



GI Joe pauses for a refreshing Coke after restoring freedom and democracy to the Persian Gulf region in 1990, as depicted in this exceptionally large spread on the front page of Sweden's leading newspaper. Not visible is the oil that fuels the tank—the ultimate explanation for its presence in the region.

THE WORD FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

U.S. influence over Swedish news media

In a series of public meetings in Stockholm during the month of September, 2001, the problem of United States influence over Swedish news media was addressed by several speakers, including former CIA agent Philip Agee, the chief news editor of Swedish public radio, and a professor of media who has studied the issue as it relates to the application of U.S. power in such places as the Persian Gulf and the Balkans. The series was arranged by Nordic News Network (NNN) in co-operation with the Swedish Workers' Education Society ("ABF").

For obvious reasons, the issue has become increasingly urgent since the end of the Cold War notes NNN's co-ordinator, former U.S. citizen Al Burke: "Journalists are in the habit of stating that their most important task is to act as a check on power, in which case it would be especially appropriate to keep a critical and watchful eye on the world's sole remaining superpower.

"But all indications suggest the opposite," he observes. "With few exceptions, the view of reality conveyed by Sweden's most influential media corresponds in most essentials with that devised by the United States to justify its global hegemony. This is hardly a pure coincidence, and it has obvious significance for the Swedish people's understanding of world events, and thereby for the nation's foreign policy—which during the time of Olof Palme was widely regarded as among the most enlightened in the world."

Those issues were addressed at the following public meetings at ABF House in Stockholm:

10 September

On behalf of the United States: The Case of Vietnam

“In Sweden, there was probably a greater organized popular opposition to the United States’ war than in any other country on earth,” notes Björn Elmbrant, one of Sweden’s pre-eminent journalists. But something has obviously happened since the days of the war, as indicated by Swedish public radio’s coverage of the 25th anniversary of Vietnam’s reunification: It was almost entirely concerned with the suffering that the war has caused the United States; not a single Vietnamese or war-resister was heard.

On hand to discuss that approach to the history of the Vietnam War was Staffan Sonning, chief editor of public radio news. Also, Helle Rydstrom, a Danish social anthropologist who has lived among the country folk of Vietnam and has learned something of their experiences during the war, as well as their strategies for coping with its terrible aftermath. (See appendices A and C).

17 September

With eyes and ears directed toward the U.S.

The Swedish mainstream press has increasingly come to function as a cog in the world-wide propaganda apparatus of the United States. This is reflected in the research of Stig Arne Nohrstedt, Professor of Media and Communications at Örebro University, who has studied mainstream news coverage of the Persian Gulf War and the Balkan wars. On September 17th, he presented his research findings on the media image of the Kosovo catastrophe, and commented on news coverage to date of the terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September.

24 September

The CIA and international terrorism

The events of September 11th provided the backdrop for a talk by former CIA agent Philip Agee, who reviewed the lengthy history of the Agency’s involvement in global terrorism—including its training and support of the Muslim terrorists held responsible by the U.S. government for the attacks in New York and Washington. Also discussed were the methods used by the CIA to infiltrate and influence the institutions of other countries, not least their mass media. (See Appendix E.)

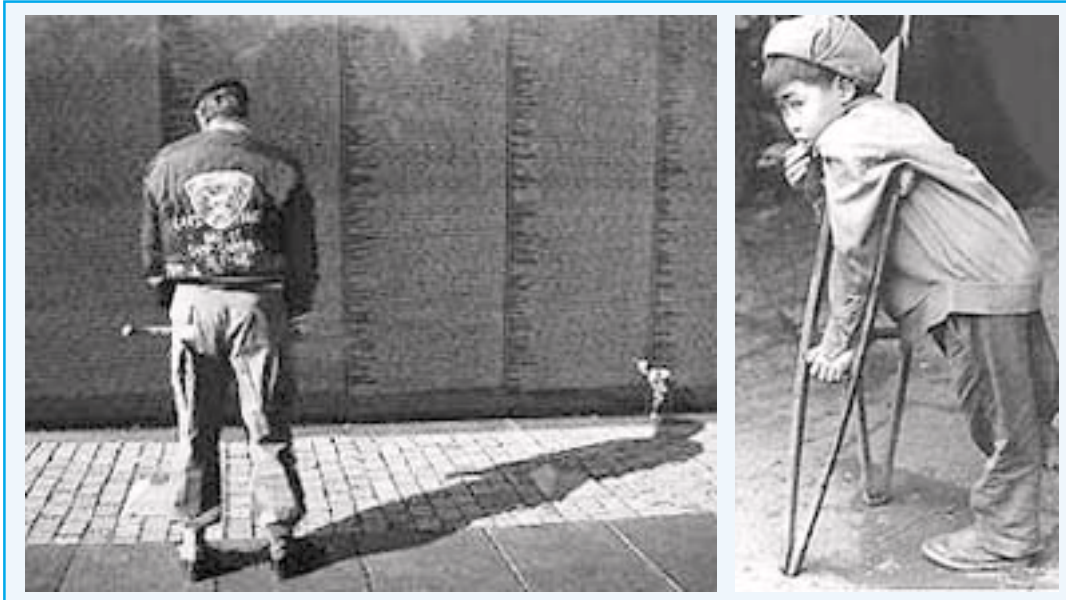
Notes on the speakers

Staffan Sonning has 25 years’ experience as a journalist with Swedish newspapers, radio and television. He is now chief editor and publisher of the news division of Swedish public radio, for which he has previously served as Asian correspondent with responsibility for reporting on Indonesian politics, etc.

Helle Rydstrom is Ph.D. and Assistant Professor of Social Anthropology at Linköping University in Sweden. She has been conducting research among the country folk of Vietnam since 1994.

Stig Arne Nohrstedt is Professor of Media and Communications at Örebro University. His research is primarily concerned with media coverage of major foreign policy issues, as indicated by a selection of titles from his published works: *Journalism and the New World Order*; *From the Persian Gulf to Kosovo— War Journalism and Propaganda*; *Enemy Images and Their Impact on the Journalistic Process*; etc.

Philip Agee is the first CIA agent to resign from “The Company” and to disclose its secrets. To no one’s surprise he was then subjected to a systematic campaign of slander and persecution by his former employers, a story told in the book, *On the Run*. At present, he is helping Cuba— a frequent target of the CIA— to further develop its tourist industry by means of his on-line agency, Cuba Linda (www.cubalinda.com). See Appendix E for additional details.



The suffering of the United States from the Vietnam War was the subject of Swedish public radio's news report on the 25th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification. The vastly greater suffering of the Vietnamese, including that of the mine-crippled child in the photo to the right, was apparently not considered worthy of attention.

THE WORD FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

SUFFERING AMERICANS

The true meaning of Vietnam's reunification

There was great rejoicing in Norway during the early days of May, 1945, as the Nazi empire collapsed and its occupying army prepared to withdraw. That year, the traditional national day on May 17th became a joyous festival of liberation from the German super-power and its puppet regime in Oslo. To a great extent, it has remained so ever since.

Consider, then, the following report broadcast hourly by the predominant national radio station of Norway on the 25th anniversary of that glorious day in 1945.

Introduction to the hourly news

Today's news: Lawyer criticizes informer-telephone line at Immigration Bureau. Municipality paid for Danish youth leader's casino gambling. Silence in Germany on the 25th anniversary of the end of World War II. Dogs in the southern provinces can breathe out—the fate of those in the rest of the country is decided tonight

Several news items. . . .

News reader: Today, it is 25 years since World War II came to an end and in Oslo, formerly known as Kristiania, the occasion was celebrated with a giant parade. Festivities and cultural events continue throughout the city this evening in celebration of Germany's withdrawal. In honour of the event, Norway's government is planning to release 1000 prisoners—the largest amnesty in Norway thus far. In Germany, however, the day passed largely in silence.

Reiner Wallraffski: It isn't very easy for me to even tell myself what the motivation was to come here. . .

Reporter: Near the water in the southern part of Bonn stands a large glass wall in which letters from World War II have been sealed. There are carnations and other flowers lying about this weekend, and in front of the war memorial stands Reiner Wallraffski reading a letter which is special to him. It is from the German soldier who was the last to be officially counted as killed in the war, and who was on his way in an aircraft to collect Raymond when he was shot down.

Reiner Wallraffski: He was coming to pick me and my fellows up, to go to a mission in Poland, and I know myself that there were actually eighteen others that were killed in that mission with him.

Reporter: While victory was celebrated with pomp and circumstance in Norway, it was relatively quiet in Germany. Naturally, the anniversary was noted in the media. But much of that had to do with relations between the two countries today. Chancellor Brandt has no plans to mention the war on its anniversary, and in the German capital the only modest acknowledgement of its significance was to clean the war memorial in the morning.

A majority of Germans say that the country never should have got involved in World War II, according to a recent opinion survey, while just under one-fourth support that chapter in German history. Among the latter is Reiner Wallraffski. He is 45 today, and at the time was a young man flown in from the Ruhr district to keep watch over bomber planes at a base in Denmark. He defends the war and, according to his theory, it was World War that led to the collapse of the international Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy. And he feels that the many dead, including those in the glass wall, were worth it.

Reiner Wallraffski: Absolutely! Absolutely, 100 percent. Yes, I do. I really do!

End of story.

Thinking the unthinkable

Two things may be noted about this news report on the 25th anniversary of Norway's liberation. One is that not a single Norwegian or anyone else opposed to the Nazi war effort was heard during the entire report.

The other is that it never happened, and the reason for that is quite simple: It is unthinkable. Any journalist in Norway, or most likely in any other part of the world, who even suggested such a treatment of this particular subject would almost certainly be dismissed as insane, depraved, or possibly both.

Yet, something very like it was actually broadcast by Swedish public radio on the 25th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification. With a few adjustments and substitutes— Vietnam for Norway, the United States for Germany, Ho Chi Minh City for Oslo, New York for Bonn, and communism for the Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy, etc.— this fictive news report on the anniversary of Norway's liberation corresponds exactly with the report broadcast by Sweden's national public radio on April 30, 2000 (see Appendix A for transcript in Swedish).

For the journalists in charge of Swedish public radio, the most important thing to note about the 25th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification was the suffering of the Americans who had tried for so long, and with such horrifying consequences, to prevent it. As the

Swedish author Sara Lidman ironically observed on a subsequent occasion, “Oh, what shall a sensitive superpower do with such a heartless little folk!”

Obvious difference

Of course, the analogy between Norway and Vietnam is merely illustrative.* Every such tragedy has its own history, and its own special circumstances. The most obvious difference in this case is that the effects of the German occupation on Norway were trivial in comparison with the massive destruction inflicted on Vietnam and its people by the United States (see comparison on page 8).

Perhaps the main reason for this disparity is that the occupying Germans regarded the Norwegians as a kindred folk— direct descendants of the “Aryan race” which populated the bizarre world of Nazi mythology. In contrast, as Martin Luther King Jr. and others pointed out at the time, the United States’ war machine and its leaders treated the Vietnamese as an inferior race of little yellow people whose lives, liberty and pursuit of happiness were of little or no consequence.

Another difference is that Norway assisted the United States in the early stages of its assault on Vietnam, but there is no record of the Vietnamese ever helping Germany to occupy Norway. They were rather busy at the time, trying to survive Japan’s French-administered, and much less gentle, occupation of their own country.

**Note:* It is necessary to exercise caution in the use of analogies and similar linguistic devices in Sweden, due to the extreme risk of misinterpretation. The risk arises from a culture of consensus which emphasizes the avoidance of open conflict. There are exceptions, of course; but a general principle of public discourse is that, to the greatest extent possible, disagreement should be expressed indirectly— with analogies, metaphors, vague opinions, etc. In many cases, this has the intended effect of blunting the edge of discord. But there is also an unintended effect, which is to create uncertainty about the “real” meaning of such formulations. There is always a risk that, however carefully expressed, they may be interpreted to mean something other than intended.

Naturally, the risk is especially great when dealing with sensitive issues such as the Nazi Holocaust. With good reason, that is regarded as a uniquely monstrous event in human history, and anyone who even remotely approaches the subject does so at great peril. This has been discovered, for example, by one of the two Swedish politicians who have had the courage to defy their own government and party leadership by openly challenging the propaganda employed by USA/NATO to justify its criminal behaviour in the Balkans.

