

## Swedish-American Relations and the Vietnam War, 1965–1975

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### Abstract

Between 1965-1975, Sweden and the United States experienced a worsening diplomatic relationship as a result of domestic pressures caused by the Vietnam War. In Sweden, this came initially in the form of grassroots activism, which spread into the electoral base of the governing Social Democratic Party, whose leadership feared losing voters to the Communist Party. Simultaneously, the government of the United States sought to combat any criticism towards its campaign while at the same time not alienating an otherwise strategic partner. The massive fluctuation in diplomatic relations was further complicated by a wide array of issues, ranging from American deserters to Swedish mediation efforts and attempts at freeing American prisoners of war. Notably, military and intelligence cooperation during this period remained strong and largely unaffected. This episode offers many lessons on Cold War neutrality and attempts by small states to forge an independent foreign policy while seeking to maintain relations.

### Keywords

Cold War, Vietnam War, Swedish-American Relations

### About the author

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## 1. Introduction

Friendly relations between Sweden and the United States date back to the days of the American War of Independence when the two countries signed the 1783 Treaty of Amity and Commerce, which proclaimed that '[t]here shall be a firm, inviolable and universal peace and a true and sincere friendship between the King of Sweden, his heirs and successors, and the United States of America.'<sup>1</sup> Peace between the two countries has advanced uninterrupted to the present day. The favourable attitude held by the United States towards the Swedes was continuously reaffirmed indirectly, such as through the privileged status that the citizens of the Nordic kingdom had vis-à-vis US immigration law.<sup>2</sup> In the over 200 years of formal relations, only the period commencing in 1965 and concluding in 1975 can be described as an aberration of the otherwise positive bonds between the two nations.

The deterioration of good relations is heavily intertwined with the two respective nations' attitudes and engagement in the Vietnam War. However, the events that transpired in Southeast Asia were, in a way, secondary in regards to the development of Swedish foreign policy and rhetoric, as well as American responses to it. It shall be argued here that Sweden's condemnation of American actions was triggered by the latter's conduct in Vietnam as a direct cause, though that it was primarily albeit indirectly a response to increasing domestic political pressure.

This piece will examine in detail how the two parties, in many respects, were speaking past one another in responding to increasingly growing internal tensions, with the consequent results being a deterioration in bilateral ties that was both undesired and unintentional on both sides. At its core lies the question 'Why?', with neighbouring Denmark and Norway, having joined NATO following the failure to establish a Scandinavian Defence Union,<sup>3</sup> pursuing a more amicable relationship despite latent US-critical attitudes being prevalent amongst the general population.<sup>4</sup> In addition, this work seeks to examine the decoupling between diplomatic and military relations between Sweden and the United States.

Involved in this process is a whole cast of actors, ranging from elected politicians to local activists to diplomats, among many others with their origins spanning three continents. A key segment among these is the then-governing Social Democratic Party, a left-wing party that had governed continuously for decades and was foundational in molding and creating

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- 1 'Treaty of Amity and Commerce Between the United States and Sweden' (3 April 1783) [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(bdsdcc08701\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(bdsdcc08701)))
  - 2 Mae M. Ngai, 'The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924,' *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (Jun., 1999), p. 74
  - 3 Nils Örvik and Niels J. Haagerup, 'The Scandinavian Members of Nato,' *The Institute for Strategic Studies*, Number 23, December 1965, p. 1.
  - 4 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

numerous elements that continue to mark Sweden to this day, including the modern welfare state and reinforcing the country's policy of neutrality. Despite having been the hegemonic power in Swedish politics, they were by no means alone, with parties such as the agrarian, non-socialist opposition party *Centerpartiet* (the Centre Party) and the pro-United States *Moderaterna* (the Conservatives),<sup>5</sup> as well as the more the radical Communists and the multiple extra-parliamentary Maoist organisations.

In this work, the relationship between the two nations during the Vietnam War will be divided into four sections, each examining a specific theme. The first section deals with why Sweden chose to involve itself in a conflict from which it was so far removed, as well as the domestic causes for this. Unlike during the earlier French war in Indochina, the Social Democrats began to fear electoral losses at the hands of the Communists due to their silence on the issue of Vietnam. The section looks at the process of radicalisation in Sweden around the conflict, both on the governmental as well as grassroots level, and tracks this development. In particular, the style and substance of the rhetoric of the Swedish government is analysed to demonstrate that in order to placate a domestic electoral base, leading officials increasingly directed their criticism at the United States government.

The second section looks at the American response to growing Swedish chastisement and how this further impacted relations between the two states. By contrasting the official statements of the United States government with its actions, a pattern can be identified as consisting of repeated threats of various kinds, most notably economically, only to be followed up on by a cooling of diplomatic relations. Such a pattern holds true both during the presidency of Lyndon Baines Johnson as well as that of Richard Nixon, which suggests that the causes for this were not based so much on the personalities or ideologies but on the more fundamental relationship between the two countries and the inherent predicaments in which they both found themselves.

The third section examines the continued successful cooperation that existed despite the growing hostility between the White House and the Government of Sweden. In this section, a distinction is made between the political/diplomatic disagreements on the one hand and the continued covert military and intelligence collaboration that persisted despite the overt clashes between the two nations. The close ties in regards to armament and intelligence sharing illustrate that the strategic aims of the two countries did not divert significantly enough to cause any serious damage to the practical dimension of bilateral relations.

The fourth section broadens the scope of Swedish foreign policy and what role Vietnam, and consequently the United States, played within the Cold War and how it mirrored and

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5 NB The name literally translates to 'the Moderates' though contemporary translations tended to use the term 'the Conservatives.'

yet differed from other Cold War hotspots. What made Vietnam the subject of Swedish attention was ultimately its remoteness, which in turn offered the Nordic country significant freedom of action that may not have been possible along the Iron Curtain. By surveying the postcolonial landscape, Vietnam ceases to stand as an isolated case, except for its impact on Swedish-American ties, and one can begin to see that it falls within a consistent framework that extends beyond Southeast Asia to Southern Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean and elsewhere.

While the fighting in Vietnam has been covered extensively, the diplomatic impact of this has not been explored to the same, or even to a satisfactory, extent. Understanding the indirect effects of the war, in particular as it relates to an asymmetrical relationship such as the one between Sweden and the United States, is vital if one wishes to appreciate more fully the legacy of the War in Vietnam on the rest of the world. This is particularly true in the case of military relations, whereby a small and formally neutral state exists under two simultaneous pressures consisting of the political-diplomatic on the one hand, while maintaining a seemingly contradictory military relationship that was internally perceived as necessary.

Many of the sources obtained from the Military Archives of Sweden were only recently declassified, and include an array of vital documentations and origins and illustrate the divergence between diplomatic and military relations. Among these are documents from the Swedish Embassy in Washington D.C., the Pentagon, the Swedish Defence Staff, and research institutions. These are varied in nature, ranging from personal correspondence between key military officials from both the United States and Sweden to technical assessments and intelligence observations. The uniqueness of these sources is significant due to their unavailability in English (and until recently in Swedish as well) in addition to their frank reflections, something that is missing in memoirs, which are distorted by the benefit of hindsight and are almost entirely written by diplomats and civilians and not military officers. By analysing many of these original sources for the first time, a clearer picture can be formed on the basis of contemporary attitudes, which is not otherwise possible. Some of these aspects have been explored to varying degrees, such as in Ann-Marie Ekengren's *Olof Palme och utrikespolitiken: Europa och tredje världen* ('Olof Palme and foreign policy: Europe and the Third World') or Ulf Bjereld's, Alf Johansson's and Karl Molin's *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred: svensk utrikespolitik under kalla kriget* ('Sweden's security and world peace: Swedish foreign policy during the Cold War'), though they have not been singularly focused on the impact of the Vietnam War on Sweden's bilateral relationship with the United States. Furthermore, these works and others, like Mikael Holmström's book *Den dolda alliansen: Sveriges hemliga NATO-förbindelser* ('Hidden alliance: Sweden's secret ties to NATO'), have been almost entirely

confined to Swedish language literature, with few of these works, with the sole exception of military-focused research like Mikael Nilsson's *Tools of Hegemony: Military Technology and Swedish-American Security Relations, 1945–1962*, having entered English language research before.

The first two sections, though previously covered by the likes of Carl-Gustaf Scott and Fredrik Logevall, in and of themselves stop short from fully unveiling the isolation in which bilateral military relations existed and even flourished in. By introducing the sources covered in the third section, the bizarreness of the US-Swedish relationship, in its fullest sense, becomes evident beyond the initial breakdown in amity. The ultimate purpose of this work is twofold: review the existing literature, and simultaneously examine the discrepancy between Sweden's overt and covert conduct in the context of the Vietnam War, namely in the form of increased and strengthened military cooperation.

## 2. Development of Sweden's Vietnam Policy

Post-WWII American involvement in Southeast Asia dates back to the First Indochina War, which began under Truman, continuing past the Eisenhower Administration into the Kennedy and later Johnson periods. Despite the long prior history of American involvement in the region, Swedish opposition to it manifested itself earlier than American mass opposition to the war. While some public protests had taken place during the latter half of 1964, it was not until February 1965 that they had become regular, with small weekly vigils being held in front of the US Embassy in Stockholm.<sup>6</sup> Despite the regularity of the vigils, they did not initially generate a lot of attention. This changed on 14 June 1965 when several anti-war protestors were ill-treated by police, immediately resulting in media focus, with *Aftonbladet* and *Stockholms Tidningen* (Social Democratic newspapers)<sup>7</sup> and *Dagens Nyheter* (a Liberal Party-leaning newspaper) writing sympathetically of the protests.<sup>8</sup> Until this point, the Swedish media had been rather mute on the conflict, with most of the coverage of Southeast Asia initially having been confined to cultural or editorial pages of newspapers.

