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From Invulnerable to Anxious – Ontological (In)Security and the US After 9/11

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Declaration

I, Ida Olberg Torsdalen, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

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Abstract

The US declared itself at war on terrorism as a response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. These attacks changed the US's perception of security as the threats did not originate from a confined geographical space, but rather from a space of ideas. Instead of only going after the perpetrators of the attacks, the US declared that they would fight to defeat all terrorism. Ontological security theory can provide an alternative explanation to the US's security seeking after the attacks, as it is concerned with security as being, rather than security as survival. This thesis seeks to investigate how we can understand the US as an ontological security seeker after the attacks of 9/11, how the attacks could destabilize the US's sense of ontological security, and how the American narrative and 'self' was affected.

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1. Introduction

The war on terror was declared as a response to the attacks on September 11, 2001, when members of the terrorist organization al Qaeda hijacked four commercial airplanes. Two of them were directed to crash into the World Trade Center in New York, a third plane was directed to crash into the Pentagon and the fourth plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. The attacks left the world in shock and in the question of how this could happen. In the aftermath of such attacks, the state leadership is expected to provide explanations and solutions. In the case of September 11, the solution would turn out to be rather complicated as the attacks did not necessarily originate from a state or a geographically defined space, but rather from a space of ideas. Additionally, terrorist attacks are not usually perceived as an existential threat to physical security as they tend to be limited in resources and capabilities, unlike states which have an institutionalized military. Moreover, the threat was perceived as unknown in its unfolding, which might have disrupted the US's sense of ontological security and sense of stability in its surroundings. Ontological security is concerned with *security as being*, rather than security as survival. Hence, this approach argues that factors such as a continuous self-narrative, self-understanding, routines, and expectations are important for actors to feel secure.

President George W. Bush led the US response to the attacks as the head of the state. Under such circumstances, like the 9/11 attacks, the President carries authority in his words as a representative of the state and the people. When states or representatives of states 'talk' about their actions on the basis of identity, such as explaining who they are and why they act the way they do, it can be perceived as an effort of justifying their actions. Therefore, self-narratives can be utilized as an entry point to understanding how identity and self-understanding motivate and mobilize action (Steele, 2008, p. 10). Because ontological security is largely about narratives and the importance of a continuous narrative, a discourse analysis of speeches made by President Bush in the year following the attacks can help understand whether the attacks caused the US to become ontologically insecure. Such an analysis might begin with analyzing what is called a 'critical event' in ontological security theory, which is events that disrupt the routines and expectations of states. The first step of this analysis will then be to look at the attacks of September 11 as such a critical event and how these attacks became a threat to the ontological security of the US.

The attacks of 11 September 2001 changed the US's perception of security, wars were no longer something that implicitly took place on foreign soil. Additionally, there was a realization that even non-state actors were able to inflict considerable harm using the civilian infrastructure, and furthermore, the presumed perception that the 'third world' cannot bring the conflict to the 'first world' was proven wrong (Rasmussen, 2002, p. 325). The attacks and threats did not originate from a confined geographical space such as a state, but rather from a space of thoughts and ideas, which likely also disrupted the US expectations of how conflict is played out. The concept of globality and multilateralism can help explore how or why the attacks were made possible by opening for an exploration of the extension of social spaces beyond state borders (Rasmussen, 2002, p. 326). Previously, efforts of preventing disaster and war had been understood as reliant on agreements between states. However, as a result of globalization, distinctions between military and civilian, external and internal, war and peace, and foreign and domestic became harder to distinguish between, which might have made the US unsure about if the established routines they relied on could be trusted anymore. A new problem of security was constituted at a new level of global organization; the terrorists were global actors, not bound by state borders or a legitimate government that followed international laws and norms. By taking advantage of being undefinable, 'faceless', random, and unpredictable, the terrorists were able to transform a normal day into a scene of chaos and fear. In other words, they were able to disrupt the ontological security of the US by taking advantage of security frameworks and routines that were institutionalized and trusted (Zaretsky, 2002, p. 101).

The US military response to the attacks of 9/11, 2001, is one of the most extensive military efforts since the Persian Gulf War (Ratner, 2002, p. 905). The war on terror has been interpreted by most international relations scholars as an effort to restore the physical security of the US and its allies. However, by investigating the post-9/11 reactions through the concept of ontological security theory, it appears that the war on terror also was an effort to protect the United States or the 'civilized' sense of identity and 'self'. Instead of only going after the perpetrators of the attacks and bringing them to justice, which would have seemed like the more rational strategy in terms of risks, economy, and resources, if the only goal was to eliminate the immediate threat to their physical security. The US, however, decided to declare war on terror and pledged to eliminate all sources of evil in the world. What motivated the topic for this thesis is then a question of why the US chose this path and moreover, what lies behind the choice to declare such an extensive war. This is where the theory of ontological security is interesting because it provides an alternative explanation to the security efforts of the United States. The

strong emphasis on the US as a sort of guardian of freedom and democracy in the discourse on responses to the attacks implies that there seems to be a more underlying explanation for the extensive response to the attacks (Epstein, 2007, p. 13).

Even though theories based on identity likely cannot explain every action of a country or every change in foreign policy, they can offer some explanatory value in a lot of cases. Such as in cases where the perceived threat goes beyond state borders or comes from a space of ideas. If the threat originates from this space of ideas, it is likely that the measures states take to protect themselves from the threat also extend beyond the traditional focus on security. As so, the concept of identity and ontological security opens up possibilities for analyzing how security can be understood beyond the traditional focus on the state. However, some challenges with such approaches include investigating how identity might impact actors' decision-making on what and how something is being secured, or how security practices can contribute to the production of identity. First, security and identity are understood as contestable concepts, making fixed definitions and answers complicated to outline. Second, the assumption that security and identity can affect each other one way or the other creates difficulties in defining which concept existed first and how they can be understood as affecting each other (Christie, 2008, "Identity and Security" section). This thesis will analyze the correlation between security and identity from an interpretive approach, which does not necessarily demand a fixed definition of the concepts, but rather a continuous interpretation of how the relations between identity and security are formed.

Ontological security theory is mainly concerned with security as *being*, rather than security as survival. The security of the self refers to the need to secure our own identity and the need to experience oneself as continuous in the world and in our relations. As such, what is perceived as a threat is not just actions that are harming the physical self, but threats to the sources of ontological security, such as identity, routines, and values that sustain a continuous and stable actor. Ontological insecurity can however be triggered by physical attacks, such as the attacks on September 11, 2001. The attacks were by President Bush, not just perceived as a physical threat, but as a threat that came from a space of ideas and thoughts, which made it difficult to define and outline. This resulted in the war on terror, which broad premise was to remove the threat of terror from the surface of the world. Even if the most effective solution to removing the threat would be to go directly after the perpetrators, this solution would not remove the underlying threat, which was not bound by a certain group of people or a specific

geographical space. As president of the time, George Bush had a critical role in defining and constructing the 9/11 and war on terror discourse. Applying the theory of ontological security to President Bush's discourses in the post-9/11 years opens for an analysis of how the post-9/11 reactions and the discourse on the war on terror can be interpreted as an effort of ontological security seeking.

1.1. Research questions and objectives

Ontological security theory can offer an alternative explanation to the US's reactions to the attacks of 9/11 and the following policies and reactions. A central claim within ontological security theory is that states are not only concerned with, and motivated by their physical security, but they also seek to sustain and create a stable narrative about 'the self' and how they situate themselves in the world and in their relations. Therefore, state actions and policies can be understood as an effort to reinforce or sustain the sense of self-understanding and continuity in the world (Zarakol, 2010, p. 3). In other words, to understand how the attacks on September 11, 2001, extend beyond the physical security of the state, we need to look at how the US strives to sustain its biographical narrative and self-understanding as a global hegemon and protector of freedom, and further how the attacks of 9/11 might have disrupted this perception. Analyzing how the US strives to sustain its sense of ontological security and self, might also reveal how identity and values affect decision-making and policies. Furthermore, investigating the US from an ontological security perspective might also add to the understanding of how states react to events and why they respond the way they do, as well as it might reveal what factors make actors ontologically (in)secure. Following Zarakol's (2010) claim that policies are performed actions by states to underwrite the sense of self, an emphasis is put on how the official foreign policy discourse by President Bush and the following actions, such as the war on terror, can be understood as an effort of ontological security seeking. The main research question then asks:

How can we understand the United States as an ontological security seeker after the attacks of September 11, 2001?

The second research question is a sub-question to the main research question. This question serves to justify and guide the main research question. To understand how the post 9/11 policies can be interpreted as an effort of ontological security seeking, we also need to understand the drivers of ontological (in)security. A state becomes ontologically insecure through the presence of fear or anxiety. Within ontological security theory, fear is understood as an event that disrupts the state's self-understanding, whilst anxiety is understood as the result of shifting away from the fear response and towards ensuring that such an event never happens again. Giddens (1991) defines anxiety as "*fear that lost its referent object*" (p. 43). However, the debates around fear and anxiety in ontological security theory are marked by ambiguity and conceptual issues. Mitzen (2006) defines ontological insecurity as a "*deep incapacitating state of not knowing which dangers to confront and which to ignore, i.e., how to get by in the world*" (p. 345). As such, this question is embedded in both a theoretical and an empirical inquiry into how states become ontologically insecure. The second question then asks:

How could the attacks of 9/11 destabilize the US's sense of ontological security?

The third question is like the second one, a sub-question to the main research question. To understand how states become ontologically insecure, we first need to understand how states give meaning to themselves and situate themselves in the world (Steele, 2008, p. 2). Therefore, we need to look at the main pillars of US identity, routines, and self-narrative, and relations in the international community to understand how the attacks affected their sense of ontological security. Mitzen (2006) argues that states do not have a final say in whether they are security-seekers or not, she emphasizes the role of other states in defining this through a shared social order (p. 357). A shared understanding of the behaviors that are recognized as either security-seeking or greedy is therefore crucial for a state to be defined as a security-seeker, rather than an aggressor (Mitzen, 2006, p. 358). Huysmans (1998) further argues that states that are seeking ontological security will identify anyone who disturbs the status quo or break boundaries as enemies (p. 242). Rhetoric involving morality and values were brought into the discourse early on as President Bush made the statement: "*Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists*", shortly after the attacks (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 30). This question then seeks to investigate the relationship between identity and security, furthermore how the shared social order was

perceived as threatened or disrupted, and what shared beliefs or values were attacked on 9/11. The third question then asks:

What part of the US ‘self’ was attacked and how did identity affect the discourse as a result?

1.2. Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The research questions and objectives for this thesis have already been introduced in the introductory chapter. In the second chapter of this thesis, the theoretical foundation of this study, including a brief overview of previous research on the topic of US and ontological security theory, is outlined and discussed. This chapter explores how ontological security theory can broaden our understanding of the US as a security seeker after September 11 and how the post 9/11 policies can be understood as efforts to reinforce the ‘self’ and ontological security of the US. The third chapter outlines the methodological foundation of the thesis and discusses discourse theory/analysis as an analytical tool and method. This chapter, furthermore, discusses how analyzing official policy discourses can be significant to the approach of ontological security theory. Furthermore, the choices of delineation for this study are discussed and justified in this chapter. And the empirical material selected for this analysis is presented and explained. The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters make up the analysis for this thesis. Relevant context and background information on the topic is also provided where needed in this chapter and otherwise throughout the thesis. Here, the empirical material chosen is analyzed and discussed in relation to ontological security theory and the research questions. The focus of the fourth chapter is on how the attacks of 9/11 can be considered a critical event that disrupted the US’s sense of ontological security and on how President Bush defined the threat of terrorism in his speeches. The fifth chapter focuses on the American ‘self’ and efforts to sustain the American self as stable and continuous. The sixth chapter focuses on the war on terror as an effort of ontological security seeking by the US. Finally, the seventh chapter summarizes the objectives and the main findings of this thesis.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study seeks to investigate how we can understand the US as an ontological security seeker as a result of the 9/11 attacks. And, furthermore, how the attacks of 9/11 could destabilize the US's sense of ontological security and if so, what parts of the US 'self' was perceived as threatened and how this affected the discourse. The concept of ontological security will be drawn on to analyze how identity and the security of the 'self' was a matter in the period after the attacks. As so, the objective of this chapter is to discuss and present the theoretical framework of the thesis and lay the foundation for the forthcoming analysis and discussions. Because ontological security theory is based on earlier work on identity in international relations, the early parts of this chapter will contextualize the literature on identity. Additionally, identity theories and ontological security theories are closely interlinked, as both theories are concerned with the 'sense of self'. There will also be a brief discussion of other relevant approaches. The rest of the chapter will be a discussion of how ontological security theory can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the US as an ontological security seeker in the period after the terrorist attacks.