In an informal speech at a local club, she noted— as have many legal experts— that the USA/NATO assault on Yugoslavia was no less a violation of international law than many previous crimes of a similar nature. She then cited several examples, of which *one* was Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland in 1939. For this offence, she has been reviled in parts of the Swedish press as one who would deny or trivialize the Holocaust— a subject that she never even mentioned.

Alas, this is the level at which much public discourse currently takes place in Sweden, especially in the mass media. Many journalists seem to have acquired the habit of wilful misinterpretation— if it can produce a good story. based on a shocking statement or opinion that the designated offender never expressed.

All this by way of underlining the point that the analogy here is between the German occupation of Norway and the U.S. invasion of Vietnam. It is by no means intended to draw a direct parallel with, or diminish the enormity of, the Nazi Holocaust.

There are, however, highly-qualified observers who do make such connections. One is the mother of Norman Finkelstein, the iconoclastic author of *The Holocaust Industry*. She was herself a survivor of the Nazi death camps, and according to her son: “My mother *always* made comparisons. . . . Confronted with the suffering of African-Americans, Vietnamese and Palestinians, my mother’s attitude was always the same: We are all victims of the Holocaust.”

There is no similar analogy to be made with Sweden, since it has not been occupied by any foreign power for the past several centuries. It was, however, the most notable and effective international voice in opposition to the Vietnam War—to the extent that the U.S. government broke off diplomatic relations for over a year, in pious indignation at the eloquent protests of Prime Minister Olof Palme. One of Sweden's premier journalists, Björn Elmbrant, has observed that, "In Sweden, there was probably a greater organized popular opposition to the United States' war than in any other country on earth."

Revised perspective

Something has clearly happened since then—given that the meaning of Vietnam's famous victory now, a mere 25 years later, seems to be that it caused a lot of suffering in the United States. That such a message can be routinely promulgated by Swedish public radio without the slightest controversy—there was none—is especially significant, since it is an institution which occupies a place in society similar to that of the BBC in England (to which it is in some ways superior, despite a relative lack of resources).

Swedish public radio was hardly alone with its interpretation. Much of the mainstream press was more concerned about the impact of the Vietnam War on its perpetrators than on its victims. To the extent that Vietnam was mentioned at all, it was usually to underline current problems, deficiencies, and a postulated preference for the American way of life. Among the more prominent headlines were the following: "Struggle against communism was USA's motive. . . .Saigon today—a wild east. . . .Businesses flee impoverished Vietnam. . . .Bitterness in USA is fading. . . .American life style popular in Vietnam."

Sweden's most influential daily newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, introduced its article with this capsule analysis: "A quarter-century after Saigon's fall, Vietnam struggles with serious problems: a sputtering economy, bureaucracy and corruption are holding back development. In the United States, memories of the war are still strong."

The somewhat more conservative *Svenska Dagbladet*, representing those Swedish interests that most strongly support U.S. aggression anywhere on earth, ran a series of articles whose evident purpose was to denigrate the Vietnamese and dismiss the crimes of the Americans. Among the glimpses it provided of life in Ho Chi Minh was that of the "seldom sober Australian who is together with an old prostitute, and who loudly proclaimed for all who wanted to listen that his woman had no problem with 'taking it up the ass', while she sat quietly beside him".

(In the Western press, the scene of such observations is nearly always Ho Chi Minh City, the least representative place in Vietnam, due largely to the influences of 115 years' French and U.S. occupation. It is somewhat analogous to using Miami—with its unique assortment of CIA mercenaries, international drug-runners, Spanish-speaking refugees, etc.—to represent the entire United States.)

And they were healed

Oddly enough, Swedish public television paid more attention to the Vietnamese on this occasion than did its normally more discerning radio counterpart. This was probably due to the wealth of visual material that was readily available from the archives and international news agencies—colourful parades, lovely Vietnamese girls, dramatic scenes of war, etc. But even here, there was a strong emphasis on the suffering of the Americans, and no

effort to convey the perspective of the Vietnamese. Their past suffering was mentioned only briefly in passing, and their continuing experience of illness, death and casualties from the war was mentioned not at all.

The task of interpreting the current reality of Vietnam was assigned to a U.S. soldier who had returned to the land of his former enemies. "It feels very strange," he confided. "One piece of me is very excited. A piece of me is sad, because I remember marines who were killed in this area, and I remember the war. Now, I see farms. I see rice paddies. I see prosperity. I see schools. I see happiness. I see the energy and how busy it is. It is a pleasure to see that— that the land and the people have healed."

In fact, it will be a very, very long time before the land and the people of Vietnam are healed. But the audience of Swedish public television was not offered any alternative to the cheerful pronouncements of the U.S. veteran. Instead, it was informed that, "The celebrations included parades before Communist Party bosses and other leading citizens, but the general public did not have access to the parade area in Ho Chi Minh City." A scene of dictatorial remoteness from the people, in other words. For a very different interpretation of the same scene, by two U.S. citizens with long experience of Vietnam, see Appendix B.

Uniquely poor and corrupt

The general approach to the 25-year anniversary of reunification reflected the basic themes that in recent years have come to dominate the perspective of the Swedish press on the Vietnam War and its two principal combatants.

One is that Vietnam today is a very poor country plagued by corruption and bureaucracy. The possibility that those conditions might somehow be related to nearly a century of colonial exploitation, followed by a 30-year war of independence against overwhelming odds, never seems to occur to anyone. But the labels of poverty and corruption are routinely attached to Vietnam as identifying characteristics.

The label-affixing journalists also seem unaware of the fact that such conditions are hardly unique to Vietnam. For well-known reasons, they are fairly universal throughout the Third World, and they are not entirely absent from the so-called developed countries, either. That certainly applies to both of Vietnam's most recent foreign tormentors: French government is a never-ending story of major scandals, and the U.S. White House is currently occupied by the beneficiary of widespread electoral fraud in a state governed by his brother. In "the richest country in the world", at least one-fifth of all children grow up in dire poverty, nearly half of the entire population lacks adequate health care, and the infant mortality rate is at a Third World level.

Nevertheless, it is Vietnam's unique blend of poverty and corruption that is especially worthy of note in the mainstream press.

American life style

Another popular theme is that the Vietnamese yearn to become just like the Americans, with all the material blessings that implies. The subtext is that it was meaningless to waste so many lives in defence of "the communist ideology that motivated the struggle", as *Svenska Dagbladet* put it, since the Vietnamese really wanted nothing more than to become happy little capitalists.

Of course, this sort of analysis merely perpetuates the misconceptions that led to the disaster in the first place. As former U.S. Secretary of Defense McNamara and other perpetrators of the war eventually came to realize, the driving force of the Vietnamese resistance was an intense yearning for independence, not communist ideology. That ideology has always been of far greater importance to Vietnam's attackers than to the Vietnamese, themselves. The vast majority of the millions who sacrificed their lives or future happiness in the war probably could not tell the difference between a communist and a crocodile.

There *was* a period immediately following independence during which an attempt was made to impose a communist economic system on the nation of small farmers and shopkeepers. This was hardly surprising, given that Vietnam had just been subjected to thirty years of massive destruction in the name of democracy and "the free market system". In the process, it had been forced deeper and deeper into alliance with its traditional enemy, China, and the Soviet Union. After the war, in violation of international law, the U.S. chose to promote the free market system by imposing a trade embargo on Vietnam and encouraging its allies to do the same. The impact on Vietnam's economy was devastating.

Otherwise, there has never been any doctrinaire rejection of the United States. On the contrary, Ho Chi Minh tried repeatedly to build an alliance with the U.S.; if its leaders had not ignored him, Vietnam would in all likelihood be even more influenced by U.S. material culture than it is today. It may also be noted that products from Japan, Sweden and other countries are at least as prevalent, and that this sort of "Americanization" is hardly unique to Vietnam. Sweden is a prime example.

Another curious aspect of this recurrent theme is that it appears to be based on the assumption that the benefits of the market, however doubtful they may be, are entirely one-sided— i.e. that the Vietnamese are submissively grateful for the opportunity to buy the products that the U.S. kindly offers to sell them. A more plausible assumption is that American and other producers are at least as eager to get their hands on the modest wealth of the Vietnamese.

In any event, there is nothing to indicate that a majority of the Vietnamese people, or even a sizeable minority, would have preferred to surrender their national sovereignty in exchange for greater volumes of Coca-Cola, hamburgers and mobile phones.

None of this is difficult to learn or understand. That many Swedish journalists have chosen not to do so probably reflects an urge to deprive the Vietnamese of their victory, and award it *ex post facto* to the United States on the basis of superior economic strength. *Disneyland über alles!*

Principle of equivalence

The most common theme employed in Sweden to avoid confronting the enormity of U.S. crimes in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina is that both sides were equally to blame, and have suffered to more or less the same degree. This was the fall-back position of Swedish conservatives during the war, when public opinion became so thoroughly outraged that it was no longer politically possible to openly encourage the slaughter.

That was still the line of the Conservative Party in 1994 when its leader, by a cruel irony of fate, became the first Swedish prime minister to visit Vietnam. After reluctantly viewing an exhibition on the war, he observed: "One has seen these pictures before— although it does seem a bit odd, after so much time has passed, to be presented with only one side of the story." (That remark is the inspiration for a comparison with the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington; see "Vietnam Holocaust" at: www.nnn.se/levande/holcaust.htm)

The principle of equivalence has also been implied by the chief editor of public radio news who has defended the above-noted emphasis on suffering Americans by referring to a magazine programme in the morning of the same day (a Sunday) which, he suggested, provided the necessary balance.

It is a common practice of journalists to justify biased reporting by reference to other sources of the knowledge which they, themselves, neglect to convey. The convenient assumption is that everyone exposed to a misleading or incomplete report will somehow be supplied with the missing items of information in a timely manner. That is a dubious assumption in the best of circumstances, and certainly in this case, since the audience of the Sunday magazine is merely a fraction of that exposed to the hourly news repeated throughout the day.

One of those who appears to have missed the morning programme is the selfsame editor who cited it to justify the curious angle of his own perspective. For if he had listened, he would presumably have noted that it had very little to do with the experiences and outlook of the Vietnamese. The segment was introduced with the widely spread mis- or disinformation that ordinary Vietnamese were excluded from the national celebration (see Appendix B).

There followed a rather superficial discussion in which a Swedish journalist emphasized the current significance of Vietnam's economic problems; as usual, there was no reference to the effects of the war or the post-war economic aggression in that context. The lack of bitterness and breast-beating among the Vietnamese was also touched upon. (For a discussion of that phenomenon and its deeper meaning, see Appendix C.)

Dead packet

The bulk of the magazine segment was devoted to the impact of the Vietnam War on Swedish attitudes toward the United States. The history of the anti-war movement was reviewed, the subsequent restoration of a generally positive attitude toward the U.S. was noted, and the segment concluded with the observation that, "In other words, not much of the old Vietnam movement's packet of opinions has survived."

The role played by Swedish mass media in that process was not mentioned— which was only to be expected, since this programme was itself a prime example. (For a related example in which the Vietnamese are casually presented as the bad guys of the drama, see Appendix D.)

Given that the principle of equal suffering and equal responsibility is now a key element of the conventional wisdom on the Vietnam War, it is appropriate to review the facts of the case. The following comparison is based on current estimates of the war's consequences for both countries. The figures for the U.S. are fairly accurate; but the opposite is true for Vietnam, since comprehensive statistics are often lacking in that country. However, there is general agreement on the approximate size of the following estimates.

In order for the comparison to be meaningful, it is necessary to adjust for the disproportion between the United States and Vietnam. Since the U.S. population was roughly five times greater at the time of the war, all relevant figures (for deaths, troops, etc.) have been multiplied by a factor of five in the case of Vietnam. The land area of the U.S. is over 28 times greater than that of Vietnam, thus all relevant figures in that context (bomb craters, forest destruction, etc.) have been multiplied by the corresponding factor. The absolute figures for Vietnam are given in parentheses.

The Dimensions of Equivalence	Vietnam* (Absolute figures)	United States
Colonialism Supported foreign power in attempt to reassert colonial rule over other country	No	Yes
Democracy & human rights Forced artificial north-south division of other country Prevented agreed-upon national elections for reunification Installed puppet government in south, representing ca. 10% of population Continued to shore up puppet despite widespread abuses of human rights	No	Yes
Military aggression Invading troops Bombs Land mines remaining after war Bomb craters in landscape	12,500,000 (2,500,000) 430,000,000 tons** (15,350,000) 98,000,000 (3,500,000) 644,000,000 (23,000,000)	None
War dead During war Since 1975	17,500,000 (3,500,000) 200,000 (40,000)	58,000 – 0 –
Wounded During war Since 1975	71,750,000 (14,350,000) 620,000 (124,000)	304,000 – 0 –

Continued. . .

