

The Crisis Management of the
Murder of Olof Palme:
A Cognitive-Institutional Analysis

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Series Editor: Bengt Sundelius

Title: The Crisis Management of the Murder of Olof Palme:
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Published by: The Swedish National Defence College
ISBN: 91-89683-19-6
ISSN: 1650-3856
Cover design: Leif Arback
Printer: Elanders Gotab 41469, Stockholm 2003
Number of copies: 700 copies
Previously published by the Swedish Agency for Civil Emergency Planning (2000)
ISBN: 91 7097 080-7

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1. Introduction

1.1 *Prelude*

On Friday February 28, 1986, Prime Minister Olof Palme and his wife Lisbet left their home at Västerlånggatan in the Old Town district of Stockholm at about 8:40 p.m. They took the underground to Rådmanngatan, a three-station-trip, and went to the Grand Cinema where they met their son Mårten and his girlfriend and attended the nine o'clock performance of the film "Bröderna Mozart" (the Brothers Mozart). The Palmes were unescorted; Palme had dismissed his bodyguards and told them that they would not be needed any more that weekend. The film ended a few minutes after 11 p.m. Olof and Lisbet Palme left the young couple a few minutes later and began strolling down Sveavägen, a main thoroughfare. A few hundred meters from the cinema they crossed Sveavägen and began walking on the east side of the avenue. At the corner of Sveavägen and Tunnelgatan, a man in a dark coat stole up to them and shot towards them twice. The first bullet hit the Prime Minister between the shoulder blades, smashing his spinal cord, aorta and windpipe. Dying, he fell to the blood stained pavement. The second bullet grazed Lisbet Palme's back. As she leaned over her husband, she saw the killer jogging calmly down Tunnelgatan.

The shots rang out at 11:21 p.m. The first police patrol arrived a few minutes later (alerted by a taxi driver). Their first sight on the scene of the crime was a man lying in a pool of blood, surrounded by some ten people. When the head of the patrol, Chief Inspector Söderström, asked for personal information from what seemed to be the victim's wife, she cried to him: "Can't you see who I am? I'm Lisbet Palme, this is my Olof, the Prime Minister of Sweden!" For a split second, the chief inspector stood in solitude with the knowledge that the Prime Minister had been shot.

1.2 *Focus of the Study*

It is not difficult to imagine the unreal feeling that must have struck Söderström and his staff at the scene of the crime. Perhaps most of us in Sweden received this news like an electric shock that shook the

very foundations of our conception of how things are organised; this could not happen here, not like this, not to Olof Palme, not now. But it did. The subsequent management of this crisis, especially the controversial police investigation with its often futile ‘main leads’ and an embarrassing lack of conclusive evidence have left observers with an annoying feeling of discord, especially since the apprehension and conviction of the killer(s) have yet to be accomplished. Various commissions of inquiry have been set up to find out what actually went wrong in the Palme investigation (SOU 1987:14; SOU 1987:72; SOU 1988:18; SOU 1989:1; SOU 1999:88).¹ All of the commissions have been met with considerable public distrust, and in that respect, they have not succeeded in reconciling the credibility gap between the authorities and the people of Sweden, which was produced by the mismanagement of the crisis. The initial crisis transformed into a policy failure, which in turn nursed a distrust of the state and its ability to safeguard the law and order. The Palme investigation thus became a ‘crisis after the crisis’.

Why, then, focus attention on this crisis? Fortunately, the murder of a prime minister is rare phenomenon. Unfortunately, national crises in a broader sense are not. A quick sweep over the last few decades in Sweden reminds us of the hijacking drama in Bulltofta (1972), the occupation of the West-German Embassy in Stockholm (1975), the U137 case (1981), the Hårsfjärden submarine incident (1982), the murder of Olof Palme (1986), nuclear pollution after the Chernobyl disaster (1986), the currency crisis (1992), and the M/S Estonia catastrophe (1994). These types of crises share a common denominator in that they have greatly upset everyday life and have shaken the society to its foundations. They change the prerequisites for the realms of politics and might be determinant for large societal layers. In spite of the particularities of each crisis, it has been argued that they could be seen as recurrent, rather than isolated, events (Sundelius, Stern and Bynander, 1997). The logic is that each event calls for action on behalf of policy makers: what-do-we-do-now situations, or occasions for decision-making. By way of analysing these occasions for decision, patterns can be observed and

¹ The acronym SOU stands for Statens Offentliga Utredningar (reports of the Government inquiry commissions).

lessons can be learned. It is therefore important to map out the Swedish experiences in crises and crisis management.

The aim of this study is to contribute to this knowledge base and theory building effort by focusing on the management of one national crisis, namely the assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme, from a cognitive-institutional perspective. The cognitive-institutional approach to the study of crisis decision-making will be further developed below, but in brief, it refers to the psychological and organisational factors that influence decision-makers in the process of crisis response. It is here believed that individuals, groups and organisations occupy centre stage when crises occur. Arguably, few crises have hit the Swedish society harder than the Palme murder; as a result, this incident demands an in-depth study of its management. Vague as it is, the purpose needs to be specified, further developed and motivated, which is the objective of the remaining sections in this chapter.

By way of introduction it is important to clarify that this study intends to cover the night of the murder and the two subsequent months. This delimitation is related to the fact that the first of May seemed to provide an appropriate ending point. Up till then, there had only been one prime suspect (the so-called ‘33-year-old’)², who by then had been dismissed as the suspected murderer.³ Furthermore, one of the important actors, the Chief Prosecutor (K-G Svensson) had been replaced at this time. This changed the setting and prerequisites for the continuation of the search for the murderer. Unfortunately, many of the interesting events that occurred in the aftermath are thereby overlooked in this study, such as the PKK⁴-track, the establishment of a commission of inquiry and the heavier governmental involvement that ended with the dismissal of Hans Holmér (the District Police Commissioner, who headed the investigation), and the so-called Ebbe Carlsson affair that caused the political death of the Minister of Justice (Anna-Greta Leijon). These events are extremely important to study as propelling forces in the crisis after the crisis. However, there is also a concrete reason for be-

²His name was Victor Gunnarsson. After being freed from suspicions, he moved to the USA, where he was found murdered on January 7, 1995. An American police officer was apprehended for the murder in the fall of 1995.

³It should be noted that he was not completely dismissed from suspicions, but further investigations regarding his activities on the night of the murder were put on hold.

⁴The Kurdish Labour Party (Partiya Karkeren Kürdistan).

ginning from the beginning and, hopefully, this study will inspire further research on this topic.

1.3 Method

One might brush aside the ambition to learn from historical events, arguing that history does not repeat itself. Further, the lessons learnt from one event may be inconsistent and contradicted by the lessons derived from another. And how do we know that different observers draw the same lessons from a particular occurrence? Despite these palpable methodological difficulties, political scientists often devote themselves to formulating theories that “[attempt] to absorb the ‘lessons’ of a variety of historical cases within a single comprehensive analytical framework” (George, 1979a: 44). Professor Alexander L. George (1979a) suggests a promising way to navigate between the Scylla of getting stuck in the uniqueness of historical events and the Charybdis of oversimplifying in order to generate general theories from case studies. He calls this the method of structured, focused comparison, and is upon what this study essentially relies. The approach is “focused because it deals selectively with only certain aspects of the historical case [and] structured because it employs general questions to guide the data collection and analysis in that historical case” (Ibid: 61–62). This study is ‘focused’ in that it deals with the crisis management concerning the murder of Palme and thus fits into the field of Swedish crisis management ‘class’. The general questions that here guided the data collection and analysis will be elaborated under section 1.4 Theoretical Framework, but for the sake of clarity, it should be mentioned that the main source of inspiration has been *Crisis Management the Swedish Way – In Theory and Practice* (Sundelius et al., 1997⁵).

As the name of George’s method indicates, its nature is comparative. According to Swanson, “Thinking without comparison is unthinkable. And, in the absence of comparison, so is all scientific thought and scientific research”⁶ (Ragin, 1987: 1). Although the

⁵ The English translation is presently being produced and will have this title. It has, however, been listed in the bibliography under the Swedish title *Krishantering på svenska – teori och praktik* (Sundelius, Stern and Bynander, 1997).

⁶ The original quote comes from: Swanson, Guy (1971) “Framework for Comparative Research: Structural Anthropology and the Theory of Action.” *In Comparative Methods in Sociology: Essays on Trends and Applications*, edited by Ivan Valier, pp. 141–202. Berkeley: University of California Press.

forms of comparison vary widely in the field of political science, the label ‘comparative method’ has a standard meaning in the discipline; “it refers to the methodological issues that arise in the systematic analysis of a small number of cases” (Collier, 1993: 105). A prerequisite for fruitful comparison is however that the observations, or cases, belong to the same ‘class’ in order to enable cross comparisons of the results make sense (i.e. to compare apples with apples and not apples with oranges). It is widely believed that a (limited) set of compared observations of the same ‘class’ can contribute to theory development (e.g. Eckstein, 1975; George, 1979a; Lijphart, 1971; Ragin, 1987). Two of the pioneers in this line of thought, Lijphart (1971) and Eckstein (1975), argue that case studies are useful in all stages of theory development, from theory formation to theory testing.⁷

A pertinent question that has to be discussed is where the single case study fits in, and how it contributes to theory development. First and foremost, the single case should be seen as being part of a ‘class’, and hence to be used as an implicit comparison with other observations in that ‘class’. Single case studies have the advantage of being holistic in nature and capture the idiosyncrasy of the case under scrutiny, and thus in turn makes it easier to find new angles in order to problematise the case. This seems to encourage theory development, but does it facilitate comparison? The dilemma alluded to in the beginning of this section could be brought to its head in the words of Sidney Verba: “Generalizations fade when we look at particular cases. We add intervening variable after intervening variable. Since the cases are few in number, we end up with an explanation tailored to each case” (Verba, 1976: 113). George’s solution is that the cases’ characteristics should be formulated in general terms (if seen as part of a theoretical framework) with the aim of explaining a certain class of phenomenon (George, 1979a: 46–47).

Where in the theory development is the research field of Swedish crisis management situated? Although some important efforts have been made in mapping out patterns in Swedish crisis management

⁷ Lijphart distinguishes between the following types of case studies: atheoretical case study, interpretative case study, hypothesis-generating case study, theory confirming and theory infirming case studies, and deviant case study. Eckstein distinguishes among: configurative-idiographic, disciplined-configurative, heuristic, plausibility probe, and crucial case studies. Lijphart does not designate a separate category for Eckstein’s “plausibility probe,” and Eckstein does not take Lijphart’s “deviant” case study into consideration.

(Stern and Bynander, 1998; Sundelius et al., 1997), the field is still in an embryonic stage. In Lijphart and Eckstein's language, the existing case studies could be located somewhere between "interpretative" (Lijphart)/ "disciplined-configurative" (Eckstein), and "hypothesis-generating" (Lijphart)/ "heuristic" (Eckstein) (see footnote seven above). The first category refers to cases that are described and analysed in terms of theoretically relevant general variables. The second aims at discerning important new general problems, identifying possible theoretical solutions, and formulating potentially generalisable relations that have not been previously apparent (George, 1979a: 51).

Given the nature of single case studies and the present position of the theory development, single case studies carried out in order to contribute to the theory development of Swedish crisis management seem to leave the door open to finding new explanatory factors (independent variables), which in fact significantly affect the dependent variable (outcome). A problem that arises is that of discerning the independent variables. Put differently, the above-mentioned conditions invite a number of specific questions, in addition to the general questions in the operationalisation of the study, which guide the data collection and analysis. The challenge is thus that of finding a balance between general and specific questions. Which these are will be discussed in the next section, but the procedure of selection is of methodological concern. New questions may be necessary to actually develop the present theory construction, but what will guide the research in partially new directions? George (1979a: 47) states, "Much depends upon the sensitivity and judgement of the investigator in choosing and conceptualizing his variables and also in deciding how best to describe the variance in each of his variables" (emphasis added). This author's sensitivity and judgement have directed attention above the Swedish horizon, and a few specific questions raised elsewhere, in similar crisis research efforts, have inspired this work (more on that below). Of course, this approach requires some previous knowledge both about the case in point and about the research area. Consequently, this report has been built up from the middle, beginning with a superficial data collection, which has been explored in depth when theoretical considerations have been examined.

A crucial part of this work has been devoted to tracing a process: to crystallise impetuses that have called for action, or non-action, on behalf of decision-makers (i.e. occasions for decision). This technique is highly related to the nature of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Decision-makers do not necessarily perceive a crisis episode as a crisis when it actually takes place. Rather, they have to handle a series of complex and difficult problems that from hindsight can be denoted as a crisis (Sundelius et al., 1997). The crisis concept is often viewed as being tantamount to “occasions for decision” (Snyder, Bruck and Sapin, 1962; Paige, 1968; Rosenthal, Hart and Charles, 1989).

As the ‘class’ or phenomenon in this study is Swedish crisis management, a method that captures the underlying reasons for different lines of action is required. Alexander George (1979b) suggests a process-tracing procedure, which aims at understanding the actors’ belief systems, or cognitions. However, “[this] leads us to expect that the influence of an actor’s beliefs is likely to be more weighty in determining his policy preferences – the option he prefers – than in determining the option he finally chooses” (Ibid: 104). Since actors who manage crises interact with and among different institutions, these settings are likely to affect, if not the belief systems, at least the decisions taken (or not) in the process. Hence, the process tracing directs focus on both cognitive and institutional matters. If it is true that crises of different kinds have a common denominator in that they can be described as occasions for decision, scrutinising this empirical body looks promising and supports the comparative ambition outlined above.

Getting into the metaphorical ‘black box’ of decision-making can however be problematic. Bovens and Hart (1996) highlight two difficulties in this regard. The first refers to the institutional complexity that is an inherent feature in complex policy situations. When trying to understand the institutional complexity, the task of identifying those members of an organisation formally (or de facto) capable of exerting some type of influence on the course of action might become more unclear the more one explores it. Since commonly a policy goes through many hands before it is actually adopt-

ed, one might even wonder if it is meaningful to trace the exact source of the policy process. The second problem is related to temporality (i.e. to reconstruct the causal chains in the decision-making process). The presumption is that an observer is likely to find different explanations depending on which points in time are considered to be crucial or not. The key question to clarify is thus, "Where does the reconstructive chain begin?" (Ibid: 60).

Unavoidably, the way the researcher chooses to cope with these difficulties has epistemological implications in terms of allocating blame or praise. This calls for attention on the investigator's data collection, for the process-tracing procedure requires a solid empirical body to be worthwhile (George, 1979b). Being interested in understanding the ways in which beliefs affect decision-makers' choices in an environment marked by institutional complexity, the process-tracing procedure is however a promising, or perhaps the most promising (Larson, 1994) way, the problems related to the researcher's subjective assessments notwithstanding. These problems can not be solved in this kind of research, but can be mitigated by at least being addressed.

To sum up, this single case study should be read as an implicit comparison. It aims at contributing to the development of the emerging theory construction in Swedish crisis management by way of scrutinising the decision-making process regarding the management of the murder of Olof Palme during the two months succeeding the event. The fact that the independent variables (or general questions) are not fixed, but rather complemented by some specific questions, ensures that the idiosyncrasies of the case are captured. On the other hand, the relationship between the independent variables and the outcome (the dependent variable) becomes somewhat uncertain. This predicament is however related to the underlying belief that this research benefits more from being developable than testable.

An important question on a meta-theoretical level is whether or not the probabilistic and suggestive outcome to be expected from this kind of research can be defined as 'good' science. That depends, of course, on the reader's scientific conceptions. This author's ideas in this regard are to be made explicit.

Case studies in all are generally conceived as being a qualitative way to produce science, which essentially belongs to the hermeneu-

tic or phenomenological school of thought. Focus is here centred on a type or class, and the aim can be described in terms of description, discovery and hypothesis generation. The researcher is the main tool in collecting data, and her sensitivity to contextual matters makes her not only an observer, but also a participator of the observations. The analysis is inductive and the researcher seeks to find a theory that can explain the collected information. The results are holistic and developable. If the opposing, neo-empiricist, school of thought should be strained in the same way, research focus could be explained in terms of quantities (how many, how much), and the aim in terms of prediction, control and theory testing. The data collector is not a 'living' instrument, e.g. a computer work-up. The analysis is deductive and the results are precise and reductional (Merriam, 1994: 32). Scholars who nurse the neo-empiricist tradition are prone to avert from single case studies, because of the alleged difficulties in establishing causalities between independent and dependent variables and in testing theories (notably King, Keohane and Verba,⁸ 1994).

However, most scholars do not identify themselves with either of these 'caricatures'; they are rather methodologically eclectic and place themselves somewhere in between, with a more or less accentuated hermeneutic or neo-empiricist preponderance (Mörth, 1996: 462). This research effort lends much from the hermeneutic school, by which the choice of research problem, aim, methodological techniques and theoretical framework indicates. An ontological standpoint, when studying decision-making and focusing on micro settings, is that the world, or reality, is a mental construction and consequently, as an epistemological function, the researcher and the researched are mutually interdependent. The scientific virtue of intersubjectivity can thus not be met in a strict sense. To mitigate this circumstance, an ambition throughout the paper has been to be explicit about methodological reflections, concepts and analytical considerations. For some degree of intellectual communicability is needed if this single case study shall be of any use in the effort to develop

⁸ One of the ideas in King et al.'s book is that there is no principal difference between a qualitative and a quantitative method: "Our view is that these differences are mainly ones of style and specific technique. The same underlying logic provides the framework for each research approach" (King et al., 1994: 3). This is, however, a clear-cut neo-empiricist posture in the meta-theoretical discourse. King et al. never discuss the hermeneutic research tradition.

theories and contribute to the knowledge base in Swedish crisis management. George's method of structured, focused comparison comprises an inherent logic that claims a somewhat modified, less stringent posture towards neo-empiricist ideals on causalities between independent and dependent variables. This work strives to be one brick in the Swedish crisis management theory building wall, which in its prolongation will hopefully provide useful patterns, although not laws, of this phenomenon.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This section will begin with a brief survey of the recent trends in the research area of crisis management, from which the cognitive-institutional approach is an offspring and to which it is a contribution. Thereafter a discussion and clarification of the crisis definition will be outlined, and, from there, the general and specific questions that have guided the in-depth data collection and analysis will be explored.

