



Reporting more, informing less

A comparison of the Swedish media coverage of September 11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

■ **Lars W. Nord and Jesper Strömbäck**

Mid-Sweden University, Sweden

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine and compare how leading Swedish news media in television and the press covered and described the terrorist attacks in the USA on September 11 in 2001, the US attacks on Afghanistan later in 2001 and the war in Iraq in 2003. The article examines factors influencing news decisions and media ability to maintain fair news reporting. The study looks specifically at the sources that are used, the occurrence of speculations and whether the coverage was anti-American or anti-Muslim. The central questions are: what were the most frequently used sources?, how frequent were different types of speculation?, and how frequent were anti-American and anti-Muslim rhetorical figures respectively?

KEY WORDS ■ media logic ■ sources ■ speculations ■ Swedish journalism
■ terrorism ■ war coverage

International conflicts of our time are usually not only a battle of weapons but also a battle of opinions. Propaganda plays an important role in portraying the conflict in the most favourable way for each side. The propaganda strategies are most often oriented towards the media arena, as information provided by the media is the main source of information for most citizens today (Bennett and Paletz, 1994; Strömbäck, 2004). Thus, studies of the media coverage of wars and other crises are essential for the understanding of the opinion formation processes as dramatic events occur.

Besides that, there are many important questions about how journalists and editors actually work in the outbreak of international conflicts: Are professional standards in reporting achieved? Do the media provide information that citizens can use to form well-informed opinions? Is the line between

fact and fiction clear to everyone reading the newspapers or watching the news on TV?

We think there are good reasons to reconsider the role of professional journalism in crisis communications, and to ask the question: Why is it sometimes successful and why does it sometimes fail? In this study we therefore examine the challenges for professional journalism and its core values at times of war and terror by comparing Swedish media coverage of three dramatic international events in recent years. We do so by discussing some of the challenges confronting media ability to cover different serious crises, and test our thesis using empirical data about the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, the US attacks in Afghanistan in October 2001 and the outbreak of the war in Iraq in March 2003.

Factors of journalistic production at war

Wars and war-like situations undoubtedly pose huge challenges for news reporting. Much of war reporting has to rely on political and military sources, whose incentives are often to cover the truth and manipulate media reporting. Every single nation, whether totalitarian or democratic, uses different types of propaganda *before* the war (to prepare and mobilize), *during* the war (to confuse and encourage) and *after* the war (to justify and 'write history') (Nord and Strömbäck, 2002, 2003; Tumber and Palmer, 2004). Most studies of the subject confirm assumptions about biased news reporting, asymmetrical reliance on sources and neglected areas of coverage. Also, most scientific research reports about the media at war doubtless support the often heard expression that 'the first casualty of war is the truth' (Knightley, 1975; Hallin, 1986; Kennedy, 1993; Bennett and Paletz, 1994; Zelizer and Allan, 2002).

However, some conflicts have been covered with more journalistic quality than others. The obstacles to war reporting may exist in every case, but they can be easier or more difficult to overcome depending on the prevailing political viewpoints and/or professional premises.

The political perspectives regarding a conflict may vary. There are conflicts covered by the rules of international law, and there are conflicts that are extremely controversial in a political sense. When the political elite is united and in favour of a war the possibility for patriotic reporting in national media will increase (Kalb, 1994; Rosen, 2002). On the other hand, if the political elite is divided, the national media will probably describe the conflicting positions more carefully and cover the war more comprehensively (Hallin, 1986; Bennett and Paletz, 1994).

The quality of war reporting is, however, not only a matter of political consensus or controversy. Internal factors of production within media organizations are inevitably of great importance to the quality of media coverage (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; McNair, 1998; Tumber and Palmer, 2004). In war reporting it is relevant to ask *where* journalists are working, *when* journalists are publishing the results of their work, and perhaps most importantly, *how* journalists are working within the media organization.