The Dimensions of Equivalence <i>(continued)</i>	Vietnam* (Absolute figures)	United States
Environmental destruction		
Extensive poisoning of food supply	Yes	
Defoliated forests & farmland	56,000,000 ha (2,000,000)	None
Herbicides, arsenic and other toxic chemicals sprayed on landscape	2,016,000,000 litres (72,000,000)	
Social & psychological disruption		
Internal refugees	35,000,000 (7,000,000)	None
Destruction of towns and villages	10,000s	None
Mental disease, family disruption, etc.	10,000,000s	1000s
Missing in action	2,000,000 (400,000)	2,000
Continued aggression after war		
Trade embargo, etc.	—	Yes
Diplomatic isolation		
World-wide propaganda campaign		

*Comparison ratios (Vietnam:USA)

Population 1:5

Land area 1:28

**Equivalent to over twice the total amount of explosives used all over the world by all parties during World War II (metric tons).

Mental occupation

Of course, this brief comparison is far from comprehensive, and can not convey the depth or extent of misery and destruction that the American War inflicted on Vietnam and its people

There was a time, not so very long ago, when a large proportion of Swedish journalists and the general public were intensely aware of this very unequal distribution of suffering and responsibility. Clearly, that is no longer the case. The conventional wisdom on the Vietnam War has increasingly come to reflect the self-serving perspective of the United States, and the same pattern is evident in news coverage of virtually all other “initiatives” of U.S. foreign policy, including the Persian Gulf and Balkan wars. The effect on public opinion has been as one might expect, which helps to explain why Swedish public radio can inform its listeners that, “not much of the old Vietnam movement’s packet of opinions has survived.” .

Essentially, the Swedish mainstream press now functions as a cog in the United States' worldwide propaganda apparatus— with the customary veil of occasional exceptions, of course. Although the reasons for this are not clear, it is almost certainly the result of a subconscious process that may be described as a sort of mental occupation (see “The Mechanics of Mental Occupation” at www.nnn.se/levande/mechanic.htm).

The implications for international relations and the “new world order” are fairly obvious: If people can be made to forget the enormity of the Vietnam War— even in the country that was most solidly opposed to it— they can be made to forget just about anything. That being the case, the U.S. has no need to be concerned about its reputation in the world, even if protests do occasionally arise in response to the latest episode of killing and destruction. The lesson of Vietnam is that the fuss will eventually die down— especially if some new disaster erupts, or can be encouraged to erupt, in some other part of the world.

With proper management and the assistance of obliging journalists in Sweden and elsewhere, it may even be possible to reorient sympathies toward the land of the free and the home of the brave.

— Al Burke
September 2001

Next:

Walking Softly with a Big Stick

U.S. Habits of Behaviour and Methods of Propaganda

Good-Neighbour News

The Reliable Conduct of the Swedish Press

Growing Up

Keeping a Watchful Eye on the Superpower

Appendix A: The View from Swedish Public Radio

The following is a translation of Swedish public radio's hourly news segment on the 25th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification, 30 April 2000, followed by a review of the chief editor's attempt to justify its emphasis on the suffering of the United States.

Introduction to the hourly news

Today's news: Lawyer criticizes informer-telephone line at Immigration Bureau. Municipality paid for Danish youth leader's casino gambling. Silence in the United States on the 25th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. Dogs in the southern provinces can breathe out—the fate of those in the rest of the country is decided tonight

Several news items. . . .

News reader: Today, it is 25 years since the Vietnam War came to an end and in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon, the occasion was celebrated with a giant parade. Festivities and cultural events continue throughout the city this evening in celebration of the U.S. withdrawal. In honour of the event, Vietnam's government is planning to release 12,000 prisoners—the largest amnesty in Vietnam thus far. In the United States, however, the day passed largely in silence.

Raymond Valdinsky: It isn't very easy for me to even tell myself what the motivation was to come here. . .

Reporter: Near the water in the southern part of New York stands a large glass wall in which letters from the Vietnam War have been sealed. There are carnations and other flowers lying about this weekend, and in front of the war memorial stands Raymond Valdinsky, reading a letter which is special to him. It is from the U.S. soldier who was the last to be officially counted as killed in the war, and who was on his way in an aircraft to collect Raymond when he was shot down.

Raymond Valdinsky: He was coming to pick me and my fellows up, to go to a mission in Poland, and I know myself that there were actually eighteen others that were killed in that mission with him.

Reporter: While victory was celebrated with pomp and circumstance in Vietnam, it was relatively quiet in the U.S.. Naturally, the anniversary was noted in the media. But much of that had to do with relations between the two countries today. President Clinton has no plans to mention the war on its anniversary, and in the U.S. capital the only modest acknowledgement of its significance was to clean the war memorial in the morning.

A majority of U.S. citizens say that the country never should have got involved in the Vietnam War, according to *one* recent survey, while just under one-fourth support that chapter in U.S. history. Among the latter is Raymond Valdinsky. He is 45 today, and at the time was a young man flown in from New Jersey to keep watch over B-52 bombers at a base in Thailand. He defends the war and, according to his theory, it was the Vietnam War that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall. And he feels that the many dead, including those in the glass wall, were worth it.

Raymond Valdinsky: Absolutely! Absolutely, 100 percent. Yes, I do. I really do. Because a direct result of the war in Vietnam was the Berlin Wall falling, and the demise of the evil empire of the Soviet Union.

End of story

(Continued. . .)

Editorial judgement

At a public meeting in Stockholm on 10 September 2001, the editor-in-chief of Swedish public radio attempted to justify this curious approach to the reunification of Vietnam and the appalling war of aggression that preceded it.

Stating that the essence of the report could not be conveyed by a written transcript, editor Staffan Sonning played back the entire report on a tape recorder and suggested the following interpretation: “When I listen to this piece, I get the feeling that this is a tragic figure, desperately trying to justify something that, deep inside, he knows to be wrong. I know that that was what the reporter was trying to convey. It is a rather cleverly constructed piece that works with the contrast between various ‘sound images’. . . . In short, I would argue that this is, so to say, a portrayal of war’s insanity— a portrayal that is every bit as dramatic as if we had instead broadcast a report from Vietnam.”

Interested parties may form their own opinion of that interpretation by listening to the 4:45 p.m. edition of Swedish Radio news on 30 April 2000, which is available in full audio format at this web address: <http://www.sr.se/cgi-bin/nyheter/ekot/1645.asp> (Playback requires the program RealPlayer, which can be downloaded from the web site.) The report is in Swedish, of course, but the words of Raymond Valdinsky are presented in their original English.

Editor Sonning’s interpretation of the report from New York was questioned at the public meeting, but he chose not to reply. Among the sceptics in the audience were three immigrants from the United States, all of whom felt that the effect of the report was clearly to elicit sympathy for the mournful U.S. veteran and his fallen comrades.

A native Swede with some experience of post-war Vietnam said afterward that, “I cannot treat the report as lightly as Staffan Sonning did— as though it merely presented the confused ideas of a pathetic figure. For one thing, we know that there are many others like him. For another, it cannot be assumed that everyone in the Swedish radio audience experiences the same immediate ‘gut feeling’ as Staffan— and which we other ‘enlightened ones’ are presumed to experience. The report should never have been allowed to stand alone, without comment.”

Common opinion

There are certainly many like Mr. Valdinsky in the United States. Opinion surveys of Vietnam War veterans suggest that some three-quarters of them regard their experience as positive, and would be prepared to repeat it if called upon to do so. As for the majority of U.S. citizens who “say that the country never should have got involved”, the report neglected to point out that it has little to do with concern for Vietnam and its people. The war is regretted for its negative impact on the U.S. and its citizens; no one else seems to matter.

In Sweden, there is a strong and increasingly vocal minority which has always supported U.S. aggression in Vietnam and elsewhere. That opinion has an eager mouthpiece in *Svenska Dagbladet*, the country’s second-most influential daily newspaper, which during the past year or two has been rewriting history to the United States’ advantage and Vietnam’s detriment. Further, it would appear that most Swedish youths who have grown up since the war’s end have received their primary education in such matters from Hollywood (see Appendix D).

If it is difficult to understand how the chief editor of Sweden's most important source of radio news could be unaware of all this.

Illusory balance

Editor Sonning also claimed that it was a mistake "to concentrate on one item and allow that to characterize our entire coverage. . . . The problem for both TV and radio is that we have to be so extremely brief. . . . This means that, when dealing with a broad issue, we have to concentrate on one angle."

He then cited five other programmes that also dealt with the 25th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification, but acknowledged that none of them included so much as a single Vietnamese voice. Four of them were talk shows broadcast during the preceding week, and their contents were not reviewed. The only other programme on the actual date of April 30th was a Sunday-morning magazine that focused on Swedes' generally positive attitudes toward the United States; its concluding message was that "not much of the old Vietnam anti-war movement's packet of opinions has survived" (see summary under "Dead packet" in main text of "Suffering Americans").

Given editor Sonning's observation that "we have to concentrate on one angle", the obvious question is why this particular angle—the suffering of the United States—was chosen on this particular occasion. As for the "balance" that was supposed to be provided by the other five programmes, that appears to be illusory—and, quite possibly, deliberately misleading. Among other things, the news report from New York was repeated several times throughout the day, and was by far the most important and most widely disseminated of the six items cited.

One may also reasonably enquire as to what kind of balance would be appropriate in this case, given the enormous imbalance between Vietnam and the United States with regard to suffering and responsibility (see comparison, "The Dimensions of Equivalence", in the main text of "Suffering Americans"). Editor Sonning did not address that issue, nor did he have anything to say about the analogy between Norway's liberation and Vietnam's reunification (see introduction to "Suffering Americans").

In short, the effect of Swedish Radio's news coverage on the 25th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification was to reinforce the beliefs of the U.S. lobby in Sweden and the miseducation of the nation's youth, while disregarding the nature, extent and continuing impact of the crimes committed by the U.S. against the land and people of Vietnam.

The explanation offered by editor Sonning gave the impression of someone desperately trying to justify something that, deep inside, he knows to be wrong.

Silent treatment

Editor Sonning's presentation on 10 September 2001 was the culmination of a lengthy process which illustrates how difficult it can be to pursue a dialogue with journalists. It began with a phone call to Swedish Radio's news department shortly after the broadcast on 30 April 2000, when it was learned that the journalist responsible for the report from New York was the producer, Micke Lindholm. When subsequently reached by phone, Mr. Lindholm confirmed that he was chiefly responsible for the report, but said that he was busy at the moment and asked to be contacted again at some later date. That date never came, as he was never available and did not return subsequent calls.

After two months of this silence, a polite letter was sent to him on July 2nd. It included the following question: "Why did your report on April 30th place the emphasis on the suffering of U.S. soldiers and their efforts to justify the war, while practically nothing was mentioned about the vastly greater suffering of the Vietnamese— which continues today, and will continue to do so long into the future— or the fact that the war is widely regarded as the worst crime against humanity since World War II [references enclosed]? . . . As you are perhaps aware, this question involves much more than the Vietnam War; it also relates to news coverage of the Kosovo disaster and all the similar disasters that may be anticipated in the future."

In addition, the letter proposed the analogy with Norway's liberation from Nazi Germany's occupation, and requested answers to the following questions:

Who is the editor responsible for the report?

Did the assignment go to someone with knowledge of the subject?

Which sources provided the background for the report?

Do those involved in producing the report, including yourself, have personal memories of the Vietnam War?

If you were to explain the war to young people born since the end of the war, what would you tell them?

What general impression of the war do you suppose that those young people would receive from this report?

Why did you choose this particular angle, emphasizing Raymond Valdinsky and his psychological needs?

Mr. Valdinsky claimed that the war was justified. Do you agree with him?

Why were no Vietnamese or Swedish war-resisters included in the report?

Those questions have yet to be answered, apart from the rather dubious arguments of Staffan Sonning noted above.