Visible among the early demonstrators were not senior Social Democratic Party figures, but rather members of *Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Studentförbund* (Sweden's Social Democratic Student Association).<sup>9</sup> While the Swedish left was unanimously opposed to US involvement in Vietnam, it was still divided into two factions: those who advocated

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6 Erik Tängerstad, 'Att organisera ett engagemang,' University of Stockholm, 1988, p. 19, 30.

7 For examples, see *Stockholms-Tidningen* 16 June 1965 and *Aftonbladet* 17 June 1965.

8 *Dagens Nyheter* 21 July 1965 and 29 January 1966.

9 Carl-Gustaf Scott, *Swedish Social Democracy and the Vietnam War*, Stockholm: Elanders, 2017 p. 51.

peace and those who advocated continued Vietnamese armed struggle. The latter group, to a significant extent, consisted of Maoists who were particularly vocal in their opposition to the government's inaction. Increasingly, there was a fear that if the Social Democrats fell behind on the Vietnam question, it could be seized upon by the Communists, the Liberals, or even a new socialist party. This concern was even publicly written about by the Social Democratic monthly periodical *Tiden* as early as June 1965.<sup>10</sup>

The first high profile critique of the Vietnam War was made by Olof Palme, a minister without portfolio at the time, on 30 July 1965. Palme spoke at a gathering of *Sveriges Kristna Socialdemokraters Förbund* (Sweden's Christian Social Democrats' Association) in the city of Gävle. While he refrained from explicitly condemning the United States, he went further than any previous Social Democratic politician of his stature in claiming that it was 'an illusion to believe that demands for social justice can be put down by military force.'<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Foreign Minister Torsten Nilsson's earlier comments on this topic had done little more than express hope for a speedy resolution to the conflict. The fact that Palme was first to make such a declaration, as opposed to the Prime Minister, is understandable, since the Prime Minister, Tage Erlander, though supportive of the sentiments expressed in Palme's comment, was hesitant to openly risk Swedish-American relations. This can be seen in the Cabinet's quick apology to the Johnson Administration for the burning of an American flag at a May Day demonstration.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Erlander responded to the news that anti-war protesters had vandalised the American Embassy in January 1967 by stating that he was embarrassed that such a thing could have come to pass, and reiterated his certainty that the whole of Sweden was similarly ashamed about this incident.<sup>13</sup> While it is easy to understand Palme's critique as being directed towards the United States, the principle audience was the far left, as Palme privately confessed to Lennart Petri, the Swedish Ambassador to Beijing.<sup>14</sup>

At the forefront of the anti-war movement were left-wing radicals, particularly Maoists and the Communists. Even in the lead up to the 1966 municipal elections, the Swedish Communist Party emphasised its position on issues relating to the Third World and national liberation movements. Even American officials predicted that these efforts by the Communists would push the Social Democrats to the left on the question of Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> This left-wing pressure on the municipal and parliamentary level was mirrored by the creation

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10 Ibid., p. 52.

11 'Det är en illusion att tro att man kan möta krav på social rättvisa med våld och militära maktmedel' Palme as cited in UD, Utrikesfrågor 1965 (Stockholm: UD, 1965) pp.42–47.

12 Dagens Nyheter 2 May 1966.

13 Erlander in Svenska Dagbladet 29 January 1967.

14 Scott, *Swedish Social Democracy and the Vietnam War*, p. 54.

15 27 Aug. 1966. J. Graham Parsons. Telegram to State. Subject Numeric Files 1964–1966. Political and Defense. Sweden.

of *Arbetsgruppen för stöd åt FNL* (Working Groups for the Support of FNL, commonly referred to as FNL-Groups) in September 1965, which would become very prominent at demonstrations, though less so elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> Physical presence of anti-war sentiments grew increasingly visible. FNL-Groups, with chapters across Sweden, managed to organise biennial ‘Vietnam Weeks’ that were each made up of a whole week of everything from anti-war photo exhibitions, teach-ins, theatre productions, etc., which were concluded with a large rally. The first of these weeks, which occurred in March 1966, took place in 12 different locales with 26 different demonstrations, with the event in Stockholm featuring the largest anti-war demonstration Sweden had seen since WWII.<sup>17</sup>

Left-wing radicalism became increasingly defined by its critical stance vis-à-vis the United States, and consistently stood to the left of the government itself. To some degree, this became a mark of pride. For example, after US Ambassador Jerome Holland was hit with eggs in 1970 by FNL sympathisers, both Palme and Nilsson were swift to come out and call the agitators ‘*lymlar*’ (‘rascals’) in parliamentary debates. The phraseology would quickly be co-opted with the term ‘*lymmel*’ (singular form) becoming a badge of honour, to the extent that the FNL group in Örebro even named its newspaper ‘*Lymmeln*’ (‘The Rascal’).<sup>18</sup>

It is necessary to identify what trends caused Swedish criticism of the United States (and to a lesser degree South Vietnam). The most identifiable is US conduct in Southeast Asia, which is to say that Swedish critique was tied directly to the intensity of US fighting. This was particularly true regarding massive bombing campaigns, such as Operation Rolling Thunder (1965–1968), the bombing of Laos and Cambodia (1970), and the Christmas bombing of Hanoi (1972), as illustrated in the graph below:<sup>19</sup>

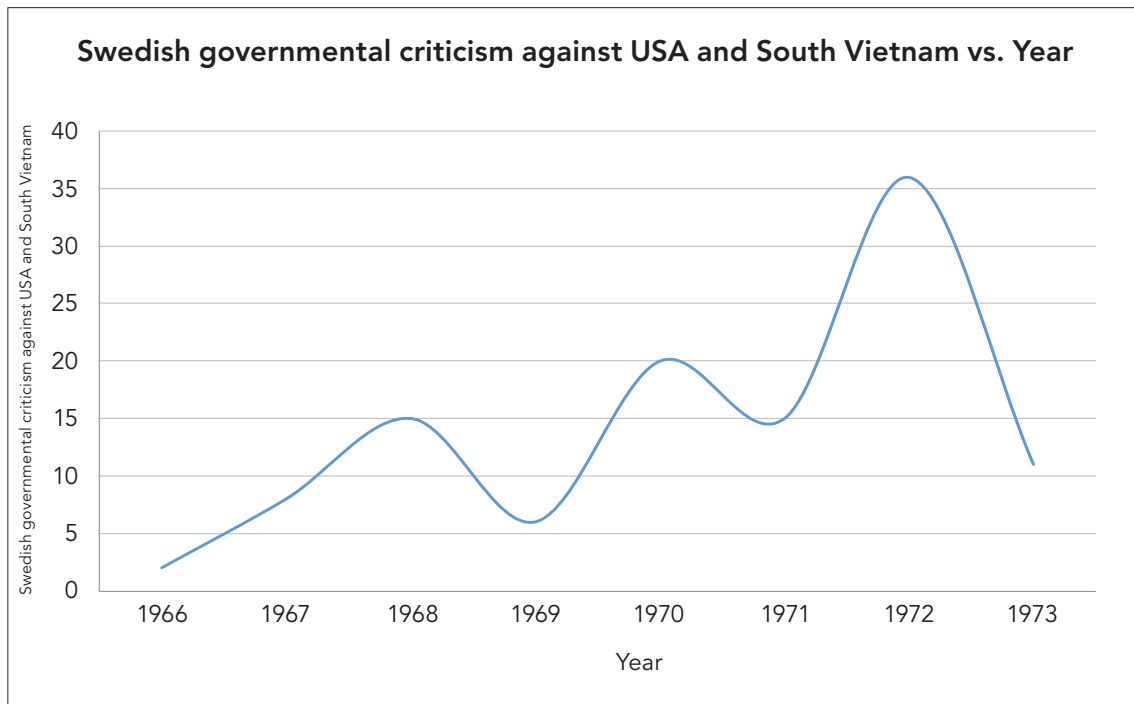
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16 Scott, *Swedish Social Democracy and the Vietnam War*, p. 56.

17 Ibid. p. 58.

18 Åke Kilander, *Vietnam var nära: En berättelse om FNL-rörelsen och solidaritetsarbetet i Sverige 1965–1975*, Leopold Förlag, 2007, p. 160.

19 Graph produced with Google Sheets – Ulf Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare? Sveriges utrikespolitiska roller 1945–1990*, p. 127.



Conversely, condemnations became muted during standstills in the bombing, as well as when the Paris Peace Talks became more prominent and negotiations intensified. The domestic nature of the criticism is made more apparent when one breaks down the type of *kritikutsagor* ('statements of criticism') issued by the government. Of the 103 official criticisms, 59% were ideological or moral in nature, whereas a mere 11% referred to *folkrätt* (international law).<sup>20</sup> This was especially true of Palme, who saw moral statements as compatible with Sweden's policy of neutrality, that 'neutrality policy does not condemn [Sweden] to silence', and that 'silence can be the ally of injustice.'<sup>21</sup>

Swedish criticism was limited mostly, though not exclusively, to the US bombing of North Vietnam. Of the above mentioned 103 *kritikutsagor*, 87 were targeted at the United States, mostly for what it was doing in the North, with only 11 reserved for the government in Saigon. Though criticism was made of the spillover of the conflict into neighbouring Cambodia and Laos, it was not on the same scale.<sup>22</sup> This can partially be explained by the lack of media coverage. Individuals like the leading anti-war activist and intellectual Professor Noam Chomsky actively met with editors of the *New York Times* and *Dagens Nyheter*, but to no avail, the excuse given being that it was 'not the right story.'<sup>23</sup> In North

20 Ibid.

21 'Neutralitetspolitiken innebär ingen strävan till isolering... Neutralitetspolitiken dömer oss inte till tystnad. Tystnaden kan vara oförrättens bundsförvant.' Andrén, Nils and Möller, Yngve, *Från Undén till Palme: Svensk utrikespolitik efter andra världskriget*, Norstedts Förlag AB, 1990, p. 82–3.

