent form, which was then signed by both the respondent and the researcher. Due to the COVID-19 measures, most interviews were conducted online, mainly through MS Teams and Webex. For these online interviews, the respondent's answers to the consent questions were recorded. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher⁷.

In the Netherlands, 48 expert interviews were conducted. Respondents were selected at both the national level and the local levels, the strategic and tactical⁸ levels, and included policy makers. Most of the respondents were experts working at the higher management level of their organization and can therefore be qualified as elites (see also section 3.6 for a reflection on elite interviewing). In total, 28 respondents from the armed forces, the police, and the intelligence services, working at the strategic or tactical levels were interviewed. Within the armed forces, respondents from all parts of the armed forces (Army, Air Force, Navy, Marechaussee), based in different parts of the country were interviewed. In addition, 7 respondents working at the higher management level in all relevant ministries (Defense, Interior, Justice and Security, Social Affairs) were interviewed. At the local level, 4 mayors and 2 city managers were interviewed, from medium-sized and large cities geographically spread around the country. Finally, 7 representatives from the academic community with expertise in the themes of the research were interviewed.

The interviews focused on 4 different topics related to the sub-questions of the research. At the start of each interview, the respondents were questioned on the security and stability related challenges to liberal democracy in Northwestern Europe. Next, the researcher focused on the position of the armed forces, first asking about the current position of the armed forces and recent changes. Then, questions were asked about policy options for the future role of the armed forces in a domestic context. Finally, questions were asked about the consequences of these policy options for civil-military relations and the position of the armed forces in the security domain. Following the

6 See appendix for the interview protocol and consent form used in this research.

7 Two respondents did not give permission to record the interview; at these interviews the researcher took notes and wrote a transcript afterwards. In both cases, the transcript was sent to the respondents for approval. This led to minor textual adjustments in one of the transcripts.

8 The author defines the 'tactical level' as the level between the strategic level and the operational level.

snowball-method, at the end of each interview, each respondent was asked for other respondents that could be approached for interviews.

The tree model, as described by Evers, was used to design the interviews. In each interview, key questions, follow-up questions and analytical questions were combined, using a topic list in order not to forget any necessary elements. As a result, the transcripts are comparable in structure even though of course the follow-up questions have differed (J. Evers, 2015).

In addition to these general questions, some interviews focused on the specific expertise of the respondent in one of the relevant themes of this research, for example undermining organized crime, civil unrest, or crisis management.

In Sweden, 21 interviews were conducted with respondents from the armed forces, police, National Defense College, other academic institutions, and government ministries. The interview questions were the same as those used for interviews in the Netherlands.

In Finland, 21 interviews were conducted with respondents from the armed forces, Border Force, police, National Defense University, other academic institutions, and government ministries. The interview questions were the same as those used for interviews in the Netherlands.

Group interviews

In the Netherlands, in addition to 48 individual interviews, 2 group interviews were conducted with military liaisons to the Dutch Safety Regions. Safety Regions are crisis management networks that bring together the expertise and capabilities of various emergency services on a regional level. They are responsible for crisis prevention, preparation, and response. The military liaisons are responsible for the facilitation of the military support to the crisis management activities of the Safety Regions.

One group interview was conducted with 5 military liaisons from the south of the Netherlands and the other interview was conducted with 6 military liaisons from the north of the Netherlands. The first group interview was conducted in a live setting; the second group interview was conducted on MS Teams. Both interviews were recorded and transcribed. Subsequently, they were sent to the respondents for their approval. In the first case, this led to minor adjustments in the transcript.

In these group interviews, the respondents were questioned on different themes, focusing on both their views on the contribution of the armed forces to the Safety Regions

and on their personal experience as military liaison. As for the contribution of the armed forces, the focus of the interview was on the changes in the last 20 years that have taken place, the current situation, differences between the Safety Regions and whether the armed forces are seen as a 'last resort' or a 'structural partner'. As for their personal experiences, the respondents were questioned about their motivation to work as a military liaison and the consequences of this specific placement for their future careers.

In Sweden and Finland, no group interviews were conducted due to time constraints and a smaller network of the researcher in these countries. Therefore, the Dutch case study provides the richest data in this research.