The letter concluded with an invitation to an informal dialogue on these matters, noting that several previous attempts to discuss similar issues with various responsible figures at Swedish Radio had been met with complete silence.

Legalistic response

That familiar silence was repeated on this occasion, so a confrontational follow-up letter was sent to Micke Lindholm on 11 September 2000, in an attempt to provoke some kind of response. It came nearly a month later, in the form of a note from Staffan Sonning which sought to correct two "misunderstandings".

The first was that, "The producer is not responsible for the contents of our news broadcasts. The responsibility lies entirely with the responsible publisher under Swedish law, in this case the chief editor [myself]."

This was a defensive, legalistic response to what had begun as a simple enquiry concerning journalistic procedure, directed to the individual who had been identified by himself and colleagues as the person responsible. He was now effectively eliminated from any

further discussion and replaced by editor Sonning, who would later note that he had not yet assumed his post at the time of the report on 30 April 2000. “Nevertheless,” he said, “the burden of defending us has fallen to me.”

The other misunderstanding, wrote editor Sonning, was that a single news report could not be used to represent Swedish Radio's view of the Vietnam War. “In our massive coverage [of the 25th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification], a short feature on a U.S. war veteran can certainly be justified” (see above).

To this, editor Sonning received a polite reply with yet another invitation to dialogue. After months passed without any further response from Swedish Radio, it was decided to address the issues in a series of public meetings. It was only then— sixteen months after the initial enquiry— that Staffan Sonning was prepared to offer the explanation summarized above. The question is: If that explanation is so evident and valid, why was it not presented in the first place?

This lengthy process reflects a fairly widespread reluctance among journalists to openly discuss the news they produce, which plays such a crucial role in the formation of public opinion, particularly in matters of foreign policy. Although they enthusiastically criticize and attack others— often with great damage to reputations, careers and states of mind— they seem largely incapable of critically reflecting upon their own work and behaviour. On those rare occasions when it is possible to elicit or provoke a response, it is frequently characterized by evasion, manipulation and defensive posturing.

The news department of Swedish public radio appears to be suffering from something of a siege mentality. Awhile back, a reporter from *Etc.* magazine called to enquire about a questionable news item, only to get this response from his colleague at Swedish Radio: “I think you are behaving like a goddamn pig— and this is not the first time you have been out to get us!”

At the public meeting on 10 September 2001, editor Sonning invited questions and comments with the following encouraging words, spoken in perfect American English: “Shoot! Kill me!”

* * * * *

Appendix B: Limited Perspective on Limited Access

In reporting on the festivities surrounding the 25th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification on 30 April 2000, Swedish and other international news media were at pains to point out that "the general public was not admitted to the ceremony," as Swedish public radio stated. The image conjured up was that of a remote elite enjoying itself in an exclusive enclave, while the subservient masses huddled outside.

But that image does not conform with the first-hand observations of two U.S. citizens with long experience of Vietnam. Chuck Searcy, a U.S. army veteran, is currently the Hanoi-based representative of two organizations working to heal some of the wounds of war. Lady Borton has lived and worked in Vietnam since the days of the war as international affairs representative of the American Friends Service Committee.

* * * * *

Chuck Searcy

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund & Asian Landmine Solutions

I was in Ho Chi Minh City for the 1995 celebration of the 20th anniversary of reunification. It was restricted to the city blocks around the Catholic church and the old presidential palace, now "Reunification Hall". This was for security reasons, according to the Vietnamese.

At the time, I thought that the restrictions reflected some sort of paranoia; but I have since learned differently. It turns out that there have been more than threats: Light weapons, time bombs, ammunition and gunpowder have been confiscated from groups of Vietnamese exiles who have smuggled them from Cambodia, fully intending to wreak havoc on some public event in order to embarrass or create a crisis for the government.

Despite the security precautions, however, the parade was a delightful occasion. Representatives of all the major industries, working groups, and professions marched and waved. Military units— only one carrying weapons, most of them parading in dress uniforms and white gloves— marched past the reviewing stand, and floats depicting historic scenes rolled by. It was a warm and pleasant day, with a holiday atmosphere.

I was in Ho Chi Minh City again last year for the 25th anniversary, and it was much the same as before. Yes, it was confined to a much smaller area— the grounds of Reunification Hall inside the walls of the old palace compound. This was due to increasingly serious threats and reports of planned violence from a number of sources, some of whom were discovered, arrested, and confessed.

The government was extremely concerned about the possibility of any incident that could result in the death or injury of innocent citizens or the national leadership. For this reason, they cordoned off a large area around the palace, and did not admit anyone who was not authorized or who had not passed a security check. The event took place without incident, and by all accounts was very successful.

I was inside the palace grounds for an interview with Vietnam's national TV channel at the start of the proceedings. Within minutes of finishing the interview, I had received more than twenty phone calls from people all over Vietnam saying, "Mister Chuck, I just see you on TV!" This, at 6:30 in the morning! The size of the audience was estimated at over twenty million households.

The parade was much the same as in 1995, with representatives of all the major organizations and occupational groups in the country. The warmest reception and the biggest cheers went to an older group of women from the Mekong Delta, clad in black and wearing distinctive scarves. They became famous during the war as the “long-haired army” which defied the troops of the Diem and subsequent regimes while their husbands and brothers were off fighting or in prison. The children’s groups were also great favourites.

The last float at the very end of the parade was a huge model of the earth, surrounded by children. As the children sang, the globe opened and scores of white doves flew out, rising in lazy circles into the sky while everyone cheered. It was very moving.

The millions of Vietnamese who would gladly have attended the parade if it had been possible watched it on TV, instead. Then they spent the day strolling through the streets, visiting cafés and the riverfront, relaxing, talking, enjoying a delightful holiday. That night, there were free outdoor concerts on huge, gaily decorated stages, followed by spectacular fireworks.

It was a festive occasion and a time of remembrance, with so many recollections of just how bad things were before 30 April 1975, and how difficult the situation continued to be in the following years— understandably so, given the devastation that the country had suffered.

As foreigners, we sometimes have a tendency to impose our own critical bias on situations that we are only able to observe at a cultural and psychological distance. We may perceive official control, restrictions, or manipulation of events which are, in fact, something very different.

As far as the celebration in Ho Chi Minh City is concerned, I have attended presidential inaugurations in Washington where official credentials were needed to get anywhere near the proceedings, and the entire city was jammed with police barricades. The security situation for the 25th anniversary in Vietnam last year did not even come close to the official restrictiveness, bordering on oppressiveness, that I have experienced in the United States.

Lady Borton

American Friends Service Committee (Quaker Service)

The 25th anniversary parade in Hanoi last year was a fascinating experience. The parade began with a group of veterans from 1945, then came the kids, followed by representatives of all the people’s organizations. All the religious groups, all the artistic professions, businesses, government agencies, youth groups, etc., were there.

All the while, there was a huge group of about 400 kids sitting on stools in front of the viewing stand. They had an assortment of cardboard squares, which they turned from time to time to so as to form the flag of Vietnam or quotes from the Declaration of Independence.

The parade went everywhere throughout the city. I abandoned my bicycle a half-kilometre from the central route, because I knew it would not be possible to push my bike through the crowds. At night, there were bandstands all around town and a huge stage in front of the Municipal Theatre. The streets were jammed all around the theatre, even for several nights in advance when the performing troupes were rehearsing.

All of these events were open to the public, and the celebrations all over the country were televised nationally.

Appendix C: The Silent Sorrow of Vietnam

After thirty years of war that left their country in ruins, with millions dead and many more millions wounded, thousands of communities destroyed, the life-giving earth choking with unexploded munitions and toxic chemicals, etc., etc., one might assume that the Vietnamese would be consumed with outrage over what has been done to them in the name of freedom and democracy. But most visitors to post-war Vietnam have been struck by the apparent absence of bitterness, and the friendliness with which even former tormentors from the U.S. military machine are greeted.

This singular pattern of behaviour is partly due to a government policy which emphasizes the need to consign the war to the past, and focus instead on rebuilding the country for the future. Probably more significant in this context are deeply-rooted cultural beliefs in Buddhist reincarnation and stoic acceptance.

Whatever the causes, the results can be misleading to observers from other cultural backgrounds who are often left with the impression that the war has had no lasting impact on the country or its people. That being the case, there is no reason for outsiders to be especially concerned about the legacy of the war or the ethical issues that it obviously raises. For, if the Vietnamese do not themselves bemoan their fate, why should anyone else?

It is a thought that has frequently been expressed, directly or by implication; but it suggests a curious approach to basic issues of morality and international law. The principle seems to be that any great crime against humanity may be ignored, as long as the victims do not make too much of a fuss about it.

Yet, it should not require too much effort of empathy or the imagination for any normally constituted human being to grasp that, beneath the smiling surface of the stoic Vietnamese, there must be a world of silent sorrow, rage and grief. One who has studied the Vietnamese experience of the war is Helle Rydstrøm, a Danish social anthropologist currently affiliated with Linköping University in Sweden, who has been conducting research among the country folk of northern Vietnam since 1994.

In a seminal article published last year in Danish and Swedish newspapers, she explained that the apparent “forgetfulness” of those who survived the war is part of a strategy for dealing with profound grief and painful memories. Further, that strategy is linked to fundamental Vietnamese values of respect and honour: “In striving to show respect for guests of their nation, while at the same time maintaining their personal honour,” she observes, “many northern Vietnamese avoid confronting visitors from the West with the devastation to which their country has been subjected by foreigners throughout history.”

She relates the experience of a young woman to whom she gives the fictional name of Lien, who in the mid-1990s was assigned to act as guide and interpreter for a U.S. pilot who had returned to visit Haiphong, the port city near Hanoi that had been subjected to massive bombing during the war. Lien knew the area well, having grown up in Haiphong and having survived the traumatic experience of the bomb attacks in which the returning pilot had participated. Many of her relatives were killed in those attacks and Lien, like so many other Vietnamese, had lived ever since with a constant, aching survivor’s guilt.

So there they were in Haiphong, some twenty years later— the returning pilot who for decades had been living in anguished awareness of the suffering that he had helped to inflict, together with the young Vietnamese woman who was inwardly overwhelmed with

anguish and bitterness at the human consequences of the U.S. bombings. But outwardly, she disclosed nothing of all this— thereby preserving her honour while treating her nation's guest with customary respect.

Such encounters have become commonplace in recent years, as both the U.S. and Vietnamese governments have initiated various gestures of reconciliation. Not surprisingly, such efforts do not alter the fact that ordinary people still feel strong bitterness, rage and grief as a result of their experiences at the hands and bombs of the U.S.A.

There are about 400,000 Vietnamese MIAs (Missing in Action) from the American War, as well as many others who have not been buried according to traditional rite. Each of them is a source of pain and anxiety among the survivors, according to Helle Rydstrom:

“The Vietnamese seldom speak of their anxieties in this connection. But the pain is there, and it is dealt with by purposely forgetting— as with so many other traumatic memories of the war. Thus, the will to forget reflects the traces of memory that a tragic war has imprinted in the minds of the survivors, and that will becomes a strategy for enabling life to go on.”

“I wanted to kill Americans for what they did.”

In their book, *Even the Women Must Fight*, Karen Gottschang Turner and Phan Thanh Haoa also address the Vietnamese experience of the war. The following is an excerpt from the authors' encounter with a female war veteran from northern Vietnam:

“We were all tense at first, but then she began her story, which she told in a slow, deliberate way, with a full sense of history and her place in it:

“ ‘I was born in Thai Binh Province. My family were farmers. In 1948, my father was killed in the French War. My mother was with child when he died and she raised us four children alone. In 1968 I volunteered to be a people's soldier, *bo doi*, and I spent five years in the field during the most terrible time of the war. Why? Four people in my family died when the Americans bombed the Hanoi suburbs. I was angry and I believed that what men could do, I could do, too. Life was hard. In the jungle, we kept the telephone lines open, and at first I was homesick and afraid. But I wanted to avenge my family, to kill Americans for what they did. I survived, and when the war was over, my spirits soared. But life was still not easy. My husband is a career military man. . . . He carries a bullet in his body and he is not well after sixteen years in the battlefields. We are lucky because we have two children, a boy and a girl.’ ”

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Appendix D. Misguiding TV Guide

A generation of young people in Sweden and elsewhere has received its basic education on the Vietnam War from Hollywood, with films like “Rambo” and “The Deer Hunter” which depict the Vietnamese as evil communists who do terrible and inexplicable things to innocent Americans abroad. One exception is “Heaven and Earth”, a film based on the autobiographical books of the Vietnamese-American, Le Ly Hayslip. But even that modest corrective has been misrepresented in the widely-read TV guide of Sweden’s most influential daily newspaper, as the following letter from Ms. Hayslip points out.