22 Example of Cambodia criticism from both 1970 and 1973, see *New York Times* 27 April 1973.

23 Noam Chomsky, Personal Communication, 4 August 2018.



Vietnam, American reporters were largely absent. Broadcasters like NBC and CBS had to depend on Swedish reporters, with the Pentagon forced to partially backtrack on their denial regarding the bombing that posed a danger to the Red River dikes.<sup>24</sup> The coverage of Laos and Cambodia, on the other hand, was far more restricted, with the bombing kept mostly under wraps. In the case of the former, the international press corps reported President Richard Nixon's (false) claims that North Vietnamese tanks had encircled the Laotian capital of Vientiane 'while the correspondents sending the stories were ridiculing the tales in the hotel bar, where they seemed to spend most of their time.'<sup>25</sup> As a result, Swedish criticism continued to be self-contained and limited to the severe, though relatively speaking less horrific, attacks on North Vietnam.

Qualitatively, Swedish criticism varied greatly depending on the audience. This fact did not go unnoticed by the State Department. The US Mission to the United Nations noted that Nilsson's criticism of the US bombing in 1965 was less harsh in New York than in Stockholm, since the former was not directed at a domestic audience.<sup>26</sup> This held true even a decade later, with the National Security Council noting in a memo to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that in light of a left-wing Social Democratic parliamentarian calling 'for an intensive week-long anti-US campaign... the [Swedish] government probably will seek to distance itself from anti-US demonstrations', and that 'the Palme government probably has little stomach for a resurgence of anti-US sentiment at this time.'<sup>27</sup>

### 3. American Reactions and Pressure

Beginning with Palme's Gävle Speech, American reactions were consistently negative towards Swedish criticisms of the American war effort. Repeatedly, the United States government lashed out with various threats, ranging from a cut to arms exports to economic sanctions. However, such threats were never acted upon. Rather, the US government sought to induce pressure, particularly indirectly and through diplomacy, in order to push the Swedish government towards a more pro-US position. This was a pattern that reproduced itself on a number of occasions, with each bringing with it a new series of threats, only for the American government to limit itself to diplomatic pressure.

One of the earliest flare-ups in Swedish-American relations occurred around the Russell Tribunal. Organised by the philosophers Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre, the tribunal

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24 Erik Eriksson, *Jag såg kärleken och döden*, Ordupplaget, 2008, p. 164.

25 Chomsky, Personal Communication, 4 August 2018.

26 'The Situation In South Vietnam, Weekly Report' (13 October 1965) <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00472A001800040002-7.pdf>.

27 'Memorandum for Secretary Kissinger – Swedish Leftists Revive Vietnam Issue (18 January 1974) <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/LOC-HAK-43-4-8-1.pdf>.

sought to criticise American conduct in the Vietnam War. While originally organised to be hosted in London and then Paris, it was moved to Stockholm after both the British and French governments sought to prevent them from taking place in their respective countries, despite formal governmental opposition to the War in Vietnam. The decision to move the proceedings to Stockholm did not sit well with the Government of Sweden (GOS). Privately, Erlander and other government officials had pleaded with Russell not to bring the tribunal to Sweden, since it could potentially hinder the country's ability to act as a possible future mediator in the Vietnam conflict.<sup>28</sup> However, mounting internal pressure resulted in the proceedings finally being allowed to go ahead.

The US government was swift in vocalising its opposition to the Tribunal. In December 1966, US Consul-General Turner C. Cameron publicly said that President Johnson was 'disappointed and disturbed' by the allowing of the tribunal to continue in Stockholm.<sup>29</sup> Walt Rostow, Johnson's National Security Adviser, met Erlander in Bonn for Konrad Adenauer's funeral and conveyed (in what Erlander described as a 'rather animated discussion') the president's concern and warned that Swedish-American relations were sure to suffer if Stockholm did not rescind the invitation, a mischaracterisation since the Government of Sweden did not actually invite the participants.<sup>30</sup> During the proceedings, the US Embassy issued a statement saying that Swedes would do well to remember the role the United States had played in maintaining the peace in Western Europe. While the potential existed for a crippling breakdown in relations, Swedish public opinion prevented this from occurring. The negative press and public reaction to the proceedings, which viewed the trial as being unfair to the United States, resulted in Cameron cabling Secretary of State Dean Rusk and cautioning against any overly aggressive American response, e.g. economic sanctions or a 'counter-tribunal' attacking communist conduct, in light of the public response.<sup>31</sup> While formal retaliation did not come to fruition, the affair was not without negative side effects, with Erlander noting in his own diary that Fletcher, a Washington Post journalist, had succeeded in his goal 'to injure Sweden in the USA' through his coverage of the whole affair.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the most damaging moment in Swedish-American relations during the Johnson Administration occurred during a torchlit march on 29 February 1968. On that night, Palme addressed a group of anti-war demonstrators and then marched alongside Nguyen Tho Chan, the North Vietnamese ambassador to Moscow. In the face of American pressure, party officials claimed that Nguyen's participation was spontaneous and not

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28 Göteborgs handels- och sjöfartstidning 6 Dec. 1966.

29 Fredrik Logevall, 'The Swedish-American Conflict Over Vietnam,' *Diplomatic History*, Volume 17, Issue 3, 1 July 1993, p. 429.

30 Ibid.

31 Cameron to Rusk, 5 May 1967, White House Country File 277, box 68, Johnson Library.

32 'Att skada Sverige i USA' Tage Erlander, *Tage Erlander Dagböcker 1966–1967*, p. 102.

planned – a clear fabrication since Nilsson had given permission to Nguyen to join the demonstration.<sup>33</sup> Both Erlander and Nilsson reiterated to US Ambassador William Heath the immense importance that lay in not permitting the Communists to seize a monopoly on the increasingly important question of Vietnam. However, this did not prevent Heath from being called back to Washington for ‘consultations’, an act that was widely covered in the American media as well as in Sweden, where it was viewed suspiciously as a silencing tactic.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, US Embassy officials in Stockholm acknowledged that any present disagreements had to be balanced against long term interests, and consequently warned Washington not to overreact since Vietnam protests were the exception and not the rule in the totality of Swedish-American relations, which were otherwise generally strong.

Both during and after his tenure, Swedish governmental attitudes towards Heath were decidedly negative. In his memoir, Nilsson went to great lengths to contrast the wisdom and experience of diplomats of countries that were not aligned with Sweden, such as Soviet ambassador Victor Maltsev and Francoist Spain’s ambassador José Felipe Alcover y Sureda, with that of Heath, which he summarised as consisting of the belief that the Earth consisted ‘for him all the rich source that gave fodder to animals and oil for petrol-driven cars.’<sup>35</sup> Yngve Möller, a career diplomat who was later appointed ambassador to the United States, simply described Heath as Johnson’s ‘ranch neighbour.’<sup>36</sup> Nilsson and Möller were by no means alone in emphasising Heath’s non-diplomatic credentials, as well as the ambassador’s general lack of interest in Sweden, its culture, history, etc.

Matters were further complicated by Heath’s rather Manichaeian approach to the Cold War as a fight between good and evil. This predilection was made abundantly clear through his fondness to remind the Swedish public of the respective roles of the United States and Sweden during the Second World War and the parallels that he perceived with the fighting in Southeast Asia.<sup>37</sup> The resentful attitude held towards Heath was not reserved only for career diplomats, but applied also to the Prime Minister. Prior to Heath’s recall, Erlander recorded in the days that followed his sheer astonishment with the American position, as well as its messenger. ‘Are the Americans mad?’ the Prime Minister asked himself before going on to acknowledge that trade ties could very well suffer, before ending with ‘How am I supposed to say any appreciative words about the USA [sic].’<sup>38</sup> Heath actually

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33 Scott, *Swedish Social Democracy and the Vietnam War*, p. 94.

34 Ibid.

35 ‘Jorden var för honom all rikedomas källa som gav foder åt djuren och olja för de bensindrivna bilarna.’ Torsten Nilsson, *Åter Vietnam: Memoarer och reportage*, Kristianstad: Kristianstads Boktryckeri AB, 1981, pp. 137–8.

36 ‘Ranchgranne’ Yngve Möller, *Sverige och Vietnamkriget*, Falun: Scandbook, 1992, p. 121.

37 For an example see *New York Times*, 17 July 1968.

38 ‘Är amerikanerna skvatt galna?... Och hur ska jag nu kunna säga några uppskattande ord om USA.’ NB: the second sentence, though phrased as a question, is punctuated with a period – Erlander, *Dagböcker 1968*, p. 21.

managed to squander Swedish goodwill, since a plurality of Swedes in fact agreed with the State Department in believing it was a mistake for Palme to march with Ambassador Nguyen.<sup>39</sup> However, by attacking the Swedish government over Palme's conduct, Heath simply alienated the Swedish populace even more.