Database analysis

As mentioned before, chapter 4 is partly based on the analysis of several quantitative databases on the stability and quality of liberal democracy. It includes the following databases: the World Values Survey, two high standard databases on liberal democracy developed by V-Dem Institute and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the Worldwide Governance Indicators produced by the World Bank, and the Fund for Peace data on state fragility. In this chapter, the relevant data from these databases are compared with the results of a document analysis on the stability and quality of liberal democracy.

The respondents from all three countries were questioned about this topic as well and in the case-study chapters (chapters 5, 6 and 7) their views are compared with the results of chapter 4.

It must be noted that most data for the case studies were collected between April 2019 (start of the dissertation project) and March 2022. The interviews in the Netherlands were conducted between July 2020 and January 2021. The interviews in Finland were conducted between September and December 2021. The interviews in Sweden were conducted between December 2021 and March 2022. The cut-off date for new policy documents and other reports was 1 July 2023, with some exceptions for highly relevant documents and reports that were published after that date and were brought to the attention of the researcher.

3.4 OPERATIONALIZATION

As defined in chapter 1, the research question for this dissertation reads as follows:

How can the armed forces in Northwestern Europe strengthen liberal democracy and what are the consequences for civil-military relations in theory and practice?

The following sub-questions will be studied to answer this main research question:

1. To what extent is liberal democracy in Northwestern Europe under pressure and what are the security and stability related challenges undermining liberal democracy in Northwestern Europe?
2. What is the current position of the armed forces in Northwestern Europe on the CMR dilemma, to what extent has this position changed in recent years and how can these changes be explained?
3. What policy options can be developed for the future role of the armed forces in a domestic context in Northwestern Europe and how will this change the domestic role of the armed forces?
4. What would be the consequences of a changing domestic role for civil-military relations in Northwestern Europe in theory and practice?
5. To what extent could a changing domestic role of the armed forces and a new balance in civil-military relations either contribute to the stability of liberal democracy in Northwestern Europe, or alternatively, detract from its stability? What are the opportunities and caveats for a new balance?

Based on a study of relevant theoretical concepts in chapter 2, I have developed the conceptual model for this dissertation, which is reproduced in figure 3.1 below.

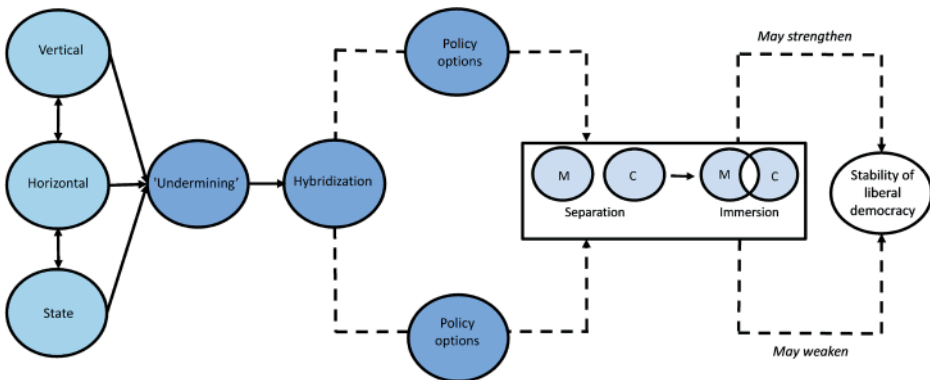


Figure 3.1: Hybridization and the stability of liberal democracy

The relevant concepts will be operationalized as follows.

The stability of liberal democracy (chapter 4) is measured (using existing databases) by looking at the following variables:

- Support for democracy in different age groups.
- Liberal Democracy Index used by the Swedish V-Dem Institute to measure the quality of democracy.
- The Global State of Democracy Indices used by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance to measure democratic performance using five indicators: representative government, fundamental rights, checks on government, impartial administration, and participatory engagement.
- Worldwide Governance Indicators used by the World Bank to measure six dimensions of governance. Three dimensions (political stability, rule of law, and control of corruption) will be used for this research.
- Fund for Peace cohesion indicators to measure state fragility.

The undermining of liberal democracy is operationalized by studying three security and stability related threats that undermine liberal democracy:

- The blurring of internal and external security and the rise of new security threats (vertical undermining).
- Declining social cohesion and the rise of social unrest and parallel societies (horizontal undermining).
- Undermining of liberal democracy by the state (state undermining).