Her efforts to explain illustrate one of the major difficulties with mis- and disinformation, once it has become established: It takes much more time and editorial space to correct it than to casually repeat it. It also requires the serious attention of editors and their publics. After all, a few throwaway lines in a TV guide. . . . What does it matter, and who cares?

* * * * *

“It is through the seemingly harmless repetition of such bits of disinformation that misleading myths are built up and established in the public mind.”

Editor. TV Guide
Dagens Nyheter
105 15 Stockholm
Sweden

Dear Editor,

I was gladdened to learn from fans in Sweden that your national television channel recently broadcast, for the third or fourth time, Oliver Stone’s film based on my life story, “Heaven and Earth”. I regard it as a great honor that the film has been broadcast in Sweden and in other countries, so that people in all parts of the world can learn more about the wars that have afflicted Vietnam and its people in the past.

I am afraid, however, that the presentation of the film in *Dagens Nyheter’s* TV guide gave a very misleading impression of the American War, my people and my own experiences. According to the translation I have received, the film was presented in your guide as follows:

“Le Ly grew up in the countryside of Vietnam during the 1950s and ‘60s. After being raped and tortured by the resistance movement, she flees to Sanoi, where she becomes unemployed after becoming pregnant by her employer. She is forced to find her own way to support herself.” Much the same description was given in an accompanying feature article, with the additional comment that, “FNL arrived in her village in 1963, upon which Le Ly’s brother left home.”

It is true that I was raped by a young man from a neighboring village who happened to be in the FNL (so was I), but definitely *not* by “the resistance movement”. Unfortunately, such crimes are committed on all sides in wartime, as we have learned from more recent tragedies, and even in peacetime. In recent years, for example, there have been several reported cases of U.S. soldiers raping young Japanese girls and women on Okinawa.

The fact is that rape, torture and brutality were far more frequently committed by soldiers of the United States and its “South Vietnamese” puppet regime than by the FNL. The

infamous massacre at Song My/My Lai was just one of many similar events, as we have recently been reminded by disclosures of Senator Bob Kerrey 's responsibility for the slaughter of innocent civilians in the Mekong Delta region.

The FNL, which is more properly referred to as a liberation movement, was supported by the overwhelming majority of the people, including my own family. To a great extent, the FNL *was* the people, as several studies commissioned by the U.S. government during the war pointed out.

As a young girl, I served the FNL and was eventually arrested on suspicion of doing so by the puppet government. It was at the hands of the "South Vietnamese" army that I experienced the torture depicted in the film. I was released after three days, thanks to the intervention of an influential relative. But this caused suspicion among my comrades in the FNL, because it was very unusual for anyone— even a little girl like me— to be released so soon, or without being physically and mentally destroyed. Against my will, I was caught in the middle of suspicions on both sides, and was eventually forced to flee to the occupied city of Danang, and then to Saigon (not "Sanoi", which I presume is an accidental blending of Saigon and Hanoi).

The reference to my brother who left home is also very misleading. I actually have two brothers, the older having in 1955 moved to the north, where he joined the Communist Party and fought to liberate the south. My younger brother, Sau Ban, left home because my parents did not want him to fight on either side, and especially not for the puppet government. But our hearts were always with our beloved uncle Ho Chi Minh and the cause of liberation. Eventually, Sau Ban joined the FNL near Saigon. He was killed by U.S. troops while on his way home to prepare for the Tet offensive of 1968.

No doubt some of the confusion is due to the fact that the film, which is necessarily condensed, does not reflect the exact sequence of events in every respect. Anyone who is interested in all the facts will find them in the two books on which the film is based, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* and *Child of War, Woman of Peace*.

I was also dismayed to learn that Swedish television broadcast "The Deer Hunter" just two days after "Heaven and Earth". I understand that Michael Cimino's film, which is notorious for its portrayal of U.S. soldiers as innocent victims and the Vietnamese as sadistic monsters (the reality, of course, was something very different) has been broadcast several times in Sweden without any warning about its grotesque propaganda message.

Dagens Nyheter's presentation of the film, for example, notes only that "the scene in the prison camp where Christopher Walken is forced to play Russian roulette is one of the most powerful ever filmed". In reality, there were millions of "powerful scenes" during the American War, and in most of them the victims were Vietnamese.

Everyone who has read my books or heard me speak knows that I have always worked for reconciliation between all parties to the war. But that can never be achieved with lies and distortions. During nearly a century of colonial oppression and thirty years of cruel war to gain our independence, my country and my people have endured unimaginable suffering. More than a quarter-century after the American War's formal conclusion, the earth and water are still poisoned, with devastating effects on human health and the environment. Innocent children and adults are still being killed and disabled by land mines, unexploded ordnance and other remnants of the war, and this will continue far into the future.

It is therefore very hurtful when influential media such as *Dagens Nyheter* continue to spread disinformation about our history and our national character. Some may feel that

what is written in a TV guide is of little importance. But I am certain that more people, especially those in younger generations, today get their impressions of Vietnam and the American War from Hollywood films and what is written about them, than from more reliable sources. It is through the seemingly harmless repetition of such bits of disinformation that misleading myths are built up and established in the public mind.

I take it for granted that it was never *Dagens Nyheter's* intention to spread anti-Vietnam propaganda. But having unintentionally done so, I also take it for granted that you will publish this correction in a prominent place, and strive to be more accurate in the future. I know that there are many people in your country with a good understanding of these issues and I urge you to consult them in all such matters. Of course, you are very welcome to consult me at any time.

Yours in peace,

Le Ly Hayslip

Editor's note: This letter was submitted to *Dagens Nyheter* on 11 August 2001. As of 1 September, there had been no reply.

APPENDIX E: Philip Agee on the CIA and international terrorism

On 24 September 2001, just thirteen days after terrorist attacks against symbols of U.S. economic and military might in New York and Washington, Philip Agee visited Stockholm to speak on the history and methods of the CIA, and its long involvement in international terrorism.

Agee is one of the most interesting and important figures in modern U.S. history. No one has done more to shed light on the darker side of U.S. foreign policy, based on the knowledge and insights he gained as an agent of the CIA, the Central Intelligence Agency. His disclosures have been important in their own right, but his example may be even more important. He was the first to leave the CIA and reveal its secrets to the world, confirming much of what had long been suspected. Since then, many former employees of the CIA and other government agencies have provided valuable service to the public by following his example.

That example is the product of a remarkable personal journey. He grew up in very comfortable circumstances in Florida, and was a devout Catholic who for a time seriously considered becoming a priest. "My entire background and education were conservative," he has written. "That meant conformity and acceptance of authority. Nothing could have been more natural than to go into the CIA to fight the holy war against Communism." This was in the 1950s, "long before the world knew they were into political assassinations, torture and overthrowing governments".

Between 1960 and 1968 he worked as a CIA agent in various countries of Latin America. "During those years, I changed," he writes. "I wondered why we were so afraid of governments that put priorities on helping peasants and other poor people." Those doubts led to his resignation from the CIA in 1968, and he eventually decided to write a book about his experiences and the conclusions he had drawn from them. It was entitled *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, and it caused an international sensation when it was published in 1975.

"I tried to show how our operations help to sustain favourable operating conditions for U.S.-based multi-national corporations", Agee has explained. "These conditions, together with political hegemony, were our real goals. . . . 'Free elections' really meant freedom for us to intervene with secret funds for *our* candidates. 'Free trade unions' meant freedom to establish our unions. 'Freedom of the press' meant freedom for us to pay journalists to publish our material as if it were their own. When an elected government threatened U.S. economic and political interests, it had to go. Social and economic justice were fine concepts for public relations, but only for that."

Naturally, the CIA and the Nixon government then in power— Henry Kissinger, in particular— did everything they could to discourage Agee. Among other things, he was expelled from five NATO countries under pressure from the United States. When that failed, they mounted an intensive propaganda campaign to discredit him, via their contacts at *Newsweek*, the BBC, CBS' "60 Minutes" and other "respected news sources". In fact, the campaign against Philip provides an excellent illustration of how the CIA infiltrates and manipulates news media.

But none of that seemed to have much effect. Agee went on to write several other books and a long series of articles in such publications as *Covert Action Quarterly*, of which he is a co-founder. At present, he is helping Cuba— a frequent target of CIA propaganda and

destabilization efforts— to further develop its crucial tourist industry by means of his on-line agency, CubaLinda (www.cubalinda.com).

Philip Agee's visit to Sweden coincided with proposals to reinstate CIA practices which his disclosures had helped to outlaw 25 years ago, including the assassination of foreign nationals and close co-operation with persons known to have committed serious violations against human rights. Those and related matters provided the backdrop for his talk at ABF House in Stockholm on 24 September 2001.

* * * * *

The Plot Calling the Kettle Black

The United States and International Terrorism

Address by Philip Agee
Stockholm • 24 September 2001

Thank you all for coming. I would also like to thank Göran Eriksson, the director of ABF, for inviting me to participate in this series on U.S. influence on Swedish news media. It is a very broad topic, and I am sure you understand that, since I do not live here and do not speak or read Swedish, it is not possible for me to analyse Swedish media and point out areas of possible U.S. influence.

But I am familiar with the practices of the past, which I believe have never ended, and I would like to begin by citing a well-known observation of A. J. Liebling, a U.S. journalist and media critic who was active during the early 1900s: "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one," he said.

In a sense, this has always been true. News media in general, except for state-funded organizations, are part of the private sector. I know that, here in Sweden as in Britain, you have state television and state radio. But generally speaking, and certainly in the United States, the press has always been in the private sector.

The power of the written word

The United States— that is, the political class of the United States— has known about the power of the word for a very, very long time. A personal experience may serve to illustrate how powerful the written word can be.

For legal reasons, I stayed away from the United States for about seventeen years— from the time I started work on my first book, in the early 1970s, until my autobiography was ready for publication in 1987. The publisher of the latter was very eager for me to return to the States for the promotion of the book, but my lawyers all warned me not to take a chance. They suspected that there could be secret criminal indictment, as there could have been all those years, and argued that the risk was not worth it.

My wife and I decided that we would take that risk. We went back, and they didn't touch me. I did the promotion of the book, and that began ten years of frequent travel to the U.S. for lectures at universities and speeches at political rallies, civic centres, churches, even out

in the street. Altogether, and must have spoken at more than 500 events in the United States. One of those trips, around 1989 or 1990, was to the University of California at Santa Cruz. When the organizers told me that the event was scheduled to take place at a civic centre with room for about 3000 people, my reaction was: "Oh, my god! We are going to look like we're all alone in there. We will never attract more than a couple of hundred people." But they said, "Don't worry. You'll see."

Sure enough, on the night of the meeting the arena was packed. During the discussion period after my talk, which was about the war in Central America still going on at the time, a man stood up way in the back. He was a very large person, with a lot of long hair, a bushy beard, and a plaid lumberjack shirt. He paused for a moment, and then said my name in an enormous, booming voice: "Philip Agee!" He said, "Philip Agee, I want to thank you for saving my life!"

With that, the place became as quiet as you could imagine. You could have heard the proverbial pin drop. He went on to tell the story of how he was seriously wounded in Vietnam, and had to spend several years in a veterans' hospital in the United States. While in hospital, he became despondent: He thought there was no hope, and decided to commit suicide. But then someone gave him a copy of my first book.

He said: "When I read that book, it changed my life." He said that he decided then not to end his life, but to spend the rest of it helping Vietnam War veterans who had problems like his own. From that point in the mid-1970s until the time of this meeting some fifteen years later, he had made a career of social work among Vietnam War veterans suffering from mental problems because of the things that they had done and seen in Vietnam.

This is merely one personal story, but it indicates the strength of the written word. Possibly, one life was saved— possibly.

Covert action

The CIA, as you probably know, was founded in the years following World War II— supposedly, to prevent another Pearl Harbor, the Japanese surprise attack which brought the United States into that war. In that sense, the events of September 11th represent a terrible failure on the part of the CIA and the rest of the U.S. intelligence establishment.