Traditionally, in the realist field of international relations, questions of security are approached from a physical point of view, such as the territorial security of the state (Edjus, 2017, p. 2). In this approach to security, military conquest would be considered a great existential threat, and having a powerful military would be considered the greatest defense. The state is typically described as an individual rational actor and the idea of the state as an actor is common for several theories within the field, such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism. However, their views on the state as an actor has some variations. Realism views the state system as anarchic, meaning there is no overarching authority, and states must therefore ensure their own safety first. Only the state itself can provide for itself, and the state, therefore, views itself as the primary actor in the international community (Mearsheimer and Alterman, 2001, p. 31). From a realist point of view, the policies that were introduced in the post-9/11 era might be perceived as legitimate because they were understood as important for securing the physical integrity of the United States and protecting it from external threats. An alternative argument could be that the United States acted like it did because it had an interest in securing its biographical narrative, self-identity, understanding of who they are, and its position in the international community (Steele, 2008, p. 2). Embracing a broader definition of security through ontological security theory allows for a more comprehensive understanding

of how states seek security beyond physical deterrence and how the reasoning behind policies might be more complex than physical security.

Liberalism on the other side acknowledges how other actors, such as non-governmental organizations also have a role. Liberalism further views actors as driven by self-interest, which would bring actors to act peacefully because war and conflict are irrational and bad for the economy (Russett, 2016, p. 69). To constructivists, the state is the core actor, but norms are considered influential on how the state acts. Constructivists challenge this perception of physical security as exclusive and argue that identities also can be vulnerable to threats. In opposition to the traditional concern with physical security in the field of international relations, ontological security theory is concerned with security as being. Moreover, the ontological approach to security allows for an investigation of how discursive practices are significant to security and how securitization processes can be relatively independent of physical vulnerability. And further how some actors in the international community can be willing to compromise material gains and physical security in order to protect or reinforce their sense of identity and continuation in the world system. The concept of ontological security can therefore illuminate other aspects of how states struggle for security (Edjus, 2017, p. 2).

2.1. Identity in politics

Theories based on identity appeared in the field of international relations in the 1990s. Nations started discussing their identity after the cold war and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and identity theories were considered effective in explaining the world in this period of time. Furthermore, scholars started investigating concepts of identity to explain state action and state interests in relation to the causes of war and peace (Berenskoetter, 2010, p. 3). The early work on identity in international relations was situated in the field of constructivism and focused on the importance of shared ideas and knowledge in the study of international relations and state motivations. Alexander Wendt's constructivist theory gained attention in academia, especially after he published the article 'Anarchy is What States Make of it' and brought identity theories into the mainstream (Wendt, 1992). Wendt criticized the previous concepts of anarchy, reconceptualized them, and proved how ideas are important in providing meaning to the material world. He further argued that "*the structures of human association*

are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces”, hence that ideas are important because they provide the material world with meaning and therefore contribute to our perception of the world (Wendt, 1992).

Identity theory argues that the interests, preferences, and norms of an actor are tied to the actor's identity and that the actor's identity can help explain their actions and decision-making. Some argue that identity cannot be formed without a negative perception of ‘the other’, and that identity is formed by the boundaries set between ‘us and them’ (Hansen, 2006, p. 6). Others argue that identity is not depending on the negative perception of ‘the other’, but that the construction and maintenance of identity are formed through both positive and negative interactions with others (Bucher and Jasper, 2017, p. 408). The post-structural approach within international relations has taken the work on the correlation between identity and foreign policy further. Within this approach it is argued that state identity can be an outcome of perceived threats or danger from the outside, from this point of view, policies are formed as a part of a process to secure the state from threats and are also dependent on the representation of threats (Hansen, 2006, p. 6). As so, the US’s decision-making after the attacks on 9/11 was likely affected by how they defined their relations with others, as well as by norms and values connected to their self-identity. Analyzing how the US distinguishes between ‘us and them’ might reveal how the US defines its own identity and furthermore, if and how they work sustain this identity in a possible effort of feeling ontologically secure.

Constructivism in IR uses identity to look at relations, e.g., to define relationships, differentiating ‘us and them’ or to measure how other states represent themselves (Hagström and Gustafsson, 2015, p. 4). State identity is generally considered to be a part of the culture of a state. For example, state identity can be a part of a state’s domestic political and military culture or a state’s domestic culture can be a source of state identity. Further, state identity can be a result of role relationships, such as rivalry or alliances with other states, in this sense, state identity can partly be a result of the state’s position or role in the international community or world orders (Berenskoetter, 2010, p. 10). Such friendships or rivalries between states can further contribute to how the state defines its meaning or role in the world, which according to ontological security theories is a part of the biographical narrative that states strive to sustain to feel ontologically secure. If the 9/11 attacks resulted in an ontologically insecure US, looking at the US’s relations with the international community and its narratives about it can offer explanatory value. If the US’s effort to build an international coalition in the war on terror is

interpreted as an effort of sustaining or reinforcing its biographical narrative, the following policies and the war on terror can be investigated as an effort of ontological security seeking.

State identity can also be shared or expanded to include other states, NATO identity or European Union identity are examples of this. Such collective identity is a result of the participating individuals' identification with the other participants and the collective identity is shown through the collective actions of the group members (Hagström and Gustafsson, 2015, p. 10). State identity and a state's perspective on itself can contribute to influencing e.g., what the state in question perceives to be the main goal, the necessary assets to reach the goal, or how much the state is willing to fund. Foreign policy can contribute to the shaping, weakening, or strengthening of such identity politics (Hagström and Gustafsson, 2015, p. 4). It can also provide other states with an idea of the value basis of a state. Further, the national self-image might also function as an ideal for how the state wants to be perceived in international society and in its international relations. As such, state identity can help explain the actions and reasoning of a state. However, it is important to notice that although interest can be produced by identity, identity is also likely to have been chosen or formed from certain values and interests. This means identity and interest may be closely intertwined (Leira, 2007, p. 8).

National identity is generally described as the internal dimension, something that binds the community together, such as historical context, ethnic components, or traditions. Whilst state identity is often understood as the external dimension, such as shared beliefs about the self and the other, both, however, sustain the feeling of 'weeness' and help states, individuals and groups define and position themselves according to others. Both dimensions are interlinked and influence identities (Banchoff, 1999, p. 262). The state usually represents the collective identity as this tends to uphold or reproduce the structure of the social reality (Dittmer and Kim, 2018, p. 17). Further, the state identity will provide actors of the state with a framework and guidelines for who they are and represent and what their interests and behavior should be. Therefore, identities are valid in relation to others and the interests of others, and both how a state act and presents itself are important to define identity (Dittmer and Kim, 2018, p. 13). State identity can function as an explanatory tool for foreign policy as it can contribute to the formation of foreign policy and an instrument to realize foreign policy goals (Dittmer and Kim, 2018, p. 15). Steele (2017) explains identity as an anchor, as something that keeps us centered and stable in the world and in our relations (p. 72), which relates to the claim of

ontological security theory that states need routines and met expectations to feel secure. Ontological security and identity theory are closely linked, as both relate to how states situate themselves in the world and how this impacts their actions. While ontological security theory refers to how states need to sustain a stable sense of 'self', identity theories argue states' actions and decision-making is affected by their identity. Moreover, a stable and clear self-identity provides routines and a predictable environment, which are important factors for states' sense of ontological security. As so, analyzing how the US defines its identity and how it situates itself in the international system might also reveal how the US defines its premises of ontological security.

2.2. Ontological security theory

The ontological approach to security originates in psychology and psychiatrist Ronald David Laing's studies on mental illness. He believed that someone who was ontologically secure had a sense of presence in the world as a real and continuous person. The approach was brought forward by sociologist Anthony Giddens and his discussions of modernity and self-identity. Further, Jennifer Mitzen and Brent J. Steele brought the concept into the field of international relations and security studies (Edjus, 2017, p. 3). Most research on ontological security in international relations is situated in EU – Russia relations. However, there are some studies that focused on the US as ontologically insecure after the attacks of 9/11. Noa Epstein's study from 2007 'Explaining the War on Terror from an Ontological-Security Perspective' investigates how examining the Bush administration's actions from an ontological security perspective can reveal the war on terror as an effort to protect the US's sense of identity. Keven G. Ruby's study 'Securitizing Terror: Ontological Security and the U.S. Response to 9/11' (2004) argues that the impact of terrorism is best understood within the context of ontological security, as he seeks to examine the link between terrorism, the state, and the practice of security. And Eli Zaratsky's study 'Trauma and Dereification: September 11 and the Problem of Ontological Security' (2002) uses the concept of dereification to discuss how the attacks of 9/11 were a catastrophe for the US because it disrupted the idea of the US as an 'impregnable fortress' and its expectations that the world was constantly moving towards liberal and modern values, and furthermore the US's ability to predict danger. Brent J. Steele's study 'Organizational processes and ontological (in) security: Torture, the CIA and

the United States' (2017) explores how ontological security theory can illuminate organizational narratives and the support of torture by the US.

Ontological security is the security of the self, not necessarily in terms of the physical body, but in the sense of one's self-perspective and self-understanding – "*the subjective sense of who one is, which enables and motivates action and choice*" (Mitzen, 2006, p. 334).

According to Mitzen (2006), ontological insecurity refers to the feeling of not knowing your place in the world and therefore not knowing how to handle threats or dangers. The ontological approach is not concerned with security in terms of survival but in terms of *security as being* (Mitzen, 2006, p. 334). Essentially, this divide is about analytically separating the security of the physical dimension, such as territory or people, from the 'idea', which e.g., could be historical memory or the biographical self-narrative of the state (Mälksoo, 2015, p. 224). In terms of this, to be ontologically secure would mean that one's understanding of the self must be relatively stable (Zarakol, 2010, p. 3). This requires that one's actions can be sustained over time, as actions will either reproduce identity or be contradictive to it. If the self-understanding is stable, this will reflect on the actions, which further will sustain the perceived identity (Mitzen, 2006, p. 334). Another concept within ontological security theory is narration, which can contribute to the strengthening of the biographical self-narrative and self-representations. Narration can be described as a set of tactics to entail a broader representation and justify actions and procedures that have been practiced in the past and might be practiced again in the future (Steele, 2017, p. 78).

Change in ontological security is described as something that happens in relation to traumatic experiences, ruptures, or disturbances and is called 'critical situations'. Such unpredicted critical situations could lead to a reformation or disruption of the agent's sense of self, potentially change the actor's self-understanding (Steele, 2017, p. 77), and further lead to ontological insecurity. Such a critical situation disrupts the protective feeling that institutionalized routines establish and is usually taken for granted. Disruptions like these lead to anxiety around fundamental existential questions. As so, the norm is no longer perceived as reliable, and the actors need to re-establish the routines to regain control over the new environment of threats (Edjus, 2017, p. 7). The attacks of 9/11 can be considered a so-called critical situation. As we shall see, several factors about the attacks disrupted how the US perceives and situated itself in the world. First, as a hegemon in the world system, there is a self-understanding that includes the feeling of invulnerability. Second, the attacks were

conducted by non-state actors and civilian infrastructure had a big part in enabling the attacks. In this case, military power, and the deterrence it brings did not guarantee security. The traumatic experience in combination with the unexpected method of attack disrupted the US's expectations of their security routines and might have motivated a revision of how security is ensured.