1.4.1 RECENT TRENDS IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

As insinuated above, meta-theoretical standpoints tend to be inter-related with the research scope. Crisis management and crises were long seen as an antithetical research area, not suitable for positivist ambitions to discriminate conformities to laws in domestic politics or international relations. When crises were on the research agenda of security policy, focus was often centred on nuclear crises and brinkmanship events, such as the Cuban missile crisis (notably Allison, 1971). Consequently, the crisis notion was related to foreign enemies, sudden assaults and the like. This narrow conception does not easily embrace multifaceted phenomena like disasters and calamities, conflict and turmoil, revolt and revolution, riots and terrorism (Rosenthal, Comfort and Boin, forthcoming); perennial societal hardships that manifest in all parts of the world and that do not respect national borders. In the Post-Cold War world, when military threats are challenged at the top of security policy agendas (Buzan, 1991), the military-centred notion of crisis has lost momentum. Scholars have increasingly opened their eyes to the idea that crises

are not always necessarily military-oriented and have effects on entities that are not necessarily tantamount to the nation-state. Research efforts in this tradition have now concentrated in exploring and understanding the scope and nature of crises, and crisis management is now viewed through a multidisciplinary lens with a pragmatic ambition (notably Rosenthal et al., 1989). Some angles which have been focused on are 1) the object of the basic threat, which ranges from the well-being of citizens to basic structures of institutions within social and political life: 2) the domain of threat from the local level to the international: and 3) the origins of threat, which could be viewed as either endogenous or exogenous to the system affected (Ibid: 12–13). This kind of crisis research has gained momentum lately, not the least because of its policy relevancy in several parts of the world where military threats are no longer perceived as pending, but in any event where the sense of security has not increased. Capturing crises in this broader sense requires a widening of the theoretical framework and research efforts in other disciplines than just international relations gain momentum as well. Once in the ‘black box’ of critical decision-making, achievements in psychology, organisation theory, political science, sociology and so on contribute by shedding light on the different constituents of the crisis process (Ibid.).

1.4.2 THE COGNITIVE-INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH

The emerging theory on Swedish crisis management owes much to the multidisciplinary, pragmatic scholars that have taken the forefront in the study of crisis management. The cognitive-institutional approach outlined by Sundelius et al. (1997) gave a foothold in the ambition to explaining a line of action. In doing so, research related to cognitions and social psychology, institutional analysis, organisational theory and cybernetics have been deemed fruitful (Ibid: 48–50).

The cognitive pillar departs from the element of the human being in the crisis process. For the analyst, it becomes crucial to get in to the individual decision-makers’ mind settings and to understand how they interpret the world in a given moment. The human mind is limited and selective when it comes to dealing with complex and controversial information, especially when important values are at

stake (Janis, 1982). When information is missing or uncertain, decision-makers might fill the gap with what their mental schemes allow, e.g. historical analogies (Khong, 1992), or other cognitive 'shortcuts'. The question of why a person interprets the world in a specific way can thus be broken into pieces, which take the analysis a step beyond the behaviourist stimulus – response model (Stern, 1999/2001). Beside these 'cold' cognitions, interest is also focused on 'hot' cognitions, such as motivation and emotion. These forces have proved to have a significant effect on the information processing, and hence on the crisis management performance (Bovens and Hart, 1996). The notion of stress also has a fruitful explanatory potential in this regard. A low stress factor tends to have a negative impact on decision-making. The quality of the performance increases as the stress level augments, up to a certain point. When the stress factor goes beyond the optimal peak, the decision performance decreases (Holsti, 1989: 25–37; Stern, 1999/2001).

The institutional pillar relies essentially in 'neo-institutionalism'. Focus is centred primarily on meso-level social formations, such as groups, networks and organisations. Empirical data seem to suggest that these formations occupy important positions in critical decision-making (Allison, 1971; Janis, 1982; Rosenthal et al., 1989; Sundelius et al., 1997). Neo-institutionalists are concerned with the pervasiveness of rules, roles and routines, particularly in modern governmental apparatus (March and Olsen, 1989). The teleologically defined purposes of these formations need to be complemented with insights in how they interact and interpret their roles in real life. An underlying belief is that the explanation of the management of an actual crisis gains much from acknowledging historical and political contexts. Decisions taken by predecessors may influence and restrain ongoing policy making processes. Also factors such as clashing organisational cultures and personal antagonisms may reveal why a given crisis was managed in the way it was. Cognitivist as well as neo-institutional approaches emphasise the role of subjectivity in interpretation and policy problem framing (Stern, 1999/2001).

With these theoretical frames, Sundelius et al. have analysed three Swedish crises: the U137 'Whiskey on the rocks' case (1981), the Swedish reaction to nuclear pollution from the Chernobyl meltdown (1986), and the currency crisis (1992). They found the signifi-

cance of group dynamics was of specific concern to Swedish circumstances, especially small group dynamics. This explanatory factor weaves together the importance of the individual with that of the bureaucratic complexity. Individual peculiarities affect the working group in different ways and the small group is a forum where organisational rivals confront each other. In the Swedish political culture, the value of reaching decisions through group deliberations (instead of through executive leadership) is often stressed. Besides, the Swedish administrative machinery, or the chancellery, is not such an enormous apparatus, as is the case in other countries (i.e. the Superpowers, which have dominated the focus in crisis research) (Ibid: 49).

It should be observed that this grip to approaching critical decision-making is not new; it falls back on the early works of Snyder, Bruck and Sapin (1962)⁹, Paige (1968) and George (1979a, b) among others. They have striven to capture the determinants of action in a holistic sense. Snyder et al. (1962: 105), “The important assumption we are making is that the three major determinants of action in the system are spheres of competence, communications and information, and motivation”. The first concept calls attention to the organisational aspects of decision-making, the second to the kinds of information considered by the decision-makers and to the process by which it is transmitted and received. By motivation is meant “a psychological state of the actor in which energy is mobilized and directed towards aspects of the setting” (Ibid: 140), that is, psychological explanations to a decision-making performance. See also George (1979b: 104), cited in the previous section. Richard Ned Lebow (1981: 335) captures the core of the problem:

Successful crisis management is therefore a function of cultural, organizational, and personal behavioral patterns established long before the onset of any crisis. These patterns and the expectations they create largely determine the performance of a system in crisis.

⁹This article was first published by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin (1954) “Decision Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics.” *Foreign Policy Analysis*. Series no. 3. Princeton University.

The cognitive-institutional approach can thus be positioned in this research tradition, but it does not focus uniquely on crises as a part of foreign policy decision-making in warlike situations, which was the case for the pioneers. As noted above, crises are understood in a wider sense.

1.4.3 THE CHALLENGE OF DEFINING CRISES

How, then, should a crisis be defined? What are its constituents? As the study of crises has transformed, a need for a more comprehensive crisis definition has developed. A pioneering contribution to the process-tracing research at hand is Charles Hermann's (1963) definition, which put focus on the subjective elements surprise, limited time for decision-making and questioning of primary goals. There is, however, a lack of complete agreement regarding a definition of crisis, even among those who have adopted the decision-making perspective. A common denominator, Holsti (1989: 12) suggests, is the concept of crises as being marked by a severe threat to important values and that time for coping with the threat is finite. Sundelius et al. (1997: 13) define a crisis as a situation which the central actors interpret as 1) important values are threatened, 2) limited time is available, and 3) the circumstances are marked by a great deal of uncertainty. This open definition leaves room for threats that are not necessarily of military nature, and thus embraces a variety of societal strains.¹⁰

How well does the present case fit into this definition? The murder of Olof Palme is a clear-cut case of a severe strain on society, which dramatically changed the prerequisites for the realms of politics. Few would argue that the Palme assassination should not be a part of the Swedish crisis management theory and knowledge base construct. It is therefore important to bring the characteristics of the crisis to the fore. The crisis definition provided by Sundelius et al. could arguably be valid for the first hectic hours immediately following the shooting, if the crisis were to be viewed from the worst-

¹⁰ To be compared with the definition provided by Rosenthal et al. (1989, 10): "...a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a social system, which – under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances – necessitates making critical decisions."

case perspective. The important value at stake was, or at least could have been, the sovereignty of the country. As long as the perpetrator was unknown, the entire purpose and its possible implications were embedded in a great deal of uncertainty. However, the perception of the worst-case scenario soon faded out, and transformed into an agonisingly fruitless hunt for the assassin. In this respect, the Palme case has a common denominator with the 1982 Hårsfjärden submarine incident (see Bynander, 1998). The Swedish Navy had to compel a submarine to the surface in order to save face and its credibility in front of the gathered world press and Swedish taxpayers. In the backwater of that crisis episode, a credibility gap between the authoritative agency (the Navy) and the public was the only thing that was actually brought to the surface. In a similar way, the misleading ‘main leads’ in the hunt for Palme’s murderer produced the same effect (although, the police was the authoritative agency in the Palme case). One might argue that the outcome of this initial, acute crisis turned into a policy fiasco, which hit (or risked hitting) the credibility of the state as governed by law. Bovens and Hart (1996: 15) define a policy fiasco as follows:

A policy fiasco is a negative event that is perceived by a socially and politically significant group of people in the community to be at least partially caused by avoidable and blameworthy failures of public policymakers.

Of course, the term ‘fiasco’ signifies different things for different participants in debates about negative events and controversial policy episodes. An interesting feature is however the shift in focus of perceptions, from the crisis as defined by decision-makers to a policy fiasco as defined by an ambiguously defined public. It should be made clear that the decision-makers, and their perceptions, are of interest in this study. It is, however, important to bring in the concept of policy fiasco as an explanatory factor to what induced the decision-makers’ feelings of stress and urgency. The notion of accountability shed some light on this attribute. “The price of power and authority is responsibility, no matter what. The role of leader entails bearing the cost of failure” (Vertzberger, 1990: 361). It also explains the change of the perceived values at stake. When the im-

mediate threat to life and limb could be dismissed, subtler values such as organisational *raison d'être* and credibility in front of different publics were manifest. In the long run, a public distrust in a state's authoritative agencies risks eroding the inhabitants' confidence in the state governed by law.

In conclusion, to capture one of the most prominent idiosyncrasies of this crisis requires an understanding of its open-endedness, and how this in turn impacted the crisis criteria urgency and threat of values. Unlike the U137 case, where the period between the moment when its intrusion was known until the moment where it had left Swedish territorial water can be denoted a crisis, the murder of Prime Minister Palme consists only of a clear starting point. Arguably, exploring a somewhat differing crisis typology is one step in the contribution to theory building in Swedish crisis management. In fact, an individual crisis's characteristics propel the search for theoretically useful cornerstones, which support the general and specific questions that guide the in-depth data collection and analysis. The remainder of this section will be preoccupied with this concern.

1.4.4 GENERAL AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS THAT HAVE GUIDED THE IN-DEPTH DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

It might be worth reiterating that the general and specific questions that have guided the data collection and analysis are related to the comparative ambition discussed above. Hence, they do not pretend to reveal everything there is to say about the crisis management during the two first months succeeding the murder of Olof Palme. The general questions are those that have been used and analysed in previous studies of Swedish crisis management (i.e., in Sundelius et al., 1997). The specific ones are related to the idiosyncrasy of the prevailing case. In that respect, the international literature on crisis management has been the source of inspiration.

Sundelius et al. highlight ten aspects of their crises, of which four did not seem to be prominent in this case: Political compro-

mise,¹¹ negotiation games,¹² multilateralisation,¹³ and sequencing and synchronicity.¹⁴

Of the six themes developed in this survey, one is specific, namely symbolic crisis communication. This aspect has been touched upon in studies of Swedish crises (Grönvall and Löfgren in Stern et al.,¹⁵ 1998), but has not been analysed with the intention to widen the theoretical framework outlined by Sundelius et al. The five others are general, as they have already proved fruitful when analysing Swedish crisis management patterns. Below, the six aspects are presented thematically, in order of appearance in the analysis. The first one is a consolidation of two of Sundelius et al.'s themes, i.e. decision-making units and leadership.

Organisation of Crisis Response. This theme encompasses questions regarding decisional units and leadership implications. Who was included in or excluded from pivotal decision-making units? To what extent was this errand centralised/decentralised? And why? How did the government affect the crisis management?

Problem Definition. In the cases scrutinised by Sundelius et al., the way the problems were initially framed had a crucial impact on how they were later managed. Strategically placed individuals who took quick initiatives, without previously consulting other decision-makers or experts took the initiative. When Palme was murdered, several societal bodies had to adjust to this situation, and one of the most important ones, the police, changed leadership after the first night. Of importance is thus to see how different authorities reacted to the news of Palme's death, who took the initiative to define the

¹¹ Sometimes political disagreements about the way a crisis should be handled affect its management, but no such traits were evident in the prevailing case.

¹² Negotiation games involve the capability to manage interactions with external actors (abstract or heterogeneous) with the objective to gain control over the situation. No such actors were involved in this crisis.

¹³ Occasionally, crisis managers try to mobilise international actors to defend their own interests. In this case, US and West German police experts were consulted and diplomatic channels were opened, but not for this purpose.

¹⁴ Sequencing refers to the interrelationship between the occasions for decision. This aspect would be interesting to scrutinise in depth in another study. Synchronicity has to do with competing problems which have to be dealt with simultaneously as the prevailing crisis and hence affect the crisis management. Such competing problems did not affect the crisis management of the murder of Olof Palme during the period studied here.

¹⁵ The volume edited by Stern and Bynander (1998) contains eight case studies, of which six scrutinise Swedish crises from a cognitive-institutional perspective. Löfgren (Swedish Public Actors' Management of Hostage Crises Abroad) touches upon mass media implications, and Grönvall (The Mad Cow Crisis) discusses mass media issues and symbolism. However, these are not elaborated upon or commented in the conclusion, and thus not utilised to developing the theory in that direction.

problem and how it was re-framed when the acute phase of the crisis was over.

Organisational Co-operation and Conflict. Swedish experiences reveal that potential organisational conflicts are often avoided early on in a crisis, by way of governmental allocation and sanctioning responsibility to a certain agency. The agency that takes the first initiative is then likely to get the preferential right of interpretation. Examples from the international arena indicate that crises, more often than not, trigger organisational conflicts, that clearly hamper the crisis management (Rosenthal, Hart and Kouzmin, 1991). Sweden has been relatively spared from such negative implications that an organisational profile pursuit can imply, which possibly has to do with a culturally based concurrence-seeking atmosphere. In the prevailing study, several police organisations and the Prosecution Authority were involved in the hunt for the murderer. Their interrelationship and intrarelationship is of pertinence in this respect.

Information Management. As Snyder et al. (1962) pointed out, the way information is processed in a crisis situation has a large impact on the quality of the decision-making process. After all, pieces of information are what the decision-makers analyse. It is, however, difficult to discern an unambiguous Swedish pattern in how information has been managed. Sundelius et al. see a tendency that seems to suggest that the information channels that are used in 'business as usual' situations are relied upon as much as possible even in stressful events. The channels that have been used for collecting information and how these affected the crisis management are thus of interest, but also the way information has been processed between the organisations directly involved in the crisis management.

Symbolic Crisis Communication. This topic is considered to be specific. The analytical section will be divided into three subsections. The first is 'crisis communication and media relations'. The point of departure is the idea that failure to maintain constructive media relations is likely to promote faultfinding and impose legitimacy costs. The converse – that positive media relations tend to be associated with a forgiving rather than a faultfinding posture – is also important in regards to the media related aspects of crisis management. The second subtheme is 'crisis communication and framing'. Crisis communication, which heightens media and public expectations, is likely to promote faultfinding and impose legitimacy

costs if subsequent performance does not measure up. In this respect, rituals of reassurance (Hart, 1993), which has to do with decision-makers' need to communicate an image of being in control, are interesting to relate to public and media reactions. The last aspect is 'psycho-symbolic dramaturgy'. To the extent that crises are perceived as posing an unredressed assault on core symbolic values of the polity, there is an increased likelihood of both faultfinding and enduring psycho-political trauma. Such events often provoke a need for rituals of solidarity (Hart, 1993) and a need for redress. How the central actors coped with this problematic in the Palme case will be elaborated and discussed.

Use of History and Learning. When crises occur, decision-makers are prone to base their strategies on past experiences which have similar features. Up until the Palme murder no premier had been killed in Sweden, so it would be interesting to see if other historical analogies have been used to analyse the prevailing situation (e.g. the Kennedy assassination). Crises are also instigators of change. When seized with misgivings, decision-makers are urged to perform better in the future. New perceptions of the order of things might call for adjustments in the present working procedures, and for some, crises can be 'windows of opportunities' (Kingdon, 1995), which serve to advocate reform. What was learnt from the Palme murder in this sense will be investigated.

In sum, these questions regarding the Palme murder indicate what there is to expect from the analysis chapter. They are meant to refine and develop the emerging theory on Swedish crisis management. The open-ended nature of the crisis (i.e. that it implied a 'crisis after the crisis') bears with it the traits of a policy fiasco, which in turn affected the degree of manoeuvrability for the stakeholders. This is hoped to be captured in the section on symbolic crisis communication.

1.5 Sources

The ambition to capture and depict a historical event involves, to say the least, great responsibility. As the murder of Palme still has not been officially concluded, it is still a rather inflamed topic. Stakeholders have differing opinions on what really happened and on why the investigation went astray. Any attempt to write a histor-

ical account of these fateful months is therefore likely to be questioned. In order to enable the reader to form an opinion on the reliability of this account, the sources that it has been based upon will be brought to the fore and discussed. A general comment is that the data collection began with a mass media coverage: televised broadcasts and newspaper articles from Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter. Thereafter, official documentation and personal memoirs from those involved were scrutinised. Then, near the end, after a general overview had been constructed, eight interviews were carried out. Below, these clusters of sources will be discussed.

As a tool for obtaining an overall grip of the course of events, the mass media coverage was useful in a superficial sense. Of greater importance were public statements made by the decision-makers, who expressed distrust or tried to invoke reliance. Press conferences or televised interviews are then more reliable than written sources, since the risk of misinterpretation on behalf of the journalist is largely diminished. Of course, the editorial staff for the televised news broadcast has the power to select certain parts of a press conference, which can consequently minimise the impressions demonstrated by the decision-makers. Nevertheless, their statements are real and authentic.

Already in May 1986, the Jurist Commission started to collect data for their two reports (SOU 1987:14; SOU 1987:72). They reconstructed the course of events by way of interviewing no less than 178 people who, in one way or another, had been involved in the management of the murder. The number of interviewees and the relative approximation in time render their descriptions trustworthy. In March 1987, a Parliamentary Commission (SOU 1988:18) was set up with a somewhat more future-oriented purpose. They relied essentially on the historical account provided by the Jurist Commission, but complemented a few parts that had been unclear, and discussed the issues that had flourished in the press (e.g., the exact minute that the police had been alerted and when they actually arrived at the scene of the crime). Their investigation corroborated the findings made by the Jurist Commission. In August 1988, the government commissioned the county governor of Jönköping, Gösta Gunnarsson, to scrutinise the menacing picture against and security apparatus around Palme (SOU 1989:1). Gunnarsson had access to the classified files of concern from Säpo (the Security Department of

the National Police Board). He was mainly concerned with the potential threat that the PKK might have constituted. These official reports have not passed unchallenged, but they were based on material that very few others had access to, for good and bad. In this essay, they have mainly been used for the chronological and the contextual chapters. The first occasion for decision, which was the night of the murder, has been mainly based on SOU 1987:14, since it has been difficult to find more comprehensive sources for that night.