There are at least twelve or thirteen different intelligence agencies in the United States, and they are spending on the order of thirty billion dollars per year— the CIA being simply the foremost among them. Of course, the CIA was not only established to collect information and to anticipate attacks. From the beginning of the CIA's existence, it was also used to intervene secretly in the internal affairs of other countries. Virtually no country on earth was exempt.

This secret intervention— as opposed to the collection of information— was called covert action, and it was used in a variety of ways to influence the institutions of other countries. Interventions in elections were very frequent. Every CIA station, that is the undercover CIA office inside a U.S. embassy, included agents who were involved in covert action. In addition to intervention to ensure the election of favoured candidates and the defeat of disfavoured candidates, the CIA also infiltrated the institutions of power in countries all over the world. I am sure that Sweden is no exception, and was not an exception during all the years of the Cold War.

There was electoral intervention, propaganda via the media, and also the penetration and manipulation of women's organizations, religious organizations, youth and student organizations, the trade-union movement— very important— but also the military and security services and, of course, political parties. All of these institutions were free game for penetration and manipulation by the CIA.

In short, the CIA influenced the civic life of countries all around the world. It did this due to a lack of faith in democracy in other countries. There was a desire for control. The secret U.S. policy was to not leave things to "chance", that is to the will of the people in whatever country it might be. They had to be tutored, they had to be "guided" in such a way that they would be safe for U.S. control. Control was the key word. None of this was done for altruistic or idealistic reasons.

Three key factors

Where the media are concerned, there are three important factors involved: sources, selection and the slant. With regard to sources, it is my understanding that Swedish news media have very few of their own people working abroad. That means that they are dependent on what they get from other sources, for example the Associated Press, Reuters, BBC or CNN. Those huge organizations which have people all over the world are, of course, selling their products here.

So you receive those products here, and an editor takes uses them in any way he chooses. What seems to be happening with globalization is that the treatment of news is becoming more and more homogeneous. Sweden, of course, is a unique society with a unique history, culture and language. You would surely have a unique way of viewing and interpreting world events— a vision of the world that is Swedish, in contrast to that of the U.S., Germany or any other nationality.

But how do you maintain this cultural identity with regard to international news, if the media here are dependent on foreign sources? These sources are, of course, becoming fewer and fewer, as the process of monopolization continues. Consider the mergers that have occurred just during the past ten years or so— for example, Time merging with Warner, then taking over CNN and now merging with AOL. Or General Electric, another giant corporation, taking control of NBC. This is a process that has been going on for a long time, resulting in fewer and fewer independent sources.

Selection may be the most important factor of the three, because what is most important in the news is what is left out. It is a form of censorship. There is a lot of news out there; but editors determine what is news and what is not. Whatever is overlooked, not reported, says a lot about the media.

Invisible background

This has been very well illustrated during the past two weeks. I imagine that we have all seen the same reports over and over again, on what happened in New York and Washington, along with the demonization of Osama bin Ladin. There has been *some* reporting, but not very much, about the fact that bin Ladin is a product of the United States. He is a creature of the CIA, having gone to work for the it in Afghanistan. It was the largest operation ever carried out by the CIA, and its purpose was to bleed the Soviet Union.

Bin Ladin was one of thousands who volunteered to fight with the *mujihadin* against the Soviets. As I recall, there were seven different groups. All seven were basically fundamentalist Islamic forces, who felt that the Soviet invasion defiled an Islamic country. Bin Ladin was among those who did not stop fighting after the Soviets were expelled. In fact, he started laying plans for the future while the war against the Soviet Union was still going on. He was able to develop a world-wide network which today is operating in sixty countries or more.

Very little of this background on bin Ladin as a creation of the United States has been brought to public attention during the past two weeks. Most of what we have seen and heard is related to the “solution”, which is war. How much have we read or heard about those voices calling for alternative solutions to the problem of international terrorism? How much reporting have we seen on analyses of what has driven these people to such desperation that they carried out those attacks on September 11th?

I have not seen very much of that. This may be due to the fact that I am living in Cuba at present. But I do read the *New York Times* on the Internet every morning, for example, and have access to quite a lot of other news. When it comes to alternative solutions to the problem, such as a re-examination of U.S. policy in the Middle East, particularly with respect to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, I don't think I have seen anything. The only thing we get is Bush saying “this is war, we are at war, this is the first war of the 21st century, this is a question of good versus evil, whoever is not with us is against us”, and so on.

That is pretty much the attitude we had in the CIA during the 1950s. When we analysed the operational climate and all the political forces in any given country, we had our friends and we had our enemies. There was no one in between. The friends were centre and right-wing social democrats, conservatives, liberals, in some cases all the way over to neo-fascists. The enemies were left-wing social democrats, socialists, communists, all the way to those advocating armed struggle.

This is the way we saw the world. It was a strictly dualistic view of the political climate in any given country where we were operating. It was very much like what we are hearing today from Washington.

The uses of journalists

The third important factor affecting the news is, of course, the slant or bias. It reflects the moral, social and political values of the person doing the writing, or at least the editor. This is where the CIA played a very fundamental role in years past, and I cannot imagine that it suddenly stopped when the Cold War came to an end.

In fact, like many others, I believe that the Cold War never really ended. It did so along the east-west axis. But the Cold War always had a north-south dimension—the war against forces of liberation in Third World countries. That never ended, and it continues today.

I also believe that the CIA's media operations have continued. They involve the recruitment and payment of editors and reporters who take the CIA's material and publish it as if it were their own. Taken all together—the sources and selection of material, and the point of view or slant—the result is essentially what is known as propaganda, but which passes for “unbiased news”.

Journalists are also very important to the CIA for non-journalistic activities. They serve as very convenient agents of access for the Agency. Particularly since they come from a

country with a neutral tradition, Swedes in general have always been of great interest to the CIA. This is because they do not carry a lot of political baggage, as do people from most other countries. I am aware of the ongoing debate here concerning just how neutral Sweden has or has not been. But in the rest of the world, the neutrality of Sweden has created a special attraction for U.S. intelligence agencies, because Swedes have readier access to certain target individuals than, say, an American or a German would.

The fact is that journalists *are* used for non-journalistic purposes— as collection agents for intelligence, and for making contacts, because a journalist can approach practically anyone and ask for an interview or develop some type of relationship. Of the hundreds of journalists who have come to me over the years, I have no idea how many have been sent by the CIA. I get some idea when I read what they write. But I learned to be cautious, early on.

Education in injustice

The covert action operations to which I referred earlier were carried out all over the world, and certainly in Latin America where I was posted. I spent three years in Ecuador, then three more in Uruguay. In both cases, my cover was as a political attaché in the U.S. embassy.

I then returned to Washington, pretty disillusioned with the work. I was a product of the U.S. education system of the 1950s, which provided me with a very good liberal education, but no political education at all. I was simply brought up to believe that whatever the government did was good, and that it was doing these good things in the name of us all.

It was not until I got down to Latin America that I began to get a political education. Whatever my ideas when I went down there, I saw things around me every day that influenced me. I saw the terrible economic and social conditions, and the injustices that could not be ignored.

The two most fundamental, interrelated problems were the grossly unequal distribution of land and the unequal distribution of wealth. In the early years of the Kennedy administration— I had gone down to Latin America toward the end of the Eisenhower period— there was much talk about land reform as a way of dealing with those problems.

But with the success of the Cuban revolution, and its success in surviving U.S. attempts at invasion and other hostilities, land reform in the rest of Latin America was put aside. “Stability” was the order of the day. The view in Washington was that, if reform programmes were pushed, it could lead to instability and create openings for liberation forces all over Latin America that were inspired by the Cuban revolution.

So, the aim of our programmes was to support the *status quo*, to support the oligarchies of Latin America. These are the power structures that date back centuries, based on ownership of the land, of the financial resources, of the export-import system, and excluding the vast majority of the population. With all of our programmes, we were supporting these traditional power structures. What first caused me to turn against these people were the corruption and the greed that they exhibited in all areas of society. My ideas and attitudes began to change, and eventually I decided to resign from the CIA.

It is widely believed that, once you have joined the CIA, it is likely being in the mafia, that you can never leave. But that is actually not the case. The CIA does not want people working within the organization who are not happy and do not want to be there. They are security risks, for one thing. So, people are coming and going all the time..

Maddening diary

I decided to start a new career in teaching, and enrolled as a Ph.D. student in a programme of Latin American studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. In the course of those studies— of the Spanish Conquest, the colonial period, and all the horrors that have occurred over the centuries in Latin America— I gradually came to the conclusion that what my CIA colleagues and I had been doing during the 1950s and '60s was nothing more than a continuation of nearly five hundred years of exploitation and political repression.

It was then that an idea entered my mind which had previously been unthinkable— to write a book that would show how all this works. The research required me to spend a year in Paris, and then another year in London where the British Library's newspaper archive proved to be invaluable. There, I was able to read all news reports relating to the places that I had worked in Latin America, in many cases dating back to the 19th century.

When the book finally came out— the title was *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*— it was reviewed in the CIA's classified in-house journal, *Studies in Intelligence*. I managed to get a copy of the review, which speculated that I had kept copies of all the stuff I had worked on while I was in the CIA, because they could not believe that I was able to reconstruct all those thousands and thousands of details from memory. It drove them absolutely crazy. But, in fact, most of the maddening details were gleaned from the newspaper archive of the British Museum.

The book had a tremendous effect on the Agency's effectiveness, its ability to continue its standard operations. The most gratifying result was that many Latin Americas told me how important the book was for defending themselves and their organizations from destruction by the CIA. In the broadest sense, the purpose of the Agency's various activities was to prop up those forces that were considered to be friendly to U.S. interests, while penetrating, dividing, weakening and destroying those forces that were regarded as unfriendly to U.S. interests— the forces of the political left that I mentioned earlier.

Thus, for Latin American revolutionaries to come to me and say how much they appreciated the book, with all its details on how the CIA works to subvert institutions in other countries, was extremely gratifying.

Suitable enemy

Since the events of two weeks ago, there has been much comment and speculation about the new era we may now be entering. Looking back, there was a long Cold War that had already begun during World War II. An important turning point occurred in 1950, when it was decided to start an arms race that would serve the dual purpose of forcing the Soviet Union into bankruptcy while stimulating the U.S. economy. Since the Soviet Union was still recovering from the devastation of World War II, it would never be able to catch up; but it would be compelled to make the effort, nevertheless. Meanwhile, military spending in the U.S. would keep going up and up, which in turn would stimulate the U.S. economy through a sort of "military Keynesianism". This continued through the Reagan administration of the 1980s.

But in the decade since the end of the Cold War until September 11th, the U.S. security establishment— the political class, the CIA, the people who fought the Cold War— had no real enemy to focus on. True, they had Saddam Hussein for awhile, and they might have

had a minor enemy here, another one there. But there was no real world-wide threat similar to that of the Cold War. Well, now it seems that they have one again.

What this means is that the United States is going to be in this for quite some time. I have feeling that it is going to go on for ten or fifteen years, because they are not going to wipe out international terrorism or something like bin Ladin's group overnight. During this period, they are going to be doing the same things they did in the Cold War. We can already see it in such expression as, "Whoever is not with us is against us." They are going to be trying to use every bit of power they have to bring countries in line behind the United States.

It also means important changes within the United States, because the war on terrorism will serve as the justification for restraints on civil liberties. They are building a huge crisis in the United States. They are building the psychological climate for broad-based acceptance of an ongoing war, for which there will be no quick resolution. There will be no great battles, either.

Little room for alternatives

During this period, there will be very little room for alternative views and alternative solutions in U.S. news media. What are the alternatives? Well, one is obviously to address the question of why these people are doing these things: What are the roots of international terrorism? How does U.S. foreign policy create this type of reaction? How does U.S. support of everything that Israel does, including the oppression of the Palestinian people, influence fundamentalist Islamic groups?

In other words, a feasible alternative would be a reconsideration of U.S. foreign policy, to see if it would not be possible to create a more just situation in the Middle East. But the United States is stuck. It is stuck with an authoritarian regime in Egypt, which is one of the really shaky countries at the moment. Algeria has gone through a horrible period, and the fundamentalist movement there has not died away at all. In Pakistan the government could fall; fundamentalists there could take over, and they would then have nuclear weapons in their hands. So, a lot of things can happen in the months and years ahead.