Asking *where* the journalists are based may appear to be trivial, but it is an essential element of ensuring objective and balanced reporting. A net of correspondents on both sides of a battlefield increases the possibilities of comparing military statements and completing official declarations with personal field reports or new perspectives of the events. Most modern wars are, however, marked by the opposite conditions for most journalists. Since the Vietnam War 30 years ago, all wars have been difficult for the media to cover in a professional way as they have been subject to severe military restrictions, which regulate all media activities. The journalists have been obliged to follow well-directed press conferences far way from the war zone or join well-organized and supervised tours to the frontier. The war in Iraq was to some extent an exception to this rule, since the system of 'embedded journalists' allowed journalists more freedom to find their own news and to witness events with their own eyes. At the same time, this may have led to the journalists identifying more with the American and British troops they were embedded with, and thus to a journalism marked less by independence and a critical stance and more by patriotism and a sense of solidarity with 'our troops' (Beck and Downing, 2003; Brandenburg, 2003; Brown, 2003; Tumber and Palmer, 2004). However, there were also significant exceptions to the rule of embedded journalism: for example, unilateral journalists operating on their own; journalists placed in Baghdad; and the reporting in Arab satellite broadcasts. Another feature of the modern war is a mixture of censorship and self-regulation which obviously also obstructs fair and balanced news reporting. In that sense, the war in Iraq was not an exception.

When and *how* quickly news can be published might affect its quality. Publishing was once a struggle for breaking news every day, but nowadays the increased speed in publishing allows news to be broken instantly. Historically, war journalism appeared in newspapers and broadcast news with stories about yesterday's actions. A considerable time passed between events and the news about the events, which gave news departments a reasonable chance to confirm new facts, complete stories and analyse the recent development from different perspectives. There was plenty of time to explain the whole situation and evaluate different testimonies.

Today, the leading feature of reporting is 24-hour news production. TV channels are producing news all the time and websites on the Internet are updated instantly (Seib, 2001). Journalism has gone from deadline to online. The latest news becomes an old story within hours or even minutes. The instant demand for news influences journalistic practices in many ways. Even nothing substantial happening causes problems, since the media then has news holes which have to be filled. That 'filling' might more often than not be non-events, pseudo-events or commentaries involving large amounts of speculation. The increased competition, spurred on by more market-driven media organizations, especially tabloid newspapers and commercial TV stations, tends to produce less serious journalism and more sensational news (McManus, 1994; Underwood, 1995). When recurrent deadlines are obsolete and everyone seems to be online all the time, high quality reporting, especially about dramatic events, is less likely to occur.

In their book *Warp Speed* (1999), the American media researchers Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel describe how the pressure for news has created a mixed media culture in the USA with some distinct features. This new media culture involves journalism that is less complete and more fragmented, the increasing power of sources in news reporting, decreasingly important professional journalistic values, and commentaries replacing information. The authors explain the development of a new situation where news departments have to fill the void in the 24-hour news cycle but with economic resources that are too small to gather the news.

Finally, apart from *where* and *when*, war reporting is of course a matter of *how* to report. For example, a critical stance toward sources is of great importance as is the ability of media professionals to verify and follow up statements from different groups involved in a conflict.

There are reasons to believe that the possibility for adequate reporting increases if media *routines* already exist and if it is possible for the media to make adequate *preparations*. If journalists can refer to other events and recognize significant patterns in a conflict, they might be more successful in scrutinizing and questioning official views, even though there is also a risk for stereotypical reporting in such cases. On the other hand, if reporters face a completely new crisis in which there are no routines to follow, there may be fewer possibilities for high quality reporting. In this situation, there is a greater risk of circulating false information and confusing news reporting. Of equal importance is the possibility for media organizations to make adequate preparations before the outbreak of a war or a crisis. If an event can be anticipated, news departments can change their priorities, time schedules and working procedures in order to improve the coverage of the forthcoming event. Experts can be alerted and contacts can be established with independ-

ent news sources. When a conflict starts with no notice, journalists have limited opportunities to check facts and value partisan statements, at least at the outset.