The 'self' and identity are according to Krickel-Choi (2022) connected through what she calls personhood. She connects the two by referring to the 'self' as an existential framework that a person relies on to affirm their reality, manage anxiety and develop identities (p. 2). As so, ontological security cannot be reduced to identity in itself. Furthermore, she suggests that the institution of sovereignty is what provides states with a sense of self, by giving the world 'realness', a sense of belonging, and predictability in interactions. The 'self' then allows states to be recognized as 'persons' rather than objects, which affirms them as 'real' actors that have a say in how they define themselves and their actions (Krickel-Choi, 2022, p. 14). When the US was attacked by the non-state actor al Qaeda, their perception of the institution of sovereignty might have been disrupted. Because al Qaeda or terrorism itself is not connected to a specific sovereign state, the institutionalized system that the US relied on was taken advantage of and the US might have seen itself as insecure in its perception of the 'real' world and in its interactions.

The perception and understanding of the self are not necessarily completely stable, since politics involves a constant struggle over power, and power relations might shift, this struggle over power can also affect states' definitions of who they are. Even though there is a strive for a coherent sense of self, the concept of ontological security exists because the sense of self is not unproblematic (Steele, 2017, p. 72). If the clarification of a sense of self is understood as a process of coming into being and understanding the 'self' within the world, one could move away from the perspective of security as something static and move moreover to perceiving security as a social process (Berenskoetter, 2014, p. 268). It is through this process of 'coming into being' by shaping and constructing the self, that policies can be understood as tools that states use to sustain their self-narrative or as tools that contribute to the production of a specific story of the self. And, it is through events that challenge the ontological security of states and the ontological security of the international community that we can analyze how states pursue policies and narratives to reinforce or sustain their self and their role in the world.

Few studies have systematically studied how emotions matter and affect politics (Kinnvall, 2017, p. 93). Mainstream approaches have tended to portray emotions as irrational, typically emotions such as shame, sympathy, or anxiety which are not related to ‘hard’ threats and the feeling of fear. However, emotions can be useful in situating ourselves in our surroundings and in our relations to others, and to help us understand ourselves (Hagström and Gustafsson, 2015, p. 9). Hobbes’s argued that emotions are irrelevant in discussions of state actions (Steele, 2008, p. X), but some approaches to ontological security argue that when there is a gap between an actor's self-understanding and their actions, they might feel shame (Hagström and Gustafsson, 2015, p. 11). Physical security is important to states, especially for survival, but ontological security is just as important because it affirms the identity of the state, in terms of physical existence, how states see themselves, and how a state wants to be perceived by other states (Steele, 2008, p. 2). Since “*ontological (in)security is grounded in temporal and spatial emotional structures through which individuals, societies and states make sense of themselves and the world around them*”, it is undoubtedly connected to emotions (Kinnvall, 2017, p. 94). For example, in the months following the 9/11 attacks, one could argue that the United States was in crisis and marked by acute societal anxiety. Such a crisis requires close analytical attention because the actions the United States took in response to the attacks could possibly lead to a reduction of anxiety, if not in the outcome than at least in appearance. The responses and actions could create the perception of being able to control an uncertain threat through narration. Viewing it like this, the narrative and emotions are just as important as ‘reality’ and actual control (Steele, 2017, p. 79). After the attacks of 9/11 President Bush’s discourse on the attack and the threats was largely based on identity in relation to values. Investigating how the US situated itself and its values in the international community and in its relations to other states after the attacks of 9/11, might offer some explanatory value to how the US perceived itself as threatened and how values and identity were a part of it. As we shall see, President Bush’s efforts to define the threat after the attacks can also be interpreted as an effort to reduce anxiety, as defining the threat, and outlining a suitable response are important factors to sustain the sense of ontological security.

Ontological security is claimed to be a basic need because deep uncertainty and anxiety can be experienced by actors as an identity threat. Uncertainty can make it difficult to motivate action and pursue them, which might disturb the actor’s self-understanding (Mitzen, 2006, p. 345). The ontological approach to security understands policies as depending on the threat, therefore the concept of identity includes an acknowledgment of the ‘self and others’. This

acknowledgment of the self and the others does not necessarily have to be based on threats, it can also be constructed through e.g., geographical, or political representations (Hansen, 2006, p. 6). According to Innes and Steele (2014), policies and state behavior are attempts to actively narrate the perceptions of what it is in a political community and that states sometimes even pursue policies in favor of their state identity despite the fact that they in order to secure the 'idea' might compromise their physical security (p. 17). As so, analyzing the purpose of the war on terror from such a perspective might reveal that the physical security of the US was compromised in order to secure the narrative and ontological security of the state.

Ontologically secure agents are usually perceived as peaceful and with a healthy sense of self. However, actors who are seeking out ontological certainty can in their path towards establishing order against potential threats to their identity take violent actions to achieve their goal, which emphasizes the claim that states are willing to compromise their physical security in favor of a stable 'self' (Steele, 2017, p. 72). Additionally, ontological security theory is based on the premise that actors are as willing to compromise and take risks with materialistic factors and physical security to sustain their identity and perception of themselves in the international community (Edjus, 2017, p. 2). When the drive to achieve ontological security is seen in the context of political power, we can further recognize how turbulent the process of becoming ontologically secure can be, this also applies to democratic countries in their 'crafting of the self' (Steele, 2017, p. 73). Moreover, today's increasingly globalized world can be an uncertain world for many where the terms of living are constantly being contested and changed, this can lead to intensified levels of insecurity and a weakened sense of self (Steele, 2017, p. 73). When actors are challenged by situations that threaten their self-identities, we can understand how policies are a reaction to a security need and how avoiding such action through policies could disrupt the self-identity and lead to the actor feeling shameful or anxious about their how it reflects on their biographical narrative (Steele, 2008, p. 49). For the US, the 9/11 attacks had changed their perception of security and their perceived invulnerability, following this, it would be necessary for the US to take action, according to their values and identity to sustain their narrative.

Even though the work on ontological security theories has broadened the understanding of security in the field of international relations, there is still some disagreement on the source of ontological insecurity. A central debate is whether it is the international environment and

interactions that cause anxiety or if it is the state's own insecurity about its identity and position in the world that is the cause of anxiety. (Zarakol, 2010, p. 6) Moreover, the debate revolves around questions about whether the source of anxiety is external or internal. The security dilemma is an important concept in this discussion, in which Jennifer Mitzen took more of a social approach in her article *'Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma'* (2006), contrary to the traditional materialist approach. For this, she has become a leader in thinking of ontological security as dependent on 'the others' and as affected by external factors. Her central argument is that states experiencing protracted conflict might eventually integrate the conflict as a part of the 'self'. As the conflict becomes a part of defining the 'self', states may prefer conflict to cooperation because it has become a part of their routine and self-understanding (Mitzen, 2006, p. 361). Following this understanding of ontological anxiety, the source can be said to be external and heavily influenced by the other. This approach is relevant to this thesis because there is an emphasis on 'the other' in President Bush's speeches, which is al Qaeda and states that support terrorists and furthermore, an emphasis on 'the other' as a threat. Additionally, 'them'-al Qaeda, brings discontinuity to the American narrative because they are a relatively new threat. This effort to distinguish between us and them by the President will be elaborated on more in the analysis. Another aspect is that the goal of the war on terror was to eradicate all terror in the world, which might exemplify how conflict can become a routine and a premise for ontological security to states.

Brent J. Steele represents the opposition to Mitzen's conceptualization and criticizes her for focusing too much on the power of the other (Steele, 2008, p. 59). Even though Steele recognizes that the other has some influence, he argues that it is not always external factors that help actors make sense of themselves in the social world and on their path to feeling ontologically secure. Furthermore, he argues that the self should be at the center and that actors do not necessarily depend on others or the external environment in their understanding of themselves. In his analysis, he concentrates on the self and the narratives about the self that is produced by the state (Zarakol, 2010, p. 7). The methodological shift Steele does when he puts the focus on narratives instead of interaction further implies that ontological security is not necessarily sustained by policies or actions, but through a narrative that makes the actions meaningful in a certain situation (Berenskoetter, 2014, p. 270). From this point of view, the goal is to protect an idea of the self, the structure of the social world, and the political community. To reach that goal, states create a narrative that ideas are manifested through.

Catarina Kinnvall's and Ayse Zarakol's approach is a middle-ground between Mitzen and Steele. They agree with Steele that a stable narrative about the self is essential for ontological security, but they also agree with Mitzen that the other and relations in the social world contribute to states' definition of themselves. Kinnvall argues that both the internal and external approaches are important because our internal self-understanding cannot be separated from the representations of the self and the other, meaning that it will always affect interpersonal relationships (Zarakol, 2010, p. 7), whilst Zarakol (2010) argues that even though external factors have an important role, ontological security is mainly about securing the presented narrative and idea of the self. Even though the emphasis is on 'the state' and the internal, she leaves an opening for external factors that are rooted in 'the state system' (Zarakol, 2010, p. 6). The internal factor relates to the US's narrative, which was likely established before the attacks. As such, President Bush's discourse on how 'freedom-loving' nations are threatened and his effort to build an international coalition can be interpreted as a way of securing the initial US narrative and its position in the international arena.

The forthcoming analysis will follow Kinnvall and Zarakol's middle-ground approach and investigate both how internal and external factors are important in the discussion of post-9/11 discourse because narratives related to both internal and external factors can be identified in President Bush's speeches after the attacks. The US's self-narrative and how they present themselves can be counted as internal factors, which is relevant to this analysis because of President Bush's discourse on America's identity as a "*beacon for freedom*" (Bush, 2001a, paragraph 4). However, following Zarakol's (2010) argument that self-understanding cannot be separated from representations of the self and the other, the threat, which essentially is terrorism and 'haters of freedom', represents the external and uncontrollable factor and cannot be separated from the idea of the US as a 'freedom lover'. Because President Bush defines the threat as terrorists and all that supports terrorists, it is clear that the US's feeling of ontological (in)security is influenced by external factors after the attacks. In addition, the discussion around the protection of democracy and the continuation of the world as we know it can be perceived as an idea or understanding of the self as threatened. As so, it is difficult to exclude the internal dimension without excluding the center of ontological security which is a stable sense of 'self'. If external factors cause anxiety, it might also lead to internal anxiety from not knowing how to identify the self within the chaos that the external threat is causing. Therefore, the divide into external and internal factors can help analyze the causes of anxiety, but they can also be understood as intertwined.

From an ontological security perspective, routines and met expectations are important to sustain the sense of self and the feeling of being ontologically secure. Huysmans (1998) describes ontological security as strategies for managing fear and the unexpected, and as having routines and orders for social relations (p. 242). As so, the ontological security of a state would be particularly vulnerable to threats that are difficult to outline or if the state struggles to define the threat. When states struggle to ‘hierarchize threats’ in addition to being in a state of crisis, the state might experience ontological insecurity. Therefore, to address the experience of ontological insecurity, it is important for states to get an overview of the extent of the threat and systemize how it should be addressed. Giddens (1991) refers to this routinization as ‘basic trust’ and argues that basic trust and stable routines are essential for actors to feel ontologically secure. Without routines and predictability, the feeling of chaos and anxiety would be overwhelming (p. 40). Mitzen (2003) supports this argument and argues that ontological security is dependent on routines to make sense of the environment and social interactions and that having routines stabilizes the actor's sense of self (p. 23). The ontological security of states is vulnerable to critical events that disrupt these routines and predictions, however, in a healthy basic trust system, smaller disturbances do not necessarily cause ontological insecurity that calls for rigid responses because there is a certain level of flexibility in the trust system (Mitzen, 2003, p. 350).