As the core part of this study is preoccupied with a process-tracing effort, the chapters on the occasions for decision and analysis rely mostly on interviews, memoirs, a personal report (Svensson, 1 September 1986), and transcripts from hearings conducted by the Parliament's Standing Committee on the Constitution (KU) with the people involved. These sources all reflect very personal and individual opinions, which benefits the purpose of capturing the decision-makers' beliefs. However, some disadvantages and advantages concerning their reliability should be addressed.

The interviews took place nearly 13 years after the murder, which could considerably affect their reliability negatively. Although the murder of Palme is a point of reference for a large part of the Swedish society and even more so for the people involved in the management of it, memory tends to be less and less detailed over the years. Dates, persons and events can easily be mixed up. Moreover, as new evidence and prerequisites have emerged, the stories told by the interviewees run the risk of being adjusted so that they are seen in a more favourable light. On the other hand, most of them are retired and thus not restrained by their professional positions. Another factor that lends to the reliability of their accounts is their centrality to the decision-making process. Hans Holmér, who headed the police investigation, was interviewed, as well as his second man, Hans Wranghult, the head of the Stockholm Criminal Division. Interviewed from the National Police Board was the head of the Criminal Division, Tommy Lindström. In the managerial group that was formed shortly after the murder, two 'observers' from the Ministry of Justice participated, and one of whom, Klas Bergenstrand, belongs to the interviewed group. From the judicial side, the Chief Prosecutor, K-G Svensson, and the Prosecutor General, Magnus Sjöberg, both lent their time to this survey. It was harder to per-

suade people from the political establishment to participate. Both Ingvar Carlsson, the Premier who succeeded Palme, and Sten Wickbom, the Minister of Justice at the time, declined interviews that, admittedly, is a weakness for this study. Ulf Dahlsten, Ingvar Carlsson's Under-Secretary of State, responded to some e-mail questions and an interview was carried out with Palme's press secretary, Kjell Lindström. The interviewees were (and to some extent still are), for the most part, stakeholders and representatives from different (sometimes competing) organisations and agencies, which made it difficult to avert the possibility of the bias in their judgements. This circumstance calls for prudence, not only on behalf of the author, but also on behalf of the reader. A last point about the interviews, they were carried out in an unorganised fashion. That is, no standardised questionnaire was used; their character was rather discursive and the interviewees had the opportunity to highlight the features that they found most pertinent. Of course, some questions had been prepared in advance but they served more as a sort of checklist and were used as points for departure in the discussions.

The murder of Palme has nursed an abundance of more or less imaginative literature, of which quite a few were consumed by this author. However, only three have served as sources for this report, namely the memoirs of Holmér (1988) and Ingemar Krusell (1998) (who entered the post of the deputy to the head of the investigation after the Holmér era, and who was engaged by the managerial group a few weeks after the assassination), and the documentary novel by Ann-Marie Åsheden (1987). The latter, a journalist from *Dagens Nyheter*, got permission to meet with Holmér 30 minutes a day during the three first months, to document the proceedings of the investigation. They all provided a narrow description regarding the working conditions and the atmosphere inside the managerial group. To some extent, Holmér (1988) and Åsheden (1987) mitigate the time difference limitations that the interviews suffered from.

Another empirical body that served the last-mentioned purpose were the hearings with the standing committee on the constitution (KU 1986/87:33), that took place between March 3 and 31, 1987. In chronological order, K-G Svensson, Magnus Sjöberg, Hans Holmér, Sten Wickbom, and Ingvar Carlsson were heard. The personal report from K-G Svensson (1 September 1986) can also be seen in this light. Carlsson and Wickbom have, as mentioned be-

fore, not been interviewed, which render their participation in KU highly valuable. Of course, one has to be cautious about the fact that the hearings in the KU is a part of the political arena, and that both the questioners and respondents articulated themselves very carefully.

2. Context

2.1 *General 'Givens'*

No crises occur in a vacuum, as perceived by decision-makers. Conceptions of the surrounding world, recent history and internal settings (i.e. the prevailing political and administrative scene) have an impact on how a crisis is managed. Paige (1968: 8–9) stresses the importance that the analyst portrays the general developments and trends in order to capture the ‘givens’ of the decision-making process in question. The objective of this chapter is to depict some of these ‘givens’, which are most prominent in order to understand the context in which this crisis was managed. In this respect, focus will be centred on the deliberately open Swedish society, the perceived threat picture and Olof Palme’s standpoints on personal security matters.

The murder of Olof Palme is not just an important turning point and point of reference in the Swedish contemporary history. It is more of a watershed that separates the ‘before’ from the ‘after’, which makes it difficult to relate to the ‘before’ without defining it in terms of the implications of the murder (i.e. the ‘after’). One recurrent theme in discussions about how the Swedish society changed as a consequence of the murder is its lost innocence; the lost illusion of Sweden as being a safe corner of the world and of being a relatively open society in the sense that statesmen could walk about unprotected. In fact, Sweden has been spared from the drama of assaults on Swedish statesmen for over 200 years, the last being when Anckarström shot King Gustav III at the Opera House in Stockholm on March 16, 1792. However now, two centuries later, Sweden and the surrounding world look dramatically different. Persons in high political positions do not normally appear in public without bodyguards.

The phenomenon of international terrorism has been well known in Sweden, and has demonstrated its grim face even in this part of the world a few times since the beginning of the seventies. The sensational murder of John F. Kennedy left no one unaffected, and pointed to the vulnerability of prominent persons in public offices as being targets for malefactors.

Nevertheless, Sweden was relatively open in the eighties. It was just in the fall of 1982 that Säpo contacted Olof Palme to discuss his personal security. According to Sven-Åke Hjälmsroth, the head of Säpo, he did not accept of personal bodyguards until the early part of 1983 (DN, 2 March 1986: 9). Olof Palme was keen on safeguarding his integrity and made sure he maintained a private sphere. “[This conception] derived from his philosophy of how a democracy should work” Holger Romander, the Director General of the National Police Board, said (Ibid.). A trait of fatalism seems to have nursed the illusion of safety, at least in regards to the public image. Of more vital interest to this context is perhaps the assessed threat picture directed towards Palme and the government at that time.

When Gösta Gunnarsson presented his official report on the threat picture against and security apparatus around Olof Palme (SOU 1989:1, p. 7), he began with the following lines:

In my assessment whether or not any concrete threats against Olof Palme prevailed in the time preceding the murder, I begin by stating that any circumstances of such kind, that it was obvious that his safety was endangered, did not prevail.¹⁶

When Sven-Åke Hjälmsroth was interviewed on March 1, the day after the murder, his conclusion was the same (SVT, 1 March 1986). Gunnarsson had taken part of Säpo’s files regarding this concern, and his findings confirmed Hjälmsroth’s statement.

For some reason, the Croatian Separatist movement, which had been behind the murder of the Yugoslavian ambassador to Stockholm in 1971 (HDP), played a certain role during the night of the murder and a few years thereafter. Miro Baresic, who had been convicted for having killed the ambassador and served a lifetime sentence outside Stockholm, had repeatedly plead the government to change the lifetime sentence to a time-limited one. The government had denied these requests, but in the fall of 1985, his wish was accepted and his sentence was limited to 18 years. Olof Palme was troubled with this decision, as he believed that Baresic was capable

¹⁶ The author has translated this citation and others in this study which were originally written in Swedish.

and motivated to seek revenge on him personally (SOU 1999:88, pp. 449–556). Lisbet Palme had apparently been informed of Olof's fears, which she communicated to the police during the night of the murder (Tommy Lindström, 1998). However on this night, Baresic was behind bars.

According to Hjälmsroth, Säpo recommended protection whenever Palme appeared in public. His aversion to constant protection led however to an arrangement where he informed Säpo of his plans, which he normally did, but not on Friday night, February 28 (DN, 2 March 1986: 9). It was up to the government in power to decide upon the security arrangements and the degree of police involvement, and Romander noticed that the social democratic government had chosen a lower degree of personal protection than its liberal predecessor had (Ibid.).

Crises tend to occur at very inconvenient moments. This one was no exception. The assassination took place in the middle of the night between Friday and Saturday, during the last weekend of the winter school holiday. A great number of people were on vacation and thus unreachable, including the vital decision-makers.

2.2 *List of Crisis Managers*

In order to facilitate for the reader, some, though not all, of the actors that appear frequently in this paper will be presented below in alphabetical order, by their names, with their Swedish title and the respective English translation.

Crisis Manager	Swedish title	English title
Carlsson, Ingvar	Vice statsminister/ statsminister	Vice Prime Minister/ Premier
Dahlsten, Ulf	Statssekreterare, regeringskansliet	Under-Secretary of State
Hjälmsroth, Sven-Åke	Chef, Säpo	Head – Säpo
Holmér, Hans	Stockholms länspolis­mästare	District Police Commissioner
Lindström, Kjell	Pressekreterare, regeringskansliet	Press Secretary – Chancellery
Lindström, Tommy	Chef, Rikskriminalen	Head – National Criminal Div.

Crisis Manager	Swedish title	English title
Romander, Holger	Rikspolischef	DG of the National Police Board
Sjöberg, Magnus	Riksåklagare	Prosecutor General ¹⁷
Svensson, K-G	Chefsåklagare	Chief Prosecutor
Wickbom, Sten	Justitieminister	Minister of Justice
Wranghult, Hans	Chef, Stockholmskriminalen	Head – Stockholm Criminal Div.
Zeime, Claes	Överåklagare, Sthlms åklagarmynd.	Director – Stockholm Office of the Public Prosecutor

¹⁷ Not to be mixed up with the Attorney General (Rikskanslern) Bengt Hamdahl, who also appears in this book.

3. Course of Events – An Overview

3.1 *The First Twelve Hours*¹⁸

- At 11:21 p.m.¹⁹ Olof Palme was shot. Two riot squads were sent to the scene of the crime. The alarm central of the administrative province, LAC (Länsalarmeringscentralen) ordered an ambulance to be sent off at 11:24 p.m. At the same time LAC sent a message to the Swedish Central News Agency (TT) stating that there had been a shooting on Sveavägen. A police patrol headed by Gösta Söderström was stopped and alerted by a taxi driver that had heard a colleague's conversation over the taxi radio. Söderström's patrol was the first to arrive at the scene. An ambulance had passed by and had picked up Olof and Lisbet Palme, and took them to Sabbatsberg's Hospital (SOU 1988:18, 36).
- At about 11:30 p.m., Söderström announced that the person who had been shot was the Prime Minister and the radio traffic was directed to a special channel. Within ten minutes, some ten police patrols started searching the surrounding area.
- At 11:30 p.m. a journalist called the Press Secretary of the Cabinet Office, Kjell Lindström, to inform him that Olof Palme had been shot.
- At 11:40 p.m. a tipster called TT and claimed that the one who had been shot was the Prime Minister. A journalist (possibly the tipster) called the radio operator at the communication centre of Säpo at this time to get some information about the incident, but the radio operator did not know anything about it.
- The police commissioner on duty, Göran Hansén, was informed at about 11:45 p.m. by the police communication centre. He tried to contact the District Police Commissioner, Hans Holmér, but he was on vacation in Borlänge, and could not be reached (Holmér, 1988).

¹⁸ This section is, if not otherwise stated, based on the first report of the Jurist Commission, SOU 1987: 14.

¹⁹ At this time a witness called the emergency services telephone hotline.

- The doctors verified that Olof Palme was dead at 12:06 a.m. When Dahlsten was informed of this, he called Lindström and Ingvar Carlsson, the Vice-Prime Minister, and the latter asked Dahlsten to assemble a quorum.
- At 12:15 a.m. TT got the information about the shooting and death of Palme confirmed. At 12:20 a.m. TT sent a newsflash with the text “Olof Palme död” (Olof Palme dead).
- The official on duty at the National Police Board (Criminal Division), Christer Sjöberg was informed at 12:25 a.m. and he contacted the Director General of the National Police Board, Holger Romander.
- Sandström and Welander (the Deputy District Police Commissioner) arrived at the police headquarters at about 12:30 a.m. Welander then took charge of the police efforts.
- Ingvar Carlsson arrived at the Cabinet Office at 12:45 a.m. by taxi. After 1:00 a.m. several members of the Cabinet arrived at Rosenbad. Many of them came by taxi.
- The officer on guard at the military headquarters received a call from the military attaché in Washington at 1:15 a.m., who wanted the rumours of the Palme killing confirmed. The officer on guard did not know anything about the murder as of yet.
- The Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces, Lennart Ljung, was informed at his home at 1:30 a.m. by the officer on guard at the military headquarters.
- Just before 2 a.m., Welander ordered that a nationwide alert be sent out, which it was at 2:05 a.m. Welander was then on his way to Sabbatsberg’s Hospital.
- The Cabinet held a meeting, which began at 3:07 a.m. at Rosenbad. Thirteen members were gathered from the start. Welander and Hjälmsjö informed about the police efforts.
- A correction of the nationwide alert was sent out at 5:06 a.m., ordered by Welander.
- The Cabinet held a press conference beginning at 5:15 a.m.
- Hans Holmér found out about the murder at his hotel in Borlänge, early on Saturday morning. Once in Stockholm, at about 10:50 a.m. the same morning, he took charge of the search for the murderer (Holmér, 1988).

- The Parliament Speaker arrived at Arlanda at about 11:00 a.m. He went directly to the parliament where he dismissed the Cabinet and at the same time asked the members to keep their offices in a caretaker government.

3.2 March 1 to May 1, 1986²⁰

- March 1: During the first days of March, a managerial group was set up within the police force. The Chief Prosecutor, K-G Svensson, was given the task of accomplishing all of the duties associated with that of a prosecutor. The Executive Committee of the Social Democratic party gathered and decided to nominate Ingvar Carlsson, the Vice Prime Minister, to be Palme's successor (DN, 2 March 1986: 11).
- March 2: The Cabinet and the managerial group decided to have Baresic's telephone tapped, without sanctioning this decision with the Chief Prosecutor.
- March 6: A composite picture that was based on a witness's observations was handed out to the media for publishing. On that day, suspicions were directed towards a 33-year-old man. K-G Svensson took charge of the investigation of the suspect.
- March 12: The 33-year-old was informed that he was suspected of being involved in the murder. K-G Svensson decided to take him into custody. The Swedish Parliament, Riksdagen, voted in Ingvar Carlsson as the new Prime Minister (DN, 13 March 1986: 8).
- March 15: Palme's funeral took place in Stockholm's City Hall. Some hundred guests were invited.
- March 17: K-G Svensson handed in a detention order regarding the 33-year-old. The court proceedings were scheduled to begin on March 20.
- March 19: When preparing for the court proceedings, the prosecutors found out that the police had carried out the investigation in an incorrect manner, and consequently Svensson decided to withdraw the detention order and set the suspect free.

²⁰ If not otherwise stated, this section is based on the second report of the Jurist Commission, SOU 1987:72.

- March 20: Holmér visited Claes Zeime (the Director of Stockholm's Prosecution Authority) and asked him to take over Svensson's post as prosecutor. Zeime officially declined the offer the following day and thus, in this case, Svensson remained in his post as prosecutor.
- March 22: At a private dinner, the Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice (Harald Fälth) told the Prosecutor General (Magnus Sjöberg) that co-operation problems existed between the prosecutors and the police.
- April 16: Via the tabloid Expressen, Wickbom announced that he wanted a commission to scrutinise the search for Palme's murderer (Expressen, 16 April 1986: 14).
- April 25: Svensson received a list from the police containing 74 witnesses, whom the police thought should participate in a line-up with the 33-year-old in connection with the final hearing on April 28.
- April 28: The final hearing and line-ups with the 33-year-old took place. Svensson decided that 11 more witnesses should be included in additional line-ups with the suspect the following day. In the evening, the Prosecutor General decided to overrule Svensson's decision regarding the line-ups.
- April 30: The Prosecutor General decided that another 28 line-ups should be carried out and commissioned Svensson to be responsible for their implementation.
- May 1: Holmér visited Zeime at his place of residence and discussed the investigation with him. Zeime finally agreed to take over the management of the investigation.

4. Critical Decision Problems: February 28 – May 1, 1986

No. Decision Occasion	Type of Decision-Making Unit
1. Olof Palme is shot dead!	Small groups/Individuals
2. The morning after	Small groups/Individual
3. How to pull off Palme's funeral safely?	Large group
4. What to do with the 33-year-old?	Individual
5. How to prevent political distrust of police?	Individual
6. Relations between the police and the prosecutor become intolerable	Small group

4.1 *Olof Palme Is Shot Dead!*²¹

This first impetus caused frantic activities in various societal bodies. It might be difficult to argue that any of the numerous decisions taken on different levels and by different agencies could be characterised as critical per se, when trying to capture the individual decision-makers' perceptions. Yet, the stress level was high and the fact that the Prime Minister had actually been shot and killed was paralysing. Arguably, affected decision-makers performed worse than expected, which explains largely why the police entered the second phase with a significant credibility deficit. Scrutinising this occasion for decision-making promises to provide pertinent insight of what initial values prevailed in the second, less acute, phase of this case.

The most prominent decision-making units during this first night were the police, the Cabinet, the military, and the media actors. The most acute tasks they had to deal with were to inform, or alarm, the appropriate decision-makers (and for the media actors to inform the public), to make sure the Cabinet's authority remained intact, and to catch the perpetrator. A substantial number of actors were directly involved in the acute response phase, and they did not all deal with the same problems. The communication centre for the

²¹ Information regarding the first occasion for decision derives, if not otherwise stated, from SOU 1987:14.

Stockholm Police became the spider in the web. Since the crime had been committed in the heart of Stockholm, the police personnel there (initially headed by Chief Inspector Hans Koci) organised the search for the murderer, and it was also the police's duty to inform the Cabinet. Except for the Stockholm Police Headquarters, the headquarters of Säpo (the security police) and the National Criminal Division (each with a communication centre and an emergency centre respectively) are located on the same premises. The Stockholm Police Communication Centre also had to inform the staff on the National Police Board, since they had the instructions on how to protect the 'block' (where the three headquarters are housed), and Säpo was responsible for bodyguard activities.²²

In the Chancellery, one official was responsible for taking care of the necessary duties in the event that an extraordinary incident should occur during the weekend. This person should continuously follow Radio Sweden's news broadcasts and be reachable by telephone or a beeper at all times. In the case of an emergency s/he should hastily go to the Chancellery and inform its head of security and his/her substitute, as well as the Chancellery's press secretary. Also the Minister of Justice and his/her Under-Secretary of State should be contacted. If necessary, the military headquarters should also be informed.