No crises are identical, and when it comes to their media coverage our hypothesis is that the ability to give adequate information to citizens is dependent on both the existence of media routines and the possibility for the media to make adequate preparations. The greater the opportunity to prepare for a crisis and to use existing routines, the more likely it is that citizens will be adequately informed. In accordance with this it is possible to consider four types of crises where the media's ability to inform hypothetically differs significantly (Figure 1).

Type I represents a kind of crisis which we have never heard about before and have no possibility to foresee. The Chernobyl disaster in Ukraine in 1986 is perhaps the best example, but the killing of President John F. Kennedy in 1960 and that of the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986 could also fall into this category.

Types II and III represent situations where the quality of journalism could be expected to be higher, but is still far from excellent. In Type II a new crisis develops which it has been possible for the media to prepare for. The outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991 is a good example. A new kind of war was difficult to cover and a lot of disinformation occurred. However, preparations could

		Media Preparations	
		Bad	Good
Media Routines	Bad	Type I (new and surprising events)	Type II (new but expected events)
	Good	Type III (surprising events which have happened before)	Type IV (expected events which have happened before)

Figure 1 Media and Crises, four typical cases.

hypothetically eliminate some of the problems. Type III crises, on the other hand, happen suddenly but have happened 'before'. Airplane accidents, earthquakes and floods definitely belong to this category.

Lastly, Type IV represents the kind of crisis that should present the media with few problems. The situation is possible to prepare for (such as sending correspondents to a war region and consulting political experts) and there are media routines for these kinds of events. As a result, media coverage of a Type IV crisis should be characterized by journalistic professionalism. The American invasion of Somalia, where TV crews waited for the marines to reach the shores for their 'live' reports from the war scene is probably a good example here.

Thus, both the existence of media routines and the opportunity to make adequate preparations should influence the quality of war reporting (Nord and Strömbäck, 2003). The 'noble art' of war reporting could be described as something of a 'mission impossible', but there are good reasons to believe that journalistic quality, generally speaking, should be higher in situations where there is time to prepare for a forthcoming event and there are routines to lean on, than in situations marked by a lack of media preparations and a lack of media routines.

However, what is meant by journalistic quality is by no means self-evident. The answer might vary depending on different journalistic norms and standards in different countries (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Nevertheless, in Sweden there are certain ethical guidelines that all major news organizations subscribe to, at least theoretically. According to these ethical guidelines, journalists should check the facts, clearly separate fact from fiction, use balancing sources and report the views of all sides in a political conflict. Furthermore, journalists should refrain from appealing to certain prejudices and stereotypes and provide the citizens with impartial and 'correct' news (Spelregler för Press, TV, Radio, 2001; see also Fichtelius, 1997; Leth and Thurén, 2000; Sahlstrand, 2000; Nord and Strömbäck, 2002, 2003). There is also a widespread agreement among Swedish journalists that the most important function of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need in order to be free and self-governing (SOU, 1995: 37; Strömbäck, 2004). In order to do that, it is important that the news coverage is based on facts, that it gives citizens a fair chance to evaluate the viewpoints from different sides in a conflict, and that it does not evoke prejudices and stereotypes.

This view could be compared with the 'elements of journalism' proposed by Kovach and Rosenstiel. According to them, the purpose of journalism is to 'provide people with the information they need in order to be free and self-governing' (2001: 12). To fulfill this task, they argue that journalism's first obligation is to the truth, and that its essence is a discipline of verification.

This means, among other things, that journalists should never add anything to their stories, should rely on their own reporting, and be as transparent as possible regarding methods and motives (2001: 78).

Thus, within a Swedish framework, one way to measure the journalistic quality of the news coverage is to measure (a) the extent to which the articles and news features include at least two sources (providing there are at least two sides in each conflict); (b) the occurrence of speculations (since speculations by definition are concerned with things that have not happened yet, logically they are at odds with a fact-based journalism); and (c) the occurrence of rhetorical figures that are based on certain stereotypical views of the main actors in an event.

