

**AMERICAN WAR
EDUCATION & RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

Status Report: Stage I

Al Burke
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The first stage of the project having now been completed, the purpose of this report is to summarize what has been learned to date and to suggest a strategy for the next stage. The following discussion assumes a familiarity with the original proposal, which is available in both French and English.* To recapitulate, the tasks of Stage I were outlined as follows:

This will involve broad discussions with as many interested parties as available resources permit. The contacts developed in connection with the Stockholm conference comprise a network that can be, and is being, expanded. Among the issues to be discussed are: methods and strategies for implementing the project; likely institutional and organizational collaborators; recruitment of distinguished citizens as official patrons; financing, anticipated problems and preventive/preparatory measures; composition of the editorial board; and other relevant issues, including those referred to above.

The results of these discussions will be presented in a report that will provide a basis for the next stage. Although the details cannot be specified in advance, the report will presumably include a preliminary budget, a proposed organizational structure, suggestions regarding implementation of the project, and an analysis of obstacles to be overcome.

Although the available resources turned out to be far from abundant, and not all of the anticipated tasks have been carried out as thoroughly as I would have preferred, enough experience and useful advice has been gathered to permit some general conclusions in preparation for the next stage of the project.

General reactions

The project proposal has thus far been distributed to some 150 individuals with special interests and/or competence in the issues involved. At this stage, broader distribution is neither necessary nor desirable. Among other things, it seems advisable to maintain a low profile as long as possible, for reasons that are probably apparent to anyone who has read the proposal.

Most of the recipients were directly or indirectly associated with the Stockholm Conference from which this project has emerged, and they consisted primarily of progressive educators, representatives of solidarity organizations, peace activists and scholars of that disposition.

*The project proposal is in PDF format and can be downloaded from:

www.nnn.se/vietnam/proposal.pdf (English)

www.nnn.se/vietnam/francprop.pdf (French)

The reactions can be sorted into three general categories of roughly equal proportions. About one third have been enthusiastically supportive and eager to assist. Some have already contributed by mediating contacts, translating/interpreting, gathering useful information, etc.

The responses of another third have ranged from lukewarm to indifferent; they have acknowledged the validity of the proposal, but with little or no enthusiasm. Most of the individuals in this category are already involved, often quite intensely, with various kinds of solidarity work.

The third category consists of individuals who have read the proposal, but seem to have grasped very little of it. At least that is the impression conveyed by the fact that they have tended to raise, as though for the first time, objections that are clearly addressed in the proposal — e.g. that the Vietnam War is a thing of the past and has little or no relevance for the present, that there are far more urgent problems requiring attention, etc. There appears to be something about the logic of the proposal that these individuals are unable or unwilling to comprehend.

Given that this range of reactions is from a selective sample of individuals who might reasonably be expected to strongly support the proposed project, the overall response could be interpreted as rather disappointing. For one thing, the need for just such a broad-based programme of public education has often been emphasized in a variety of contexts. Also, the persistent relevance of the Vietnam War and its value for providing historical perspective have become prominent themes of the current debate surrounding the unfolding catastrophe in the Middle East. That catastrophe has confirmed the value and necessity of this project or something very like it.

Accordingly, the lack of enthusiasm and/or comprehension among roughly two thirds of presumptively like-minded souls is more than a little perplexing. But upon a moment's reflection, and in light of comments offered by the indifferent and the uncomprehending, such reactions are not terribly difficult to understand.

First and foremost, there is the nature and magnitude of the task. It is undeniably daunting, and there is no shortage of reasons to believe or suspect that the project will never get off the ground. There are days, and times of the day, when I am plagued by the same doubts (a fairly normal condition in such circumstances).

That being the case, it is certainly a reasonable strategy to focus on less grandiose but more feasible projects — especially if one has already invested significant amounts of time, effort and other resources in them. And when resources are scarce, as they usually are in such contexts, it is always necessary to concentrate one's efforts in order to accomplish anything.