Chapters 5-7 contain the results of the three case studies. These chapters will elaborate on the undermining of liberal democracy in the specific country investigated, the extent of hybridization, policy options, and the balance between separation and immersion. To do this, these chapters will study:

1. The context:
 - o Domestic tasks and roles of the armed forces.
 - o The legal framework concerning these domestic tasks and roles.
 - o The position of the armed forces in society, looking at the following variables:
 - § Size of the armed forces
 - § Conscription
 - § Support for the armed forces in society
 - o Civil-military relations, looking at the following variables:
 - § Ideal-type for CMR
 - § Civilian control

- o Civil-military cooperation (framework for cooperation between civil and military authorities).
- 2. Security challenges and threats, looking at the three threats defined in chapter 4:
 - o The blurring of internal and external security and the rise of new security threats (vertical undermining).
 - o Declining social cohesion and the rise of social unrest and parallel societies (horizontal undermining).
 - o Undermining of liberal democracy by the state (state undermining).
- 3. Recent changes in the domestic role and explanations (ergo: the extent of hybridization), looking at the following variables:
 - o Policy changes since the end of the Cold War.
 - o Changes in practice as perceived by the respondents.
 - o Changes in practice based on research (where available).
 - o Explanations for changes as perceived by the respondents.
- 4. Policy options for a changing domestic role, looking at the following variables:
 - o Policy options named by the respondents. For each policy option, both descriptive elements (what domain and what task does the policy option entail) and normative elements (why, or why not the armed forces should have a role, and under what conditions) were explored.
 - o The respondents' opinion on policy options named by the researcher (normative).
- 5. The balance between separation and immersion, looking at 4 dimensions:
 - o Immersion in society.
 - o Immersion in public administration and government strategy.
 - o Immersion in performance.
 - o Immersion in the law.
- 6. Analysis, looking at the following variables:
 - o The extent of undermining / prevalence of the three security and stability related challenges.
 - o The extent of hybridization (both looking back and future-oriented) + explanatory factors, using the work of Bruneau on effective use of the capabilities of the armed forces in a domestic context.
 - o The extent of immersion + explanatory factors, using the concepts explained in chapter 2 (concordance theory, Levy's exchange model, Desch's model on internal versus external threats, Travis model on the intensity of conflict).

Chapter 8 contains a comparative analysis of the three case studies, using the same concepts as in the case study chapters to verify whether these can explain similarities and differences between the three case studies.

Subsequently, the research question on the stability of liberal democracy is answered, by focusing in on the effect of a changing role of the armed forces and a new balance in civil-military relations on the stability of liberal democracy.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND VALIDATION

Data analysis

The data analysis is based on 'thick analysis'. The aim of thick analysis is to enhance the depth and breadth of data analysis by creatively combining several analysis methods, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis (J. C. Evers, 2016). Thick analysis has some similarities with 'grounded theory'. However, it combines several analysis methods in an eclectic manner and therefore encompasses more than the grounded theory method. In addition, because thick analysis methods do not have fixed or regulated procedures, it taps into the creative spirit of the researcher, who can choose a combination of analysis methods that fit the specific dataset and research question (J. C. Evers, 2016). In that sense, thick analysis fits with the abductive methodology mentioned earlier (Gioia et al., 2013; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Thick analysis requires an intensive coding process, comparing the data with existing theoretical concepts, and finding anomalies and surprises that require the researcher to develop tentative new theories. One such a surprise found in the Dutch data was the use of metaphors by the respondents (see below), requiring a new round of coding and revisiting the data.

In this project, a combination of analytic techniques was used, specifically open coding, thematic coding, and axial coding. As for analytic tactics used to connect the various codes, descriptive analysis, causal analysis, pattern analysis, metaphor analysis and frame analysis were used. Finally, the analytic strategy used combined elements of descriptive and explanatory strategy and theory construction.