Friction between Stockholm and D.C. was not limited simply to the executive branches. In the case of the United States, Congress was highly critical of Swedish conduct, even if it was not a high priority issue that led to intense scrutiny. Yet the issue that animated members of the Hill was not the same as that which bothered the White House. Rather, it was the Swedish treatment of American deserters that caused the wrath of Congressmen. Beginning in the late 1960's, a slow stream of American soldiers began arriving in Sweden. The total number of American deserters in Sweden was always marginal, never exceeding six hundred, paling in comparison to the amount that the United States' northern neighbour was hosting.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the number was tiny compared to other groups that had immigrated to Sweden for political reasons, with almost 2,000 Czechoslovaks arriving in Sweden in the first six months of 1970 alone.<sup>41</sup>

The most vocal critic of Sweden's acceptance of deserters in the Congress was Senator Strom Thurmond. While advocating economic sanctions, Thurmond attacked what he perceived was the Nordic country's attempt 'to encourage men to be disloyal to their country.'<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Louisiana Congressman John Rivers called for the US Embassy to be converted into a consulate as retaliation for Sweden causing American servicemen to abandon their posts and 'become traitors to their country.'<sup>43</sup> Fellow Congressman John Rarick agreed with this assessment and joined the call for sanctions, believing that the deserters were actively siding against the United States in Vietnam. However, condemnation was not universal, with some, like Senator J. William Fulbright, growing increasingly sympathetic to the Swedish position, especially in light of the threat of boycotting Sweden issued by union leader Teddy Gleason, head of the Longshoremen's Association.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, both the Congressional and private sector threats failed to materialise into concrete actions. To some degree, even Congressmen understood the political and non-ideological component of the deserter question, with a September 1971 report composed by the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Europe noting that 'the Social Democratic government has received the publicity it wanted with the Intrepid

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39 Henrik Berggren, *Underbara dagar framför oss: En biografi över Olof Palme*, Norstedts Förlag AB, 2010, p. 391.

40 Logevall, 'Swedish-American Conflict,' p. 438.

41 Johan Erlandsson, *Desertörerna*, Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag, 2016, p. 142.

42 Congressional Record, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1969 vol. 115, pt 26:35116.

43 Congressional Record, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970 vol. 116, pt 10:13885.

44 Möller, *Sverige och Vietnamkriget*, p. 125.

Four and now wished the deserters and their personal problems would quietly leave.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, the White House was itself non-dogmatic on the question of deserters, with Nixon only opposing amnesty as long as Americans were still deployed in Vietnam, and as long as North Vietnam held American POWs.<sup>46</sup>

Despite not experiencing any formal retaliation for the hosting of deserters, the GOS genuinely feared the risks posed to bilateral relations. As such, attempts were made to mitigate the situation. While FNL groups advocated for granting political asylum to the American deserters, the government took a firm stance against it. Instead, they opted for humanitarian asylum, which had to be periodically renewed. The primary distinction between the two statuses lay in the fact that humanitarian asylum made one still liable for deportation in the case of a crime having been committed. This grew to be particularly relevant as public apathy, and later antipathy, grew towards the deserters in light of a series of crimes perpetrated by some of them, ranging from robbery to sex with underage girls.<sup>47</sup> The main aim of not issuing political asylum was to not aggravate US-Swedish relations. According to Anders Ferm, an advisor to Palme, ‘to give [the deserters] political asylum was part politically dumb and for Sweden’s part a worthless point. To needlessly create additional irritation against the USA was just stupid.’<sup>48</sup>

The decision to extend formal recognition to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) by Sweden represents an attempted balancing act whereby the government sought to placate its domestic electoral base without harming relations with the United States. Despite left-wing agitation, the Swedish Cabinet promised the Johnson Administration in 1966 that it would not recognise Hanoi, yet by 1967 even the Center Party, an opposition party, had introduced legislation calling for the establishment of full relations with North Vietnam.<sup>49</sup> The ostensible justification for not recognising the DRV given in 1966, namely the hope to act as a possible mediator, was no longer viable by 1968. It should be remembered, however, that even at this stage support for recognition was not universal in Sweden, but rather reflected an internal question within the Social Democratic Party. In fact, only 30% of the population supported recognition while 48% found themselves opposed.<sup>50</sup>

This balancing act took the form of carefully timing the recognition. Official recognition of North Vietnam by Sweden took place on 10 January 1969, scheduled for the transitional

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45 Scott, *Swedish Social Democracy and the Vietnam War*, p. 153 – NB: ‘Intrepid Four’ refers to four deserters (who served on the aircraft carrier *USS Intrepid*) whose arrival became particularly prominent in the media.

46 ‘More than 50,000 Americans killed in Vietnam,’ *New York Times*, 24 December 1972.

47 Erlandsson, *Desertörerna*, p. 147 – examples of crimes include two New York-born deserters robbing a series of pharmacies in Uppland.

48 ‘Att ge dem politisk asyl var dels politiskt dumt, dels en för Sverige värdelös poäng. Att i onödan skapa ytterligare ett irritationsmoment mot USA var bara korkat’ Erlandsson, *Desertörerna*, p. 141.

49 Scott, *Swedish Social Democracy and the Vietnam War*, p. 174.

50 Scott, *Swedish Social Democracy and the Vietnam War*, p. 185.

period between the outgoing Johnson administration and the incoming Nixon one, with the hope that this would result in less attention being drawn to Stockholm. US State Department officials had seen recognition as being inevitable but still undesirable. Regardless of Swedish desires, the recognition did not go unnoticed in Washington. Within three days, presidential advisor Robert Murphy suggested that the incoming Nixon administration should maintain a tough line and possibly introduce trade sanctions.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, however, Nixon chose not to act as forcefully as suggested and instead simply withheld nominating a new ambassador upon the end of Heath's tenure, as well as closing the consulate in Gothenburg.

The primary purpose of recognising the DRV was for the Social Democratic government to placate both its left-wing base as well as to contain radical left agitation around the question of Vietnam. On this fundamental goal, the government failed. Rather than pacifying leftist desires, the act of recognising Hanoi simply emboldened the left, particularly the FNL groups. Consequently, the recognition of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG), i.e. the political arm of the FNL, became the new goal. This forced the Social Democratic Party, more so than the government itself, to take an increasingly left-wing position. This explains why the party invited a chief PRG negotiator at Paris to address a May Day rally in Stockholm in 1972, following renewed American bombing of North Vietnam, itself a response to the communist Spring Offensive.<sup>52</sup> This propelled a snowball effect resulting in first the Social Democratic Party inviting PRG Foreign Minister Madame Thi Binh to the October 1972 Party Congress, as well as the Congress' embrace of the PRG Peace Plan, while simultaneously denouncing the American war effort as a 'human rights violation.'<sup>53</sup> This remained true even after US withdrawal from Vietnam, with the United States considering the Swedish upgrade of the PRG office to 'General Delegation' and the dropping of the RVN from the Swedish diplomatic list to be a 'virtual recognition of the 'PRG' by Sweden'. The US believed that 'this new move also shows that [the US Government] should have reacted more strongly to GOS upgrading of the 'PRG' office, as we [the US Embassy in Saigon] urged at the time.'<sup>54</sup>

The most notable aspect of the American response to the recognition of Hanoi is perhaps that it was carried out in the form of non-actions. Economic punishments, despite being threatened multiple times, were never implemented. Instead, both the Johnson and the Nixon administrations chose to recall or not to appoint ambassadors, respectively. There were two primary motivations for this particular course of action: a) it drew less attention to

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51 13 Jan. 1969. Robert Murphy. Memo to the President-Elect Richard Nixon. Nixon Project. White House Special Files. 1969–1974. Country File: Sweden. Box 9.

52 Scott, *Swedish Social Democracy and the Vietnam War*, p. 225.

53 Ibid.

54 'Swedish Attitude on Vietnam Issues' (18 November 1974) [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1974SAIGON14424\\_b.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1974SAIGON14424_b.html).

the Swedish position than economic sanctions would have done, and b) it enabled continued bilateral cooperation, albeit on a lower tier, which will be covered in the next section. This reflects the fact that the American fear did not fundamentally stem from the Swedish critique itself, but rather from its potential impact on public opinion abroad of the United States. Being opposed to the war in Vietnam was by no means a unique position held by Sweden; in fact, it was shared by other European countries. The difference, however, was how vocal Sweden was. While President Charles de Gaulle of France had stated publicly his opposition to the US presence in Southeast Asia, he nevertheless sought not to alienate the United States either, as exemplified by the aforementioned refusal to host the Russell Tribunal.

What the United States anticipated to be the actual consequence of Swedish critique is never made fully clear in the internal records. What is clear, however, was that such criticism was to be counteracted quickly and thoroughly. An exploration into the realm of counterfactuals is useful, since it may enable one to better understand what motivated the United States' responses. Continued Swedish criticism had the potential of legitimising, and indeed emboldening and strengthening, the growing anti-war movement in the United States, and further diminishing the notion that the War was simply a clash between the so-called 'Free World' and the Communists. Externally, in the absence of any punitive response to Swedish criticism, other nations may have felt increasingly compelled, by virtue of their own growing radical student populations, to respond to and condemn American conduct. It is difficult to quantify either the likelihood or the impact of such a course of development, yet such a line of thinking can partially explain why the United States government feared Swedish criticism in the first place.

The clearest example of American non-action in bilateral relations came in the form of refusing to invite Palme to the White House during his visit to the United States in 1970. Palme, by now prime minister, was to accept an honorary degree from Kenyon College, his alma mater. Though he did meet Secretary of State William Rogers, his low-key visit paled in comparison to the grandiose reception of Finnish president Urho Kekkonen just a month earlier. Kekkonen, who held a largely ceremonial post, was received by his American counterpart, and the visit featured a state dinner, raised Finnish flags, a positive portrayal in the media, and ended with the White House reiterating its great confidence in Finland's neutrality policy.<sup>55</sup> The non-reception of foreign heads of state or governments was extremely rare in the United States, with the last person not to have been received by an American president having been Fidel Castro in 1960.<sup>56</sup>

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55 'Rapport med synpunkter i anslutning till statsminister Palmes besök i USA 4/6–11/6 1970,' (1970-08-04), 1970 Arméattachén Hemliga skr. volym nr 1.