Almost everything that could go wrong did this fateful night. It should be kept in mind that the murder took place in the middle of the night between Friday and Saturday, on the last weekend of the winter school holiday. A large amount of the Swedish population was on vacation and therefore unreachable, including many of the vital decision-makers. From the police, the General Director of the National Police Board (Holger Romander) and the Stockholm Police Commissioner (Hans Holmér) and his second man (Hans Wranghult) were at different skiing resorts in Sweden. At 11:30 p.m., less than ten minutes after the murder, Hans Koci and his staff at the Stockholm Police Communication Centre were aware of the fact that the victim at Sveavägen was indeed the Prime Minister of

²² As stated in the opening lines, Olof Palme had told his bodyguard earlier during the day that he would not need anymore protection that weekend. Palme had an agreement with Säpo, according to which he decided quite arbitrarily to the degree of his personal security. Palme was supposed to tell the bodyguards whenever he moved outside the designated 'triangle', which consisted of his home, Rosenbad, and the Parliament. But the night of his death, he did not do so.

Sweden. It was then not just an ‘ordinary’ crime, but perhaps the most serious one in centuries to hit Sweden. The perpetrator had to be caught as soon as possible in order to face the punishment for the crime and also in order to disperse the haze regarding the possible motives, the further implications etc. They had to find out whether or not the shooting was an isolated event, if other persons needed protection and if other counter-measures had to be taken.

The initial search efforts were marked by deviations from the standard operational procedures. The area roped-off around the scene of the crime had been much too small, and technical evidence was thereby not likely to be found. Within ten minutes after the shooting, some ten police patrols were searching the surroundings, but not systematically. Moreover, neighbouring police districts were not alerted, and could not assist in the search efforts. Policemen off duty, who volunteered, were not made use of. Possible escape routes were not secured. As the Stockholm Police Commissioner was on vacation and not reachable, his deputy (Gösta Welander) was called in. When he turned up at about 12:30 a.m., he took charge, but did not change the organisation of the search efforts. He prepared a nationwide alert that was sent out at 2:05 a.m., which indicated that there were two perpetrators, probably belonging to the Ustasja movement. Before the nationwide alert was sent out, Welander and the head of Säpo (Sven-Åke Hjälmsroth) went to Sabbatsberg’s Hospital, where they joined some of the governmental ministers and the Palme family. Thereafter, the two followed the ministers to Rosenbad, the Chancellery, for a meeting with the Cabinet, which started at 3:07 a.m.

When Chief Inspector Söderström reported over the police radio that the victim at Sveavägen was indeed the Prime Minister, journalists absorbed this message. Had it not been for curious journalists, the information processing would have probably been slower at the onset of this affliction. The Stockholm Police Communication Centre did not inform Säpo. Rather, the third time the radio operator there received a call (at least two from journalists) he called the Stockholm Police Communication Centre, to confirm the rumours. Palme’s Press Secretary (Kjell Lindström) was the first one in the Chancellery sphere to find out about the shooting, when a journalist called him just after 11:30 p.m. He then called Ulf Dahlsten (the Under-Secretary of State in the Cabinet Office) who called the po-

lice. Dahlsten informed the Vice-Prime Minister (Ingvar Carlsson) who instructed him to assemble the Cabinet. Most of its members got to Rosenbad by taxi.

At Rosenbad, the situation was no less chaotic. The official on duty had been to a restaurant during the night, and when staff from ABAB (the security company that guarded the entrance to Rosenbad 24 hours a day) tried to call him, he was on the subway so his beeper did not work. Having received a message as he came home, he immediately called Rosenbad, but Lindström and Dahlsten said that he would not be needed. The obligations bestowed upon the official on duty were not fulfilled; no one from the Chancellery informed the military that night. Again, the rapid infrastructure within the mass media sped up the processing of information. At 1:15 a.m. (Swedish time) the Swedish Military Attaché in Washington called the military headquarters in Stockholm and asked the surprised operator if the rumours about Palme's death, spreading around in Washington, were true.²³

For the Cabinet members who gathered at Rosenbad, the question was, "Is the government constitutionally functional?" This was the first test to the order of succession since the creation of the new constitution in 1974. The regulations existed, but legal expertise was also needed. However, the Cabinet Office's Constitutional Adviser, who also was its Head of Security, had recently passed away and not yet been superseded (Eklundh, 1999). Under more normal circumstances, the Parliament's Speaker would have dismissed the Cabinet and asked its members to hold their offices in a caretaker government, but the Speaker was on vacation in Spain, and could not fulfil this task until 11 o'clock of March 1, when he was flown home. Ingvar Carlsson took charge of the caretaker government during the night and whether this was in accordance to the constitution or not, was never subjected to criticism.²⁴ In addition to constitutional matters, the Cabinet discussed security and bodyguard concerns. Welander and Hjälmsroth were present at the Chancellery and informed of the police efforts. The highest available police command was thus not involved in the search operation. It should be

²³ The Supreme Commander was thereby called in, and a military state of alert was carried out.

²⁴ The Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party chose Ingvar Carlsson as candidate for the post as party leader unanimously already on March 1, and Sweden had a regular functioning government on March 12, with Ingvar Carlsson as Prime Minister.

noted that the Head of the National Criminal Division was never called. The task to reinforce the protection of the police headquarters was thereby not fulfilled (Tommy Lindström, 1998).

After having driven like a “car thief”, Hans Holmér (Stockholm’s Police Commissioner) returned to Stockholm from his interrupted holiday at 10:50 a.m. on Saturday March 1. He then took charge of the police efforts (Holmér, 1988). The crisis that never occurred – a possible coup d’état, or, less dramatic, a succession disorder – was over, but the crisis that never stopped – including its many erroneous ‘leads’ and the severe tension between the actors and the organisations in the judicial and the political spheres alike – had just begun.

Before proceeding to the next occasion for decision-making, a reflection is appropriate. Not only the fact that the murder actually took place triggered speculations around different conspiracy theories, but many circumstances in fact nursed them. Why did Palme not call Säpo to inform them about his cinema visit? Why were the police efforts managed so exceedingly unprofessional? Why did the Cabinet ministers choose to go to Rosenbad by taxi? Why did nobody from the police force or the Chancellery think of informing the military? Did everybody know that it was about an isolated event? The list of questions can go on and on. It is important to keep in mind that the obscurity, in which these queries rests, is the root of the deception for many who have tried to turn the Palme murder mystery inside out.

4.2 The Morning After

A clear ambition to create a state of normalcy (implying the creation of a legitimate ruling state and, above all, the capturing of Palme’s assassin) was discernible in the immediate aftermath of the murder. Thereby, some of the actors that had been involved during the night, like the military, were no longer imperative to the crisis management. As it was about an isolated murder with an unknown perpetrator, the police took centre stage, but also the Government played an active role, not only in its state ruling capacity. The Prosecution Authority got directly involved as soon as someone became suspected for being involved in the murder. Of course, the mass me-

dia followed each step of the murder investigation as thorough as possible.

As the Stockholm Police Commissioner (Hans Holmér) was driving home from Dalarna, where he had been on vacation, he recalled a situation just a few months earlier. A mad rock-blaster had threatened to blast up a train to pieces in the Christmas traffic unless he got four million SEK from the Swedish State Railway. However, the perpetrator's ambitions were unsuccessful and he was caught thanks to, what Holmér considered, a very successful cooperation between the Stockholm Police, the National Criminal Division and Säpo. Holmér wrote, "This was the kind of organisation I wanted to set up in the hunt for Olof Palme's murderer. This was the management structure and these were the policemen I needed" (Holmér, 1988:53–55).²⁵ A managerial group was set up quite spontaneously during the first weekend of March. Besides Holmér, it consisted of a number of other senior staff from the Stockholm police force and the National Police Board, mainly police jurists. Apart from them, two officials from the Department of Justice were assigned as observers to the managerial group. Within this group, Holmér created an inner circle (the so-called Brain Trust) consisting of himself, Hans Wranghult, S-L Petersson and Tommy Lindström. The idea was to create a forum for formulating tentative thoughts and to help each other criticise favourite hypotheses (Åsheden, 1987).

Of the some 300 police that were assigned to work on the investigation, 120 came from the Violent Crimes Division and the Search Division and some hundred from the National Police Board (National Criminal Division and Säpo). Holmér decided to sacrifice the Narcotics Squad, and its 60 policemen also became investigators for the murder (Ibid: 11; Holmér, 1998).

When Holmér took charge of the investigation, certain significant factors were in effect. The scene of the crime had been poorly protected and technical evidence was thus not believed to lead to the perpetrator. The information given by the witnesses was very vague and did not give an unanimous picture of his appearance (Wranghult, 1998). The matter was also about the murder of Swe-

²⁵ The author has translated this citation and all other citations originally written or spoken in Swedish.

den's Prime Minister, which might have been politically motivated. These circumstances induced Holmér to embark on the investigation from the motive side, which appeared unorthodox for experienced murder investigators accustomed to finding the motive from the technical and circumstantial evidence (Krusell, 1998). In addition to this, Holmér decided to take on a broad perspective in the search for Palme's assassin. The ambition was not to get stuck in just one hypothesis, even if the search would seemly lead suspicions to one particular direction (Åsheden, 1987). Säpo and the National Criminal Division looked at the Swedish extremist organisations. International inquiries were also carried out. Information and the evaluation of possible terrorists (given by foreign intelligence services and Swedish embassies) were compiled to the ever-growing mountain of information. Notable is the fact that this was the first time in Swedish history that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs assisted the police to a murder investigation. Holmér contacted the retired ambassador Sverker Åström on the third day of the investigation. Åström helped with the analyses and became a liaison between the police and the Foreign Office. In short, anything from a single madman to an international terrorist organisation was interesting for the managerial group. At the press conferences, Holmér kept stressing his belief in this method, as he did in the managerial group (Wranghult, 1998). Even when the first prime suspect, the so-called 33-year-old, was taken into custody, Holmér stated that the only thing they had done right was to maintain a broad perspective, by not burning any bridges and by not dismissing any other possibilities. "I believe in this dredger that keeps working" (Holmér, 1988:54).

A dilemma for Holmér and the managerial group was, however, the absence of a manifest motive. Of course it was not a problem to find people who wished to see Olof Palme dead. He was, after all, a controversial statesman. The problem was that no motive seemed more prominent than the others.

The growing amount of information, tips and testimonies seemed to the Brain Trust to indicate that the outrage had been carefully planned. In order to encourage people who might know anything about the assassination, Holmér and Wickbom (the Minister of Justice) decided to offer 500,000 SEK to the one who gave a tip that led to the capture of Palme's murderer. Offering a state fi-

nanced reward is, however, not a standard operating procedure in Swedish murder investigations; in fact this line of action was quite unique. What if the perpetrator turned himself in and put in a claim for the money, would he get it? Questions like this had been neglected, and when asked by journalists at the press conference on March 4, Holmér evaded them (DN, 5 March 1986:7).

On March 6, another sensational enterprise was carried out, namely the circulation of a composite picture that was supposed to depict the perpetrator. This picture was construed based on the observations made by a woman who had seen a man not far from the scene of the crime some thirty minutes after the shooting. It was later proved that the woman had seen two men on her way home (a few blocks away from Tunnelgatan) and that she had mixed up the faces. Hence the composite picture was very much alike another man, who was later identified, yet he was not a suspect in the investigation (Tommy Lindström, 1998).²⁶ The decision to go to the media with this picture was controversial within the managerial group. The Head of the National Criminal Division (Tommy Lindström) claimed that it could be harmful to the investigation, since it would give the impression that the police actually knew what the murderer looked like, and would thus make the public more reluctant to give alternative tips (Ibid.). Wranghult (1998) remembers that this objection was raised too late in the planning stage. Holmér and Wranghult reasoned, however, that nothing could be lost by such an undertaking (Holmér, 1998; Wranghult, 1998).

A highly interesting feature of the initial search efforts, which shed some light on the relationship between the police and the government, is the decision to tap Baresic's telephone. On March 2, two days after the murder, a representative from Säpo (who wanted to have Baresic's telephone tapped at the Täby criminal institution) contacted the appointed Chief Prosecutor in the Palme case, K-G Svensson. To tap a person's telephone requires a decision from a court of law, and as Svensson did not find a shred of suspicion against Baresic, he declined this request. Svensson then informed Säpo's Operative Head, P-G Näss, of his decision. Näss agreed with

²⁶ Was the 'phantom' man ever found? Lindström says yes and Holmér disagrees. My judgement here is that Lindström's version is trustworthier, since he allegedly recalls having met and questioned this man in person.

his decision and declared that the initiative derived from the managerial group. However, already the same night, a person in the sphere around the Minister of Justice called Svensson and reported that the Cabinet had decided to tap Baresic's telephone, with the support of a provision in the law concerning correctional treatments conducted in prison (31 § lagen (1974:203) om kriminalvård i anstalt). Also that same night, a meeting had been held at the home of the Minister of Justice. There, Wranghult represented the managerial group, assigned this task by Holmér. Wranghult had previously contacted Christer Ekberg at Säpo, who told him that Baresic had been quite active and had called many people after the murder, of one whom was close to Baresic had been reportedly observed on Sveavägen the night of the murder. The Head of Säpo (Sven-Åke Hjälmsjö) who was contacted by the group who had held the meeting also corroborated these circumstances. After that, Wickbom (the Minister of Justice) called six other members of the Government, including Ingvar Carlsson. Together they made the decision to tap Baresic's telephone. Oddly enough, neither the identity of the man at Sveavägen nor the person who supplied the information has been traceable. Moreover, K-G Svensson was never informed of these circumstances by the man from Säpo, who first suggested Baresic's phone be tapped (SOU 1999:88 pp. 557–559).

In the political arena, the way back to normalcy was much less controversial. The succession issue was resolved already on March 1, and the new regular Government was functionally working from March 12. The appointment of Ingvar Carlsson did not come as a surprise to anyone. Carlsson had been Palme's shadow for his entire political career and was known to be the trouble-shooter of the party, internally nicknamed "Crisis-Carlsson", after having been the mastermind behind the party's policy concerning several difficult issues, such as nuclear power and environmental problems. Both the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sten Andersson, and the Chairman of the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, Stig Malm, pointed out that Carlsson had the same capability to unite the labour movement as well as Palme had had (DN, 2 March 1986:11). Carlsson's appointment as Prime Minister was significant to the murder investigation. Carlsson and Holmér had known each other since they had been working together in the beginning of the eighties, and were on good terms (Holmér, 1998). This meant that the bonds between the

Government and the managerial group were not jeopardised, but rather reinforced.

In conclusion, some of the initial and crucial positioning of the actors involved in the management clearly marked the second phase of the Palme crisis. A certain polarisation of the preferential right of interpretation was taken by the managerial group, and particularly by Holmér personally. In a way, his close connection with the Government entitled him and his managerial group this privilege. The 'normal' murder investigators and the Prosecution Authority were already at this stage positioned at the periphery of the decision-making hub. To some extent, this was also true regarding the national police representatives in the managerial group, which the decision about the composite picture indicates.

4.3 How to Pull Off Palme's Funeral Safely?

On March 15, a last solemn farewell to the late Prime Minister was arranged in the Stockholm Town Hall. For one day, Stockholm was the place of pilgrimage for important statesmen from all over the world. Given the fact that Palme's assassin had not yet been captured, this event (which in any case would have implied an extraordinary security apparatus) put the Stockholm police force under extreme pressure. Some hundred eminent guests were awaited, each of whom was a possible target for a malefactor. Nothing was allowed to go wrong. At the same time the murder investigation was supposed to proceed unabated. Some 2000 policemen were on duty in Stockholm that day (Holmér, 1988; Åsheden, 1987).

One theory that originally emanated from the socialist headquarters, which organised the funeral, was that the killing of Olof Palme was the first step in a more extensive attack on worldwide socialism. The funeral would attract socialist leaders from the rest of the world, and when gathered at the same spot, they would form an easy target for a terrorist attack (the so-called sugar lump theory). Intelligence information did not seem to corroborate this hypothesis, but it was nevertheless included in the threat assessment; no possibilities could be overlooked (Holmér, 1988; 1998; Wranghult, 1998; Åsheden, 1987). Sweden had already been violently shocked by the fact that Palme was shot in the open on the streets of Stockholm, which was only reinforced by the subsequent

criticism directed at the police force. In this respect, it was important for Sweden to demonstrate to the world its capacity to pull off the funeral safely.

Sune Sandström, in his capacity as the Head of the Police Department in charge of public order, organised the police effort for the funeral. Together with a team containing police officers and representatives from the Social Democratic Party, he orchestrated the event, surveyed by Holmér. Meticulous preparations left nothing to chance and by the end of the day, the atmosphere in the police headquarters was marked with relief (Holmér, 1988). But to restore the public trust in the police, the search for the murderer had to produce results soon.

4.4 What to Do with the 33-Year-Old?

Since the beginning of the investigation, the police had poked about in the criminal underworld and had arranged hearings with known criminals and various people who in one way or another had been pinpointed in the stream of tips. A 33-year-old man without previous convictions became a great interest for the investigation since different witnesses stated that they had met him not far from the scene of the crime just a few hours before the murder. The 33-year-old had then very explicitly aired his hatred for Olof Palme. The police had questioned the man on March 8. Nothing was conclusive and he was released. As new circumstances raised new questions, the man was called in again on Wednesday, March 12, and the Chief Prosecutor, K-G Svensson, decided to take him into custody.

One witness from the Ivory Coast reported the day after the murder that he had been driving his car on Döbelsgatan, which crosses Tunnelgatan, at about 11:30 p.m. on the night of the assassination. A man had stopped his car and offered whatever the driver wanted for a lift. The man from the Ivory Coast got scared and drove away. When the 33-year-old was behind bars, two working groups from the police headquarters got an order from interrogator Wingren, to confront the suspect with the witness from the Ivory Coast, without each other's prior knowledge. On Friday March 14, the witness from the Ivory Coast, whom the police referred to as "the Negro" (Holmér, 1988; Åsheden, 1987), was called in by the first group and they gave him a bunch of photographs, one of which

depicted the 33-year-old. He did not recognise 'his man' in any of the pictures. This event was not forwarded upwards or laterally in the police hierarchy. On Sunday the 16th, the second group called the witness in and they arranged a line-up with the 33-year-old. This time he pointed out the arrested man and another man in the line-up (K-G Svensson, 1 September 1998). That he had pointed out the suspect was reported upwards and strengthened the circumstantial evidences against the 33-year-old (Ibid.).