Among the scarcest and most precious resources, of course, are of the human variety. In voluntary organizations, even those with large memberships and impressive records of achievement, most or all of the work tends to be done by a small core of dedicated individuals who are therefore in no position to participate in major new initiatives. This seems to describe many of those in the "lukewarm to indifferent" category noted above. Although they are not able to participate in the development of this particular project, some may wish to do so at a later stage if it gains momentum and takes a form that is compatible with their own programmes.

Somewhat more mysterious are the reactions of those who have read the proposal but ostensibly failed to understand it. Based on their comments, it appears that many of them are so preoccupied with efforts to halt or ameliorate current calamities, such as those taking place in Afghanistan and Iraq, that they literally cannot be bothered with

broader perspectives. Some have even expressed mild but detectable disapproval at the notion of "wasting" time and effort on something so remote to them as the Vietnam War, when there are so many urgent matters crying out for attention in the here and now. It remains to be seen whether individuals in this frame of mind can be persuaded that equipping the general populace with a historical perspective might help to reduce their workload in the future.

Apart from these three general categories, it may be noted that a fairly typical range of human motives and emotions is evident in the reactions to the proposal thus far. There is, for example, a natural tendency (which I share) to think more highly of one's own initiatives than those of others. Most intriguing has been the hint of irritation or resentment among some individuals who have themselves called for such an effort as this to be made. It is evidently the sort of recommendation that may be dutifully repeated without the slightest expectation that anyone would ever be foolish enough to act upon it.

In any event, it is clear that the proposal does not arouse immediate, universal enthusiasm — not even amongst a selection of individuals with various kinds of interest in the fundamental issues involved. But that is hardly surprising, as the objections raised and the obstacles invoked reflect the very conditions that the project is intended to alter. Such reactions thus indicate how difficult it will be to implement the proposal, while confirming the value of doing so.

Given the above-noted considerations, the positive response from one third of those contacted thus far is probably the best outcome that could be expected at this early stage, when there are many questions and few answers. The level of interest and enthusiasm is likely to increase when the project begins to take more concrete form.

It should also be possible to do a better job of explaining why the history of the Vietnam War provides a useful paradigm for anticipating and interpreting subsequent events of a similar nature. For example, one key function of the project that should probably be stressed more clearly is that it will raise and supply an answer to the question: By what process has one of the most appalling crimes against humanity committed in modern times been relegated to some remote corner of the world community's collective memory — and to the extent that it *is* recalled, how has it become possible to portray the Vietnam War as a "noble, selfless enterprise" of the perpetrating nation?

That is an important issue in its own right, but also because it is essential for aggressor nations to cover up and/or whitewash past crimes in order to clear the way for new ones. The outline of such a process has already begun to emerge from the chaos and destruction of the current catastrophe in the Middle East. Thus, anyone who would like to anticipate how the tragedy currently being enacted in Iraq is likely to be swept under the carpet of history, glorified as a noble and selfless attempt to confer the blessings of democracy upon the unready / ungrateful / unworthy citizens of that country, etc., etc., would do well to study the mythology and historical falsification of the Vietnam War.

Initial strategy

A basic assumption of the proposal is that no such project is ever likely to be conducted via official channels, because: "The entire world is afraid of the United States, and with good reason. That, in itself, is sufficient cause to 'speak truth to power'. But it is unlikely to the point of unthinkable that any national leader might take the same kind of initiative concerning the Vietnam War that Sweden's prime

minister has done with regard to the Nazi Holocaust. Accordingly, if the thing is to be done, and done well, it must be a citizens' initiative."

The initial strategy has been to focus on developing contacts with teachers and, if possible, with progressive elements of their labour unions. Educators are vital to the success of the project for at least two reasons: their experience and advice will doubtless be of great value in the design of appropriate teaching materials; and it is presumably they who will be presenting and interpreting those materials to the principal target audience, secondary school pupils.

Initially, I entertained the notion of introducing the project simultaneously in three major European countries — France, England and Germany — on the theory that there is safety and encouragement in numbers. The idea was that a joint introduction would confer a measure of legitimacy, and help to alleviate anxieties about the personal and professional risks associated with such a controversial subject.