56 Ibid.

The appointment of a new ambassador to Sweden in 1970 reflects Nixon's attempt to normalise relations without fully getting over his dislike for the GOS, and was arguably meant to be a provocation. The naming of an ambassador came about partially as a result of pressure from figures such as William Ryan of New York, who in Congress in late 1969 pointed out that the United States had ambassadors to South Africa and the Soviet Union. Like Heath, Ambassador Jerome Holland was not a diplomat either, but instead a university president and sociologist, as well as a childhood friend and classmate of Secretary Rogers. Notably, Holland was also black, with the *Washington Post* believing the appointment of a black ambassador was meant to make it more difficult for protestors, who may be seen as racists.<sup>57</sup> If that was the intention it failed to come to pass, with Holland being called a 'housenigger' upon arrival in Sweden by an American deserter, and told 'nigger go home' by demonstrators after presenting his credentials to the king.<sup>58</sup>

Nixon's attempt to temper anti-war, and increasingly anti-American, demonstrations in Sweden proved to be futile. Virtually everywhere Holland went, FNL sympathisers were sure to show up. Just in the year 1970, FNL Groups showed up in Gothenburg (3 May), in Malmö (7 May), in Sundsvall (7–9 June), in Kiruna (7–9 July), at Karlbergsskolan in Åmål (3 September), at Chalmers Technical Institute in Gothenburg (4 September), outside of Västerås Cathedral (16 September), in Växjö (14 October), and in many other places.<sup>59</sup> These encounters often turned violent, resulting in damage to places like the American Cultural Center in Stockholm.<sup>60</sup> The intense need for security did not lessen tensions, with Holland later noting that 'as far as I know I am the only [US] Ambassador in Europe (including the USSR) that has to have a bodyguard at all times... the next US Ambassador [to Sweden] should receive hardship pay.'<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, Holland did actively seek to promote economic ties and showed genuine interest in the country, as noted by his numerous travels beyond the confines of the capital.

The absolute nadir in Swedish-American ties came with the Christmas bombing of Hanoi in 1972. In 1965 only student activists were carrying placards calling Johnson 'Hitler's ghost,' with the government avoiding such analogies at all cost.<sup>62</sup> However, in the midst of the mass bombing campaign launched by the United States against North Vietnam, Palme personally crafted and delivered his harshest criticism:

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57 Möller, *Sverige och Vietnamkriget*, p. 237.

58 Ibid., p. 238.

59 Kilander, *Vietnam var nära*, p. 159.

60 Möller, *Sverige och Vietnamkriget*, p. 239.

61 Holland, as cited in Newsweek 27 June 1972.

62 Kilander, *Vietnam var nära*, p. 103.



... And that is why the bombings are an atrocity. And of that we have many examples in modern history. And they are in general connected with a name: Guernica, Oradour, Babi Yar, Katyn, Lidice, Sharpeville, Treblinka. There, violence has triumphed. But the judgement of the world after has fallen hard on those who carry this responsibility. Now another name is added to the row: Hanoi, Christmas 1972.<sup>63</sup>

*Jultalet* ('The Christmas Speech') was the first, and only, time when the government directly compared American actions in Vietnam to those of Nazi Germany. Considering that Palme had written out the speech himself (albeit without any consultation, his foreign minister having been on vacation in West Africa<sup>64</sup>), it appears that he did not fully grasp the significance that a Nazi comparison would carry in the United States. With both Nixon and Kissinger enraged (the latter having himself fled Nazi Germany due to his Jewish roots), the risk of economic sanctions reemerged. With unprecedented criticism from a generally friendly nation, one could naturally expect an unprecedented retaliation to such criticism. However, once again cognisant of the risk of legitimising Swedish attacks, the two men decided at a retreat at Key Biscayne instead to opt for a diplomatic freeze.<sup>65</sup> The mere act of criticising the United States, irrespective of the severity of language, was not enough to compel it to respond with full non-military force, which it had contemplated and ruled out before.

Unlike in previous attacks, however, Sweden was not alone in the risk of being diplomatically damaged. The Christmas bombing of Hanoi had triggered widespread condemnation, with relations being damaged with multiple countries. Denmark, India, and Australia (the latter of which had even deployed troops to aid the American war effort until just a few weeks earlier that month) all being threatened with diplomatic sanctions by the United States.<sup>66</sup> In fact, Kissinger later bemoaned the fact that 'not one NATO ally supported us or even hinted at understanding our position.'<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, Sweden continued to be singled out, with the other countries all restoring ties to pre-bombing levels relatively quickly. Admittedly, Swedish criticism was particularly unique. In addition to the Nazi comparison, the usually non-political head of state, King Gustaf VI Adolf, described

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63 'Och därför är bombningarna ett illdåd. Och av det har vi många exempel i den moderna historien. Och de är i allmänhet förbundna med ett namn: Guernica, Oradour, Babij Jar, Katyń, Lidice, Sharpeville, Treblinka. Där har våldet triumferat. Men eftervärldens dom har fallit hård över dem som burit ansvaret. Nu fogas ett nytt namn till raden: Hanoi, julen 1972.' Palme, 23 December 1972 <http://www.olofpalme.org/1972/12/23/uttalande-om-usas-bombningar-av-hanoi-julen-1972/> .

64 There appears to be some disagreement about Wickman's exact location at the time, as *Neutralitetens Tid* (p. 107) claims he was in the Gambia whereas *Ekot från Vietnam* (p. 165) states that he was in Ghana.

65 Logevall, 'The Swedish-American Conflict,' p. 441.

66 Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years*, Boston: Little Brown, 1979, pp. 1453–1454.

67 Edited by Marc Jason Gilbert, *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*, New York: Palgrave, 2002, p. 92.

the offensive as a ‘merciless bombing.’<sup>68</sup> It is possible, however, that had Sweden been the sole critic of the Christmas bombing the White House may have felt more emboldened to act without risking relations with other states.

#### 4. Continued US-Swedish Cooperation

Understanding the deterioration of diplomatic relations and their political roots is necessary in order to assess the remarkable military relations that endured. Rather than viewing security cooperation as a by-product of the diplomatic relations, it is more accurate to approach the topic as consisting of two parallel and concurrent streams with limited overlap. The independence from one another suggests, as will be shown, different sets of pressures and motives that affect conduct, rather than a shared decision making process that trickles down.

With ties at historically low levels, it would be natural to assume that this would have had a domino effect on all levels of bilateral relations. However, upon closer examination, this turns out not to be the case. Rather, below the ambassadorial level, relations appear to have largely remained unaffected. This is principally attributable to the fact that the strategic aims of both the United States and Sweden did not diverge in any meaningful ways in the years 1965–1975. Economic ties continued without interruption. Perhaps more interesting is how little military ties were affected and how intelligence cooperation actually increased.

Prior to Swedish criticisms, the US Department of Defense (DOD) held a positive view of the Nordic country. In a report on Sweden issued by the Directorate of Special Studies at the Office of the Chief of Staff, the US Army explicitly stated that it ‘would be wrong, of course, to exaggerate the political differences between the United States and Sweden, since in essentials the ultimate objectives of the two countries are closely parallel.’<sup>69</sup> Even after Palme began publicly criticising the United States, the tone from the Pentagon was still very favourable. For example, in a letter written by Col. Robert Marsh, director of the Defense Supply Agency, offering to sell surplus materiel to *Krigsmakten* (the Swedish Ministry of Defence), the director states that such goods are ‘available for sale to friendly foreign governments,’<sup>70</sup> with a letter written a month later that is almost identical in content and formulation stating explicitly that the friendly government is indeed Sweden.<sup>71</sup>

68 Logevall, ‘Swedish-American Conflict,’ p. 442 – NB: The journal article incorrectly attributes it to ‘Gustaf IV Adolf’ rather than the reigning monarch ‘Gustaf VI Adolf.’ ‘Gustav IV Adolf’ (with a v) was deposed during the Napoleonic Wars.

69 ‘Situation Report on Sweden,’ (1963-10-04), Arméattachén i Washington, 1967 nr 8.

70 ‘Letter from the Defense Supply Agency to Army Attaché Wahlgren,’ (1966-02-24), Arméattachén i Washington, 1966 nr 7.

71 ‘Letter from the Defense Supply Agency to Army Attaché Ståhl,’ (1966-03-23), Arméattachén i Washington, 1966 nr 7.

The topic of Vietnam is rarely featured in official correspondence, either between the army attaché at the Swedish Embassy in Washington and the Swedish military headquarters on the one hand, or the army attaché and Pentagon officials on the other. While the role of Vietnam in bilateral ties is mentioned semi-frequently in 1972, it is non-existent throughout the 1960s. In fact, in the previously classified documents featuring Swedish Embassy-Pentagon correspondence, only a single letter in 1966 mentions Vietnam, and is of a medical nature (asking for information regarding vaccinations given to American troops prior to deployment to Southeast Asia).<sup>72</sup>

The divergence between the White House-GOS relations on the one hand and the DOD and *Krigsmakten* on the other is a consistent theme throughout the first half of the 1970s. In a conversation between Lt. Col. Frykhammar, a Swedish student at the US Army Intelligence School, and Robert P. Goold, from the Bureau of European Affairs (subdepartment: NATO and Atlantic Political-Military Affairs), the former summarised the latter's attitude that "on all levels except the absolute highest official" there were none who held any resentment against Sweden' and that 'cooperation worked without any problems.'<sup>73</sup> Such attitudes were mutual, with Swedish army attaché Col. Carl-Gustaf Ståhl having previously written a letter to Maj. Gen. William P. Yarborough, the Assistant Chief of Staff for the Intelligence Headquarters at the Department of the Army, where he stated that he sought to 'keep and to improve even further the good relationship with the United States Army and to emphasise that the Swedish Army wants this relationship to be of mutual benefit.'<sup>74</sup>

In many ways, both sides, though particularly the Swedish side, sought to increase bilateral military cooperation. The Swedish Chief of the Defence Staff, Lt. Gen. Stig Synnergren, actively sought to increase contact with the Pentagon by accrediting an army attaché to the Joint Staff, via the Defense Intelligence Agency, an idea that Gen. Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was receptive to and indeed sought to reciprocate in Stockholm.<sup>75</sup> Such contact was conducted almost entirely and directly on a military-to-military basis, with little involvement of either the State Department/White House or their Swedish equivalents. Even after *Jultalet*, when 'it was known – though not officially conveyed – that a meeting on the top level is not forthcoming,'<sup>76</sup> it was still

72 'Letter to Foreign Liaison Officer,' (1966-10-04), Arméattachén i Washington, 1966 nr 7.