On Monday March 17, K-G Svensson submitted a detention order for the suspect and started to prepare for the court proceedings that were supposed to take place on March 20. In these preparations Svensson found out about the separate photo identification and line-up with the principal witness and the prime suspect, which rendered the circumstantial evidence useless. Because of this, Svensson decided to set the 33-year-old free on March 19. Holmér was informed about Svensson's decision just when he was about to enter a press conference. He then had to announce this sensational news, and he put himself behind the decision in front of the press gallery. However, this meant the deathblow of the relation between Holmér and Svensson. The following day, Svensson decided to request, at the district court, for a permission to have the 33-year-old's telephone tapped. According to Swedish law, it is only possible to have telephones tapped in cases where someone is suspected with good reason of a crime. This means that the prosecutor still found the 33-year-old being with good reason a potential suspect for the murder of Palme (Holmér, 1988:143). Later on that day, Holmér and Wranghult visited Claes Zeime (the Director of the Stockholm Prosecution Authority) and asked him to replace K-G Svensson. They thought he had behaved inappropriately in the hearing with the man from the Ivory Coast the previous day. Zeime decided not to replace Svensson on March 21 (Åsheden, 1987:59–67).

4.5 How to Prevent Political Distrust of the Police?

As the investigation did not seem to produce any substantial result, voices were raised demanding the establishment of a commission to scrutinise the investigation. An editorial writer of Svenska Dagbladet wrote of the need for a commission like the Warren commission, already on Wednesday, March 5 (SvD, 5 March 1986:2). The

Attorney General, Bengt Hamdahl, assented to this request (SVT, 5 March 1986). In *Dagens Nyheter* on March 6, all party leaders stated that they found the idea of appointing a committee somewhat rushed; the police needed to work in peace. Some kind of commission would however be needed in the future (DN, 6 March 1986:8). Although the search team was exposed to sporadic expressions of distrust, their bond with the Government was tight. The Minister of Justice, Sten Wickbom, met regularly with Holmér and was very well informed as to the proceedings of the investigation. He also got information via the observers in the managerial group.

On April 16, Wickbom used the tabloid *Expressen* to leak a speculation that the search team might become the subject of a commission's scrutiny, which came as a shock, at least to Holmér. To shed some light on this initiative, one has to keep in mind that the investigation had not been successful up to that point. It was politically correct to demonstrate a distinction between the political and the police sides of the course of events; both from an opportunist and a legal rights perspective. Even though another month passed before the Government decided to set up a commission, Holmér felt that this statement caused a rupture in the mutual confidence between the search team and the Government. The police in the field had the general feeling that they were isolated in their efforts to bring the case to an end (Holmér, 1998; Åsheden, 1987:130). This should, however, be interpreted as a personal disappointment. Both Tommy Lindström (1998) and Hans Wranghult (1998) refer to the political game, which had to be played by the political establishment, given the enormous public pressure. They (Lindström and Wranghult) would not say that Wickbom's initiative affected the police in general at all.

4.6 Relations between the Police and the Prosecutor Become Intolerable

In the month of April, the investigation proceeded quite calmly. For the police, there were still some question marks regarding what the 33-year-old had been doing on the night of February 28. From the prosecutors' point of view, the circumstantial evidences got weaker and weaker. The 33-year-old had claimed to have an alibi at the time of the murder; he had been sitting at a cafe, chatting with two

young men whom he did not know. K-G Svensson wished to get in touch with these men by means of media, and told the police in the G-group²⁷ to solicit them. At the end of April, Svensson found out that the men had been searched for by means of putting up a notice at the cafe (on April 19). Later on Svensson found out that the managerial group had declined his request to make a public announcement in the media. (When this came to Svensson's knowledge, he took an initiative to solicit the young men. They showed up the following day, and could give the 33-year-old a reliable alibi, but this was not until May 13–14) (Svensson, 1 September 1986).

By the time Svensson heard that the 33-year-old's alleged alibi had unsuccessfully been searched for at the cafe, the managerial group turned up with a request to arrange line-ups with him and a large number of other people. They wanted to get an adequate picture of what he had been up to, since he refused to speak about, according to the police. On April 25, the police gave K-G Svensson a list of 74 witnesses that they wanted to participate in line-ups with the 33-year-old. At first, the police wanted to have some 40 witnesses in these line-ups, but Svensson objected to that amount, since he claimed that it was too many. So the police retorted by raising the number to 74. Svensson said that it was impossible with respect to the suspect, because of the extended time he would need to spend just for the line-ups. He took the list and pointed out 11 witnesses who should be confronted on March 28. S-L Petersson, who handed over the list yielded, "Perhaps it does not have to be 74, but 50..." (Åsheden, 1987:144–145). According to Svensson, his decision regarding the line-ups with the 11 witnesses was not final. When they had been carried out, he would evaluate them and decide whether or not more line-ups were needed (KU 1986/87:33, p.149). Holmér was furious and tried to reach Zeime in another effort to eliminate Svensson from the investigation, but he was not reachable. He called the Under-Secretary of State in the Department of Justice (Harald Fälth) with his complaints. Fälth called the Prosecutor General who called Svensson and then back to Fälth, and Fälth to Holmér. This was late on Sunday night, March 27, and the Prosecutor General (Magnus Sjöberg) explained to Svensson, that he might have to overrule his decision about the number of line-ups. Svens-

²⁷ G for Gunnarsson. The 33-year-old's name was Victor Gunnarsson.

son had however not made a final decision, since the first 11 witnesses were to be line-upped the following day (Ibid.). Holmér, Svensson and Sjöberg were also asked to come to a meeting at the Ministry of Justice on Monday night, March 28. Before this meeting, the line-ups were carried out and Svensson decided that another 11 witnesses would be called in for line-ups. Most of all because he wanted to avoid a confrontation with the managerial group (Ibid.). Sjöberg and Svensson went to the meeting together, with the idea that they would meet alone with Wickbom and the representatives from the Ministry of Justice to inform them about the investigation from the prosecutors' point of view. They were both surprised to meet Holmér there (KU 1986/87:33, p.149; Sjöberg 1998). During the meeting, Holmér and Svensson reported their different points of view, almost exclusively about the number of line-ups. Svensson found them rather useless and stated that the 11 additional line-ups were the last ones and thus that was his final decision on the matter. Holmér stressed the importance of exhausting this 'lead' and thus urged for more line-ups. Wickbom expressed his sympathy for Holmér's remarks. Wranghult (1998) revealed that neither he nor Holmér at this stage thought that the 33-year-old had anything to do with the murder, but felt that he was simply hiding something. Sjöberg was asked to stay even after Holmér and Svensson had left, and the question of overruling Svensson's final decision was discussed (KU 1986/87:33). The following day, Sjöberg took part of the material on which Svensson had based his decision and overruled it. Svensson was present, but did not object (Sjöberg, 1998).

Holmér considered the situation to be intolerable and called the Director of the Prosecution Authority (Claes Zeime) at his home on April 30. Holmér told him that he wanted to visit him the following day. Holmér and Wranghult went to visit Zeime on May 1. After having discussed the matter, Zeime decided to replace K-G Svensson and to take over his duties. Svensson would remain the prosecutor for the 33-year-old (SOU 1987:72). However before this, on April 29, when Sjöberg officially handed in the decision to overrule Svensson's decision regarding the line-ups, Svensson explained to Sjöberg that he was not able to pursue the duties of the prosecutor under the prevailing circumstances. He felt that the way in which Holmér had organised the investigation had not derived from realistic assumptions; in fact, he wanted the managerial group to be dismissed

and to be replaced by the police with who he was used to working with (i.e. the police officers and not the police jurists). It was not until May 5 that Svensson was informed that he had been discharged and that Zeime had taken his post. (KU 1986/87:33, p.152).

5. Brief Outline of Further Developments

The last decision-making problem of these first two months ended in a disharmonious chord regarding the relationship between the managerial group and the public prosecutors. However, only a few months later, history repeated itself. When the 33-year-old was dismissed from suspicion, the managerial group had become interested in the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK). They had been interested in the PKK from the beginning of the investigation, but from late spring/early summer 1986, it came to be the Main Lead. Holmér and the managerial group planned a major bust on the PKK-members in January 1987. When preparing and implementing this bust, co-operation problems occurred between the managerial group and the new prosecutors. The latter thought that the managerial group was too optimistic regarding the validity of their findings, and complained that they were not sufficiently informed. After the bust (which was postponed some ten days because of the co-operation problems) the prosecutors set the Kurds free the same day (January 20), which the managerial group felt was a rash undertaking. Since the prerequisites for continuing the investigation did not prevail, largely because of the tension in the personal setting, the Government decided that the National Prosecution Authority would lead the investigation and that the National Police would lead the search efforts. This decision was taken on February 5, 1987 (SOU 1987:72).

The new search group – the Palme group – continued to investigate the murder from a broad perspective. The investigation proceeded quite calmly for a year and a half, before the hitherto biggest scandal in this errand manifested. Within Säpo, an investigation had secretly been running parallel to the Palme group, and had continued to follow the PKK-track. This group contained two PKK experts from Säpo and Ebbe Carlsson (a publisher and close friend of the then Minister of Justice, Anna-Greta Leijon, and also of Holmér). Leijon had sanctioned their activities and the General Director of the National Police Board, Åhmansson, was informed. The Palme group was not informed, however, until May 1988.

On June 1, the bubble burst. The tabloid *Expressen* published this sensational news which was only the beginning of the so-called 'Ebbe Carlsson affair'. Two days later, on June 3, Holmér's former bodyguard (who at this time had been enlisted as Ebbe's bodyguard by the head of Säpo – Sune Sandström) had been stopped by the Customs Authorities in Helsingborg. In his car they found illegal bugging equipment, which was supposedly to be used to bug a possible witness from the PKK. The equipment was ordered by Säpo and procured in England. The bodyguard was also equipped with a recommendation letter that Åhmansson had provided, and on which Leijon had put her signature (Krusell, 1998). Her political career was thereby over. Regarding the legal repercussions, Chief Prosecutor for the Ebbe Carlsson affair (Ola Nilsson) found out that, in addition to the possible PKK witness, this equipment was also intended to bug people within Säpo, most notably P-G Näss. Allegedly, the reason was that he did not give much credit on the PKK-trail, and furthermore, Ebbe Carlsson and his group thought that Näss had known about a threat to Palme's life before the murder, but had been hiding it (SvD, 7 January 1989).

In December 1988, the Palme group had directed most of the suspicions against a well-known criminal, named Christer Pettersson. The prosecutors accused him with good reason of being the guilty suspect who killed Palme. A disunited Stockholm District Court ruled him for strong suspicion of guilt and sentenced him to life imprisonment in July 1989. This was appealed by his legal defence. A united Court of Appeals changed the degree of suspicion, to 'possible suspect' on November 2, 1989. This declared degree of guilt does not permit any deprivation of liberty, and thus Christer Pettersson was set free. The search for the murderer has thereafter mainly been preoccupied with efforts to tie Pettersson to the crime.²⁸ In other words, the crime, according to the Palme group, is considered to be solved. The public is, however, not at all convinced.²⁹ For many, Pettersson symbolises their frustration regarding the police efforts.

²⁸ The Commission of Inquiry (SOU 1999:88, pp. 915) reportedly met arguments of the type: "If it was not Christer Pettersson, then we have no idea who committed the murder."

²⁹ According to Krusell (1998: 334), who based his statement on a poll presented in a tabloid ten years after the murder, no less than 12% of the Swedish population believed the police had been involved in the assassination.

A few words should also be devoted to the four commissions of inquiry, which have been scrutinising various aspects of the Palme murder and the actual Palme investigation. As mentioned above, the Government set up the first commission on May 22, 1986. It was a jurist commission, which was already from the beginning meant to do a first cut, and then a parliamentary commission would follow it. The jurists produced two reports (SOU 1987:14 and SOU 1987:72), the first one focusing on the first twelve hours after the murder, and the second on the period between March 1, 1986 and February 5, 1987. Even the parliamentary commission looked at this period (from the night of the actual murder to February 5).

Both commissions reached similar conclusions. Without going into detail, they pointed to the weaknesses of the police efforts during the night of the murder, and thereafter to the disrespect of existing regulations regarding the stipulated roles of the police and the Prosecution Authority respectively. The prosecutors should have taken a firm and more convincingly leadership over the investigation, and the managerial group should have let them do so. Both commissions expressed a need for creating a special task force within the police, which would also be prepared for dealing with terrorist attacks.

Due to the Ebbe Carlsson affair, new hearings were carried out by the KU in the summer of 1988. It was at these hearings that it was revealed that the bugging enterprise was emanated from the suspicion that there had been prior knowledge of a threat to Palme before the murder. Therefore, the County Governor of Jönköping (Gösta Gunnarsson) was instructed to investigate the prior threat scenario and the security apparatus around Palme on August 25, 1988 (SOU 1989:1). Gunnarsson's report was delivered on January 19, 1989, and can substantially be concluded by the paragraph cited in the context chapter. However, he also made some critical remarks aimed at Säpo for their sloppiness in carrying out translations of tapped conversations among PKK-members. Reportedly, Säpo had had problems recruiting reliable translators (Ibid. p. 8).

Due to a sense of public distrust in the state governed by law, the Parliament decided to propose to the Government that a new commission be established. The Government decided to do this on September 29, 1994. This commission – the Palme Commission – was supposed to scrutinise the murder investigation from Febru-

ary 5, 1987, and onwards. Sigvard Marjasin, a former union leader and a recently retired county governor, chaired it. However, the Palme Commission never produced any report. On June 6, 1996, the Government removed Marjasin from office at his own request (SOU 1999:88, preface). By the end of May that year, RRV (the Swedish Audit Bureau) presented a report on Marjasin's period as County Governor in the county of Örebro. RRV had found severe shortcomings in Marjasin's expense account related to entertainment. Some receipts were missing and others had been manipulated (SvD, 31 May 1996). Since Marjasin thought that his personal credibility had been put into question, which in turn would harm the commission, he chose to quit (Ibid.). The Palme Commission was thereby put on hold.

On August 15, 1996, the Government delegated County Governor Lars-Eric Ericsson to chair the commission. Several experts and two secretaries, who had been part of the Marjasin Commission, were removed from office in connection with this. The new commission met for the first time on August 30 and they decided to take on the name 'the Commission of Inquiry on Account of the Investigation on the Murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme' (SOU 1999:88, preface). Furthermore, the commission decided to start from the very beginning, as though it was being done from the first time (Ibid.). Almost three years later, on June 29, 1999, the commission presented its 916-page report.

Regarding the organisation of the murder investigation, the commission conveyed that the search leaders should have been replaced when Christer Pettersson was set free in December 1989, as they had visibly run out of steam. They also considered it as being inefficient, counterproductive, and incomprehensible, that the police had been reluctant to document their analyses and evaluations of their different hypotheses throughout the investigation. The main objection was that this 'working method' rendered learning processes difficult (Ibid., pp. 892–895). The law, the commission pointed out, had not always been respected by the police, the prosecutors and in some cases the Government. All three actors had infringed upon the law regarding the investigations against the '33-year-old' and the Kurds who had been subjected to a round-up (Operation Alfa) during the Holmér era. In the new organisation, the bugging affair and the probation of a policeman were also considered viola-

tions of the law (the Government was not involved in the latter case). As to the bugging of Miro Baresic, the commission did not oppose this action as such, but the extension in time and space, they deemed unlawful (*Ibid.*, pp. 909–910). They also pointed out the visible tensions between the prosecutors and the police, which manifested in a disunited front before the media and the public (*Ibid.*, pp. 897–890).

In the introduction of this study it was said that these commission reports were met with considerable public distrust. Some aspects of this will conclude this chapter. To begin with, the fact that the commissions are set up by the Government to scrutinise the Government (amongst others) has created doubts in their findings. When the Jurist Commission published its first report, an editorial writer for SvD expressed doubts concerning the second part, insinuating that the commission was likely to be biased since its chairman and some of its other members had a recent past in the Government Office (SvD, 13 May 1987: 2).³⁰ In December 1988, an editorial writer for *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* chose the headline: “Can we trust the commissions?” (*Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 28 December 1988: 2). The Government supposedly never sincerely tried to guarantee that the errand of the Jurist Commission, nor its directives, had been scrutinised thoroughly or deemed unbiased, the editorial writer said. Strengthening his stand by referring to a professor of law in legal procedures (Lars Heuman) the journalist continued:

The fact that the Government, entirely on its own, decides when a commission shall be appointed, what it should investigate, and which persons it should contain, creates severe problems for its credibility (*Ibid.*).

Some efforts to undermine the credibility of the commissions have had more endogenous roots. The Parliamentary Commission’s only communist member, Jörn Svensson, announced in a letter on April 14, 1988 (just a few weeks before the report was published), that he

³⁰ Hans Holmér also made this point in his book about his experiences from the Palme investigation. He claimed that the reason why the commission refrained from criticising the security apparatus around Palme at the time of the murder, was that its chairman (P-E Nilsson) was the one who had created the Government Office’s Standard Operating Procedures in this matter during the seventies (Holmér, 1988, 100).

had decided to withdraw from his duties on the commission and that he did not intend to sign the report (SOU 1988:18, preface). The reason for this drastic casting was that the Parliamentary Commission had been denied access to uncensored hearings carried out by the Jurist Commission, concerning the role of Säpo in the murder investigation, reportedly for reasons related to the national security (DN, 17 April 1988; SvD, 17 April 1988). The democratic aspects of this were discussed both from the angle of the left and right political wings. Lars Engqvist (today the Minister of Social Affairs in the Social Democratic Government) insinuated in *Arbetet* that Säpo did not have confidence in the Swedish people's elected representatives (*Arbetet*, 15 April 1988). DN (a liberal newspaper) agreed with this line of thought, and insisted that if the uncensored material could shed some light onto the investigation, it should not be hidden from the commission (DN, 17 April 1988). SvD (a conservative newspaper) on the other hand, commented that it had been injudicious of the Government to appoint J. Svensson to the commission in the first place, since he had publicly aired ideas, suggesting that the USA and the CIA were behind Palme's murder. Better late than never, was the opinion of SvD (SvD, 17 April 1988). An ironic epilogue to this affair was that once Jörn Svensson had withdrawn, the Parliamentary Commission had got access to the material previously denied to them, but then Svensson could not take part in it (DN, 19 April 1988; AB, 19 April 1988). The above-mentioned 'cut and paste' history regarding Marjasin's financial receipts is just another example of the endogenously created credibility traps.