If the threat is considered or perceived as existential, it is unlikely that a healthy basic trust system is flexible enough to accept the risk (Ruby, 2004, p. 18). Even though terrorism is usually limited in terms of capabilities, states who experience terrorism tend to respond significantly in order to restore their sense of security. However, despite being materially limited, terrorism is flexible in nature, which makes addressing terrorism difficult. Therefore, terrorism can disrupt a state's sense of ontological security by being flexible and difficult to discover until it's too late and by taking advantage of the routines and expectations that make the state and its inhabitants feel ontologically secure. Terrorism does not have an order or follow rules like most states do and is, therefore, a threat to the routines that form a stable sense of self. As such, even though terrorism does not necessarily pose an immediate existential threat to physical security, it does threaten the foundation of the system and routines that states situate and understand themselves within (Ruby, 2004, p. 5). Even though the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks were limited to the terrorist group al Qaeda, the US defined all terrorists and supporters of terrorists as a threat. The cause of this may be the

nature of terrorism, rather than its capabilities as an existential threat is what motivated the US to broadly respond to the threat and perceive it as a matter of protecting values, identity, and trusted routines.

3. Methodology and Discourse Theory

3.1. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the methodological foundation of this thesis and explain how it relates to the theoretical approach of the study. This thesis will conduct a discourse analysis of statements by President Bush revolving around the attacks of 9/11, responses to the attacks, and the war on terror, furthermore, ontological security theory will be utilized as a theoretical lens to examine the discourse. Conducting a discourse analysis combined with the lens of ontological security will allow for an analysis of the presence of ontological (in)security expressed in the post-9/11 discourse by President Bush.

The methodological approach of a study should resonate with the theoretical approach taken. Steele (2008) argues that since the ontological security process deals with matters of self-identity and perspectives, we should lend ourselves to an interpretive approach to understand it (p. 6). The interpretive approach to social science argues that observations and facts cannot be separated from subjective interpretations. This approach defines reality as socially constructed and meaningful through the actors' interpretations, therefore it does not provide a definite answer of what society really looks like, but rather investigates how people attach meaning to their actions and different phenomena or events (Bryman, 2015, p. 624). Through embracement of the interpretive epistemology, it is possible to conduct a study of how a certain social reality is constructed and made possible. This thesis is based on an interpretive approach to international relations. With this in mind, this study will not contribute with objective and definite facts to what the world really looks like, but rather with an interpretation of the concept of ontological security and identity in international relations and how these concepts can be utilized to analyze and understand the reactions to the 9/11 attacks and the US as a potential ontological security seeker. Following an interpretive approach, conducting a discourse analysis of speeches by President Bush as a representative for the US allows for an interpretation of how the US narrative is constructed, affected, sustained, or reinforced as a

result of the attacks on September 11. And furthermore, how this narrative is given meaning through and relates to the ‘event’ of the attacks.

According to Hansen (2006), “*foreign policy rely upon representations of identity, but it is also through the formulation of foreign policy that identities are produced and reproduced*” and that things are given meaning and identity in the construction of language (p. 1). As such, if we understand reality as a discursive construction that relies on language, language can be understood as ontologically significant because it contributes to the construction of reality as perceived. Following an interpretive approach, separating the ‘idea’ from the material is impossible. Therefore, if language creates and challenges meaning, we need to examine the discourses that construct this meaning (Steele, 2008, p. 11). Moreover, reality as we perceive it is not understood to just unconditionally exist, but is rather understood as a social construct, made by individuals through how they give meaning to their reality. Such construction of meaning occurs through narratives that are embedded in a broader discourse (Steele, 2008, p. 10). This approach to studying language as the producer of meaning is logically coherent with the theoretical approach to this thesis as ontological security theory defines security as a social process. This social process can further be studied through the discourses that contribute to the manifestation of meanings to reality. Ontological security theory argues that states use their self-understanding and their definition of themselves to situate themselves in the world and further know how to act upon the world. Following this understanding, state actions are closely connected to how states give meaning to themselves. Actions are given meaning through the narrative that states sustain or build on to define their identity and purpose. When the actions are seen as coherent with the narrative and self-understanding, they are also seen as meaningful and logical actions.

The theoretical foundation of this thesis merged with the methodological premise that meaning is constructed through narratives and discourses, allows for an analysis of how states give meaning to their actions accordingly to how they situate themselves in the world (Steele, 2008, p. 10). By ‘talking’ about their actions in identity terms, e.g., by explaining who they are and why they act as they do, states justify their actions. This often happens in relation to an event because it is only in relation to an event that this narrative and justification is acquired meaning. As such, narratives can be used as a point of entry to understand how self-identity affects action and the justification of those actions (Steele, 2008, p. 10). Furthermore, these narratives and discourses can be used to study how states give meaning to their policies and how the

implementation of these policies contributes to reproducing self-identity. Hence, foreign policy relies on self-narratives and identity, but identity is also reinforced through the formulation of foreign policy (Hansen, 2006, p. 1). Following these claims, the US's reactions and responses to the attacks of 9/11 and the declaration of the war on terror can be studied through the narratives presented in the official foreign policy discourse. Three connected positions of analysis then guide this thesis: first, the interpretive understanding that meaning is given through language and narratives. Second, the claim that ontological (in)security can be observed in the language. And third, discourse analysis will function as the analytical tool of the study to observe the ontological security process through narratives. Steele (2008) argues that discourse analysis can help identify what is considered an ontological security threat to the state and how actors connect policy implementation to narratives about self-identity to deal with the threat (p. 12). As so, the aim of this study is not explicitly to describe the self-narrative of the state but to try and understand how these narratives and understandings of the 'self' can motivate and affect action. Even though discourse analysis can be utilized as a tool to understand the relationship between foreign policy and ontological (in)security, this does not mean that there is a definite causal relationship between the two. As this thesis is situated within an interpretive approach, the focus is on interpretation and understanding rather than explaining and defining.

3.2. Discourse theory

By claiming that meaning and knowledge are constituted through language, discourse theory challenges the traditional approach to knowledge as observable and objective. Within discourse theory, discourse is understood as written or spoken language as a representational practice that generates meaning to reality or the experienced world. Moreover, discourse theory *“rejects notions that knowledge is separate from the social realm and rather see knowledge as constitutive of reality”* (Dunn and Neumann, 2016, p. 2). The material world is then not understood as self-evident, but rather as a construction by societies to attach value and meaning to the materialistic dimension. Analyzing discourses can therefore reveal how or if social realities are taken for granted, constructed, or reproduced through language (Dunn and Neumann, 2016, p. 2). However, discourses should be understood as interpretations or a lens to understand a certain event or phenomenon, rather than objective truths to describe reality (Hansen, 2006, p. 7). The idea that the material world is given meaning through representational practices and construction does not mean that the material world is a simple

construct or that reality itself does not exist, but rather that the materialistic and ‘real’ is given meaning through discourses, perspectives, and interpretations (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002, p. 9). Language is then not only understood as a way to communicate information about the world, Jørgensen and Philips (2002) describe language as a machine that generates and constitutes the social world, social identities, and social relations (p. 9). Identities and relations should therefore not be reviewed as something static, objective, and self-evident, but rather as a part of a discursive process that is in constant development (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002, p. 34).

There are multiple strategies for discourse analysis, but in general discourse analysis is used to investigate how “...*systems of meaning-production have been generated, circulated, internalized, and/or resisted*” with a focus on continuity, change, or rupture in discourses in relation to an event or comparatively (Dunn and Neumann, 2016, p. 4). The different approaches furthermore have in common that language has an active role in creating meanings and certain worldviews, but despite this, language does not reveal essential truths about what the world really is or looks like. Dunn and Neumann (2016) then argue that it is not the text itself that functions as an object of study, the text itself is understood as a vehicle to help understand and investigate social, political, and cultural phenomena (p. 2-3). This relates to Wæver’s argument that the importance lies in how the text argues and not what the specific words in the text say (2004, p. 41). Therefore, discourse analysis is about investigating how certain discourses contribute to the reproduction of certain perceptions and worldviews or how the discourses challenge these. Moreover, discourse can be understood as social action that produces perceptions, understandings, and world views (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002, p. 5). The objective of this discourse analysis is then to investigate if, and if so, how, ontological (in)security is expressed through language and discourses, and furthermore to investigate how we can understand the US as an ontological security seeker after 9/11 through President Bush’s discourses on the attacks. To do so, an outlining of the American narrative before September 11 as well as identifying the main pillars of US identity is a necessary premise to understand if they experienced ontological insecurity.

3.3. Text selection and delineation

In social science, the research process is set to follow certain steps in order to do a systematic and transparent study. There should be logical consistency between the proposed research questions and the data collected to answer the research questions. Furthermore, the conclusion and answers to the research questions should be based on logical argumentation and evidence. This aspect is called internal validity in social research and implies that there is correspondence between theoretical ideas or concepts and any observations or interpretations (Bryman, 2015, p. 384). Moreover, the questions asked, and the approach taken to study these questions should follow the assumptions outlaid for how knowledge is generated.

To investigate how the critical event of 9/11 could have resulted in ontological insecurity and how the war on terror can be understood as an ontological security effort, the focus will be on the discourses where the policies are presented and justified. This analysis will follow Hansen's (2006) claim that "*official foreign policy discourse is the discourse through which state action is legitimized*" (p. 53) and the primary focus will therefore be on US official foreign policy discourse as expressed in speeches and press conferences made by President Bush as an official representative and head of the state. This will allow for an analysis of how the state communicates insecurity, values, actions, fear, and concerns. The US post 9/11 reactions and discourse, as well as the US as an actor in the international community is the center of the analysis, as to how the US situates and perceives itself in the international community and from that makes sense of threats, relationships, and its foreign policy and actions. The texts and speeches selected for the analysis will be presented and justified in the next subchapter.

The approach of ontological security theory will be central in the analysis of the text, as it is the theoretical approach of this study. The aim is to investigate how ontological (in)security is expressed in the official policy discourse. Understanding how actors give meaning to their self-identity and any identity threats, can according to Steele (2008) be done by looking at the causes of ontological security threats, why those threats must be dealt with, and which policies are the best to confront the threat (p. 12). However, as mentioned previously, the relationship between identity and policies is intertwined, which is why identifying the 'original' narrative before the threat was established is also important, in an effort to sort out how the threat affected the ontological security. This discourse analysis will consist of what

Hansen (2006) calls ‘model 1’, which *“is directly based in official foreign policy discourse and centers on political leaders with official authority to sanction the foreign policy pursued as well as those with central roles in executing these policies...”*. The goals of model 1 are then to identify texts, speeches, political debates, interviews, etc., and investigate the constructions of identity within the official discourse (p. 53). Through this approach, it is possible to analyze how the US, after the attacks of 9/11 created meaning to their self-identity, to the ‘other’, and to the legitimization of the war on terror, as a potential effort of ontological security seeking.

The timeframe of this thesis is set to the period between September 11, 2001, and July 16, 2002, which is the date President Bush, and his administration issued the National Strategy for Homeland Security. Even though discourses on the war on terror and on 9/11 continue way beyond the timeframe of this thesis and the empirical material relevant to this thesis extends far beyond what I could and have included, I considered it logical to limit the timeframe to about a year from the day of the attacks for two reasons. First, this period can be considered to include the time when the discourse on 9/11 reactions and the war on terror was first established and largely outlined by President Bush. Second, because of time and space restrictions set for the thesis. The sampled text is selected because they represent key events and because they are important and relevant to the American self-narrative. Furthermore, the selected texts are also chosen because they contributed to the establishment of US foreign policy discourse and guided the US’s decision-making. Expressions from the selected speeches such as ‘the brightest beacon for freedom’ (Bush, 2001a) ‘war on terror’ (Bush, 2001b), ‘with us or against us’ (Bush, 2001b), and ‘axis of evil’ (Bush, 2002a) and ‘freedom lovers/ freedom haters’ (Bush and Megawati, 2001) were all first spoken by President Bush in these speeches, which makes these texts especially relevant.