73 "På all nivåer utom de absolut högsta officiella" var det numera ingem som helst avog inställning mot Sverige. Samarbetet fungerade utan problem.' – 'Amerikansk syn på Sverige just nu,' (1970-03-24), 1970 Arméattachén Hemliga skr. volym nr 1.

74 'Letter to Major General William P. Yarborough from Ståhl,' (1967-12-05), Arméattachén i Washington, 1967 nr 8.

75 'Letter to the Chief of Defence Staff, Lt. General Stig Synnergren, from Ståhl,' (1970-02-17), 1970 Arméattachén Hemliga skr. volym nr 1.

76 'Det är känt – fast icke officiellt meddelat försvarsavdelningen – att besök på topp-nivå icke får förekomma' 'PM angående de aktuella militära kontakterna USA-Sverige,' (1973-03-06), Utgående och inkomna skrivelser 1973 Arméattachén volym nr 26.

understood that ‘military technical cooperation is not considered to have been impacted.’<sup>77</sup> This did not mean, however, that ongoing military ties were inherently immune from being affected by the diplomatic crisis. Military attachés in the Washington Embassy were fully aware that a continued deterioration of ‘political ties to the USA’ could negatively impact everything, from information sharing to military education exchanges, resulting in tangible and negative effects.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, in the weeks leading up to *Jultalet*, the military attachés repeatedly emphasised the good relations between the two countries, particularly in regard to naval cooperation. The secret to this success rested in official visits by officers in the two countries.

Swedish military officials were particularly eager to engage in high level visits with their American counterparts. This came to pass, with figures like Lt. Gen. Bo Westin, Chief of the Defence Staff, and Vice-Admiral Lundvall, Chief of the Navy, both visiting the United States in 1972 with the observed impact of strengthening relations at the defence level.<sup>79</sup> Particularly remarkable is the fact that despite that diplomatic relations had not fully healed from the falling out in 1967–69, DOD confidence in the Swedish armed forces was almost completely untouched even though department spokesmen were hindered by White House implemented restrictions.<sup>80</sup> Contacts were not restricted to the American mainland, with Swedish officials inviting figures like the above mentioned Maj. Gen. Yarborough to visit places like the Swedish Defence Staff, the Swedish Army Staff, and the Research Institute of National Defense.<sup>81</sup>

The exchange of technology and materiel remained steady and durable throughout the period encompassing the Vietnam War. The scope and range of armaments and information shared and sold between the two were wide reaching. Explicit permission was granted to the transporting of secret materiel via the US military base at Frankfurt am Main, with explosive materiel to be transported via Ramstein.<sup>82</sup> Just months after Sweden’s public condemnation of the US expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia, Anders Thunborg, the second most senior official at the Swedish Ministry of Defence, and John S. Foster, a Deputy Director of Research and Engineering at the DOD, were still in talks about the possible sales of AIM-7E air-to-air missiles.<sup>83</sup> Two years later, Dr Foster did not deviate

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77 ‘I fråga om det militärtekniska samarbetet så tycks detta för närvarande icke ha påverkats’ Ibid.

78 ‘Politiska förbindelserna till USA’ ‘De aktuella militära kontakterna USA-Sverige,’ (1973-03-06), Utgående och inkomna skrivelser 1973 Arméattachén volym nr 26.

79 ‘Utkast till ambassadens årsredogörelse 1972,’ (1972-12-05), Utgående och inkomna skrivelser 1972 Arméattachén volym nr 19.

80 ‘PM för försvarsstabschefen. Generallöjtnant Bo Westin med synpunkter på förbindelserna USA-Sverige,’ (1972-07-18), Utgående och inkomna skrivelser 1972 Arméattachén volym nr 19

81 ‘Letter to Major General William P. Yarborough from Ståhl,’ (1967-12-05).

82 ‘Skeppningar av hemlig materiel via Frankfurt,’ (1970-04-02), Utgående och inkomna skrivelser 1970 Arméattachén volym nr 2.

83 ‘Anteckningar från Statssekreterare Thunborgs samtal i Department of Defense/Pentagon 1970.10.21,’ (1970-10-24), 1970 Arméattachén Hemliga skr. volym nr 1.

when he recommended 'increased direct contact between the American and Swedish armament industries in order to increase exchange of knowledge and experience,' with General Westmoreland agreeing.<sup>84</sup> The same applied to technical information sharing, such as the Swedish army attaché requesting 'kind assistance in getting possible United States Army reports on test and evaluation of different 35 m.m. cameras' from the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence in order 'to study before a decision on the procurement' for the Swedish military was to be made.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the generally warm feelings held by the two armed forces towards one another, the political circumstances of the times meant that this was not without limits. Army attaché Geijer reported an encounter with a Pentagon official that illustrated the reservations held by the DOD towards Sweden's openness to the DRV. Following a meeting with DOD officials in which an American officer noted that 'Sweden has an ambassador in Hanoi who sends reports,' Geijer attended an evening party featuring another American officer from that same meeting who stated that 'we read his reports.'<sup>86</sup> However, such espionage was by no means unique nor particularly insidious. To a significant extent, such surveillance had less to do with the Swedes themselves but rather with developments within North Vietnam. Nevertheless, by 1972, leading American military officials like Lt. Gen. Philpott, Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency, were of the belief that an 'understanding and to some degree appreciation of the Swedish policy of neutrality' existed within the American government since 'the Vietnam War no longer infected ties between our countries.'<sup>87</sup>

Swedish criticism and collaboration did not manifest themselves in a sequential order. Rather, during the earlier Johnson period, the two often went hand-in-hand. Namely, there existed overt criticism at the same time as Sweden covertly acted as a third-party mediator between Washington and Hanoi, which was termed Aspen (a reference to the ski resort in Colorado that mirrored the Swedish climate).<sup>88</sup> Aspen was established in 1966, in other words before North Vietnam had even been recognised by Sweden. This posed a series of problems. How would this impact Sino-Swedish relations? Would Sweden be

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84 'ökad direkt kontakt i första hand mellan svensk och amerikansk industri för att utbyta kunskaper och erfarenheter' – 'Anteckningar från samtal kring internationell samverkan ifråga om framtagningar av försvarsmateriel,' (1972-01-05), Utgående och inkomna skrivelser 1972 Arméattachén volym nr 19.

85 'Letter from Ståhl to Office of the Assistant Chief of staff for Intelligence,' (1968-03-06), Arméattachén i Washington 1968 nr 9.

86 'Sverige har dock en ambassadör i Hanoi som skickar rapporter' & 'vi läser hans rapporter' 'Samtal med officer i Pentagon angående svenska ambassadörens i Hanoi rapporter,' (1972-08-10), Utgående och inkomna skrivelser 1972 Arméattachén volym nr 19.

87 'förståelsen för och i viss mån även uppskattningen av den svenska neutralitetspolitiken hade ökat hos den amerikanska regeringen. Detta var bl a en följd av att Vietnamkriget inte längre infekterade förbindelserna mellan våra länder' – 'Rapport efter överlämning i Department of Defense, föatt Öv Ståhl till Ov Geijer, 1972-02-24,' (1972-02-29), Utgående och inkomna skrivelser 1972 Arméattachén volym nr 19.

88 Jean-Christophe Öberg, *Varför Vietnam? Ett kapitel i svensk utrikespolitik 1965–1970*, Kristianstad: Kristianstads Boktryckeri AB, 1985, p. 47.

seen as an American stooge? If revealed, what would it mean for Hanoi to be seen dealing with the United States? While the United States covertly favoured Sweden's continued role as *'kanalisatörer'*,<sup>89</sup> the internal and external risks posed to Sweden were immense, resulting in extensive efforts made by Sweden to act as a back-channel between the two warring parties with the hope of remaining friendly with both. The utilisation of Swedish diplomatic resources is illustrated by the fact that contact with the FNL was made through the Swedish Embassy in Algiers, while contact with the DRV was conducted through their respective embassies in Warsaw.<sup>90</sup>

Ultimately, Aspen failed to produce any tangible results, ending following its exposure in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* on 23 March 1968. Yet eight days later, Johnson announced a cessation to the bombing north of the 20th parallel, resulting in the DRV announcing three days afterwards their readiness to engage in direct negotiations.<sup>91</sup> Chronologically, this may appear as a posthumous product of Aspen at best. A similar act of mediation geared more towards ameliorating Swedish-American relations was regarding the issue of American prisoners of war. Over the course of Operation Rolling Thunder, a number of American pilots had been shot down over the skies of North Vietnam due to the effectiveness of DRV air defences. During Palme's visit to the United States, Rogers emphasised the American government's gratitude for his efforts to liberate the pilots,<sup>92</sup> as did the DOD.<sup>93</sup> Though it failed to produce any meaningful results, this Swedish initiative, like Aspen, was invaluable in terms of improving and solidifying Swedish-American relations.