That is still a plausible theory, but experience to date indicates that it will be very difficult to put into practice. Among other things, it has turned out to be surprisingly difficult to find potential collaborators among the teaching profession in England. Via contacts in Vietnam-solidarity organizations, I was eventually referred to a couple of primary level teachers who sympathized with the aim of the project, but were reluctant or unable to offer much guidance.

Apart from being overworked, as dedicated teachers everywhere tend to be, they indicated that the education system in England allows very little freedom for teachers to decide on educational content. That has been the subject of some debate and there may be some loosening of restraints in the future.* But for the time being, it appears that there are very few openings for the introduction of new items on the agenda, controversial or otherwise.

I also tried to learn something about the political-philosophical inclinations of the British teaching corps in general — in particular, how large a proportion would be likely to welcome such an initiative as this — but my informants were at a loss to provide a clear answer. Their admittedly vague speculations suggest that perhaps one quarter would be strongly in favour, one quarter strongly opposed, and roughly half would be more or less indifferent.

Whatever the accuracy of that rough estimate, it is reasonable to conclude that England is not at present a very likely place to initiate this project.

The response in France has been much more positive, thanks in large measure to contacts mediated by the France-Vietnam Friendship Association ("AAFV"), which was represented at the Stockholm conference. AAFV is a venerable solidarity organization with a number of quite active regional chapters, and has provided a valuable forum for the presentation of this project.

Several competent individuals have volunteered to assist in various ways, and have done so with an eager efficiency that is as gratifying as it is unusual in my experience elsewhere.

From my discussions with French teachers it has emerged that they enjoy a relatively high degree of freedom to select materials and educational strategies within the framework of the national curriculum. It also appears that the political tendencies of the French teaching corps are generally progressive — certainly more so than in England, and probably more so than in any other European country.

* See for example, "Teachers offered more freedom to tailor lessons" in *The Guardian*, 5 February 2007

Thus, the prospects for implementing the project in France appear to be favourable. This is not to say that it would be universally embraced, of course. France has its own imperial ghosts to contend with, including a history of exploitation and aggression in all of Indochina, and they continue to haunt national politics. Virulent opposition may therefore be anticipated, but that is the case everywhere — something that cannot be said of the positive indications noted above.

As regards Germany, it remains unexplored territory in this context — largely because my experiences in England had a sobering effect on the giddy notion of a multi-national introduction of the project. Also, I have fewer personal contacts to draw upon in Germany. Primarily for those reasons, it seems advisable to wait until a later stage of development before attempting to organize a German variant of the project.

Next steps

Experience to date suggests a number of priorities for the next stage of the project. In particular, it is essential that it begin to take some concrete form in order to cultivate broader understanding and support. For, it turns out that even people who are used to dealing with symbols and ideas may need something more palpable than a written proposal — however worthy and self-evident it may appear to some — in order to grasp its value and implications.

The obvious solution is to conduct a pilot project that can serve as a workshop to develop an effective educational programme, and then as a reference in promoting further development. For the reasons noted above, the obvious place to do that is in France.

This in turn will require the production of a basic text on the history of the Vietnam War and its consequences. It will be a prototype of the booklet referred to in the original proposal, which may subsequently be revised on the basis of comments and advice offered by those participating in the pilot project.

The booklet will be produced under the guidance of an editorial advisory board of distinguished scholars, all of them selected from the United States in order to counter-act predictable accusations of "anti-Americanism". Three members of the board have already been recruited:

Noam Chomsky. Arguably the most widely renowned and respected intellectual in the world today, Prof. Chomsky has written extensively on the Vietnam War and related subjects.

Richard Du Boff, Professor Emeritus of Economics at Bryn Mawr University, has studied the Vietnam War since its first beginnings. His numerous articles on the subject include an important analysis in the definitive Gravel edition of *The Pentagon Papers*, the official U.S. history of the war.

Gareth Porter. A historian and national security analyst, Dr. Porter began challenging the mythology of the Vietnam War as a graduate student while it was still raging, and is now regarded as a leading authority on the subject. His most recent book is the highly acclaimed, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to Vietnam*.