The data from the interviews, group interviews and documents were coded by means of qualitative data analysis software (Atlas.ti). Such software allows the researcher to analyze qualitative data in a systematic and transparent way without precluding openness. It saves time and makes it possible for a third person to double-check findings, thereby contributing to the quality of qualitative research (Friese, 2019). The coding process was started with thematic coding (following the structure of the interview questions) and open coding, thereby combining deductive and inductive elements. Axial coding subsequently resulted in 132 codes. In this process, the open codes describing similar aspects were combined to create new, broader codes, and subsequently code groups. In this last step important concepts used in this research project were used as well, leading

to a combination of 'informant-centric codes or 1st order codes' and 'researcher-centric concepts or 2nd order codes' and thus a form of abductive research as mentioned by Gioia (Gioia et al., 2013). This resulted, for example, in a code group 'CMR', that combined codes related in one way or the other to civil-military relations. Examples of codes in this code group are 'distance between armed forces and society', 'criteria for domestic role armed forces', 'limits to domestic role armed forces', 'military mindset', 'civilian control' and 'visibility armed forces', all resulting from open coding.⁹

An example for a combination of thematic and open coding is the coding of policy options. During the interviews, the respondents were asked about their views on specific policy options. Their answers were coded using thematic coding. At the same time, they could name different policy options, and these were coded through open coding, resulting in two additional policy options: 'border control' and 'expert support'.

During the open coding process of the Dutch data, it was noted that the respondents frequently used metaphors to describe the armed forces and their role, such as 'green on the streets', 'customer-supplier relationship', 'last resort', and 'structural partner'. Therefore, it was decided to include a metaphor analysis in the project. However, this only turned out to be relevant for the Dutch data. This may be related to the fact that the interviews with Swedish and Finnish respondents was done in English. When interviewed in their mother tongue, these respondents may have used metaphors as well.

Using the 'memo' function in Atlas.ti, the data per code and per code group were further analyzed, facilitating the process of counting how many respondents shared the same views on the topics discussed. In the presentation of the findings, in the chapters 5-7, many respondents quotes are used to illustrate the results, as suggested by Gioia (Gioia et al., 2013).

Validation

As has been mentioned before, the results from case studies cannot be generalized in the same fashion as can be done in extensive research. Swanborn, in this respect, states that in case studies there is no sample-to-population logic, but it is possible to generalize from case results to a theory or model, which could then subsequently be applied to other cases (Swanborn, 2010). Timmermans and Tavory propose talking to other scholars and presenting at conferences as a necessary step for creative theory development. (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012)

9 See appendix for the code book and code groups used in the analysis.

The research results were validated in different ways. First, as mentioned above, several data sources were used to be able to perform methodological triangulation. In the data analysis phase, several analysis methods were used to perform data analysis triangulation. As explained by Evers, triangulation is a way a researcher can verify their understanding of the researched reality, as it is not so simple to truly understand the social reality and one's own biases (J. Evers, 2016).

Second, (partial) results were presented at several seminars and meetings at the Ministry of Defense, several conferences, and seminars in the Netherlands, and three international academic conferences, organized by the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society in the United States (2021) and Canada (2022), and by the European Research Group on Military and Society (2024). Presentations were followed by an interactive discussion with the participants in which they gave their feedback on the research results. This can be seen as member validation (J. Evers, 2016; Swanborn, 2010).

Third, ample time was devoted by the researcher to personal reflection, as described in the next paragraph.

3.6 PERSONAL REFLECTION

Reflexivity in research involves reflection on self, process, and representation, and critically examining power relations and politics in the research process as well as researcher accountability in data collection and interpretation (Sultana, 2007). Berger defines it as the process of a continual dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome (Berger, 2015). Reflexivity is used in qualitative research mainly to secure credibility, trustworthiness, and non-exploitative research. The researcher scrutinizes the lens through which the researcher views the phenomenon studied (Berger, 2015). Transparency about the researcher's position and potential biases and assumptions is vital in judging accounts of qualitative research and the authenticity of the findings (Reid et al., 2018).

Relevant researcher's positioning includes personal characteristics (such as gender, race, age), personal experiences, beliefs, biases, political and ideological stances, and emotional responses to the respondent. These positions may impact the research in three major ways: they can affect access to the field, they may shape the nature of the researcher-researched relationship and as a consequence affect the information that participants are willing to share, and finally, the worldview and background of the researcher

may shape their lens for filtering the information and thus may shape the findings and conclusions of the study (Berger, 2015). One goal of reflexivity is to monitor such effects and thus enhance the accuracy of the research and the credibility of the findings.