6. Thematic Analysis

6.1 Organisation of Crisis Response

Crisis situations seldom allow decision-makers time to organise the response in accordance with formal rules and procedures. Stressful events – it is said – often open the door for situational leaders and ad hoc groups to handle the crisis at hand. Especially in cases where the legitimacy of a state is challenged, the management tends to become more intensely centralised, since state legitimacy essentially rests upon the central authorities (Rosenthal et al., 1989: 18). These traits might have some universal bearing, given the inherent crisis characteristics – time constraints and prioritised values at stake. But alongside the crisis experiences, national patterns of crisis organisation develop. Swedish experiences reveal that small interorganisational groups, ideally composed of political decision-makers and civil servants, often have gathered to solve crises expediently in a spirit of understanding (Sundelius et al., 1997). When the Swedish police have been an important actor, especially in the seventies, a confiding relationship between Prime Minister Palme and the then General Director of the National Police Board, Carl Persson, constituted the hub around which crisis management was organised (Hansen, 1998). In a way, this constellation became a more or less institutionalised ‘ad hoc’ solution for national crises, which dealt with issues regarding law and order. Given that these kinds of crises do not only imply problems in the field of policing, but also the call for political action, the relationship between Palme and Persson was important. Not the least in communicating sensitive information that might be of importance for executing different lines of action, but not destined for wider circles.

But by 1986, Persson had already been retired for some years, and Palme had been killed. The crisis management, thus, could not be organised in ‘the old fashion way’. It is therefore important to scrutinise what induced the major decision-making units to take on their roles, how they were constituted and how they interrelated with each other and the Government, in order to understand how the platform (from each different line of action which emerged) looked like.

Many crucial decision-makers were absent on the night of the murder, e.g. the Heads of the National and Stockholm Police (Romander and Holmér) and Holmér's second man (Wranghult), the Parliament's Speaker, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The crisis preparedness was low and, as a result, the organisation of the response was poor. The nature of the hardship called for immediate action from several agencies, and consequently, the communication centres for the three police organisations, the military headquarters and the chancellery all played important roles. The Stockholm Police Communication Centre was the spider in the web, due to the location of the outrage. Kjell Lindström (1998), the Press Secretary of the Cabinet Office, found it strange that both Welander (who was in charge of the Stockholm Police) and Hjälmsjö (the Head of Säpo) were both preoccupied with informing the Government instead of having at least one of them take charge of the search for the murderer. This reflection pinpoints a lack of leadership that may have had a negative effect on the co-ordination of the search effort.

After the first chaotic night, when vital decision-makers had found their way back to Stockholm, some decision-making units soon crystallised, namely the managerial group within the police and the Public Prosecution Authority. It was however an extraordinary case in which the Government was also directly involved. In contrast to several other Swedish crises, the dramatic characteristics of this one faded out already after the first twelve turbulent hours; i.e. when it actually began being managed in an organised fashion. It was then no longer imperative to have the political elite gathered among experts in the field of policing in an effort to co-operatively solve this murder case. The societal bodies that normally take care of a murder investigation formed the most conspicuous decision-making units in this case.

The managerial group that gathered around Hans Holmér was, with the exception of the two observers from the Ministry of Justice, composed of highly experienced people in positions as chief of police, mainly heads of different district and national police departments. It is up to the police authorities to organise their work in the way they find most appropriate, without intervention from the prosecution authority or from the Government. In several aspects, the organisation that took form in the beginning of March was unique. Hans Holmér, in his role as District Police Commissioner,

was a jurist with a past career in prosecution. He had never worked as a murder investigator and was thus not a ‘professional’ as such. The same is true for most of the members in the managerial group. What actually was set up was an extremely ‘heavy’ organisation that was not the most experienced in managing the task that had been laid before them. The Prosecutor, K-G Svensson, did not see this as beneficial for the investigation, “All the time I have had the opinion that the professionals have come in the backwater in this investigation” (KU 1986/87:33, p. 160). Regarding the weight of the police organisation, Svensson said, “An initial complication was that a discrepancy in the order of rank prevailed between the District Police Commissioner and the Public Prosecutor. The District Police Commissioner outranked the Public Prosecutor” (Ibid: 147).

A circumstance that further contributed to the unbalanced relationship between the police and the Prosecution Authority was the presence of the observers from the Ministry of Justice within the managerial group. The relationship between the managerial group and the Government was thereby tightened and K-G Svensson felt that this implied considerable psychological pressure on him in his role as the Public Prosecutor (Ibid: 19). The motivation given by the Minister of Justice (Wickbom) for this arrangement was, above all, for security reasons. It was the Government’s responsibility to keep informed of how the investigation proceeded in order to be able to form an opinion on security matters. Secondly, Wickbom stated that it was the Government’s task to take such measures in case the authorities would not have the preconditions to solve the case. In response to the question why a similar arrangement was not set up with the Chief Prosecutor, he said, “That would indeed have been unsuitable. That could have been interpreted by K-G Svensson as an attempt to influence him in one direction or the other” (Ibid: 292 and 299). Svensson’s impression was, however, that this channel had also been used by the managerial group to forward criticism regarding him to the Government and the Prosecutor General, something that he felt was very negative, especially since the observers never asked for his opinion (Ibid: 151). Wickbom claimed that the Ministry of Justice never intended to arbitrate between the two authorities. Regarding the information he got from the observers, he stated:

What is relevant in order to form an opinion on security matters is hard for Bergenstrand (one of the observers – author's own remark) to tell. He has straightforwardly told about the information he got, which for the most part have been relevant for security assessments. Then, of course, as some kind of supplementary information, it has appeared that a difference of opinion between the police and the Prosecution Authority has prevailed (Ibid: 305).

Magnus Sjöberg, the Prosecutor General, depicted the attitude of the Ministry of Justice in the following way:

I would like to say that, within the Ministry of Justice, one has had a sensitive ear to the police's standpoints, but when I have brought forward standpoints from the Prosecution Authority, they have not been met with the same attention (Ibid: 170).

K-G Svensson entered the investigation on March 6, when the 33-year-old became interesting for it, and he took charge of that part. According to Swedish law, the police or the Prosecution Authority can initiate an investigation in their own right. If it is initiated by the police and the crime is not of a simple nature, the Prosecution Authority should take charge of the investigation as soon as someone is suspected for good reason of being guilty. The prosecution authority shall also take over the investigation if required for some special reasons (Code of Judicial Procedure [Rättegångsbalken] Chapter 23: § 2). Svensson could (or should) thus have taken charge of the entire investigation, but chose to delimit his efforts to the part that concerned the 33-year-old. This surprised Holmér, who by his own account expected Svensson to take charge of the investigation as a whole (Holmér, 1998). Svensson averted the possibility of being part of the managerial group, because he considered his possibilities for exerting influence over their work as negligible, and thereafter he would be responsible for lines of action that he did not personally believe in and which were largely beyond his control and sphere of influence (KU 1986/87:33, p. 158).

The Ministry of Justice and the Prosecutor General exerted their influence to hold the balance of power, which had a decisive impact

of the course on events especially when Holmér and the Director of the Public Prosecution Authority (Claes Zeime) decided to replace K-G Svensson. Holmér and Zeime had known each other since 1965, when they had worked together at the Prosecution Authority in the Swedish capital. In 1979 Zeime became that authority's director and since then, according to Holmér, the two had "solved quite a lot of problems together" (Holmér, 1988: 145–146). They equalled each other in terms of rank, in the sense that they both headed the main authorities involved in the Palme case. When Holmér first wanted to replace Svensson after having the release of the 33-year-old, Zeime averted this wish, or to use Holmér's words, "...did not have the strength to replace K-G" (Ibid: 146; KU 1986/87:33). On May 1, however, Zeime changed his mind, but by then the Prosecutor General had overruled Svensson's decision regarding the number of line-ups and the question of having Svensson replaced was a topic for the sphere containing the Minister of Justice, his Under-Secretary of State (Fälth) and the Prosecutor General (Sjöberg); indeed stirred up by Holmér.

A pertinent question, which arose in the Palme case was how to overcome the prevailing organisational problems regarding the investigation. To start with, Wranghult (1998) points out that the formal managerial responsibility for any investigation rests with the local police authority in which the district the crime was committed. The National Criminal Division is a resource at the disposal for small and medium-size police districts, and they seldom operate in the three largest cities of Sweden (i.e. Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö). Moreover, Wranghult states that the Stockholm Police were more experienced and better prepared for this task. Tommy Lindström (1998), the Head of the National Criminal Division, had another opinion in this matter:

The Stockholm Police should never have handled this errand. In any other country, the National Police would have taken charge of the investigation... We had better means to pursue such a task. /.../ What if the murder had been committed in Säfte! Who do you think would have taken charge of the investigation?

Quite frankly, it is one's word against another's. Given the mistakes committed by the Stockholm Police during the night of the murder, it could have symbolically been valuable to delegate responsibility to the National Police. Wranghult (1998) admits that the managerial leadership could have been changed for visual reasons, since the media and the public tend to believe that the National Criminal Division is more competent.

The acute problem was not however whether the Stockholm or the National Police should be in charge. Rather, the problem was a question of how the investigation should be organised, and apparently the prevalent organisation was not functioning well. The Government could not intervene in the working procedures of the local police authorities. But there was the possibility, according to police law, to move the errand from the local level to the national (and vice versa), which was what happened on February 5, 1987. The topic was discussed in the Chancellery, but was controversial. Ingvar Carlsson's Under-Secretary of State, Ulf Dahlsten said:

Holmér had IC's [Ingvar Carlsson's] confidence. But not mine. I wanted the government to act in order to set up a professional murder investigation. That would however have required a cabinet decision, which later could have been criticised (Dahlsten, 1998).

It is also important here to consider the role of leadership. Since Carl Persson had retired, the natural leader of the Police Authorities was missing. Perhaps the only police commissioner who could have match Persson's authority at this time was Hans Holmér (an opinion nursed by both Tommy Lindström, 1998, and Wranghult, 1998). Holmér also had good relations with Rosenbad, and had worked together with Ingvar Carlsson in the beginning of the eighties (Holmér, 1998). It is quite understandable that Holmér became the head of the investigation, considering the necessity of having a confiding relationship between the Government and the police. In addition to this, Holmér had a strong personal sense of responsibility in capturing the murderer of Olof Palme, with whom he had had a good relationship.

A serious implication of Holmér's devotion was that he was seen not only as the head of the investigation, but also as the search

leader (Tommy Lindström, 1998). Two persons normally hold these posts: the head of the investigation is usually a police jurist (like Holmér) or a prosecutor, and the head investigator is usually an experienced superintendent (Ibid.). Holmér (1998) strongly denies that he had any ambition to take over the tasks of the head investigator. Obviously his leadership practices caused confusion in this matter.

A 'catch 22' situation developed in the organisation of the crisis response. For several reasons, the Stockholm Police managed the investigation. Firstly, the crime had been committed in Stockholm. Secondly, Holmér was a powerful police commissioner who considered the crime to be his own personal responsibility. In order to include the people whom he considered the best and most competent into the managerial group, Holmér ended up selecting police jurists rather than murder investigators. This fact frustrated the Chief Prosecutor, and also some of the police who had been working with the investigation, but who were not included in the managerial group (Krusell, 1998). The organisational machinery soon started to squeak disquietingly. The only decision-makers who could affect the personal setting of the investigation were the members of the Government (and the managerial group itself). Such an undertaking would, however, have implied a considerable loss in the entrusted relationship with Holmér, and the possible gains were by no means guaranteed. The easiest way out was to get K-G Svensson off the case.

This case corroborates earlier findings, which have suggested that the management of crises are left to ad hoc constellations and situational leaders. Even though the actual search was orchestrated by local actors, the Department of Justice and the Prosecutor General influenced them decisively, as tacit backers of the managerial group.

6.2 Problem Definition

The Prime Minister was shot dead, and however vertiginous, this fact was irreversible. The society as a whole was thrown into a state of shock, but crucial decision-makers had to keep their minds clear and try to frame the problems that this outrage implied. It is plausible that the perception of the potential implications were partly derived from the latest intelligence information in the field of national

security. In addition to the police, the armed forces and the Government were the primary societal bodies of vital importance in the initial phases of the crisis.

On Friday, February 28, an intelligence orientation was carried out with representatives from the armed forces and the Supreme Commander (SC), as is customary on Fridays. Based on the military's assessment there were no signs to indicate that a foreign military was expecting to take measures against Sweden in the nearest future. When information about the murder reached the Swedish military headquarters (at 1:15 a.m. from the Swedish military attaché in Washington) they augmented the staff's preparedness and SC Ljung led the work at the headquarters himself from about 2:00 a.m. Having gone through the military state of alert, some possible efforts were secured in above all the Eastern Military District. At 3:15 a.m. all military authorities were ordered flags to be flown, which was a quick way to speed the information through the organisation. As to the rest, SC did not make any special announcement about the murder (SOU 1987:14, p. 86–87). It was thus not defined as a grave military problem.

Judging from the actions taken by the police and the Government on the very night of the assassination, the picture of how the problem was defined is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, one could argue that the murder was perceived of as an isolated event for the most part, given that almost all the members of the Government chose to go to Rosenbad unprotected, and that the police did not bother to escort them. The Head of Säpo, Sven-Åke Hjälmroth, said to a reporter the day after the assassination that his organisation did not know of any substantial threat to Palme or to the Government at that time (SVT, 1 March 1986). On the other hand, the nationwide alert implies that the police suspected that the Croatian separatist organisation was behind the murder, which can be related to Lisbet Palme's fear of Miro Baresic. It is possible that this circumstance also 'helped' the Government to see the relevancy in tapping Baresic's phone at the Täby criminal institution, three days later, without having the legal basis for such an undertaking confirmed. It seems as if the scope of the possible implications, initially, was quite narrowly on a cognitive level for some reason. The aftermath of the acute crisis does not however suggest that this conception was erroneous.

The military threat was soon dismissed, and the Government and the judicial system were left to directly handle the new factual platform; the Prime Minister was shot and his assassin was not caught. The police, or at least the managerial group, estimated that the uncertain situation constituted a serious potential threat for the constitutional bodies until after the funeral, after which the 'sugar lump' theory could be dismissed (Holmér, 1998; Wranghult, 1998). After that, the fact that the murderer was not caught, caused a problem in itself, which could be defined in terms of re-establishing public trust in the police and the state governed by law (Holmér, 1998). Holmér (1988: 5) tried to capture the state of affairs at this time by saying:

Relatively short after the murder, the attention was turned away from the fury towards the fruitless police efforts. Voices were raised in support of establishing commissions, and carrying out investigations. In the raging debate, the awful fact that Olof Palme was murdered has sometimes been neglected.

It must not be forgotten that the inclusion of members from the managerial group also – by default – implied the exclusion of others, which affected the problem definition. The situation was seemingly interpreted as entirely new by those who had been directly involved in the search efforts, given the traumatic national dimension of the murder. However, it could have been treated as any other ordinary murder in which the perpetrators are to be searched for, but the ordinary murder investigators were not directly part of the problem-framing hub.

6.3 Organisational Co-operation and Conflict

Despite myths to the contrary, crises often provide fertile soil for the blossoming of interagency rivalry (Hart, Rosenthal, and Kouzmin, 1993). Conflicts may arise due to conflicting situational perceptions, divergent strategies for coping with crisis problems, or due to underlying ambitions to advance personal or organisational ambitions (Stern and Verbeek, 1998). Of course, norms regarding bureau-political competition vary somewhat across political systems. Comparatively speaking, the Swedish political administrative cul-

ture has tended to be conflict averse; thus, making overt bureau-political conflicts relatively rare. In fact, in the consensus-prone Swedish society, many crises have rather been solved expediently in a spirit of understanding (Anton, 1980; Heclo and Madsen, 1987; Sundelius et al., 1997).

The findings in this study demonstrate that the Palme case deviated sharply from the typically Swedish pattern. Severe and increasingly overt elements of frictions emerged between Stockholm's Police Commissioner Hans Holmér (and his managerial group) and Chief Prosecutor, K-G Svensson. These frictions developed into a mini-crisis surrounding the senior officials managing the Palme investigation. This bureaucratic battle culminated with Svensson's dismissal from the investigation. There were many reasons for these co-operation difficulties, a few of which have been explored in section 6.1. The functioning of participating organisations depends heavily upon the larger context and the other participating organisations; they do not operate in isolation when managing crises (Dynes, 1970). To understand the nature and dynamics of the inter-organisational relationships that develop in crisis events, it is crucial to have the knowledge of the assignments and assessed roles of the participating actors. In this case, the same is true for understanding the performance of the managerial group on an intragroup level, since "...early group interaction is affected in important ways by the extragroup cultural baggage imported by members" (Stern in Hart et al., 1997: 162).

It was quite natural that the police force played a prominent role in the part of the crisis management that dealt with the search for Palme's murderer, since they were working with the core evidence. As stated above, it was not just any murder; it was a political murder, in the sense that the Swedish Prime Minister had been the victim. Swedish crisis management patterns suggest that a crisis of that magnitude would induce the organisations involved to act in a united manner and to downplay any organisational infighting prevailing beneath the surface. At the risk of causing a public fiasco, competence battles normally restrain organisations' tendencies to expose divergent ideas about the way the crisis should be managed (Sundelius et al., 1997). This was just partly the case here. In the chapter on critical decision occasions, it is quite clear that the police (i.e. the managerial group) and their counterpart in the judicial system (the

Public Prosecution Authority) nursed a mutual lack of confidence in each other.

Since 1965, the police and the Prosecution Authority in Sweden have been divided into two separate authorities with differing objectives in a given investigation. As mentioned before, the investigation can be lead by the police or the public prosecutor, but the prosecutor always has the right to take over the investigation when s/he finds it appropriate. In an investigation, the police fulfil the operative tasks of collecting bodies of evidence and exploring possible motives. Hence, they hold a certain amount of power over the core evidence and they do have an interest in maximising the weight as evidence in the trails they follow (of course provided that they are zealous and eager to solve the crime). The prosecutor comes into the investigation when someone is for good reason suspected of being guilty or when otherwise required, and thus does not have the same power of the core evidence. His/her role is to conduct the investigation centred around a specific suspect. Moreover, to use K-G Svensson's words, the prosecutor's duty is to make sure that the work is carried out "within the boundaries of decency from a legal rights perspective" (KU 1986/87:33, p. 147).