Purpose and research questions

From this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to compare the Swedish media coverage of three cases – the terror attacks against the USA on September 11, 2001, the US attacks in Afghanistan in October 2001, and the outbreak of the war in Iraq in March 2003 – and to test the theory of differing quality of news coverage in different situations with regard to media preparations and media routines. The research questions are:

1. How did the Swedish media cover the terror attacks against the USA on September 11, 2001, the US attacks in Afghanistan in October 2001, and the outbreak of the war in Iraq in March 2003?
2. How did the quality of the news coverage differ across these three events when it came to the use of sources, speculations and anti-American and anti-Muslim reporting?
3. Can the quality of the news coverage of these three events be explained by the kind of crisis they represent?

The terror attacks are studied as they represent the most surprising news anyone could expect to happen outside of fictionalized Hollywood productions. We take that event to represent a Type I crisis. The war in Afghanistan is examined as the outbreak of this war was expected by the news media. At the same time the working conditions of Swedish journalists were dissimilar to those in other modern wars and war-like situations, and in that sense the media did not have any established routines for covering that war. Therefore, we take the war in Afghanistan to represent a Type II crisis. The war in Iraq was rather similar to the Gulf War in 1991. The war was expected and the media should have established routines for covering it since the previous war. Although the system of 'embedded journalism' represented an innovation in war coverage, we take the war in Iraq as representing a Type IV crisis.

Hypothetically speaking, then, the media coverage of the war in Iraq should have been better than the coverage of the war in Afghanistan, which should have been better than the coverage of the terror attacks.

About the study

The nationwide media outlets that are examined in the study include the morning papers *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*, the evening papers *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*, the commercial TV4's news programme *Nyheterna*, and the public service television's news programmes *Aktuellt* and *Rapport*. The morning papers are broadsheet papers in journalistic style if not in form, while the evening papers could be described as up-scale tabloids both in form and journalistic style.

Different time periods are studied. For the newspapers, the first five days of reporting in 2001 occurred between 12 and 16 September (terrorist attacks) and 8 and 12 October (Afghanistan) respectively, while for the television news, it was between 11 and 15 September and 7 and 11 October. The war in Iraq is analysed during the first five days, the initial stage of the war, between 20 and 24 March 2003.

The study includes all news journalism media content including vignettes, headings, pictures/graphics or words linked to the three events. In the case of newspapers, this includes news articles, news analyses, news coverage and special features on news pages. It does not include editorials, polemic articles and letters to the editor, however, as these cannot be classified as news journalism. It also excluded supplements. In the case of television news, the study includes all news journalism in the main news bulletin each day that made explicit references to the three events. All news articles and news features in the above-mentioned media that explicitly referred to the three events were chosen for study. The material was examined using quantitative content analysis.

Features of Swedish journalism

The design of this study makes it possible not only to compare the media reporting of three similar events, but also to compare journalism in different media that have different traditions. This is occurring in a time marked by media convergence, expanding news system, real-time news and the growing commercialization of the Swedish media system.

Since the end of the 1980s, the Swedish media system has gone through major structural changes (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2001; Hadenius and Weibull, 2003). Until then, no private television or radio stations were allowed. The market for newspapers was stable and profitable. In 1990, surveys showed that 81 percent of the Swedish population read a morning newspaper at least five days a week (Eriksson, 2002).

On New Year's Eve 1987, however, the public service monopoly in television was for the first time broken by the private channel TV3, broadcasting from London. Four years later, in 1991, the first private terrestrial television in Sweden (TV4) received permission to start broadcasting. Two years later, the public service radio monopoly was broken, which means that Sweden, as most other countries in Western Europe, now has a mixed public service/private system in television and radio.