In my position as a senior advisor working for the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee¹⁰ and studying the armed forces at the same time, I must be constantly aware of my position, the way I view and categorize respondents and conversely, the way I am viewed and categorized, and the way that this may impact my research. As pointed out by Maxey, it is impossible to distinguish clearly between these roles. My role as researcher influences my work as senior advisor and vice versa. Therefore, I must accept the fluidity of the different roles I fulfil (Maxey, 1999).

For example, in interviewing respondents within the Ministry of Defense, I am both an insider (working for the ministry as well) as an outsider (being non-military). It has been argued that having an insider status may give advantages such as easier access, easier rapport with respondents and understanding nuanced reactions of the respondents. On the other hand, outsiders might make different observations that an insider may overlook (Berger, 2015; Mason-Bish, 2019).

Most of my respondents were experts working at the higher management level of their organization and can therefore be qualified as elites. For elite interviewing, the literature emphasizes the need to overcome the reticence of the respondent to either take part in the study or their reluctance to disclose information (Mason-Bish, 2019). The insider/outsider dynamic may influence this as well. As explained by Mason-Bish, it is important to try to neutralize the status imbalance between researcher and researched by being knowledgeable about the background of the interviewee (Mason-Bish, 2019). However, the interviewer should be aware that sometimes they know more about the subject than the interviewee and this could lead to the interviewee attempting to gain the interviewer's views and knowledge. The effect of that could be a conflict of professional roles.

As pointed out by Sultana, knowledge is always partial and representations of knowledge produced through field research embody power relations that the researcher must be aware of in undertaking ethical research (Sultana, 2007). For a female researcher doing research in a male-dominated, patriarchal organization, there is a risk of falling into the 'classical male-female pattern', where the male interviewee is broadcasting his opinions, relatively unchallenged by the researcher. Though I have found myself in this position a

10 During the writing process, I switched jobs, and currently I am working at the Defense Staff at the Ministry of Defense.

few times, I have also experienced the opposite situation, where I had to force myself to remain focused with an older male interviewee that I had subconsciously already classified as 'typical-older-male-without-interesting-ideas'. All in all, I found it easier to find the right balance between the interviewee and me when the interviewee was female. Being self-reflective helps in becoming aware of these patterns. This is very important in content analysis and reporting as well because it helps the researcher to alert themselves to 'unconscious editing' because of their own sensitivities and thus enable fuller engagement and more in-depth comprehensive analysis of the data (Berger, 2015).

In addition to constantly reminding myself of my positionality and reflecting on the possible impact on my research work, I have taken some more tangible measures to avoid a conflict of interest that could potentially arise as I am doing research on the organization that I also work for.

First, at the start of my PhD research a contract has been drawn up and signed by my employer, the university and myself, stating that my employer will respect academic freedom, has no right to see unfinished parts of the dissertation and will allow me to spend 12 hours of my working time each week on my research. At no point during my research process have I experienced any pressure from my employer concerning my research results. At the final stage of my research, following the contract, my employer has had the opportunity to check the manuscript for factual inaccuracies. This has resulted in minor textual adjustments of the manuscript.¹¹ Additionally, throughout the research process I have held regular peer review meetings with colleagues in a similar position, to exchange ideas. I have discussed the potentiality of a conflict of interest with my supervisors on a regular basis as well.

In the research itself, I have drafted a research question looking at both the possible contribution the armed forces could make to the stability of liberal democracy and the limits of such a contribution within a liberal democracy. Therefore, I have chosen not only to look at possibilities, but also the limitations. Furthermore, in my selection of respondents I have consciously selected some respondents that I knew to be critical of the armed forces in general and / or of a potential domestic role for the armed forces, based on their political background, position within the security domain, academic work or personal opinions.

11 Three textual adjustments have been made. On page 38, in the section about support to civilian authorities on the island of Curacao during the COVID pandemic, the word 'Army' was changed into 'armed forces', as Navy personnel contributed as well. On page 89, the text concerning the 'Korps Politietroepen' was adjusted; this was a military police force, while it was called a civilian police force in the draft manuscript. Finally, on page 103, the text concerning changes in the Police law was updated. During the time of writing the draft, the change in the Law was debated in Parliament, but at the time the draft manuscript was checked by the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee, the Law was passed already.