3.4. Empirical material

When analyzing how foreign policy debates unfold, Hansen (2006) sees it as useful to link and map the discourses and policies to ‘key events’, which refer to situations where important facts are manifested in the political discussions and agenda and influence the official foreign policy-identity constellation. The empirical material that is being analyzed in this thesis consists of eight written documents. Four of these documents are transcripts of speeches by President George W. Bush, three are transcripts of speeches by President Bush in the

company of other state leaders, and one of the documents is an official strategic document by the Office of Homeland Security and the Bush administration. Even though the number of texts, speeches, and other official documents produced by President Bush and his administration is immense, time and space limitations put restrictions on the amount of empirical material that could be included in this thesis. The texts selected, therefore, represent 'key events', meaning that the texts can be considered especially central in the bigger context. These specific texts selected can be considered especially central because President Bush, as a representative and head of the state carries authority in his words. As so, the narrative he presents in his speeches is widely distributed and relevant in the context of US decision-making and how the US perceives and deals with the threat. I will elaborate more on the relevance of each text in the next section as well as in the analysis.

The process of text selection started with the research questions set out for this thesis, in relation to these questions, I sorted out transcripts of speeches and other written documents that potentially could be of relevance to the study. The goal of such purposive sampling is to sample in a strategic way so that the samples are relevant to the research questions asked (Bryman, 2015, p. 408). The texts were retrieved from <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/index.html>, which is the official website for the White House and President George W. Bush during his presidency, the website is now a part of the US National Archives. Because the website is no longer updated, it is marked as 'historical material' and is frozen in time. As an official governmental website, the material is considered authentic (Bryman, 2016, p. 552). Because ontological security theory is the approach of this study, it was also central in approaching the texts. With an objective to categorize how ontological insecurity is expressed in the discourse, it is also necessary to analyze what is considered an ontological security threat, why this threat must be dealt with, and the decision-making process to deal with the threat. This will be done by following President Bush's narrative about the US after 9/11 and from this presented narrative; analyze the main representations in his speeches and from there categorizing how ontological security concerns are expressed in the discourse. To get an overview and understanding of the discourse and the context I read through the texts thoroughly several times, as well as using color coding to mark key themes and patterns.

The first text selected for this thesis is the *'Statement by the President in his Address to the Nation'*, a speech given by President Bush on September 11, 2001. This text is of importance because it was the first formal speech made by the President (besides a shorter announcement) on the day of the attacks. As so, this speech can be considered important for constructing the future discourse on the attacks of 9/11 and the war on terror. As the first speech after the event, it is also relevant in analyzing how President Bush initially perceived the attacks as a critical event and as a disruption to his (and the US's) understanding of the world and itself within this world.

The next three texts, I will present as a whole because I consider them to serve the same purpose and to have the same relevance. The three texts are *'President Bush meets with Prime Minister of Italy at Camp David'*, a speech by President Bush, and Prime Minister Berlusconi on September 14, 2001, *'President Chirac Pledges Support'* by President Bush and French President Chirac on September 18, 2001, and *'President Building Worldwide Campaign Against Terrorism'* by President Bush and Indonesian President Megawati on September 19, 2001. These speeches are relevant to President Bush's construction of a worldwide coalition and campaign against terrorism, because they demonstrate how President Bush establishes a narrative based on a common threat and shared values in an effort of securing what he perceives as threatened, which is "...liberty and freedom, a way of life that is so essential for humankind, mankind to be able to realize their full potential" (Bush and Chirac, 2001, paragraph 33). These speeches might also reveal how the President situated the US in the world and in its relations within the international community after the attacks. Furthermore, discourses of identity and values are drawn on in these speeches, which make them relevant for identifying if, and if so, how the US 'self' was attacked on 9/11.

The fifth text selected is the *'Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People'* on September 20, 2001. This is the speech where President Bush gave the world an ultimatum: *"Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists"* (Bush, 2001b, paragraph, 30). As so, this speech can be considered the beginning of the formal internationalization of the war on terror and as an effort of defining the threat, which in the perspective of ontological security theory can be considered an effort to re-establishing the ontological security of the state. In this speech, the President also declared war on terror and outlined how this war was an effort to remove all evil from the world. Which as we shall see, made the war on terror eternal and furthermore an effort of ontological security seeking.

The sixth text selected is the *'Presidential Address to the Nation'* on October 7, 2001, another speech by President Bush. In this speech, the President announced that the US military had begun strikes in Afghanistan. He also emphasized how these strikes were only the beginning of a broader battle and how this war was a necessary sacrifice to protect the value of freedom. This speech is relevant to the discursive construction of the collective US identity based on freedom and victory. Furthermore, the emphasis on how the announced strikes were only the beginning is relevant to how the US can be perceived as 'hierarchizing' the threats in order to mobilize and re-establish their sense of ontological security.

The seventh speech chosen as empirical material for this thesis is the *'President Delivers State of the Union Address'* on January 29, 2002. In this speech, the President proclaimed that states like North Korea, Iran, and Iraq constitute an axis of evil and threatens the peace of the 'civilized' world, which broadened the war on terror even further. This speech is also of relevance because the President elaborates on to which extent the US is willing to go to defend the country and how the cost of freedom is never too high and how the US broadly outlined the threat.

The eighth, and last text included is the *'National Strategy for Homeland Security'*, by the Office of Homeland Security, signed by President Bush in July 2002. This text is of relevance because it is an official document that outlines the threats and vulnerabilities the US is facing as well as the plan for enhancing American security and protection against future terrorist attacks. This text is representative of the US self-narrative because it defines the national strategy of the state and furthermore is important for the state administration and US decision-making. Because of the central role and broad circulation of this text in the state administration and its purpose to define and form how the administration thinks and acts, it is also highly relevant and significant to the unfolding of the American narrative.

The following analysis is divided into three chapters, in an effort to structure the analysis into three themes that answer the research questions. First, how terrorism and the critical situation of 9/11 can pose a threat to the ontological security of the US and how defining and outlining the threat is important to re-establish the sense of ontological security. The second chapter focuses on how the US defines itself in terms of identity, values, and in its relation, and how this narrative was perceived as threatened and furthermore attempted to reinforce. The third

chapter of the analysis is focused on how the war on terror can be perceived as an effort of ontological security seeking and how it through the actions and discourses of President Bush is possible to understand the US as an ontological security seeker as a result of the critical event of 9/11.

4. Terrorism as a Source of Ontological Security

4.1. The critical situation of 9/11

The second research question of this thesis asks how the attacks of 9/11 could destabilize the US's sense of ontological security. Understanding this begins with the initial event that caused fear and anxiety. In ontological security theory, a critical situation is described as an initial event that led to or resulted in ontological insecurity. Such events are usually described as something that happens in relation to traumatic events, ruptures or disturbances in the self-understanding of the actor. Furthermore, this event can function as a motivator for action and an eventual new (in)security perspective (Steele, 2017, p. 77). The consequence of such a critical situation is that the agent that experienced the rupture in its routines is left disoriented and anxious about how to restore the routines and is insecure about what other threats might be appearing (Edjus, 2017, p. 10). Therefore, by analyzing how the US reacted to the critical situation of 9/11 and looking at the factors that disrupted their routines, we can come to an understanding of how the attacks could destabilize the US's sense of ontological security and further how we can interpret the post-9/11 policies as an effort of ontological security seeking.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 resulted in the death of 2977 people as two hijacked airplanes crashed into the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York, a third airplane crashed into the Pentagon in Virginia and a fourth airplane crashed into a field in Pennsylvania (The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 1). On the day of the attacks, US President Bush gave a speech that can be considered the beginning of, and the establishment of the discourse regarding 9/11 and the war on terror. In the 'Statement by the President in his address to the nation', Bush started out by saying: "*Good evening. Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts.*" (Bush, 2001a, paragraph 1). Further, the President described the attacks with these words:

The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong.

Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.

America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining. (Bush, 2001a, paragraph 2-4).

The President describes and defines the attacks as acts that were meant to cause fear and disrupt the country's and the people's sense of security. His saying on how the US was attacked because 'we're the brightest beacon for freedom' also implies that he defines the acts as an attack on American values and moreover opened the discourse surrounding the ontological (in)security of the US. Furthermore, this definition briefly introduces how President Bush perceives the American 'self' and its core values. President Bush further makes it clear that "*The functions of our government continue without interruption*" (Bush, 2001a, paragraph 8) and that "*Our military is powerful, and it's prepared*" (Bush, 2001a, paragraph 6). Moreover, he demonstrates how the practical and physical aspects of the government were not harmed to the point where it was non-functional, as well as he demonstrates that the country had not been weakened in terms of military power. From the outset, the 'self' was threatened, rather than the physical security and integrity of the US. Generally, a terrorist attack in itself is usually considered limited in capabilities, however, it is the faceless and flexible nature of terrorism that is perceived as threatening and hard to control. The threat stems from the notion that terrorists can go unnoticed before they suddenly attack a routinized 'everyday' situation, such as on the street, in a civilian building, or on a commercial airplane. Even though these attacks did not necessarily pose an immediate existential threat to the US, the attackers took advantage of the routines and expectations that make the state itself, but also its inhabitants feel ontologically secure. The attacks were therefore a threat to the foundation of institutionalized routines that states rely on and understand themselves within (Ruby, 2004, p. 5). With the expectations of these routines not being met, the US likely became insecure about their routines, which caused ontological insecurity.

4.2. Defining the threat on a route to security

Ontological security is dependent on a routinized basic trust system in order for actors to act productively in their environment and relations. By taking advantage of these routines terrorism can disturb expectations and cause anxiety by using violence in unexpected situations and places. Ruby (2004) argues that the attacks of 9/11 caused ontological insecurity by taking advantage of and manipulating these expectations and routines. By hijacking a common means of transportation, such as a passenger aircraft, that has strict routinized security measures both at the airport and in the air, al Qaeda took advantage of the trust in the system and invalidated these routines. Furthermore, hijackings are rare in occurrence and even rarer when the intention of the perpetrator was to utilize the aircraft as a *“quasi-guided missile”* (p. 25). This causes a feeling of chaos, anxiety about the unexpected and not knowing what dangers to expect or confront. Even though terrorism and hijackings are rare in occurrence, the normality that was formed and secured by routines could no longer be trusted. Moreover, it is the feeling of assuming that an attack will happen at some point, but not knowing when and where that constitutes a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty, and therefore also ontological insecurity (Ruby, 2004, p. 26).

Mitzen (2006) defines ontological insecurity as a *“deep incapacitating state of not knowing which dangers to confront and which to ignore, i.e., how to get by in the world”* (p. 345). Moreover, Mitzen’s description of ontological insecurity is coherent with the threat terrorism poses due to its flexibility and ‘faceless’ nature, which makes it difficult to define the danger. Because of the ‘undefinable’ structure and random occurrence of terrorist attacks, the US needed to define and outline the threat it posed to be able to implement suitable policies and legitimate security practices that would contribute to the re-establishing of the US’s sense of ontological security. The discourse around threats was more based on terrorism in general, rather than the threat represented by al Qaeda in and after the 9/11 attacks, which reflects on the uncertainty of the threat and how it was not only presented by a certain group of people or a specific state but rather from a space of ideas. Four arguments based on insecurity and vulnerability can be characterized in the discourse on the security threat in the speech ‘Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People’ (2001b) and in the text ‘National Strategy for Homeland Security’ by the Office of Homeland Security. First, President Bush expresses in his speech how terrorists might live among us unnoticed, they can be anywhere: *“There are thousands of these terrorists in more than 60 countries, (they) hide*

in countries around the world to plot evil and destruction” (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 16).

Second, the Office of Homeland Security discusses how terrorists are unpredictable and can attack anywhere without warning:

Terrorists enjoy certain tactical advantages. They are able to choose the time, place, and method of their attacks. As we reduce our vulnerabilities in one area, they can alter their plans and pursue more exposed targets. They are able to patiently plan their attacks for months and years. Plans are undoubtedly underway today by terrorist cells we have not yet eliminated (Office of Homeland Security, 2002, p. 10).