During the coming months, the editorial board will be filled out with at least two additional U.S. authorities on matters relating to the Vietnam War.

The next steps to be carried out are thus to:

- Find teachers and schools in France, preferably at the secondary level, that are willing to take part in a pilot project.
- Complete the formation of the editorial advisory board.
- Produce the prototype of the basic text in book form and print a limited edition.
- Together with participating teachers, work out the details of a programme to be tested in the pilot project.
- Monitor the pilot project and analyze the results.
- Modify teaching materials and approaches on the basis of that analysis.

While all of this is going on, it will of course be useful and desirable to begin preparations — to the extent that time and other resources permit — for implementing the project at the regional or national level.

It is especially important to collect as many prominent endorsements as possible from all over the world, for two main reasons: to help resolve the issue of legitimacy referred to in the original proposal (p. 6); and to encourage hesitant natural allies, "the indifferent and uncomprehending", to become involved.

Other tasks that will require attention include: informing potential institutional and organizational collaborators; developing a strategy for dealing with anticipated opposition and other obstacles; establishing an organizational structure and channels of communication at the national level; recruiting an advisory board or "support committee" of individuals with credibility among young people; and no doubt much more.

Organization

Thus far, there has been no need for any formal administrative structure, and I would prefer to keep it that way for the time being. This project is almost certain to provoke disagreeable reactions from certain quarters, and there are some risks involved. It is therefore prudent to limit the number of visible targets to one responsible culprit for as long as possible.

But an informal structure of French teachers and other interested parties has begun to form and may be expected to expand as the pilot project develops. At some point, it will probably be necessary to establish a formal organization of some sort; but that can wait until the need arises and suitable experience is acquired.

In the meantime, much can be accomplished with a few visits by myself to France, and by exploiting the power of telecommunications. As one example, the Stockholm conference — which involved the co-ordination of delegates and reports from four continents, ranging from North America through Europe to Asia and Australia — was organized almost entirely by one person via the medium of e-mail.

As for the question of how long it will take to implement the project, it should be evident from the foregoing discussion and the problem of financing (see below) that it is difficult to specify with any precision. With luck, it may be possible to launch the pilot project sometime during 2008. That will take about a half-year to conduct and analyse, followed by at least a year to carry out a nationwide programme. The pace of expansion to other countries will, of course, depend on the nature and level of response to the example provided in France. It may thus be crudely estimated that, in the best of circumstances, it will take anywhere from 5-10 years to realize the ambitions of the original proposal.

Financing

It hardly needs to be mentioned that this is not the sort of initiative that is likely to attract support from most established sources of funding, if any. Essentially the same sort of constraints apply to this project as to the Stockholm conference — only more so, as the challenge to power in this case is much more direct and controversial.* It is especially difficult to get funding for the early stages of any project, as there is an understandable tendency to wait and see if good ideas and good intentions are likely to produce good results.

I am quite content to continue financing the project with my own resources; but those are, to my constant sorrow, rather limited and will soon enough be exhausted. Furthermore, time is of the essence: Those of us who by age and experience are best equipped to convey the necessary knowledge to the next generation will not be around much longer to do so.

Therefore, I have decided to solicit contributions from everyone around the world whom I know or suspect to sympathize with the aims of the project. It makes for a rather long list, and even small donations by a significant portion of those to be asked would in sum go a long way toward financing the next stage of the project, as outlined above. A preliminary budget is presented on page 9.

For those who may hesitate on the suspicion that it is not possible to finance such an effort by such means, it may be noted that the statistical universe of sympathetic souls probably numbers in the tens of millions. Modest contributions by a tiny fraction of them would amount to a tidy sum; and it is not impossible that, once the project gains momentum, more well-endowed sources of funding may find it worthy of support.

For those who do care to contribute, instructions on how to do so are listed on page 10. Assuming there is something to report, an annual statement of receipts and expenditures will be distributed to all contributors.

Other types of support are also very welcome, including good advice and personal endorsements. The latter will be published when it is time to go public, and it would be helpful if they included a few words of explanation for the endorsement.