Cooperation was not limited to just Southeast Asian diplomacy or restricted to bilateral military cooperation, but in fact extended to intelligence, especially as gathered in Sweden itself. The largest scandal to break out in Sweden during the Palme years was the IB Affair. In 1958, the IB Group formed under Birger Elmér as a result of US requirements for better security risk management (i.e. against communists) in order to enhance defence industry cooperation. The result of this came in the form of an operation involving more than 20 agents (with many others also employed), with 30,000 individuals having their names registered due to political/ideological suspicions.<sup>94</sup> The 1960s had posed two different consequences of Swedish intelligence: a) increased radicalisation, which meant more resources redirected to *Säkerhetspolisen* ('Security Police,' SÄPO) and IB in order to track

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89 Roughly translated as 'canal conductors' or 'channel enablers,' i.e. a back-channel – Ibid. p. 47.

90 Ibid. p. 48.

91 Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare?* p. 120.

92 'Rapport med synpunkter i anslutning till statsminister Palmes besök i USA 4/6–11/6 1970,' (1970-08-04), 1970 Arméattachén Hemliga skr. volym nr 1.

93 'Frågan om de amerikanska krigsfångarna i Nordvietnam,' (1970-10-14), 1970 Arméattachén Hemliga skr. volym nr 1.

94 Kjell Östberg, *När vinden vände: Olof Palme 1969–1986*, Leopard Förlag, 2009, p. 148.

Vietnam activists, (Swedish) conscientious objectors, and new left wing groups, and b) a 1969 law banning 'åsiktsregistrering' (but which had no actual impact on surveillance).<sup>95</sup>

On 3 May 1973, the magazine *Folk i Bild/Kulturfront*, based on reporting by journalists Peter Bratt and Jan Guillou, exposed the IB Affair. Much of the inner workings of IB remains unknown. For example, even the initials are not fully deciphered, with the name possibly being an acronym for either *Informationsbyrån* or *Inhämtning, Birger*.<sup>96</sup> The affair included both surveillance of leftist activists and covert operations. This was done in collaboration with foreign intelligence agencies, particularly Israel's Shin Bet, as well as the Central Intelligence Agency. The exposure revealed not only the existence of such activities, but also seemingly socially non-useful information, such as the radio codes of various embassies that *Försvarets Radioanstalt* (Defence Ministry's signals intelligence division) had cracked. The exposure of the intelligence operation damaged Palme's standing, particularly amongst fellow Social Democrats. This was especially true following the arrests of Bratt and Guillou, who were charged and subsequently convicted for harming national security. Criticism came not only from Swedes, but also resulted in an open letter from Günter Grass, Max Frisch, and three other German writers who compared the arrest of Bratt and Guillou to the Nazis silencing Carl von Ossietzky, the Soviet harassing of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and the Nixon administration attacking Daniel Ellsberg.<sup>97</sup>

Despite the criticism, Palme remained unwavering through it all and maintained its legitimacy and its importance. He even went so far as to claim that it was necessary for Sweden to 'remain independent'.<sup>98</sup> However, this was objectively not the case. Håkan Isaksson, a former IB operative, revealed that agents would get assignments from the CIA. These assignments targeted Swedish citizens and would be carried out by IB.<sup>99</sup> The targets for espionage included not only communists or American deserters. In fact, many of the leftists who were spied upon shared a lot of the same beliefs as the governing Social Democrats. For example, journalists such as Dieter Strand and Gunnar Fredriksson, who worked for the Social Democratic-leaning newspaper *Aftonbladet*, were victims of surveillance by SÄPO. However, even though the bulk of surveillance and consequential intelligence flowed out, the Swedish state did indeed receive intelligence from the United States. In March 1973, the Swedish Ministry of Defence received a list of names of members of *Svenska Revolutionära Marxisterna Förbundet* (Swedish Revolutionary Marxists' League), which had been compiled by the Defence Intelligence Agency's Eastern Area Office.<sup>100</sup>

95 'Viewpoint registration', i.e. registration of people based on political ideologies – Ibid. p. 152.

96 'Information bureau' and 'Gathering, Birger,' respectively. Henrik Berggren, *Underbara dagar framför oss: En biografi över Olof Palme*, Norstedts Förlag AB, 2010, p. 474.

97 Ibid. p. 481.

98 Ibid.

99 Eriksson, *Jag såg kärleken*, p. 178.

100 'Brev till Försvarsstaben från Håkan Linde, Armédirektör,' (1973-03-26), Utgående och inkomna skrivelser 1973 Arméattachén volym nr 26.

While this article limits itself primarily to the military and intelligence realms, it is worth noting that the transatlantic bonds between Sweden and the United States went beyond that. These ties were initially rooted in the mass emigration of Swedes to the New World, which also included a significant number of returnees. As the historian Dag Blanck notes, '[t]o the majority of Swedes of the broader strata of the population, however, the emigrants or the returning Swedish Americans were the primary sources of information about the U.S. and life in the American republic.'<sup>101</sup> Naturally, this bond was not just one-way, with the postwar Swedish welfare state gaining notice in the United States, as demonstrated by the research by Dr Carl Marklund and Professor Klaus Petersen.<sup>102</sup> As a consequence of migration being primarily from Sweden to the United States, with most of the reverse migration being returnees, as well as the sheer imbalances in terms of population and economy, the sociocultural legacy of cultural exchange created a greater American imprint in Sweden than the other way around, thereby explaining the general Americanophilic attitude that often prevailed. Though the positive bonds largely cover the history of bilateral relations, it is worth noting it was not always to the same extent, with some fluctuations such as during the Second World War due to Swedish-German ties.

## 5. Vietnam Policy in the Greater Swedish Cold War Context

What caused Vietnam to become the cause célèbre of the Swedish government? To a significant extent, it was the relative insignificance of Vietnam to Sweden directly. Unlike other Cold War hotspots, Vietnam was able to be used as a pressure valve while not impacting the state's immediate interests. This held true for other issues in the developing world, particularly in regards to national liberation movements. A closer examination of other areas of interest held by Sweden illustrates the relationship between direct insignificance and freedom to act.

The recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam did not represent an overall shift in Swedish interests. This is reaffirmed by the government's unwillingness to recognise the German Democratic Republic (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*, DDR) despite arguable similarities between North/South Vietnam and East/West Germany. While some feared that a recognition of Hanoi would lead to immediate recognition of East Berlin, it soon became evident that this was not the case as party objectives were subordinate to long term state goals.<sup>103</sup> Unlike in South Vietnam, Swedish economic interests in West

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101 Dag Blanck, "'Very Welcome Home Mr. Swanson': Swedish Americans Encounter Homeland Swedes', *American Studies in Scandinavia* (2016), p. 114.

102 Marklund, C., & Petersen, K. (2013). 'Return to sender – American Images of the Nordic Welfare States and Nordic Welfare State Branding,' *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies*, 43(2), pp. 245–257.

103 Scott, *Swedish Social Democracy and the Vietnam War*, p. 179.



Germany were substantial, whereas a severing of negligible ties with Saigon in favour of Hanoi would have no meaningful effect on the Swedish economy, something which cannot be said in the case of the two German states. This is made all the more significant when one remembers that both the DRV and the DDR had better claims to recognition, namely by having full control over their territory, than the RVN, with whom Sweden previously had relations, with an ambassador accredited to South Vietnam (though based in Bangkok) until 1967.<sup>104</sup> Even when Sweden chose to recognise the DDR only a couple of years later, it was in a manner fundamentally different than its recognition of the DRV, since the former was a result of, as the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee made clear, the Four Powers (the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France) having ‘made a joint statement which includes a confirmation that they will support the application for entry into the UN by the two German states.’<sup>105</sup> On the other hand, the recognition of Hanoi was a unilateral decision made by Stockholm without consulting any member of the United Nations Security Council. The unilateral dimension is further affirmed when one considers the fact that Sweden was the first non-communist European state to recognise the DRV. Denmark and Norway waited almost three more years before following suit, with the bulk of Western Europe waiting until the signing of the Paris Peace Accords or Vietnamese reunification.<sup>106</sup>

The primary concern was Swedish interests, including ties with the United States, which as a result often trumped any criticism it may have wished to make. Even in the case of far away countries, the desire for preserved ties with Washington prevailed. For example, the ousting and death of Salvador Allende, the democratically elected leader of Chile, in a US-backed coup, became a prominent issue within the Social Democratic base, with many Chileans coming to Sweden as political refugees as a consequence. Nevertheless, the GOS was not as keen to take up the issue. In fact, the government actively prevented Harald Edelstam, Swedish Ambassador to Chile, from speaking out against Washington’s role in the overthrow of Allende.<sup>107</sup> Rather than capitalising on what could have otherwise have been short-term domestic political gains, the government chose instead to prioritise its relationship with the United States. In some cases, the GOS pursued a policy for the sake of enhancing this relationship, even if the components were not ones that Sweden adhered to itself. The most striking example is that of Iceland, which was considering stopping its territory from being used as a base for NATO, and indeed questioned its very

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104 Ibid., p. 64.

105 ‘De fyra stormakterna har dessutom gjort ett gemensamt uttalande innehållande dels en bekräftelse av att de kommer att stödja de två tyska staternas ansökningar om inträde i FN’ – Utrikesutskottets betänkande 1972:UU16 – Riksdag.

106 ‘List of countries which maintains diplomatic relations with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam, April 2010 [http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/cn\\_vakv/](http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/cn_vakv/).

107 Möller, *Sverige och Vietnamkriget*, p. 327.

own membership. Extraordinarily, Palme not only lobbied in private for the Icelanders not to dismantle the American air base at Keflavik, but to also remain in NATO while Sweden remained outside the alliance itself, with the Social Democratic party platform actually calling for continued non-membership in the transatlantic military alliance.<sup>108</sup> Once again, domestic rhetoric took a back seat to worries about the US-Swedish relationship.