Third, President Bush speaks about how the terrorist's goal is to destroy society and change the world as we know it: *“These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life”* (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 26). *“Its goal is remaking the world and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere”* (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 14). And last, President Bush argued that terrorists disregard norms that are considered general ethics and further how no one is safe: *“The terrorists' directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinction among military and civilians, including women and children”* (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 15). This can be interpreted and understood as ontological insecurity because the threat itself uncertain, terrorist take advantage of expectations by bringing attacks to the most everyday scenarios. As so, establishing the proper routines to deal with the uncertain threat is complicated, because of the ‘undefinable’ nature of terrorism. From an ontological security perspective, defining the threat to mobilize against it would be necessary. When the threat is uncertain, recasting the threat into something specific would facilitate logical and meaningful state action, in coherence with the perceived and established ‘self’. However, President Bush’s security language as presented above does not really define a specific threat, it rather portrays terrorism in general as a great vague insecurity that is hard to grasp because it could be anywhere, at any time without anyone knowing. What the President is doing, is discussing and presenting terrorism in relation to what is considered American values, identity, and norms. By putting the American narrative in opposition to the ‘threat narrative’, such as by saying: *“Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war...”* (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 55) and:

Our enemies send other people’s children on missions of suicide and murder. They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and creed. We stand for a different choice, made long ago, on the day of our founding. We affirm it again today. We choose freedom and the dignity of every life (Bush, 2002a, paragraph 64).

President Bush contrasts the American values, identity, and norms against the enemy's narrative, which results in a clearer definition of an otherwise uncertain threat. Doing so might allow the relatively undefinable threat to become more definable, as its meaning and purpose are interpreted as contradictory to the American 'self'. As such, President Bush and the US can be seen as trying to push forward the narrative of the American self-perspective and self-understanding in order to enable and motivate action and choices, which is a necessary measure to re-establish the sense of ontological security.

5. Sustaining the American 'Self'

5.1. 'What America is all about'

Ontological security theory argues that state actors seek a secure self-identity and stability in the international state system. This sense of security and stability is achieved through routines, meaning that when these routines are disrupted, the actor is likely to feel ontologically insecure. A premise of ontological security theory is then that the actor's understanding of the self must be relatively stable in order to feel ontologically secure. If actions and routines can be sustained over time, these actions are likely to reproduce the self-narrative of the actor. If the self-understanding is stable, it will reflect on the actions and decision-making of the actor, which will sustain and reinforce the 'self' (Mitzen, 2006, p. 334). To understand how the US sense of ontological security was disrupted by the attacks on September 11, a place to begin is by outlining some of the main pillars of the US identity and the narrative used to reproduce this identity (Epstein, 2007, p. 14). Investigating how the US is perceived and how the US presents itself can be used as a starting point for interpretations and understandings of why and how the attacks of 9/11 can be understood as a source of ontological insecurity and how the US strived to sustain their 'self'.

One aspect of the US's identity is the sense of essentialism or exceptionalism, referring to the US's self-assumption of being invulnerable and the understanding of its values, practices, and policies as superior. The core values are mainly based on principles of liberty, democracy, equality of opportunity, individualism, morality, and the right to property, which are the principles the US was founded on as a modern democracy. Additionally, personal freedom is also highly valued as one of the core American concepts (Epstein, 2007, p. 15). American exceptionalism is also based on a geographical factor, that the US is mostly isolated by oceans,

political factors – such as being a democratic republic and cultural factors, such as being a multinational population. This has contributed to a perspective of the US as a special republic. Furthermore, what is identified as core US values, such as freedom, is not only viewed as ideal for the US. But rather as a universal ideal that the US views as its responsibility to inspire other states and be ‘the patron’ of (Steele, 2008b, p. 248). President Bush reflects on this in his speeches as he states that “*We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self. We’ve been offered a unique opportunity, and we must not let this moment pass*” (Bush, 2002a, paragraph 51) and when he asks the people to “*...uphold the values of America, and remember why so many have come here. We are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them*” (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 39). Here he portrays the US as a nation that should lead by example, and a nation that people want to join and be a part of because of the principles America represents. He also describes America as successful “*...Because of the hard work, and creativity, and enterprise of our people*” (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 43).

Historically, victory can also be considered something that has affected the American national identity. Especially in relation to foreign policy, successful military foreign policy can contribute significantly to how the US defines itself and furthermore holds a symbolic value. Memory, history, and sustaining a biographical narrative are crucial for defining identity and making sense of the self (Christie, 2008, “*Victory and Identity*” section). President Bush made an explicit example of how victory has symbolic value and can contribute to the shaping of identity when he compared the war on terror to the Cold War and stated that “*It is an ideological struggle with an enemy that despises freedom and pursues totalitarian aims Like the Cold War, America is once again answering history’s call with confidence – and like the Cold War, freedom will prevail*” (Bush, 2006, paragraph 2) and more generally when he said that “*America has stood down enemies before, and will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day. Yet, we forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world*” (Bush, 2001a, paragraph 12).

Another aspect of the US’s identity is within the social aspects and refers to its role as a hegemon. This role is embedded in both economic and military superiority and might also be an explanation for their self-understanding of being invulnerable. Furthermore, the US’s status as a superpower reaches further than its own security and self-sufficiency, as its status and deterrence power also benefit other states, such as through alliances. Today, the US is the country in the world with the highest GDP (gross domestic product) and one of the leading industrial powers in the world. Their military budget is also the largest in the world and it is

the only country that is considered capable of fighting a major regional war at a distance due to its highly developed technology. Both their superior economy and military power portray and sustain a certain image of their role in the world and the international community. This has led to a perception of the US as an altruistic “*provider of collective goods and as the leader of the free world*” (Epstein, 2007, p. 15). However, this perception of the US as an exceptional state and a hegemon in the international system is also connected to representations of the US facing existential threats (Christie, 2008, “The complexity of US security policy” section). President Bush has emphasized that enemies of the US hate them because “*They hate what we see right here in this chamber -- a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms -- our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other*” (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 24). By differentiating the US and its ‘civilized order’ from the chaos and evil of al Qaeda the President is also affirming the US identity as expectational.

5.2. Freedom-lovers, friends, and allies: building coalition

All throughout the empirical material there is a strong emphasis on ‘us’, the freedom-lovers and efforts to reinforce this feeling of ‘we-ness’. The definition of who ‘us’ is, varies from being national, to including allies and those who hold the same values as the US. Even though there is no formal declaration of war in the ‘Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation’ by President Bush on September 11, 2001, he mentions the future war on terror and as so, verbally declares war as he says: “*America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism*” (Bush, 2001a, paragraph 11). Here, the President projects the future war as joined by friends and allies and as based on values such as freedom, security, and multilateralism, and further as a struggle between good and evil. This was a further reinforcement of when he stated that “*We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.*” (Bush, 2001a, paragraph 9). Even though the mentioning of the phrase ‘war on terror’ in this speech was not an official declaration of war, it can be interpreted as the starting point to where the 9/11 attacks were translated into an attack on values and ontological security, and from that motivated action. At this point, the intent of the phrase was more likely to unify and guide the narrative of how this would be dealt with. Furthermore, the statement that there will be no distinction between terrorists and those who harbor them can be interpreted as a warning for other states and the international community

as to how those who did not ally with the US would be perceived and met in response. President Bush expresses an expectation that all nations should engage and that it will have consequences if they do not: *“My hope is that all nations will heed our call, and eliminate the terrorist parasites who threaten their countries and our own... But some governments will be timid in the face of terror. And make no mistake about it: If they do not act, America will”* (Bush, 2002a, paragraph 16-17). The effort by President Bush to build an international coalition can also be understood as a new routine that re-establishes ontological security as it builds confidence and confirms the US’s ability to navigate the international environment, as an important element in ontological security theory is that states need to feel stable in their surroundings and in their social relations to feel ontologically secure. By understanding the surroundings and social relations as routines and expectations, President Bush's efforts to build an international coalition that would respond to the attacks can be interpreted as an effort of sustaining and reinforcing the stable relations the US has developed over time with other states. As he says it: *“Together with friends and allies from Europe to Asia, and Africa to Latin America, we will demonstrate that the forces of terror cannot stop the momentum of freedom”* (Bush, 2002a, paragraph 61).

In the week following the attacks, the discourse continued to revolve around multilateralism and values as President Bush welcomed leaders from around the world to the United States to discuss the course of action. First to visit was Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi, followed by French President Chirac, and last was Indonesian President Megawati. Through these visits, a clear expectation for an international response to the attacks was set. In his speech with the Italian Prime Minister, President Bush expressed that they were *“meeting about our common interests”* (Bush and Berlusconi, 2001, paragraph 1) and that *“...the international community must work together to prevent this from happening.”* in regard to weapons of mass destruction (Bush and Berlusconi, 2001, paragraph 28). In his speech with the French President, President Bush expressed that *“If you love freedom, you must join with us...”* (Bush and Chirac, 2001, paragraph 16) and that *“Freedom-loving loving people understand that terrorism knows no borders, that terrorists will strike in order to bring fear, to try to change the behavior of countries that love liberty.”* (Bush and Megawati, 2001, paragraph 11) in his speech with President Megawati. President Bush mentions the word ‘freedom’ a total of 16 times in his three speeches accompanied by the other state leaders. By repeating this narrative of the ‘freedom-loving’ and the evil, President Bush is constructing a coalition with the countries that he perceives to share values with the US. Furthermore, this discourse can be interpreted

as addressing the ontological insecurity that the US experienced and developed after the 9/11 attacks and as an effort of the US to try and situate itself in the world, in its relations, and in the international community. This constant emphasis on freedom lovers versus the enemies of freedom can also be interpreted as a rhetorical strategy meant to motivate other states to join their coalition. Constructing an international coalition based on shared values proved to both the US itself and the rest of the world that they did not stand alone in addressing the perceived threat and that even though the terrorist attacks disrupted the US perception of the self, the relations they had to other countries was still the same and stable, in accordance with expectations. As so, these meetings can be understood as a way of ‘checking’ that not every routine or expectation of how the US situates itself in the world is disrupted. If the ontological security process is understood as a social process and reliant on understanding the self within the world (Berenskoetter, 2014, p. 268), President Bush’s effort of constructing an international coalition can be interpreted as a way of rebuilding the US self-narrative in an international context and as a way of sustaining the international order as the US expects it to function. As mentioned previously, the focus on shared values such as freedom and liberty can also be understood as a method of outlining the threat, so that President Bush establishes an expectation of who he can trust as allies in uncertain times and who he considers as an enemy or a threat.

The discourse around freedom as a core US value, and the US as threatened, was further extended to how shared values, norms, and institutions were threatened as President Bush stated that the attacks were not only an attack on the US but an attack on “...*all of us, in the civilized world*” (Bush and Berlusconi, 2001, paragraph 3) and how this was a threat because:

...terrorism knows no borders, it has no capital, but it does have a common ideology, and that is that they hate freedom, and they hate freedom-loving people. And they particularly hate America at this moment. But many leaders understand that what happened in New York... could have easily happened in their capital as well. (Bush and Megawati, 2001, paragraph 25).

By referring to the ‘civilized world’ and how this could have happened to any country that considers freedom to be important to them, President Bush expresses that this is not only a threat to the US, but rather a threat to the liberal world order built on shared values and institutions; “*We’re fighting for liberty and freedom, a way of life that is so essential for humankind*” (Bush and Chirac, 2001, paragraph 33). From this understanding, President Bush

did not see only the US as ontologically insecure, but the world system. If he understood the protection of the current global order and its norms and rules as threatened, the US, and its position as a hegemon in the international society would be threatened as well. This is also connected to the need for routines and institutionalized order as a premise for states to feel ontologically secure. Additionally, the phrase ‘civilized’ is usually understood as something that has an order, hence a sort of routine and expectation to how the system functions. In opposition to terrorism, which President Bush understands and portrays as barbaric and without fixed points of reference. Moreover, terrorism is a threat to routines and order and furthermore ontological security, because of its flexible and invisible nature.