Unfortunately, I suspect that there will be greater self-censorship by U.S. media in order to line up behind the government, however its policy of war may turn out. There is already talk of a personal identification system of some kind for the entire country, together with large-scale surveillance of the population— especially immigrants, and Muslim immigrants in particular. There will be some opposition to this; but historically, the courts have usually gone along with the government, even though they are theoretically supposed to be the guarantors of civil liberties. For example, the courts went along with the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. So, it will be possible to restrict, and even infringe upon, civil liberties and human rights in the U.S.

It is too early to draw any conclusions about how all this is going to develop, since it is still in the planning stage. But in my opinion, if they carry out this military solution— with an attack or a series of attacks, or the establishment of military bases in Islamic countries— they will be doing exactly what bin Ladin wants them to do. It would turn more and more people to fundamentalism and to his organization. They could kill him tomorrow, but the organization that he has established will live on, and it will be nearly impossible to penetrate.

My reading of the situation is that there have been a few defectors from bin Ladin's organization who have provided valuable information. But the U.S. has not been able to have anyone working in these clandestine groups around the world and reporting from the inside. It has had to make do with whatever it can learn from a few defectors. Certainly, the CIA and the other components of the U.S. intelligence apparatus will be using all available technical means to locate and attack these groups, wherever they may be. They should certainly know where all the training bases are located, since they were established by the CIA, itself. But that will not be nearly enough.

I will conclude by noting that my experience here today has been very favourable, as I have had the good fortune to make a statement on Swedish public radio and public television, which I certainly could not have done in the United States. No one would have listened to anybody saying, "Don't go to war. Rethink the policy. Go to the roots of why all this is happening." These are alternative views which should be given access to the media, and I certainly hope that, at least here, you will continue to give access to people who think differently than the militarists of the United States.

I thank you all very much for coming here tonight, and for your attention.

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DISCUSSION

Questions from the audience in italics.

I regard this period as the most dangerous in the world since the Cuban missile crisis. I wonder if you share that assessment. I would also like to ask your opinion of Professor Robert Wright's op-ed piece in today's New York Times, which argues that the United States will have to surrender some of its sovereignty if it expects to get anywhere with its "war on terrorism". That means, for example, that it will have to submit to something like the international war crimes tribunal, which it has been willing to impose on others but not on itself.

Philip Agee: The comparison with the Cuban missile crisis had not occurred to me, but I do not feel that the present situation is the same as in October, 1962. The main difference is that, this time, there is no open confrontation with nuclear weapons— although there is a danger that fundamentalists might get their hands on such weapons. That risk is especially great in Pakistan, as I noted earlier.

But the most serious danger right now has to do with the measures that the Bush administration may take. The first thing I thought of was that they might use tactical nuclear weapons. Of course, that would not do very much good, and would produce nuclear fallout in large parts of Central Asia.

So, it is indeed a very dangerous period, and perhaps the greatest threat is to civil liberties in the United States.

As for the second part of the question, I do not believe that the U.S. will have to surrender any of its sovereignty in order to get the backing of other countries around the world. It might have to give up some information. You may have noticed that Colin Powell, the Secretary of State, keeps saying, "We've got the proof, and we may share it with certain governments". But the U.S. government is not prepared to share it with its own people, who will have to pay the bill and put their lives on the line in order to fight this phantom figure. It is almost insulting.

The argument, of course, is that making the information public would endanger their sources and compromise their methods. That is the oldest line in the book. They will always say that, and they probably do not have adequate information. They have some indicators or circumstantial evidence, perhaps. But it is probably not strong enough to justify a full-scale war, “the first war of the 21st century”.

In any event, the U.S. is the sole superpower, and it is able to count on the British following along in lock-step. Together, they will try to get the NATO countries and others to follow. They already have the Security Council resolution. So, I think they are going to go about this in a very systematic fashion, and I suspect that they are going to have to establish bases in Muslim countries such as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and in Afghanistan, itself.

It is my understanding that there is a secret budget of 30-50 billion dollars controlled by the CIA, the DIA and especially the NSA for terror activities around the world. I believe there are also training centres for torture and terrorism, including the use of remote-controlled bombs, in the states of Texas, Georgia and Florida. The CIA is reported to have financed the Albanian rebels in the Balkan region, and similar groups throughout Central Europe, and to have financed the Brigada Rosa in Italy which is responsible for a terror bombing in 1978 that was blamed on the Communists. The U.S. has bases in Latin America and trains professional terrorists that are sent all over the world. What can you tell us about all this?

Well, to reaffirm what I said earlier, the United States has been involved in state terrorism from the 1940s on, and it still is. There is an old expression in English about the pot calling the kettle black— in other words, one person accuses another of doing exactly what he is doing, himself. When the U.S. starts denouncing terrorism around the world, while at the same time is the strongest and longest-running terrorist power in the world, it makes you wonder what language really means.

The U.S. has always felt that it has the right to intervene and promote terrorism in other countries. This has been fully documented by my friend, Bill Blum, a former State Department official whose books present a litany of CIA interventions around the world since the 1940s. If you only read the part on what they did in East Germany during the 1950s and '60s, you will see that they organized a full-scale terrorist campaign to create chaos and undermine the government there. [See William S. Blum, *Killing Hope* and *Rogue State*, both published by Common Courage Press, Maine, U.S.A. The former is available in Swedish under the title of *CIA & USA:s verkliga utrikespolitik*; published by Epsilon Press, Göteborg. See also William Blum's web site at: http://members.aol.com/bblum6/American_holocaust.htm]

But they did this all over. I was myself involved in some of these activities. I worked, for example, with the police in Latin American countries, and they were often involved in torture. I remember one Sunday morning in the office of the chief of police during a state of siege in Montevideo. My boss, the CIA chief of station in Uruguay was present, along with the local army colonel in charge of anti-riot forces.

We began to hear a low moaning coming through the walls and, at first, I thought it was a street vendor outside. But then it became clear that it was someone being tortured in another part of the building. As this horrible sound became louder and louder, the police chief told the colonel to turn up a radio in order to drown out the groans and screams.

There is no end to such examples, and Latin America was one of the places where the worst offences occurred. But it was not just Latin America. Remember Greece under the military junta, which was urged by the CIA to prevent the election of Georgios Papandreou. That began seven years of severe political repression by this fascist regime.

So it does not have to be in a Third World region like Latin America. It can happen right in Western Europe, and even in a NATO country. Italy, which you mentioned, was targeted from the very start. The first important CIA intervention in elections occurred in Italy following World War II. The CIA was established in September of 1947, and the Italian elections were coming up in March of the following year.

President Truman directed the CIA to prevent the Communist Party from gaining a majority in the parliament. Since the Communists had been the strongest of the resistance forces and had produced many heroes, they emerged from the war with tremendous prestige and had a good chance to do well in the 1948 election. So the CIA set up all kinds of operations to support the Christian Democrats. It also developed a very close liaison with Pope Pius XII and with the Catholic Church, in general— and with the mafia, by the way, which had helped U.S. forces during the war. As a result, the Christian Democrats won the election in March, 1948.

The United States government in general, and the CIA in particular, have been conducting these kinds of interventions all along. In Brazil, for example, a government elected in the early 1960s underwent a period of instability. This led to the resignation of the president and the accession of the vice-president, as called for by the Brazilian constitution. The new president was Joao Goulart, a large landowner. But he was also a populist who proposed a major land reform. If there was any place in the world that needed land reform, it was Brazil, and it still is. In addition, Goulart adopted an independent foreign policy, and even made a trip to China.

So the CIA organized his overthrow by the Brazilian military in March, 1964. That ushered in twenty years of a fascist regime in Brazil. What happened? The same thing as everywhere else: the institutionalization of torture, death squads, “disappearances”, and eventually a backlash.

What later happened in Chile, after Salvador Allendé became president, was almost a carbon copy of what happened in Brazil. In Chile, the CIA carried out a programme of destabilization for nearly three years in order to turn the people against the government.

So the short answer to your question is that terrorism fomented by the U.S. government started in the mid-1940s, and has continued through the present day. It is not only the CIA, but also the U.S. military committing outright terrorist acts such as the bombing of Libya some years ago.

Do you have any idea how big the peace movement is in the United States. Also, what will happen to the U.S. Muslims, if they are called upon to go and fight other Muslims in Asia? Will there be civil war in the United States? What will happen?

To be honest, it is too early to tell. There have been some peaceful voices, and you can be sure that some Americans are going to organize against this war. But even though there was a large movement against the Persian Gulf War, it was split. As in other places, it is difficult to develop total unity in such opposition movements, and that tends to weaken them.

But there will surely develop a peace alternative to this war, and it is not a war that will be over in a matter of days or weeks. There is not going to be a set battle between military forces, for example. This means that there will be plenty of time for a peace movement to grow and become stronger. And when U.S. citizens start coming home in body bags, as from Vietnam or Somalia, the peace movement will be strengthened.

But there is no way to predict how strong it will be. Eventually, the issue will be taken up in Congress where one of the most positive figures right now is Congresswoman

Barbara Lee from Oakland, California. She is the only one who refused to sign the resolution empowering Bush to go to war, and she has received all kinds of hate mail since then. But the National Lawyers Guild, a progressive movement of some 6000 lawyers which was founded in the 1930s, has taken out a full-page advertisement in a San Francisco newspaper to support her.

This is only the beginning, and we will just have to keep an eye on developments. I will certainly be doing that from Havana. I might mention, by the way, that the current political campaign in Cuba is called "The Battle of Ideas". This is a response to U.S. initiatives, including laws known as the Toricelli and Helms-Burton acts, which openly call for the subversion and destruction of the Cuban revolution.

The Cubans understand very well how the United States intends to do this, which is one of the reasons there is no freedom of the press as we know it. Cuba will not tolerate the kinds of subversive media operations that have been targeted at other Latin America countries through the years. In the same way, the Cubans are doing everything in their power to protect their own institutions. "The Battle of Ideas" is a programme for confronting U.S. efforts to destroy the revolution.

For those of you who have never been to Cuba or may have limited knowledge of the situation there, I will note that it has been highly successful in many ways. When you compare the Cuban experience over the past forty years with the rest of Latin America—and that is the only appropriate context—you will find that it is the only country in the region that has made any consistent progress.

Everyone should be aware of its outstanding achievements in the field of health care; people come from all over the world for organ transplants and other medical treatments. This has led, in turn, to the development of world-class pharmaceuticals and biochemical industries. They have, for example, developed the first vaccines for common forms of meningitis and hepatitis.

Cuba has an educational system and a literacy rate which are second to none in Latin America. Every child can go through school, all the way through university or technical school, without the parents ever having to pay a cent.

Cubans are also well-known as phenomenal athletes. I believe it was the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, which analysed the results of the Sydney Olympic Games—controlling for national and personal income, population size of the country, etc., in order to create a "level playing field" between large and small countries—and found that Cuba had won the Olympics when such factors were taken into account.

But there seems to be no end to the United States' official hostility toward Cuba—although the recent bombings seem to have opened an opportunity for a reduction of hostilities. On September 11th, Fidel Castro denounced the bombings in the strongest possible terms and expressed total Cuban solidarity with the people of the United States.

In any case, Cubans are very aware of the power of propaganda, and they have their own campaign to counteract what is coming into their country from the U.S.

Is it fair to say that the word "communism" is the most valuable trademark in the world, when it is used as a psychological trademark to scare the living daylights out of people?

It is certainly a powerful word and, along with other powerful words such as democracy and freedom, has been very badly misused. To cite one example. I read all of the dispatches filed by Anita Snow, the Associated Press correspondent in Havana, who cannot mention the Cuban government without attaching the adjective, "communist". Apparently, that has got to be included in every article she writes, although I don't know if she puts it in or an editor does. But its function is obviously to remind readers that this is a

dirty regime. By contrast, when journalists write about the United States, they do not refer to the “capitalist regime” in Washington.

It is a label, and the effect is almost comical at times. They have pinned all sorts of labels on me over the years. They tried to make me out as a KGB agent, as a Cuban agent, an alcoholic, a womanizer— think of something negative, and they have tried to stick it to me.

They started with a fairy tale after I had finished writing my first book in mid-1974. On the fourth of July— and you know what that day means for Americans— the *New York Times* published a front-page article about this former CIA officer somewhere in Latin America who was drunk and despondent, and had been telling everything he knew to the KGB. But I had not even been in Latin America at the time, and certainly not spoken with the KGB; I had been struggling with my book.