The police organisational machinery that started rolling the first week of March in 1986 has been unsurpassed in Swedish history, both regarding its composition and size. People within and outside the managerial group have confirmed that the police were very animated in its ambition to find Palme's assassin (Holmér, 1988; Krusell, 1998; Wranghult, 1998). Holmér has explained that all of the police officers who were involved in the search for the murderer worked very much overtime without complaining. "We are 300 men working 20 hours a day, seven days a week", Holmér said at his 17th press conference, in an attempt to convince the journalists that the police were still in great shape, despite Svensson's decision to set the 33-year-old free (Holmér, 1988: 147). Wranghult (1998) reportedly worked 16 hours a day, every day. Weekends and holidays were inconceivable.

The managerial group was located in a room without windows just above the Stockholm Police Communication Centre in the Police Headquarters Building, where an organisational culture soon flourished. A special language was created with abbreviations and code names for people and phenomena. A hardened police humour

developed, where one of the favourite laughing-stocks was Bengt Hamdahl, the Attorney-General, who first put forward the proposal to set up a committee to scrutinise the police efforts (Åsheden, 1987: 12). As Svensson chose not to be a part of that group, it is understandable that they distanced themselves from each other's duties in the matter. The managerial group found it annoying that the prosecutors (Svensson and his assistant Carlström) did not seem to have the same spirit as them, "They were never reachable during late hours of the day or on the weekends" (Holmér, 1998).³¹

The problems that arose between the police and the Chief Prosecutor was however not only a question of whether or not they socialised or shared an organisational culture. It was also about how the two parties should interpret their different roles. The law provides that the prosecutor can take over an investigation, but in practice s/he never does. Normally the prosecutor takes on a passive role and orders services that the police provide in the way they find most appropriate (Lindström, 1998). In this case Svensson made use of his legal rights and intervened in the executive side of the investigation, by undertaking a hearing with the principal witness on March 19. The managerial group saw this as an infringement. Svensson had exceeded his capacity, since he allegedly had no experience in carrying out such hearings (Ibid.). Holmér (1998) stated that Svensson lacked flexibility. He did not pursue an undertaking unless he was hundred percent sure, but the stressful situation sometimes called for less certain and less calculated actions. Svensson on the other hand, put a premium on safeguarding the legal rights of the individuals under scrutiny in the investigation (KU 1986/87:33, p. 147).

The managerial group and the search team have sometimes erroneously (but for the sake of simplicity) been regarded as homogeneous, here and elsewhere. To understand the conditions for their efforts, it might be fruitful to take a closer look at the intragroup setting and the patterns of cohesion and rivalry that prevailed (Stern and Sundelius in Hart et al., 1997).

³¹ On April 13, 1987, KU received a letter from K-G Svensson, where he dismissed some of the statements that Holmér had stated before them earlier that year. Regarding his willingness to co-operate during the wee hours of the day and on weekends, Svensson said that he had never tried to evade the tasks that had been placed upon him. However, Svensson refrained from dealing with issues that were not directly connected to the murder, but rather emerged in the search efforts (DD, 2 May 1987).

To begin with, there has always existed a competing atmosphere between Säpo and the Criminal Division at the national level. In addition to this, the Stockholm Police Force, as the largest police authority in Sweden, has competed with the National Police and has been more reluctant to involve the National Criminal Division when major crimes have been committed in Stockholm, than the provincial police districts are, who have more limited resources (Tommy Lindström, 1998). When the search team and the managerial group were put together, several different organisational cultures collided. The National Criminal Division's murder investigators worked with one case at a time until it was completed before taking on a new one, whereas the Violent Crimes Division of the Stockholm Police were used to dealing with new cases as they come up. The Stockholm Police can therefore be said to operate on a more ad hoc basis. An initial problem that hampered the actual search for the murderer was the differing registration procedures. According to Tommy Lindström (1998), the Stockholm Police did not have an accurate registration culture and the National Criminal Division had to begin with instructing them how to do it. Wranghult (1998) dismissed this statement as nonsense, meaning that they just had different procedures, but considerable time was wasted before they could agree how to organise. Moreover, Holmér (1998) felt that he did not have Säpo's confidence and he had to speak seriously with the Director General of the National Police Board, Holger Romander, before their co-operation efforts worked smoothly with that organisation.

The group met twice a day (at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.) for anywhere between 5 and 90 minutes, and each of the members in turn reported on the news s/he had (Holmér, 1998; Wranghult, 1998). Depending on whom you ask, you get different answers regarding their nature. Members from the Stockholm Police remember the meetings as being very open and constructive, and where everyone could have a say and discuss different options (Ibid.). Tommy Lindström (1998), on the other hand, stated that the members from the Stockholm Police were mainly Holmér's yes-men. Holmér was a powerful leader, and the alleged yes-men were likely to work with him for the foreseeable future. The shadow of the future in this respect expanded no longer than the solution of the murder for the others. As already mentioned, Holmér had the Government's mandate to carry out the investigation, and as long as they believed in him, he could appoint

and dismiss people at will, but he needed the expertise provided by the National Police. His status was thus not only a personal matter, even though his charisma was a prominent attribute (Lindström, 1998; Wranghult, 1998).

Rallying to the leader thus seems to have been one norm cherished by some of the group's members, which can explain what bound the managerial group. The most prominent cement, however, must have been the agonising mystery. The seemingly impossible task to compel the perpetrator to the surface, and the public's increasing pressure and anger, as well as the lost self-esteem and the need to obtain redress. These different perspectives seem to suggest that this feature, for the most part, overshadowed the intraorganisational infighting that nonetheless existed.

The police entered the investigation with their sleeves rolled-up and a legitimate sense of responsibility. Solving the murder was prioritised and resources were not scarce. The prosecutors' role rested more with the premises of the crisis itself. Apart from their formal duties, the police and the prosecutors had differing objectives in the response phase of the crisis. The prosecutors were sometimes obliged to restrain the police's zealousness, which resulted in a complicated relationship. It is not likely that it benefited the goal to find the murderer, but it helped to secure the different suspects' legal rights, especially that of the 33-year-old, that was important as well. The intragroup rivalry seems to have caused problems at the initial stage, but seen in hindsight, Holmér (1998), Tommy Lindström (1998), and Wranghult (1998) all suggest that it had a stimulating effect, which also helped eliminate the groupthink tendencies. Whether or not the heads of the different branches of the Stockholm Police (who participated in the managerial group) put themselves more uncritically behind Holmér is hard to tell. At least Tommy Lindström (1998), Sjöberg (1998) and K-G Svensson (1 September 1998) have expressed this.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the interorganisational co-ordination of the crisis management under scrutiny, is the police and the prosecutors' assessments of their roles, which are both regulated by law. The dilemma was that the prosecutors, who were formally in charge of the pre-investigation, were responsible for things that they could not control, i.e. the search efforts. This means that the formal and objective responsibilities were incongruent, which seems

to have been the basis for the growing tension between the two authorities. The Commission of Inquiry noticed that this problem is still built into the system (SOU 1999:88, p. 907).

6.4 Information Management

When Chief Inspector Söderström, at the scene of the crime, had realised that the man lying in the pool of blood was the Prime Minister of Sweden, he had two options: to report it discretely to the communication centre, or to blare it out over the police radio. Söderström chose the latter option. Tuning onto the radio frequencies used by the police is a pastime, which is occasionally rewarding for journalists eager to scoop sensational news. This time, the fact that journalists were listening to Söderström's announcement was of significance for the information processing. Kjell Lindström, the Press Secretary of the Cabinet Office, was first alerted by a journalist from the tabloid *Aftonbladet* (Kjell Lindström, 1998) and the communication centre of Säpo was also initially informed by a journalist. Had it not been for the rapid mass media infrastructure, rumours would probably not have flourished in Washington, which would have delayed the military's actions in Stockholm.

In crisis situations, the task of processing information is not seldom crucial to the quality of the crisis management. To make sure that the right people get adequate information in time is an efficient way of avoiding a hardship from becoming aggravated. This might seem obvious. The problem is however that, for decision-makers, it is not always the easiest thing to know who else is concerned or what information should (or can) be passed on. As demonstrated above, infrastructural matters also determine the processing of information. Stress is an inherent working condition in these situations, which does not stimulate the most optimal working performance.

The first hours after the assassination were indeed decisive for the country's fate. Most of the actions taken by the vital societal bodies were about informing each other and pushing the news upwards in the decision-making hierarchy. Had the assassination not been an isolated event, it is imaginable that a more extended terrorist attack could have been successful. Neither the police nor the Government contacted the military at any time during the night.

Perhaps more serious was the condition under which the Government was assembled. Given the uncertainty that surrounded the matter, it would certainly not be recommended that the members of the Government go unprotected to the most obvious meeting place. The mistake committed by the official on duty at the National Police Board (Christer Sjöberg) not to alert Tommy Lindström, who in turn would have got the central emergency group going, could also have been fatal, at least when it came to protecting and controlling the police headquarters.

It is stunning to compare the mass media's rapid information processing infrastructure with the police. The Jurist Commission observed that only part of the police personnel available was used, because the news of the murder remained unknown to many of them for several hours. Furthermore, other police districts – within and outside the county – were not alerted. It took two hours and a half before the nationwide alert was sent out, and then it was erroneous (SOU 1987:14).

When the situation had settled, and the condition of the crisis changed, the managerial group became the spider in the web, from where information departed and to where information arrived. In order to find the murderer, they collected information from the public and on their own and even from their external international contacts. All information was compiled into a computer-based register, which expanded rapidly. On May 14, it contained 24,340 notes (Holmér, 1988: 182). Not only was the information extensive, sometimes it was also inconsistent. The different police organisations involved had ongoing relationships with their equivalent foreign organisations. It happened that different Swedish organisations, e.g. Säpo and the National Criminal Division, asked the same question to members in the same foreign organisation, and got differing answers, due to the character of their relationship. In addition, the Foreign Office was involved, and easily got a third version of any given situation (Tommy Lindström, 1998). An implication of this was that a staff of three people was assigned the task of sorting out and prioritising the tips. One of the three was supposed to be the search leader, which illuminate why some saw Holmér as being the search leader (Ibid.).

The man from the Ivory Coast was earlier described as the most prominent witness during this period in the investigation, but of

course, Olof's wife Lisbet must have been the most interesting person for the police to question. She was however reluctant to talk to the police initially, since they were leaking information to the media. Whatever she confidentially told the police during the night of the murder appeared in the tabloids the day after (Ibid; Krusell, 1998: 100). This inappropriate practice forced the managerial group to keep secret a later hearing with Lisbet Palme (on April 29).

The managerial group also had to communicate with the other societal bodies. The prosecution authority was one of them. K-G Svensson clearly thought that he was repeatedly denied information concerning how the investigation proceeded. Holmér, on his hand, found Svensson's criticism unfounded (KU 1986/87:33). Some kind of communication problems on the personal level seemed to prevail, and this made it impossible for the two pillars in the judicial system to co-operate efficiently.

The fact that several organisations, with different channels for collecting information, were involved created problems in elaborating the database of evidence. Regarding the information management between the organisations involved, a dilemma of secrecy, combined with a lack of confidence, seem to have induced an inertia that affected the ambience negatively, especially between the managerial group and the prosecutors, but also to some extent between the police who were inside the so-called Palme room and the ones who were not (Wranghult, 1998).

6.5 Symbolic Crisis Communication

6.5.1 CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA RELATIONS

One of the ironies of this case is that Stockholm Police Commissioner Hans Holmér did in fact manage to cultivate positive relations with the media, going out of his way to be responsive to media concerns. On Monday, March 3, the managerial group decided not to hold a press conference in order to take a rest and to focus on fine tuning the investigative machinery. The journalists were not satisfied with this decision, and the managerial group was flooded with irritated calls. Holmér then realised that he would have to give press conferences every day, even if there was nothing to report (Åsheden,

1987:18–19).³² On March 5, Director Leif Hallberg was recruited by the managerial group to deal with media contacts. However, Holmér did not choose to delegate away the role of chief spokesman for the investigation. He thought that it was his duty to stay in direct contact with the media representatives, as head of the investigation and the Stockholm police force (Holmér, 1998). He had a talent for coping with the media and was soon popular. Quickly, the media came to rely heavily on him for statements. The public also relied him for reassurance that the investigation was proceeding well and that it was in good hands. By his own account, Holmér felt that the weight of the entire system – the police organisation and the political establishment – rested on his shoulders (Holmér, 1998). Hans Wranghult speculated the mass media's implications on the investigation:

The media can have affected the conflicting situation between the police and the prosecutors. I noticed clearly that the prosecutors felt inferior towards the media, because Hans Holmér was more talented and had more experience, training and contacts. He could handle the media in a totally different way than the prosecutors, who were less known and not trained. They were supposed to be the main characters, but in the media, Holmér was the shining star (Wranghult, 1998).

To the extent that faultfinding behaviours manifested themselves during Holmér's tenure, they can not be attributed to poor press relations. On the contrary, Holmér was liberal in bestowing access to the press and in fact became their 'darling' for a time. He appeared regularly on television and radio and was often interviewed and quoted in the newspapers.

It may be argued that good press relations are associated with a more generous media posture. Ironically, it may be the case that Holmér's cordial relationship with the press delayed the identification of and steps to remedy the problems plaguing the Palme investigation. It was only in the period immediately before and after the

³² This was the case with the 1982 Hårsfjärden submarine incident. The decision-makers felt a need to arrange press conferences on a daily basis, even if there was nothing new to report (Bynander, 1998, 61–63).

investigation was shifted to the national level that many of Holmér's lapses and shortcomings came to light. Ironically, excessively good public relations can in fact be an obstacle to making necessary substantive or organisational changes. In fact, Holmér's stature as a public and media figure proved to be an obstacle in another sense as well. Once the cabinet began to realise that there were problems with the investigation, they hesitated for a time to do anything about the problem, largely because of Holmér's visibility and popularity. Ingvar Carlsson's Under-Secretary of State (Ulf Dahlsten) made a statement (1998), regarding the establishment of a more professional investigation (which is quoted in section 6.1), which highlights this internal dilemma.

6.5.2 CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND FRAMING

A national crisis of this magnitude normally calls for visible leadership. Political decision-makers often play important operative roles, such as in the Whiskey-on-the-Rocks case or when the West-German Embassy in Stockholm was occupied by West-German terrorists (cf. Sundelius et al., 1997:55–78; Hansén, 1998). But even when they cannot participate directly in the operative crisis management, they are often expected to engage in symbolic participation. Hart (1993) has identified a number of relevant types of symbolic participation, one of which is a ritual of reassurance. In this case, much of the responsibility for rituals of reassurance in the weeks and months after the murder was in fact delegated to Stockholm Police Commissioner Hans Holmér.

Rituals of reassurance have to do with decision-makers' need to communicate an image of being in control of the situation to the media and to the public at large. However, crisis managers' need to reassure and the audience's need to be reassured may have consequences for subsequent evaluations in crisis management. After the press conference on March 2, the two major national dailies had big headlines with the text "Police Convinced – the Murder Was Carefully Planned" (SvD, 3 March 1986:6) and "The Murder Was Carefully Planned" (DN, 3 March 1986:1). Both headlines were accompanied by large and suggestive pictures, one of Holmér reassuringly pointing at a giant city map of Stockholm (SvD) and another one of him sitting at the head of the managerial group's busy conference

table (DN). Only a few days later, the police circulated the composite picture. These two examples demonstrate how the police gave an impression of being in control of the situation and that they were well on the way to finding the perpetrator. In this respect, the massive police effort during the funeral is also striking. As noted above, this overkill did not derive from any intelligence estimates indicating concrete or specific threats to the event. Rather, the consciousness of the symbolic imperative of pre-empting any further embarrassing surprises was a key motive for the high-level security effort (Holmér, 1998; Wranghult, 1998).

Similarly, when the Minister of Justice Wickbom hinted that a commission of inquiry would be set up, this definitely gave the impression that the Government was willing to take every conceivable step to deal with the problems that prevailed. Wickbom's previous decision to allow a state financed reward to the one who could lead the search efforts to the perpetrator is also a sign of this. In other words, the downside of emphasising that an extraordinary effort is being made is that it heightens expectations for the results.

When the 33-year-old was set free on March 19, Holmér's honeymoon came to an end. All of a sudden, the 'main lead' ran into a wall, and with it crashed the boosted expectations of the journalists. Left was no suspect, no technical evidence except for the bullets, and no discernible motive. The managerial group's façade cracked as it was revealed to the public that the principal witness had seen a photograph of the suspect before pointing him out in a line-up (DN, 21 March 1986:6). Even though Holmér retreated from some of the initial assumptions, as for example that the murder was carefully planned, he maintained good hopes that the murder would soon be solved – at least to media (DN, 22 April 1986:7). Concurrently with a thinning out of press conferences, a more doubtful attitude towards the police efforts was noticeable, manifesting in headlines like "Total Silence in Police Headquarters" (DN, 24 March 1986:7), "Still No Firm Evidence" (DN, 26 March 1986:6), "Bullets Only Clue" (DN, 6 April 1986:14), "Now Holmér Has to Respond to the Critique" (Exp., 16 April 1986:14), "Palme Murder Remains an Unsolved Riddle" (DN, 19 April 1986:6), and "We've Got to Know, Holmér" (Exp., 19 April 1986:9).

In the wake of the murder, it was clear that values such as organisational competence and legitimacy vis à vis the political elite,

the media, and the public were believed to be on the line especially for the police, but also for the Government itself. The police performance on the night of the murder was substandard and Holmér hoped to restore the lost credibility of his organisation via the adoption of an optimistic and forceful public posture – which made him quite popular in the short term. However, sustaining such a posture would have eventually required producing results. In fact, Holmér's confidence contributed to the digging of a deep credibility trap into which he eventually stumbled and fell to his figurative death as a public servant. However, the consequences of this episode were not merely personal – the faultfinding posture, which contributed to and was fuelled by this downfall, became the default value for subsequent assessments of the crisis and its aftermath.

6.5.3 PSYCHO-SYMBOLIC DRAMATURGY

Many, perhaps most Swedes remember exactly what they were doing when they received the news of Palme's death. The Palme murder (and the inability to bring the murderer to justice) certainly qualifies as an assault on core symbolic values of the Swedish polity. The event was and has been seen as a symbolic turning point in modern Swedish history, and a tragic transition in the view of Sweden as a benign quasi-utopian place to a more cynical view of Sweden as a place no longer insulated from the dangers previously associated with other parts of the world in the Swedish mindset. As mentioned above, this event was the most severe attack on a Swedish statesman since Anckarstöm shot King Gustav III at the Opera House in Stockholm in 1792. Thus the symbolic ramifications of the event were considerable.