5.3. Providing a stable sense of self

Because the ontological approach to security understands policies as dependent on the threat and motivations, there is an acknowledgment of the self and the others (Hansen, 2006, p. 6). As such, it is through the other that the self is defined and presents itself. Furthermore, it is not enough for states to only feel secure in their perception of the self. Relations with other states and feeling secure in the company of other states are also important as the existing international order is a part of the routine’s states rely on to feel ontologically secure (Edjus, 2017, p. 13). In the period after the attacks, it can be considered important for the US to define relationships in order to reestablish its trust in the international community and its practices, which was disrupted by the critical situation of 9/11. Even though burden sharing can increase mutual vulnerability, alliances and ‘friendships’ between states can also stabilize meaning and contribute to an increase in ontologically insecure and vulnerable states’ sense of self in their relation to other states (Edjus, 2017, p. 14). By viewing President Bush’s discourse on the self and the other in light of this it is possible to analyze whether the discourses and reactions after the attacks were an effort of ontological security seeking.

In President Bush’s speeches after the attacks, the discourse was largely based on a distinction between “*people who love freedom*” (Bush and Chriac, 2001, paragraph 12; Bush and Megawati, 2001, paragraph 2) and “*people who hate freedom*” (Bush and Chriac, 2001, paragraph 3). As so, there was a construction of ‘them’ as evil, freedom haters, and ‘us’ as good and protectors of freedom, but this narrative of ‘us’ as good is also based on ‘them’ as evil. The construction of us or the self is then based on differences between us and them. Defining ‘them’ as different from ‘us’ does not necessarily mean that the difference is a

threat, however, this distinction can be used to construct and identify who we are and how we motivate action in relation to what ‘we’ see as wrong. Therefore, the construction of a narrative about ‘them’, negative or positive, also constructs and reveals a narrative about the self. This distinction is not only important in defining the threat but also a way of sustaining the self in uncertain times. Reminding the people of ‘who we are’ can contribute to a sense of stability and continuity despite the disruption in routines and expectations, which is important for the sense of ontological security. This can be further reinforced by pointing out how ‘we are different from *them*’ as an effort of building a coalition, a sense of belonging and as a way of motivating and justifying responses to the threat.

This dualism is most evident in the following quote from President Bush from the ‘Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People’ on September 20, 2001, where he clearly opened for an ‘us vs. them’ and ‘either, or’ narrative and further portrayed ‘them’ and anyone who chose not to join ‘us’ as a threat:

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 30).

For the US it was important to know the extent of the threat, without knowing how far the threat stretches it would be difficult for the US to design an appropriate response that would make them feel stable and ontologically secure again. A fear of implosion and the collapse of the world as known resulted in the targeting of al Qaeda as a non-state actor as well as other terrorist organizations and individual states who support and harbor terrorists. President Bush expressed this when he said:

This is not, however, just America’s fight. And what is at stake is not just America’s freedom. This is the world’s fight. This is civilization’s fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 35).

As such, President Bush established a discourse around the world on terror that was largely based on values and an ‘us/ them’ narrative. This can also be perceived as an effort to create order and define the threat. The US’s experience was that brutal attacks can be done by ‘faceless’ non-state actors, at any given moment and in the most civilian settings. Therefore, it

was important for the ontological security of the US to sort out anyone who could pose a threat like this in order to reestablish order and routines. Because ontological insecurity can be defined as an insecurity of not knowing which threats to address and which to ignore (Mitzen, 2006, p. 345), President Bush can be understood as trying to re-establish the ontological security of the US by creating two categories to navigate the international terrain easier: those who chose to support the US and therefore pose no threat or those who chose not to and therefore is regarded as a potential threat and an enemy of the US. Moreover, frequently using rhetoric based on good versus evil and enemies of freedom versus protectors of freedom can be interpreted as an effort of differentiating the US identity as a protector and lover of freedom from al Qaeda as enemies of freedom, which result in the affirmation of the US identity and narrative as exceptional.

6. War on Terror as a Path to Ontological Security

6.1. Becoming ontologically secure by defeating all evil

After the day of the attacks on September 11, President Bush stated that *“We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them”* (Bush, 2001a, paragraph 9). Shortly after this statement, it was made clear that ‘those who harbor them’ included the government of Afghanistan. The Taliban government was demanded by President Bush to stop harboring al Qaeda members, otherwise, they would be regarded by the US as a hostile regime (Ratner, 2002, p. 906). The Taliban did not adhere and on September 20, 2001, President Bush and the US declared war on terror. On October 7, 2001, the US asserted the right to self-defense against Afghanistan in a letter to the United Nations (Ratner, 2002, p. 907). The US also invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which meant that the member states of NATO were obligated to come to the US’s defense, which allowed the US to quickly form an international coalition (Bensahel, 2003. p. 5). As so, the war on terror became a multilateral mission and included a number of powerful states such as the UK, Germany, France, and Canada, but also smaller states such as Norway and Denmark. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established on UN mandate and its main purpose was to participate in the rebuilding of governmental institutions. Additionally, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), which was US-led, had as its main goal to respond to the enemy and fight terrorism (Olsen, 2022, p. 18).

By now President Bush's discourse around the attacks of 9/11 had outlined the threat the US and the rest of the 'civilized' world were facing, furthermore, these threats were defined and translated into motivation for action. He announced that the war on terror would begin with al Qaeda but warned that the war would not end until all terrorists and supporters of terrorists were defeated. In his 'Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People', he announced that "*Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.*" (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 23). The unwillingness to negotiate was demonstrated with Afghanistan and the Taliban: "*The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorist, or they will share in their fate*" (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 21). Furthermore, President Bush emphasized that Afghanistan under the Taliban was "*...repressing its own people, it is threatening people everywhere by sponsoring and sheltering and supplying terrorists*" (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 19) and by saying so, implied that the Afghan government does not have the same values and norms as the US. Moreover, President Bush links the perpetrators of the 'critical situation' of 9/11, al Qaeda, to the state of Afghanistan and its leadership, the Taliban. This can be interpreted as another effort of defining the threat in order to motivate and systemize action in response. Because terrorism is flexible in nature, 'hierarchizing' threats, might be difficult, but an important effort to re-establish ontological security. Even though President Bush had previously stated that the threat is not defined by borders, but by a common ideology. Including states that he considered to facilitate terrorist activities would help in pointing down the otherwise flexible and uncertain threat. And the best way to ensure the safety of the world was according to Bush to "*...find terrorism at its roots and to root it out...*" (Bush and Megawati, 2001, paragraph 30)

On October 7, 2001, President Bush announced in his 'Presidential Address to the Nation' that Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was initiated and that "*the United States military has begun strikes against al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.*" (Bush, 2001c, paragraph 1). Further, he mentioned how the support for the war in Afghanistan was internationally backed, including Great Britain, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, and "*More than 40 countries in the Middle East, Africa, Europe and across Asia... We are supported by the collective will of the world.*" (Bush, 2001c, paragraph 2). The possible ways for other states to support the war included the fields of finance, diplomacy, military, humanitarian aid, medicine, and intelligence. These diverse

ways other states could be supportive can be interpreted as a way for the United States to address the implosion they might be experiencing, the options for support can also be interpreted as an effort of sustaining the international order and to make sure that every action possible is being tested in order to regain control of the situation. As President Bush announced it:

This military action is a part of our campaign against terrorism, another front in a war that has already been joined through diplomacy, intelligence, the freezing of financial assets and the arrests of known terrorists by law enforcement agents in 38 countries. Given the nature and reach of our enemies, we will win this conflict by the patient accumulation of successes, by meeting a series of challenges with determination and will and purpose (Bush, 2001c, paragraph 7).

To re-establish and reinforce their sense of ontological security, the US and President Bush relied on the international community's support to cooperate on the set mission and justify their efforts. By internationalizing the threat of terror and consequently, including the international community in the terror and 9/11 discourse, the US was able to centralize support and effort around the US as an effort to re-establishing their ontological security.

The international support was important for the US in their retaliation against al Qaeda. Even though the US holds a position as a global superpower and hegemon in the international community, the defined threat was too vague and global for the US to restore its own sense of ontological security by itself. The US still needed the legitimacy of the international community, not simply for jurisdictional and ethical reasons, but also to reinforce its position in the world and its known and continuous sense of self in relation to other states. As such, the internationally backed US-led war with a global coalition can be interpreted as an effort to restore the ontological security of the US, by defeating the threat which the US defined as all terrorists across the world, including both non-state actors and states that in any way supported terrorists. As mentioned previously, President Bush perceived the world system as threatened. Reassuring that other states were still a part of the expected routines and institutions that the US relied on can be done by building such a coalition. The US likely expected the support of other states, when the other states confirmed this, it might have strengthened the US's sense of ontological security because it fulfilled their expectations to established routines and institutions. Furthermore, such a long-term mission of global reach called for international support, which might explain why President Bush extended the

narrative and the US's sense of ontological insecurity to all "*freedom-loving nations*" (Bush and Megawati, 2001, paragraph 34) by emphasizing that "*the civilized world faces unprecedented dangers*" (Bush, 2002a, paragraph 1) from states and non-state actors that are not following international norms and laws. In his speech on October 7, 2001, President Bush also speaks about a letter he got from a little girl whose father was in the military. He quoted her letter saying: "*As much as I don't want my dad to fight, I'm willing to give him to you*" (Bush, 2001c, paragraph 15). What the President further issues can be interpreted as an effort of presenting the letter as a letter to the whole nation. He talks about how this little girl knows "*what America is all about*" and how "*young Americans have gained a new understanding of the value of freedom, and its cost in duty and sacrifice*" (Bush, 2001c, paragraph 16). As so, he forwards going to this war as a duty and an important sacrifice in the faith of the value of freedom and that ignoring this threat will lead to never-ending anxiety and ontological insecurity. Through this example, President Bush also demonstrates how the identity of 'us' is in a situation of crisis and that war and sacrifices are necessary to protect and sustain these values that make up the 'self'.

On January 29, 2002, in the speech 'President delivers State of the Union Address' the President makes this statement about the progress of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan:

Our cause is just, and it continues. Our discoveries in Afghanistan confirmed our worst fears, and showed us the true scope of the task ahead. (...) We have found diagrams of American nuclear power plants and public water facilities, detailed instructions for making chemical weapons, surveillance maps of American cities, and thorough descriptions of landmarks in America and throughout the world. What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning. Most of the 19 men who hijacked planes on September the 11th were trained in Afghanistan's camps, and so were tens of thousands of others. Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning (Bush, 2002a, paragraphs 10-11).

Here, the President describes the US's discoveries in Afghanistan as an indicator of how the physical security of the US is threatened, which he uses to demonstrate how the war on terror is just. By pointing out the findings in Afghanistan, the President also demonstrates how

important the war on terror is to protect the US and the rest of the 'civilized' world. Presenting the purpose of the war as a war to eradicate all evil in the world, which in practice is impossible, makes the war infinite in duration. This, paradoxically, can contribute to the re-establishment of the ontological security of the US. Even though war might compromise the physical security of the US, the war on terror can be perceived as an intervention in routines. As Mitzen (2006) argues: states might experience conflict as a part of their routine and a part of their 'self' (p. 361). As discussed previously, the attacks of 9/11 can be interpreted in the approach of ontological security theory as a critical event that disrupted the US routines, the routines which the US relies on, and that contribute to ontological security. By defining the threat, mobilizing a response, and routinizing this response, the US can be seen as establishing new routines to rely on for its ontological security (Epstein, 2007, p. 18). Because the mission to eradicate all evil is an eternal project, the effort to try and achieve this becomes a routine. As the war on terror becomes a part of the US routines, it also becomes one of their efforts to sustain their sense of ontological security and self-understanding. Routinizing the war is necessary due to the nature of terrorism as unpredictable and diffuse as of not being bound to a geographically confined space, but rather from ideas or ideology. The narrative of how the war is necessary and of long duration can also be identified later in the same speech, when President Bush stated this:

Our war on terror is well begun, but it is only begun. This campaign may not be finished on our watch -- yet it must be and it will be waged on our watch.

We can't stop short. If we stop now -- leaving terror camps intact and terror states unchecked -- our sense of security would be false and temporary. History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight (Bush, 2002a, paragraphs 24-25).