Please feel free to discuss this project with anyone who can be expected to share its aims and keep quiet about it. But otherwise, for reasons noted both here and in the original proposal, it is advisable to maintain a low profile for as long as possible. Although such caution may be futile or unnecessary, it is preferable to avoid disturbing the dogs of war until such time as their barking and snarling can be of use for publicity and other purposes.

Questions or comments on any aspect of the project may be addressed to me at <editor@nnn.se> or by telephone at +46/(0)8 731 9200.

*Al Burke
Stockholm
7 May 2007*

* The problems involved in financing the Stockholm conference are summarized on pages 8-11 and 34 of the *Project Review*, available at: www.nnn.se/vietnam/report.pdf

Stage 2

Preliminary Budget

Figures in euros

Booklet

Pre-press	12,800
Printing (1000 x)	16,700
Copyright fees	3,550
Distribution	1,600

Administration

Travel	8,400
Lodging	4,600
Meetings	1,850
Website design	3,250
Office expenses	1,700
Postage/shipping	280
Telecommunications	365
Unanticipated expenses	8,000

Total **€ 63,095**

Notes

At current exchange rates (7 May 2007) one euro is roughly equal to 1.4 U.S. dollars or 9.2 Swedish kronor . Thus, the budget total of €63,095 equals about \$88,300 or 580,475 kronor.

These figures are rough estimates based on educated guesses concerning the type and extent of activities to be conducted. Any surplus that may remain will be applied to the expenses of Stage 3. However, it is more likely that Murphy's Law of project financing will once again be confirmed, i.e. that things usually cost more than anticipated.

Most of the projected administration costs are related to (an estimated) five visits of two weeks' duration to France in order to organize and co-ordinate the pilot project (see page 5), and one three-week visit to Vietnam for research connected with the basic text. All journeys round-trip from Stockholm for one person.

Continued...

Contributions

Methods of Payment

Transferring funds across national borders is not always a simple matter. But the alternative methods listed below are usually reliable, and cost little or nothing in service fees. If any problems arise, contact Al Burke at: editor@nnn.se

PayPal

With this worldwide service, money can be transferred via the Internet from a bank account, credit card or PayPal account. There is no cost to the sender. Although it is not necessary to open PayPal account, it is more convenient to do so; and the account can then be used for all sorts of other transactions via the Internet. Payments can be made in any of sixteen currencies and then automatically converted to the currency specified by the recipient. However, currencies other than the U.S. dollar are available only after a first transaction, or if the sender has opened a PayPal account. Details at the PayPal website: www.paypal.com

Senders and recipients are identified by their e-mail addresses, and in this case the recipient is "editor@nnn.se". That is usually the only piece of information required; but if the question should arise, the name of the account is "AMWAR Project".

Note on credit card security: Although the PayPal system is regarded as highly secure, for any transaction via the Internet it is always advisable to use a credit card that never has a large balance. The safest strategy is to make deposits slightly in advance, as needed.

Electronic transfer via bank

Most banks anywhere are able to transfer funds electronically, but usually for a fee of varying size. The two main pieces of information required are the recipient's International Bank Account Number (IBAN) and Bank Identifier Code (BIC), which in this case are:

<i>IBAN</i>	SE68 9500 0099 6018 0642 4162
<i>BIC</i>	NDEASESS

Perhaps needless to say, it is essential that both are reproduced exactly; otherwise, the funds are likely to end up in the wrong place. If space is available, it would also be helpful to note that the payment is to "AMWAR Project". Some banks may require the receiving bank's complete name, which is "Nordeabank Sverige AB (PUBL)".

From within Sweden

Two additional options are available for payments made from within Sweden:

PlusGirot 64 24 16 – 2 Bankgirot 5451 – 5077

The recipient in either case is "AMWAR Project".

IMPORTANT: Whatever the method used, please notify me by e-mail (editor@nnn.se) of the transaction date, amount and name of sender. This, to ensure that the funds arrive safely. Confirmation will follow by return e-mail.