It was something they made up in order to get the first blow in. The first blow is always the most important— because a person can issue a denial, but what people will remember is the accusation. I was identified as the wayward agent, of course.

If we are going to conduct a global war on terrorism, we must first agree on what it is. If we take, for example, the actions of the CIA and especially Henry Kissinger in supporting Pinochet's military regime in Chile, should that not also be considered as terrorism? Is it possible that the “crusade” against terrorism might rebound against the United States and, if so, how could that be made to happen?

Well, the information is out there, for anyone who cares to acquire it. The only question is whether there is a will to emphasize the history of U.S. sponsorship of terrorism, including the Kissinger period, and to make it public. This is what I was referring to when I spoke of selection— that is, what is news and what is not news. Since the attacks on September 11th, I do not believe there has been any serious effort by the U.S. mainstream press to review the history of U.S. involvement in and support of terrorism. The news is monopolized by those who want to go to war.

For that reason, I do not think it will be very easy to avoid this “war on terrorism”.

The U.S. media are so powerful, and they fill our minds every day with what they think we should know and how we should interpret it. They are working hand-in-hand with the government, and they share the same values. This is what makes it possible for them to earn a lot of money by selling advertising. After all, these institutions are privately-owned institutions whose capital is supposed to yield a return for stockholders. They have to keep this constantly in mind, like any other corporation, and so they go along with the government.

It is a great consolation to hear your words at a time like this, when our thoughts are being manipulated. Could you give us some advice regarding a cure or some sort of medicine that will help us Swedes to resist that manipulation?

I would urge you to go back and review the 1960s and 1970s, when this country was leading the world in opposition to the Vietnam War and the slaughter that was taking place there. I realize times have changed, but a lot of lessons can be learned by recalling how that movement developed here. I am sure that many of the principles of the past can be reapplied, because they will be valuable and relevant forever. Perhaps they can be applied now to oppose the use of violence to create more violence, which is a vicious cycle that is now likely to occur. As I noted earlier, there will be time to develop such a movement, because this violence is going to continue for quite some time.

That's one thing. The other thing is to try to keep the news media open to alternative points of view, and not submit to merely repeating the line of the U.S. government.

Regarding Cuba, for some time now there has been circulating on the Internet a declassified document of the U.S. National Security Agency about planned operations in 1963 to justify an invasion of Cuba. I believe that President Kennedy objected to it, but military leaders wanted to attack U.S. ships and blame it on Cuba in order to justify an invasion. That document was a valuable reminder during these past two weeks, but now it appears to have disappeared from the Internet. I would like to hear your comment on this.

Yes, there were plans to carry out certain acts of terrorism that would be attributed to the Cubans. These plots came out of the Pentagon, but were rejected by the Kennedy administration. A good source for this kind of material is the National Security Archive, which is now affiliated with George Washington University. They have done marvellous work. I believe they were the ones who obtained all the documents on Chile that have recently been released. Among other things, those documents show how the U.S. pinned the label of "communist" on the Allendé government— although it was in fact a socialist government— and how they have continued to do so ever since.

How important is it that the current president's father is a former CIA director and that many of his old cronies are now advising the son, who is not exactly the sharpest tool in the shed?

There have been many analyses and much speculation about who is really running things in Washington. There are those who say that it is Vice-president Cheney, others say that it is George Bush Sr. who is making the decisions behind the scenes. Actually, W" has been putting on a pretty good show since the attacks in New York and Washington. At this point, however, I really can't answer your question.

But I can tell you that the elder Bush was a bit obsessed with me when he became CIA Director one month after the assassination of the Agency's chief of station in Athens. That happened around Christmas, 1975, and my first book had come out in January of that year; so the CIA tried to pin the blame on me. It was true that I had disclosed the names of CIA agents working in various other countries. People were aghast to learn, for example, that there were 65 CIA agents working out of the U.S. embassy in London, or 60 in Paris, Rome or Bonn.

But I had never met the station chief who was murdered in Athens, and I never mentioned him in any of my writings. It was a pure myth that I was responsible. Nevertheless, George Bush Sr. was convinced that I was and, when Barbara Bush published her autobiography in 1995, she repeated the myth by relating how her husband had told a black-tie crowd of 800 people at the Washington Hilton that I was responsible. So I sued her, and I won. She had to correct that part of her book, write me a letter of apology, and acknowledge the error.

Do you suspect that the CIA or any other intelligence agency of the United States had anything to do with the murder of Olof Palme?

I haven't the slightest idea, but I really doubt it. Olof Palme gave the U.S. a lot of trouble— no doubt about that. He had many admirers in the United States, and many detractors, as he had here. But I do not think that the U.S. would go to the extreme of assassinating a Western European leader, even one as independent as Olof Palme. But, again, I really don't know. I prefer to concentrate on things that I know about, and leave the speculation to others.

Some years ago, a Swedish radio programme referred to one of your books in which it was stated that the CIA controlled some 400 newspapers and media companies around the world. Is that true?

I suspect the book you are referring to is *Dirty Work: The CIA in Western Europe*. It was an anthology, and we had quite a bit on the media in that book. I do not recall the actual number, but it was substantial. In the United States, there was a time when every major news organization was co-operating with the CIA. The official in charge of media operations during the 1950s, used to refer to his “mighty Wurlitzer”. A Wurlitzer is a huge juke box, you know, and he gave his programme that name because it involved the orchestration of propaganda all around the world.

For example, we would put out a story in one country of Latin America, and then get CIA stations in ten or fifteen other countries to do the same. This gave the appearance of a news item that was making the rounds of the media on its own merits, when in actual fact it was being fed through secret CIA channels. Local agents would take the story to journalists who could be relied upon to get it published. We made a huge amount of news that way, by orchestrating propaganda.

But I think the word “control” is too strong in this context. The CIA did not really need to control newspapers. It only had to place whatever it wanted to place, and that could be done through the control of one person. If it had the rights editor on the payroll, they would make sure that things got published. So in most cases, it was a question of individuals, not entire organizations.

But there were organizations founded by the CIA to produce news analyses and feature articles which would then be circulated in different parts of the world. One of the largest propaganda operations during the early years was the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which was founded in Berlin during the 1950s. Its political line was right-wing social democratic, and its headquarters were in Paris. Several publications were set up through this Congress, including the magazines *Encounter* in England; there were others in Germany, India and in France. It was a huge propaganda operation.

But in most cases, it is not necessary to control entire institutions in order to use them to get a message out. The key word is “penetration”, which means recruiting or placing someone inside the organization who will do your work for you.

Do you feel that the events of 11 September are likely to increase support for the missile-defence system or to weaken it, now that it has been demonstrated that such a “shield” in outer space is not able to protect the U.S. population from attack? Also, do you believe that the U.S. will try to draw out its so-called war on terrorism so that it will have an excuse to establish a presence in Afghanistan, as it has done with its large military base in Kosovo?

In the short term, the events of 11 September raised doubts about the missile-defence system, because they showed that protecting the U.S. from terrorism has little or nothing to do with missiles. But in the long term, that system and other types of military programmes will probably benefit—partly due to the commercial spin-offs that military spending has yielded in the past, such as the transistor and the computer chip.

As for the strategic significance of Afghanistan, the key factor is the petroleum of the Caspian region. From what I have read, the proven reserves there are on the order of those in Saudi Arabia. Of course, U.S. policymakers will not be saying this: They will be talking about the crusade against terrorism. But they no doubt see a need for a military presence in Central Asia, in the countries where this oil is going to be extracted and shipped. So there may very well be a permanent military presence, as in Saudi Arabia, in order to ensure U.S. access to and transport of those petroleum resources. Down the line, we can expect to see the issue of petroleum becoming intertwined with the crusade against terrorism.

Is it possible for the CIA to infiltrate U.N. agencies? I ask this because of allegations that Israel's Mossad and the CIA have used UNESCO to gather intelligence in Iraq. The former U.S. inspector in Iraq, Scott Ritter, has said this, for example. It has also been alleged that Saddam Hussein had connections with the CIA during his exile in Egypt, and that the 1963 fascist coup in Iraq was initiated by the CIA. Do you know anything about this?

I have no inside knowledge of possible CIA infiltration of the U.N. weapons-monitoring programme in Iraq. I would assume that it did take place, however, because the programme was essentially controlled by the United States. I should think that it would be a perfect opportunity— too obvious to ignore. So, I would assume that they made an effort to penetrate the programme for monitoring and destroying weapons.

Regarding a possible link between the CIA and Saddam Hussein in Egypt, I have no idea. But I can tell you that the CIA played a very important role in the provocation of the Iran-Iraq war. It encouraged the Shah of Iran to demand half of the waters in the Shatt al 'Arab that had always been recognized as part of Iraq. At the same time, they began fomenting rebellion among the Kurds of northern Iraq. All of this eventually led to that horrible war, and the CIA's fingerprints are all over the initial stages.

The past few weeks have caused me to realize that I am a child of the United States. I have visited there, of course, and I know that there are homeless people and stuff like that. But I go to the movies where the U.S. flag is always flying and U.S. citizens always save the world. I drink their soft drinks, I eat their food, and the fact is that I kind of enjoy it. That is my problem right now. I would like to ask you: How important is the export of U.S. culture for the CIA?

The CIA has published more than one thousand books in order to spread the views of certain authors, which can certainly be regarded as a cultural operation. In some cases, the authors were hired by the CIA to write these books.

In general, however, the spread of U.S. popular culture is a commercial phenomenon that benefits from having a lot of power. I cannot remember any CIA activities that were designed to spread U.S. culture around the world. I don't think it has needed to.* Even Cuba gets the U.S. version of break-dancing, of rock 'n roll, and so on, and there is an enormous interest in U.S. popular culture. Cuban young people always know the latest songs and all the entertainment stars.

By the way, those of you have never visited Cuba, I would urge you to do so. If you want to know what is waiting for you, go to this web site: www.cubalinda.com It is the result of what I have been doing for the past four years, having decided around 1997 to

**Editor's note: This response is based on Philip Agee's knowledge and experience of the CIA. There are, however, other institutions which do strive to expand U.S. cultural influence abroad. Among them are those agencies of international commerce and foreign relations which constantly work against broadcast content rules and other "trade barriers" which various countries have devised to protect their own cultural products and traditions.*

Also, there is at least one government agency whose specific purpose is to spread and promote U.S. culture abroad. It is the U.S. Information Agency, whose background and operating methods have been outlined by former employee, Nancy Snow, in *Propaganda, Inc.: Selling America's Culture to the World* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998).

In the foreword to that work, Herbert L. Schiller notes that: "The commercial flood of U.S. cultural products which engulfed the world during the past fifty years— movies, TV programs, recordings, publications, student exchanges, theme parks, data bases, etc.— was by far the most important means for transmitting ideology, anti-communism and American socio-economic institutions."

continue some thirty years of solidarity work by presenting Cuban realities to the world, and to bring the world to Cuba in order to see those realities at first hand. It is an attempt to counteract forty years of propaganda, manipulation and lies that have been disseminated primarily by the United States.

The other day, I saw a report on Fox News with a lot of U.S. flags waving, a lot of music, a lot of emotions. I did not want to be affected by that, but I was. It caused me to wonder: What is the way out of this? I do not see the U.S. backing off from Africa, from the Middle East or from Latin America. Is the solution for us to become more aware, or for the EU to offer an alternative to U.S. policy? And a final question: Is there a CIA agent among us this evening?

A lot of people have asked me how to keep the CIA from infiltrating an organization. I always tell them that you can't. The CIA, the FBI and all of these agencies have people who are prepared to join any open organization. But what you *can* do is to ensure that everyone does a lot of work for the cause, whatever it may be— enough work so that infiltrators will be more valuable to the cause than to the CIA or the FBI with the information they provide.

The best thing you can do as an individual is to take an active part in the organizations that do or will exist to find a peaceful solution to the problem of international terrorism— and such organizations will emerge, or already exist. But get involved, because every individual counts. To all those who may think that nothing they can do can have any significance, I say: You're wrong. There is strength in numbers.

I believe that this is what will happen in the United States and in a country like Sweden. People will get concerned, they will get involved, they will see the futility in creating yet another cycle of violence which offers no real solution to international terrorism. As I mentioned earlier, the more frequent and forceful the attempts to solve the problem with military attacks, the stronger bin Ladin will become. That is precisely the reaction he wants to provoke.