Here, the phrase 'our sense of security would be false and temporary' explicitly demonstrates how President Bush perceived the war on terror, even if the war is impossible to actually 'win', it is important for the US's sense of ontological security. By stating that the campaign may not be finished on his watch, he is also saying that this will be a campaign of a long duration. However, checking and taking down every terror camp worldwide would likely be impossible or at least never-ending, as new ones likely will be created with time. Therefore, the war on terror can be perceived as a routinization of security ensuring and an effort to be in control of the threat, at least in perception.

6.2. The price of freedom

The United States' sense of ontological security was now perceived to be dependent on the defeat of not only the initial threat, which was the non-state actor and terrorist group al Qaeda, but on the defeat of all states that supported or harbored terrorists, did not follow international rules and laws, and did not have the same values as presented by President Bush and the US. States that were not adhering to the international community's liberal democratic values were considered a threat to not only the US but the whole international community that was a part of the coalition of "*freedom-loving nations*" (Bush and Megawati, 2001, paragraph 34) such as the US itself. As such, the intention was not only to free Afghanistan from its 'uncivilized' system but to free the whole international community from the threat of terrorism and the ontological security threat it posed. However, freeing the world from all threats of terrorism is an eternal mission, which is why the war on terror can be perceived as an intervention of routines in an effort to restore the US's sense of ontological security. By focusing the discourse on the term 'civilization', President Bush and the US forwarded a certain perspective that all states were threatened and that there was a need for an international coalition. And as so, this civilization that President Bush was referring to, was according to him, a civilization based on shared values and a shared global institution. Furthermore, this civilization that the US saw itself as a part of was ontologically threatened by the chaos that terrorism represented and therefore needed to define the threat and the ways to deal with this threat in order to restore a sense of ontological security.

States that have a healthy basic trust system are not necessarily disrupted by critical situations because there is a certain level of flexibility in the trust system (Mitzen, 2006, p. 350). Smaller disturbances to routines and ontological security can be regarded as one-off actions or disturbances that easily can be dealt with and do not require extensive security intervention. However, if the threat posed is perceived as existential, even a healthy basic trust system is rarely flexible enough to accept the risk (Ruby, 2004, p. 18). In the speech 'President delivers State of the Union Address' on January 29, 2002, the President speaks about the extent of action that is necessary to deal with the threat.

It costs a lot to fight this war. We have spent more than a billion dollars a month – over \$30 million a day – and we must be prepared for future operations... We need to

replace aging aircraft and make our military more agile, to put our troops anywhere in the world quickly and safely...

My budget includes the largest increase in defense spending in two decades – because while the price of freedom and security is high, it is never too high. Whatever it costs to defend our country, we will pay.

The next priority of my budget is to do everything possible to protect our citizens and strengthen our nation against the ongoing threat of another attack. Time and distance from the events of September 11th will not make us safer unless we act on its lessons. America is no longer protected by vast oceans. We are protected from attack only by vigorous action abroad, and increased vigilance at home (Bush, 2002a, paragraph 28-30).

Essentially, what the President is communicating is that the threat of terrorism is serious to such a degree that the price of the security efforts necessary is not of importance, the most important aspect is to thoroughly deal with the threat itself. Even though terrorist attacks themselves do not pose an immediate existential threat, responding to them significantly is necessary to protect a part of the US core which is freedom. And, because terrorism is flexible and difficult to discover before harm is done, the President is willing to spend great amounts of resources on preventing such attacks, in order to be ontologically secure and stable.

Furthermore, President Bush points out how America is no longer protected by the oceans surrounding the country, and by doing so emphasized how the threat of terrorism does not follow the regular ‘routines’ of war and conflict and how terrorists can go unnoticed up until attacking. Hence, the attacks of 9/11 changed how the US perceived its security routines. It is therefore perceived as necessary to conduct an intervention in the security routines that the US previously relied on. Furthermore, Epstein (2007) argues that naming the response a ‘war’ gave legitimacy to using extraordinary military means (p. 18). By stating that the price of freedom is never too high, expanding the military budget, as well as the domestic security budget, and mobilizing an international coalition, the President also demonstrates and affirms and sustains the US identity as a military superpower.

Later in the speech, President Bush emphasized weapons of mass destruction as a threat to the world. A second goal besides removing terrorism from the surface of the world was also “*to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America to our friends and Allies with weapons of mass destruction.*” (Bush, 2002a, paragraph 18). The President points out that

states like North Korea, Iran, and Iraq, along with “*their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world*” (Bush, 2002a, paragraph 21). As so, the threat was further expanded to states that had the potential to use weapons of mass destruction themselves or arm terrorist organizations with such weapons. This discourse was a reinforcement of the good and evil/ us and them discourse that contributed to the justification of the war on terror and further contributed to the conceptualization of how some states were not coherent with the international system that was largely based on liberal and democratic values. As President Bush now lays it out there were two ‘teams’ in the world, the good and the evil. The ‘good’ states were the states that together with the US were cooperating with and for the international system, based on US values to achieve US goals, in other words, allies in the war on terror that were motivated to reinforce the structures and norms of the international system – which would result in the reinforcement of the US’s sense of ontological security. The ‘evil’ states were those who did not cooperate or did not comply with the structure and norms of the international system. This effort from President Bush to define what it means to be a ‘proper’ and safe actor within the international system can be interpreted as an effort of defining the sources of ontological (in)security. Calling out the states that President Bush defined as a threat and how they posed a threat to the international system made it easier for the US to structure and motivate action, which in the long run would strengthen their sense of ontological security. By bringing forward how this ‘axis of evil’ was a threat to the world and the position of the US within the world, President Bush was also addressing the source of ontological insecurity, which was states or non-state actors that he deemed capable of supporting terrorists with weapons of mass destruction or other resources.

In the ‘National Strategy for Homeland Security’ it is stated that “*The responsibility of our government extends beyond the physical well-being of the American people. We must also safeguard our way of life, which involves five key elements: democracy, liberties, security, economics and culture.*” (Office of Homeland Security, 2002, p. 8). These key elements are discussed a bit further and it is stated that democracy “*...relies on the stability and continuity of our government...*”, and that “*Many have fought and died in order to establish and protect these rights...*” when referring to the element of liberty. It is also expressed in relation to security that “*Americans have enjoyed great security from external threats, with no hostile powers adjacent to our borders and insulated attack by two vast oceans.*” (Office of Homeland Security, 2002, p. 8).

Here, it is explicitly stated that the threat of terrorism extends beyond the physical security of the US. Protecting ‘our way of life’ and so can be translated into an ontological security threat and an effort to protect the American ‘self’ as it relates to the core values and routines of the US. If the US only perceived the threat as physical, the most logical response would be to go directly after the perpetrators of the attacks, al Qaeda. However, the US saw the threat in a broader context, which extended beyond the member of al Qaeda. They perceived al Qaeda as a part of an unknown number of terrorist cells and a broader threat to the American way of life and the peace and stability of the country (Office of Homeland Security, 2002, p. 10).

7. Conclusion

In the introduction of this thesis, I presented my main research question: How can we understand the US as an ontological security seeker after the attacks of September 11, 2001? Additionally, two sub-research questions were presented: How could the attacks of 9/11 destabilize the US’s sense of ontological security? And, if so, what parts of the US ‘self’ were attacked and how did identity affect the discourse as a result? The purpose of the two sub-questions was to justify and add to the main question. Moreover, the goal of this thesis was to conduct a discourse analysis of President Bush’s response to the attacks of 9/11 through the approach of ontological security theory as an effort to understand how we can understand the US as an ontological security seeker after the attacks. When analyzing President Bush’s discourse, I identified some reoccurring key themes in the texts. These were rhetoric based on identity and values, rhetoric based on fear, anxiety, and the threat of terrorism, and rhetoric based on US decision-making and policies which were presented as necessary means to take control of the threat.

Understanding how the attacks of September 11, 2001, could have destabilized the US’s sense of ontological security begins with looking at the attacks and how such events can be disruptive to the routines the US relies on. The perpetrators took advantage of the US trust and routine systems by hijacking commercial airplanes as well as taking advantage of civilian infrastructure. Additionally, the airplanes were intentionally crashed into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. By doing so, the perpetrators disrupted the US’s trust in routinized security systems. Furthermore, the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York took advantage of what people expect to be a civilian ‘everyday life’ situation and turned it into what looked like a war zone. As so, the US lost trust in its routines and its expectations of a normal day, which

are important for their sense of ontological security. The re-establishment of these routines was therefore important to stabilize the US's sense of ontological security. In President Bush's first official speech after the attacks, he described the attacks as meant to bring fear, but ensured that the state was still very much functional. Looking at the attacks as a threat, the physical security of the US was not existentially threatened due to the limited nature of terrorism as a non-state actor, however, the ontological security of the US became threatened because the institutionalized routine system that the US relied on failed them.

Even though terrorist attacks are relatively rare in occurrence and as so does not necessarily pose an immediate threat to the existential security of the US, the feeling of not knowing what dangers they were up against or when or where another attack potentially could happen caused a sense of insecurity. Therefore, defining the threat in order to mobilize and respond to it was crucial to re-establish the US's sense of ontological security. President Bush outlined the threat as uncertain and difficult to define when he described terrorism and terrorists as hiding around the world (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 16), unpredictable, and unethical (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 15). Even though the threat of terrorism was uncertain, recasting the threat into something definable and concrete allow the state to logically (at least in perception) respond to the threat. When President Bush defined the threat, he included all terrorists and any state that supported or harbored terrorists, as so, the definition seemed quite broad and not very specific. However, defining the threat like this can be translated into an effort of trying to re-establish the ontological security of the US. Because the threat was difficult to define, it can be considered necessary to broadly define and recast the threat in order to regain a sense of control of the situation and to establish the proper response to deal with the threat broadly and not only in terms of al Qaeda. Furthermore, discussing the threat in relation to American values and norms makes the threat more definable and allows for the motivation of a response based on a perceived American self-narrative and understanding.

The discourse on the war on terror was largely based on values such as freedom and democracy and the attacks of 9/11 were perceived by President Bush and the United States as an attack on these values. President Bush explained that they hate 'us' because: "*They hate what they see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government... They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to assemble and disagree with each other.*" (Bush, 2001b, paragraph 24). The values and international system that President Bush perceived as attacked were a part of the US's self-narrative and self-

understanding, and further a part of their ontological security. As so, the attack led to ontological insecurity in the US, which was passed on to other states that were a part of the same liberal democratic system. Because the US was a part of this international system and also heavily relied on it, the US would only become ontologically secure when the perceived threat to the international system and institutions they relied on, was defeated. The threat was transferred from being applicable to only the US, to the threat as being a question of international security, which reflects on the aspect of ontological security as a social process. The attacks of 9/11 disrupted the US's sense of a coherent self, as an untouchable superpower. The US, therefore, needed to reestablish its understanding of itself within the world and reinforce its position within the international community to become ontologically secure.

Furthermore, perceptions of US identity include essentialism, exceptionalism, and a self-assumption of being invulnerable. Their core values are usually described as based on principles such as freedom, liberty, democracy, and individualism, which are also the values that the US was founded on. President Bush claimed that the attacks of 9/11 were an attack on these values, which might explain why identity and rhetoric based on freedom were frequently used in the discourse around the attacks and the war on terror. These values are also a part of the US 'self' and their narrative. Because President Bush considered the enemy to threaten these values, it also threatened the self and narrative that sustains the ontological security of the US.

To summarize, we can understand the US as an ontological security seeker after the attacks of 9/11 through the event that disrupted the US's sense of ontological security. The attacks on September 11, 2001, took advantage of expectations and routines that the US trusted and additionally, the nature of terrorism poses a vague threat and is difficult to define. Therefore, the US to begin with, struggled to understand the extent of the threat and how they would deal with it, which resulted in ontological insecurity. President Bush, therefore, needed to define the threat broadly, but also into something definable, in order to re-establish the ontological security of the US and also mobilize an appropriate response. This led to the threat being based on people or states that 'hate freedom'. Bringing values and identity into the discourse allowed the US to define more easily who they perceived to be a threat. Furthermore, the war on terror allowed the US to establish new routines that would in their perception prevent new attacks, and as a result of that, re-establish the ontological security of the US.

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