The absence of a significant colonial history gave Sweden a unique opportunity to act in the Third World. While Sweden sat on the United Nations Security Council (1975–76), it repeatedly voted against the United States and in favour of the Third World, with the latter itself being more aligned with the Soviet Union. This applied to a whole host of issues, such as voting in favour of a weapons embargo on South Africa, voting in favour of the Angolan government, and supporting PLO participation at the UN.<sup>109</sup> In none of these cases were Swedish national interests directly threatened or even indirectly implicated, which in turn granted the Swedish state, especially under Palme, significant latitude. The Swedish government's attitude to African states in many ways paralleled its conduct vis-à-vis Vietnam. Unlike Southeast Asia, however, Africa proved not to be a hindrance in Swedish-American relations, since local US involvement was in no way comparable to that seen in Indochina. Consequently, Palme was able to go even further and not only meet with heads of states, like Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, but also leaders of various national liberation movements, such as Oliver Tambo of the African National Congress and Agostinho Neto of *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*.<sup>110</sup>

The end of the Vietnam War also enabled Sweden to be more engaged, even in areas that were traditionally seen as somewhat sensitive by the United States, with no serious effects on bilateral Swedish-American relations. In 1975, Palme became the first western leader to visit Cuba, where his warm reception by Castro was followed by Sweden sending aid money to build schools on the island while the US embargo was still in effect.<sup>111</sup> That same year, Palme met Kissinger for the first time, where the latter said 'I actually believe our relations have improved.'<sup>112</sup> The reason for this was simple, with Kissinger explaining that 'because we have left Indochina, there is nothing to fight over.'<sup>113</sup> As such, the meeting could be dominated by the subject of Portugal, given its recent revolution, rather than the Third World. In contrast to the Vietnam War, Swedish involvement in the Third World no longer centred itself around American conduct, and with the absence of criticism aimed at the US, tensions reduced considerably.

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108 Berggren, *Underbara dagar*, p. 391.

109 Östberg, *När vinden vände*, p. 114.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

112 'Jag tycker faktiskt att våra relationer har förbättrats.' *Ibid.*, p. 135.

113 'Eftersom vi har lämnat Indokina finns det inget att bråka om.' *Ibid.*, p. 135.

It is worth noting that to some extent Vietnam was not wholly detached from Sweden, which arguably necessitated a response, though not necessarily to the extent that critique was uttered. Though Palme's government ultimately moved to recognise the PRG in the South, the criticism of the US bombing of the North was not fully altruistic but rather was partially within the greater concern of the development of the Cold War, as Chomsky explains:

[t]he attack on North Vietnam was regarded as an international affair: European governments had Embassies [sic] in Hanoi. Furthermore, the US was bombing internal Chinese railways, which passed through North Vietnam, and was threatening Russian ships and installations in bombing Haiphong harbor and elsewhere. There was concern that it might blow up into a major international conflict.<sup>114</sup>

Therefore, it appears that direct condemnation of US atrocities in South Vietnam was one step too far. To deplore actions in North Vietnam, consequentially, became a viable means of not fully alienating the United States while simultaneously satisfying domestic audiences. This is all the more noteworthy since US atrocities were in fact greater in South Vietnam than in the North in terms of scale and magnitude, as illustrated by the use of chemical weapons as well as the overall scope of the campaign.

## **6. Significance of the Vietnam Era on Sweden**

An exploration of this topic is inherently limited both by the nature of the primary sources as well as the interconnectedness of other issues in regards to US-Swedish bilateral relations. The former can itself be subdivided into a multitude of elements. For example, a closer look at North Vietnamese diplomatic and internal records could shed significant light on this issue, particularly on how close and beneficial, if at all, Swedish criticism and aid was. However, the difficulty in accessing such documents, due to the Vietnamese government having not declassified them as well as the possibility that many of them no longer survive due to the bombing of Hanoi among other reasons, and the lack of translations, renders this perhaps problematic in the short term. Even if such records were to be accessible, one would need to be cautious since North Vietnamese officials often looked to Sweden for a glimpse into the West, thereby possibly making such an examination an exercise in confirmation bias on both the part of the source and the historian.

A complete understanding of the role of the Vietnam War in Swedish-American relations cannot be comprehended in a vacuum. As such, a separate yet complementary analysis

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114 Chomsky, Personal Communication – 3 August 2018.

would be necessary to adequately contextualise the importance of Vietnam in relations to other domestic issues. Just as the conflict was weaponised by leading Social Democrats for domestic political gains, so were other matters. For that reason, a comparative analysis of the relative importance of Vietnam to other pressing concerns, such as unemployment, can further one's understanding of how important – or unimportant – Southeast Asia really was on the Swedish political landscape. Similarly, a chronological comparison would be of immense value, contrasting Sweden's pre-1965 behaviour with that which followed. Only by comprehending this can one truly recognise how far the political leadership was willing to push the issue, even if it impacted bilateral ties with a nuclear superpower.

The true impact of Vietnam on Sweden cannot be understood simply through the direct back-and-forth developments in Stockholm and Washington. Rather, these ties should be, and indeed need to be, seen in contrast to their other relationships. What made the United States, for all of its opposition to Swedish actions, still consider Sweden to be part of the so-called 'free world'? These questions become all the more relevant when one considers that the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Hanoi, Minister Podolski, acknowledged how far-reaching Swedish knowledge about Vietnam supposedly was, and proposed information sharing between the two, or when one reads how the Albanian ambassador proclaimed that 'Sweden is the only capitalist country that has understood what is happening in Vietnam.'<sup>115</sup> Such pieces of evidence invite further examination of these other parallel relations, which have the potential to shed further light on Swedish-American ties during this period.

The episode consisting of the years 1965–1975 seems to have been of little long-term consequence in relations between Sweden and the United States. Having once considered implementing sanctions against Sweden, Kissinger would go on to pen and deliver a eulogy for Palme, following his assassination, where he highlighted how the two men developed a personal friendship.<sup>116</sup> Though it may not have made much of a mark in the realm of direct bilateral ties, it has had an effect on post-1975 political debates within Sweden. In what then-foreign minister Carl Bildt called in 2012 'the classic Swedish recognition politics that goes back decades,' Swedish foreign policy, and the push for its implementation, has continued to be a consistent trope.<sup>117</sup> What began with the recognition of the DRV and then subsequently the PRG (though arguably even earlier with the recognition of the People's Republic of China) has had a continued influence all the way through to the present day, whether it was the decision to recognise North Korea in 1973<sup>118</sup>, or Palestine in 2014 by

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115 Albanian ambassador: 'Sverige är det enda kapitalistiska landet som förstått vad som händer i Vietnam' – Kaj Falkman, *Ekot från Vietnam: En diplomats minnen från kriget och återbesök fyrtio år senare*, Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag, 2014, p. 131.

116 Henry Kissinger, 'Olof Palme and I were friends.' *Washington Post* 9 March 1986.

117 'Den klassiska svenska erkännandepolitiken sedan decennier tillbaka.' Carl Bildt, 15 February 2012, Riksdagens protokoll 2011/12:70.

118 'Recognition of North Korea Is Announced by Sweden' *New York Times*, 7 April 1973.

another Social Democratic government.<sup>119</sup> Just as national interests triumphed despite the demands of the party base in the 1970s, so they do still, such as when the governing Social Democrats chose to disregard a parliamentary call for the recognition of Western Sahara.<sup>120</sup>

The significance of the Vietnam War in Sweden really ought to be described as an interest in American involvement in Vietnam. The distinction is subtle, yet very real. While Maoist sympathisers maintained their adherence to the cause, the popular importance of Vietnam (and by extension the United States) in Sweden largely evaporated following the reunification of Vietnam. This is true in light of continued Vietnamese suffering, namely the Cambodian-Vietnamese War of 1978–1989 and the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979, neither of which proved to be of any consequence either in Sweden or to its relationship with the United States. None of this should minimise the importance and relevance of neutrality as a component of the Cold War. The existence of a neutral western-leaning *cordon sanitaire* consisting of Sweden (as well as Finland and Austria) enabled a multifaceted relationship that impacted economic, security, and political bonds. As such, Cold War neutrality facilitated a situation that allowed serious (political) disagreements without a fundamental risk to bilateral relations.

It would be useful to understand this period as an example of great power-small state interactions, as well as neutrality/non-alignment during the Cold War. The obvious imbalance of power between the two nations is one that remains and is true vis-à-vis Sweden and the US. Accordingly, one should seek to learn the options and limitations of a small state when it comes to forming an independent foreign policy. This could be understood in a pattern that includes neutral Sweden's wartime relationship to Nazi Germany, but also communist Yugoslavia's path of non-alignment following the Tito-Stalin split. At the same time, historic parallels may not always be of much help, such as when Sweden reversed its policy on deserters in 1991 in fear of a mass influx of Yugoslav combatants, a fear that did not apply to the earlier deserters from the US.<sup>121</sup>

The divergences between the United States and Sweden, when examined through a historical lens that includes Vietnam but also goes beyond it, appear to have remained peripheral in the grand scheme of things. Despite political differences, cooperation has remained steady and indeed strong. Vietnam demonstrated that even under immense political and diplomatic duress, bilateral cooperation below the Cabinet and ambassadorial levels can remain intact. The durability of this bilateral relation, particularly in the military and intelligence dimension, offers the political branch of the government of Sweden significant leeway in terms of rhetorical independence.

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119 'Sweden Gives Recognition to Palestinians' *New York Times*, 30 October 2014.

120 Svar på skriftlig fråga 2014/15:481 besvarad av Margot Wallström (S), utrikesminister – Riksdag.

121 Scott, *Swedish Social Democracy and the Vietnam War*, p. 137.

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