As Hart (1993) suggests such events often provoke a need for rituals of solidarity. The grief and the shock associated with the murder had a uniting effect on the governing Social Democratic Party and on the political establishment as a whole – a pattern consistent with the so called 'Rally around the flag' effect (Stern in Hart, Stern and Sundelius, 1997). In fact, Ingvar Carlsson explicitly suggested that members of the parliament should refrain from avoidable conflicts due to the tragic murder of Palme (DN, 4 March 1986:1). Subdued by the shock and responsive to the national trauma, the atmosphere in the political debates became friendlier (DN,

13 March 1986:1). This ritual of solidarity arguably prevented the crisis from infecting the political establishment at this initial stage. Other rituals that served this purpose were visits to the scene of the crime, the national moment of silence that took place on March 10, and the comprehensive influx of politicians to the mourning rituals of which the funeral was the most dramatic. In addition, the smooth succession of Ingvar Carlsson to the post of acting, and later the permanent, Prime Minister may be seen as the enactment of a ritual of continuity which demonstrated to the Swedish people that the constitutional system was robust enough to cope with a provocation of this magnitude.

Yet from the symbolic perspective, this crisis entailed the activation of still another symbolic need – the need for redress. The order of things and the balance of the scales of justice were greatly disturbed by this event. And, symbolically, the only way to restore that balance was to find, convict, and punish the perpetrator in a manner consistent with due process of the law. Commentator after commentator demanded that the perpetrator be apprehended without delay. As noted, there was a broad consensus that this need for redress was urgent, and that no expense or effort should be spared. Illustrative of this mentality was the fact that more than 300 police officers were assigned to this investigation at its peak, all of whom were authorised to work as much overtime as was required to get the job done. The latter is significant in a highly unionised society where overtime is extremely costly. In addition to the manpower costs, which were considerable, the Stockholm Police alone spent some 13 million SEK directly related to the investigation during the Holmér era (SOU 1987:72 p.237). Some of this spending gave rise to incredulous reactions, like when the police hired a fighter aircraft from the Air Force in order to search for the murder weapon. “An April fool”, commented one military expert (DN, 1 April 1986: 6). Such extreme measures seemed to be grasping at straws and became increasingly controversial as time went on.

In line with this thought, the last commission of inquiry (SOU 1999:88) noticed that the law had not always been respected (which was previously described in chapter five).

Despite large investments both in terms of material and human resources (including prestige), Palme’s assassin is still at large. While optimistic observers might be able to find reassurance in the fact

that the law prevailed to the extent that the conviction of a suspect, Christer Pettersson (whose rights were violated by irregularities in the investigative and judicial processes), was overturned by a higher court. Yet for most, this is scant comfort compared to the thought that the perpetrator of this foul assault not only upon the Prime Minister but also upon Swedish innocence has still not been brought to justice.

The case evidence strongly suggests that unredressed assaults on core values are likely to provoke faultfinding, as well as exacerbate and prolong the sense of trauma associated with a particular tragedy.

6.6 Use of History and Learning

The objective of this section is twofold. First it will investigate to what extent previous experiences influenced actions in the management of the Palme murder. Second, focus will be centred on the evidence of crisis-induced reform or change. The first part is interesting in that strong empirical evidence suggests that stressful events tend to direct highly responsible decision-makers' attention to superficially similar situations from the past, which then serve as tools for analysing the prevailing situation (Bynander, 1998; Khong, 1992). The second sets out from the presumption that there is more to a crisis than the 'unness' (unexpected, unpleasant, unwanted, uncertain). Etymologically, the Greek word 'Krisis' embraces both the notions of threat and opportunity. The latter dimension has been somewhat neglected in modern conceptualisations of the crisis notion, but has a promising potential in revealing possible underlying reasons for decision-makers' actions in the crisis response. It also points to societal adaptation and learning processes in the long run.

The murder of Palme was not only unexpected, but it also put decision-makers in an awkward position depriving them of any obvious precedent. The course of action during the first hours succeeding the assassination, as well as the continuing management of the crisis, was marked by the decision-makers' attempts to find their bearings. Unlike other national crises where the police force had been a crucial actor (like the occupation of the West-German Embassy in Stockholm) this one stood for itself in the sense that it was not part of a predictable pattern in national or international crimi-

nal activities; previous experiences were not useful for coping with this crisis. However, some historical analogies seemed to serve as tools in paving the way for the management, even though it is hard to tell to what extent. A conspicuous example is the incident with the mad rock-blaster, that occurred a few months prior to Palme's murder, which apparently induced Holmér to set up a search apparatus composed of members from both the Stockholm Police force and the National Police force.

On a more subtle level, international experiences from murders that had attracted much attention seem to have formed a strong mental impression for some of the members in the managerial group. Holmér (1988) alluded a few times to the circumstances that prevailed in the Kennedy assassination, the murder of Martin Luther King and some other assaults on celebrities, even if these events only served to help analyse the Palme murder to a negligible extent. It is possible that the initial assumption, that the incident was carefully planned and organised, can be explained by expectations, which were based on international experiences with superficial similarities. However taken as a whole, the effort to find the unique preconditions for coping with the Palme situation have outweighed the retrospective perspectives, even to such an extent that well-tried police measures were found insufficient.

The mere fact that Palme had been shot was unforgivable. When seized with the misgivings, the sense of accountability normally makes decision-makers susceptible to reconsider prevailing ideas about the order of things. Crises thus fertilise the soil for instigators of change, and the Palme case was no exception. Both the political establishment and the judicial system felt a violent shock that called for reflection.

On the political agenda, personal security matters gained momentum, to say the least. The price Palme had paid for his explicitly aired aversion against over-zealous bodyguards and a watertight security apparatus had been expensive. He paid for this with his life. The ambition to be up-to-date on security intelligence matters manifested itself in the presence of observers from the Ministry of Justice in the managerial group. Arguably, the dichotomy between the open society and the opposing security interests has not been a prominent subject for discussion following Palme's death. The preconditions for pursuing political activities have changed drastically; at least, the

murder pinpointed the downside of the coveted open society in a dramatic fashion. The murder also created room for political decisions regarding the capacity of the police force. In the seventies and eighties, the power and authority of the police had been debated in the political sphere, and Olof Palme was himself an ardent advocate of the socialist party's resistance to a strong police force. However, as a result of the occupation of the West-German Embassy in 1975, the existing riot squad was allowed to train and equip itself adequately for such situations (Hansén, 1998). After the Palme murder, the need for setting up a national task force within the police force was promoted by both the Jurist and Parliamentary Commissions (SOU 1987:72 and SOU 1988:18), which resulted in its creation in the beginning of the nineties. Interesting enough, this task force would certainly not have been able to prevent the assassination of Palme (Welander, 1998).

As to the concerns for the judicial system, the two first months ended in a disharmonious minor chord regarding the relationship between the managerial group and the public prosecutors. In a way, it was assumed that the co-operation between these agencies would work more smoothly with less friction when Claes Zeime took over K-G Svensson's position as prosecutor of the investigation. This change in the personal setting was engineered by Holmér and the managerial group, but was also supported by the Ministry of Justice and the Prosecutor General. However, after only a few months, Zeime and the managerial group experienced the same co-operation problems that had occurred when K-G Svensson had been in office (KU 1986/87:33). Of course, this seems to indicate a lack of learning in the course of crisis response.

Since the police (and Holmér in particular) had played a prominent role in the media and thereby became the butt target of criticism, the successive police commissioners took up a more restrictive position towards the media (Holmér, 1998). Today, almost all of the police authorities have press spokespersons, who represent the police to the public. The police commissioners have thus become more anonymous. The kind of extrovert police leader that Holmér was is no longer visible within the police force, to a large extent as a result of the experiences from the Palme murder (Ibid.).

In connection with the publishing of the first report by the Jurist Commission (SOU 1987:14), which dealt with the night of the mur-

der, some newspapers published articles on how the police organisation was functioning one year after the murder. Curt Nilsson, then Operative Head of the Stockholm Police's Department of Law and Order, conveyed that the police had become much better prepared for managing difficult cases. Influenced by the Catastrophe Institute in Oslo, the staff at the Police Communication Centre had been trained in coping with stress. New routines regarding the processing of information to the concerned people had been worked out as well (SvD, 6 May 1987; DN, 7 May 1987).

At five o'clock in the morning on December 4, 1994, four men armed with automatic weapons shot indiscriminately into a crowd outside a nightclub at Stureplan in Stockholm. Four people died and 18 were severely wounded by the assault. In October of 1996, the Police Inspection in the county of Stockholm rendered an account of the police effort after that event. The inspection was very critical, and stated among other things the following:

It deserves to be noticed that the critic that has been directed towards the police authority in this matter is similar to the critic that was delivered by different commissions after the murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme (SOU 1999:88, p. 295).

The Commission of Inquiry concluded that the police had had difficulties in drawing lessons from their failures, which, they argued, was related to their unwillingness to evaluate the failures (Ibid.). What would happen if the Prime Minister were killed in a similar fashion today? The question is somewhat academic, since a prime minister in public without bodyguards is an inconceivable phenomenon nowadays. However, it deserves to reiterate that a perpetrator succeeded in shooting Ronald Reagan in the USA in the eighties, albeit the presence of bodyguards. Moreover, not all ministers and party leaders maintain a constant personal protection. When asked, the interviewees got a troublesome expression on their faces. Klas Bergenstrand (1998) drew attention to one of the most prominent problems during the night of the murder, namely the deficient capability to process information, due to the number of communication centres. This problem is today only mitigated by the fact that most decision-makers are equipped with cellular telephones. Tommy

Lindström (1998) claimed that the same chaos could be prevalent again, because of the lack of leaders within the police force who are supported by their staff. If anything, this statement corroborates a point that has been touched upon earlier in this study, namely that the functioning of the police is highly dependent upon personality matters.

To sum up, the murder of Olof Palme was initially managed in a semi-vacuum; in an atmosphere marked by a need to cope with uncertainty in a (for modern Sweden) unprecedented situation. Previous experiences were not prominent in managing the situation. On the political level (especially within the Social Democratic Party) practitioners have accepted the harsh realisation that the notion of an open and safe Swedish society was somewhat illusory; an insight that will make possible future assaults on statesmen more complicated, since personal security measures have become a higher priority, as a consequence of the murder. The establishment of a national task force can hardly be related to the learning process of the Palme case, but is rather related to the window of political opportunity that was opened in connection with the murder. When it comes to the co-operation problems that arose between the managerial group and the public prosecutors, it is striking how the managerial group's persuasiveness lulled crucial decision-makers into their definition of the problem, which in turn prevented a more nuanced learning or adaptation process. Thus, when contemplating the renaissance historian, Jacob Burckhardt's thoughtful remark, that the true use of history is not to make men more clever for the next time but rather to make them wiser forever (as referred to in George, 1979a: 43), an important question arises. In a more extended time span, what lessons have been absorbed from the Palme murder regarding our preparedness and capability to cope with this type of crisis, where the political elite and authoritative agencies alike become stakeholders? In which the actual source of the crisis changes over time; where the role of the state and its agencies shifts from being protective to being held accountable? This study cannot provide all of the answers to these questions, but it calls for some serious reflection.

7. Conclusions

This study started off with an interest in Swedish national crisis management, in general, and an interest in the management of the crisis following the murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme, more specifically. The premise was that the growing knowledge base on Swedish national crisis management lacked this experience, and that it would be beneficial to incorporate this case, given the impact it has had on the Swedish polity.

It was argued that national crises are recurrent, rather than isolated, events (i.e. that they can be observed as a phenomenon, rather than individual and separate phenomena). The common denominator being that they all call for action, or non-action, on behalf of decision-makers. Each crisis episode is thus a decision-making process, marked by complex problems that have to be dealt with under pressure. By way of studying and comparing occasions for decision-making in different crises, it is hoped that fruitful patterns can be observed, and that the cumulative research effort can provide a deeper understanding of how Swedish crises have been managed.

A single case study has thus been carried out regarding the crisis management of the Olof Palme murder. In order to fulfil the comparative ambition, focus was centred on certain themes in a structured way. But to capture the idiosyncrasy of the Palme case, the phenomenon of symbolic crisis communication was believed to bear an additional explanatory dimension, which is why this theme was added to the analysis. To contribute to a theory development, a promising way is, supposedly, to search for partially new explanatory angles, given that the case in point is still part of the same 'class' (or phenomenon) which is being explained.

To say the least, much has been written and said about the murder of Olof Palme. The added value of a cognitive-institutional approach to the study of this national crisis needs to be addressed. Firstly, it fulfils a comparative ambition. It is in comparison with other national crises, which have been dissected with the same analytical tools, that meaningful patterns and conclusions can be drawn. It was also believed that focusing on cognitive and institutional factors would take the analysis one step beyond other types of analyses, which assume that decision-makers respond to objectively constituted and observable problems, as it aims at finding de-

cision-makers' interpretations of the environment. Some findings from the empirical reconstruction of the case are worth recapitulating.

The Stockholm Police became the most prominent decision-making unit, and remained so for eleven months. During the night of the murder, the lack of operative leadership led to inertia in regards to delegating responsibility. Unlike several other big crises in Sweden, the political establishment was rather anonymous in the management of the Palme murder after the night of the murder. Even though the possibility to move the management from the local to the national level existed, this option was avoided. The agencies who typically take care of murder investigations took centre stage in this case, but in an unparalleled fashion. The managerial group set up by Holmér was extremely heavy, and was composed mainly of police jurists, which apparently made the Chief Prosecutor feel inferior. In addition to this, the Government and the Ministry of Justice acted in the outskirts of the decision-making process as tacit backers of the managerial group. Holmér's close relation with Ingvar Carlsson, and his personal ambition to capture Palme's assassin can partly explain this.

When it comes to the problem definition, it seems as if most of the crucial decision-makers perceived the murder as an isolated event. Quite soon, the main problem was that the assassin had managed to escape and seemed impossible to find. The police force had to make up for the mistakes committed on the night of the murder. The public and the internal pressure formed the problem definition to one focused on restoring the damaged confidence in the state governed by the rule of law.

When different organisations are put together to work towards a common goal, a certain amount of friction regarding the operational means is to be expected. Patterns of Swedish crisis management suggest that this friction is downplayed to the public. The findings concerning the intra-organisational infighting within the managerial group corroborate such a hypothesis. On the other hand, the managerial group and its counterpart in the judicial system, the public prosecutors, aired their mutual distrust quite openly over their differing perceptions of each other's roles and, inevitably, the personal conflict between Holmér and K-G Svensson.

The problems with information management that were in effect during the night of the murder clearly rendered the police effort difficult. When the search machinery started working, no means of collecting data seems to have been neglected and information overload quickly became a problem. The information's inconsistency also entailed problems in managing it. In the short run, important personal resources were tied up.

In a strongly mediatised environment, symbolic crisis communication becomes more and more important as an integral part of the crisis management. In this respect, it is interesting to see how the managerial group, and Holmér in particular, managed to meet the media pressure at an early stage of the crisis. As a result, they gained the preferential right of interpretation when it came to framing the problems at hand. Consequently, this heightened the expectations for producing results. However, the murder of Palme represented a violation of a core value of the Swedish polity, and it symbolically heightened the need to find justice by capturing and punishing his assassin. When the investigative trails ran dry, the initially convincing body language actually contributed to a faultfinding attitude among the media representatives and the public alike.

As the murder was perceived as a lightning bolt from out of the blue, previous experiences and lessons from the past did not facilitate its management. It is likely that it served as a wake-up call to an innocent society, which for a long time had lived in the illusion of being immune to this kind of trauma. Efforts to perform better in future crises have been made, even though the organisational culture within the police force still seems to have lacked discovering some crucial learning processes. The Government and the political establishment have to partake, at least symbolically, in a crisis of this sort, especially when the border of responsibility between the state's political leadership and its authoritative agencies becomes unclear and blurred.

Is the Palme murder a good case to take into consideration when attempting to generalise about Swedish crisis management? It certainly had an impact on the Swedish society. It is however important to realise that the selection of a certain case is significant. The Palme case bore traces of a crisis after the crisis, which changed the prerequisites for its managers in a way that has had theoretical implications for the researcher. Other national traumas also bear similar

traces, as for example the M/S Estonia catastrophe and to some extent the Chernobyl disaster. The assessed values at stake and the time frame to deal with them were perhaps not even explicitly defined by the decision-makers, when a threat to the national security could be dismissed (i.e. after the first night). This feature calls into question whether the Palme murder is at all a crisis as defined by Sundelius et al. The answer depends on which actors are asked and at which moment. For the police, the stress level seems to have been at a 'crisis level' during the entire time frame studied here, perhaps with noticeable peaks on the night of the murder and in connection with the funeral. For political decision-makers, the stress level arguably increased as the problems between the police and the prosecutors arose, especially as the investigation did not produce results, substantial investments notwithstanding. Can this case still contribute to theory building in Swedish crisis management? It is believed here that it can, and does. However, the crisis definition provided by Sundelius et al. Needs, thus, to be supplemented. The findings in this study indicate not surprisingly, that it was actually managed, not only by the agencies that took care of the murder investigation. It was carried out under the auspices of top level decision-makers in the shape of representatives from the Ministry of Justice and the judicial system – not to mention the active non decision-making exerted by the Government. In the months succeeding the ones studied here, governmental engagement became more intense and overt. Why would this be if important values were not at stake, and the conditions to cope with the problems were not marked by a sense of urgency? The crisis management pursued after the murder of Palme directs the embryonic theory of Swedish crisis management towards a new, open-ended, typology of crises, which this study has hopefully illuminated.

When trying to capture the idiosyncrasy of this case, the impact of the open-endedness is quite evident. The role of symbolic crisis communication then appeared to be a fruitful specific theme in illustrating this character trait. It can not however be excluded that this aspect only has a bearing on open-ended crises; it is even likely that it could have an explanatory value on others. It could in that case be a general topic in theory building in Swedish crisis management. This feature is, admittedly, in need of further research and thus can be seen as an identification of a possible theoretical solution.

It must not be forgotten that the general aspects also highlighted in this study have had the ambition of capturing the characteristics of the crisis management due to the murder of Palme, which have had theoretical implications. In many aspects, these findings challenge the ones observed in other Swedish national crises, which addresses the question of the usefulness of creating theories on this subject at all. Divergence in the findings in these general themes does not however render them less useful for theory building, as long as the findings actually have an explanatory bearing on the case in point. Rather, it incites further research on what may be the propelling force behind these disparities.

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³³ SVT = Swedish Television.

³⁴ This interview was not pursued for the purpose of this study, but for a study on the occupation of the West-German embassy in Stockholm in 1975. See Hansén (1998).