The 1990s in Sweden was a period of economic downturn, which caused major problems for the newspapers, which lost both advertisers and readers. The worst year was 1996, when readership dropped down to 71 percent. By international standards this is still a high percentage, but the change in readership forced the newspapers to cut down on staff and develop new strategies to compete in a deepening struggle to survive and maintain profitability. One effect was that the Swedish newspapers became increasingly market driven (Underwood, 1995; McManus, 1994; Hultén, 1999; Hvitfelt, 2002). For economic reasons, several regional newspapers also merged or entered into different kinds of partnerships (Alström and Nord, 2003). Another change is that foreign media companies now own parts of different Swedish newspapers, and that the links between the newspapers and political parties, whose influence used to be strong, in general have disappeared (Nord, 2001).

Traditionally, the broadsheet papers and the public service broadcast news are known for the quality of their coverage of public affairs, while the commercial news media and the tabloids, particularly, are generally considered to be more market driven and oriented towards infotainment. Recent research, however, indicates that there seems to be a convergence of the journalism in these different media (Strömbäck, 2004).

One theory which is relevant to describe the changes that have taken place within Swedish journalism is that regarding a certain kind of media logic, first developed by Altheide and Snow but further elaborated upon by other scholars. According to the former:

... media logic consists of a form of communication, the process through which media present and transmit information. Elements of this form include the various media and the formats used by these media. Format consists, in part, of how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or

emphasis on particular characteristics of behaviour, and the grammar of media communication. (Altheide and Snow, 1979: 10)

Building on this and on theory developed by Hernes (1978) and Asp (1986), Strömbäck (2000) has argued that the concrete expressions of the media logic are certain storytelling techniques such as simplification, personification, polarization, intensification, concretion, stereotyping and enhancement.

In a time marked by a surplus of information and a deficit of attention, there has been increasing competition among the different news media for people's attention. One result is that the news media has come to adopt the media logic to a larger extent than before. It has led to a journalism that often tends to interpret rather than describe, to speculate rather than stick to known facts, which blurs the line between straight reporting, commentary and so-called 'news analysis', and gives the journalists themselves a more prominent position within the news (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2001; Strömbäck, 2004).

These features of modern Swedish journalism can be found not only in the commercial TV news and in the tabloids, but also in the public service news and the broadsheet papers – although not necessarily to the same extent. Whether it is the former, which has adjusted to the latter or vice versa is an empirical question that still awaits a definitive answer. Most observers, however, would agree that there is a convergence and that it is the growing commercialization that drives the changes observed in journalistic content (Hvitfelt, 2002; Nord and Strömbäck, 2002).

In summary, there are reasons to believe that the increased media competition generally affects news reporting, encourages media logic elements and decreases journalistic quality when it comes to criticism of sources, reliance on facts and non-partisan reporting. However, journalistic quality may vary due to the possibilities of media preparation and the existence of media routines in each case. If the preparations are good and the routines are well known the risks for lower quality in reporting may not entirely vanish, but nevertheless be reduced.

Within this theoretical framework, the results of the Swedish media coverage of the terror attacks in the USA and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are now analysed.

The scope of media coverage

It is apparent from Table 1 that the terror attacks against America and the outbreak of the war in Iraq were much bigger news events for the Swedish media than the US attacks in Afghanistan.

Table 1 Number of articles and news features about the terror attacks against the USA, the US attacks in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq

	Dagens Nyheter (BS)	Svenska Dagbladet (BS)	Expressen (T)	Aftonbladet (T)	Rapport (PS)	Aktuellt (PS)	TV4 Nyheterna (C)	<i>N</i>
Terror attacks in USA	110	102	127	143	65	74	40	661
Afghani war	63	49	77	83	28	33	15	348
Iraqi war	135	99	133	136	73	65	60	701
Total	308	250	337	362	166	172	115	1710

Note: BS = Broadsheet, T = Tabloid, PS = Public Service, C = Commercial.

In a cynical sense, the news about the terror attacks against the USA and the outbreak of the Iraqi war was perfect even for the Swedish media. It fitted perfectly with the criteria that the Swedish media are found to employ when judging the newsworthiness of different events. In the same way, news about the outbreak of war in Iraq held greater value than news about the war in Afghanistan.

The more current this kind of news is, the greater its value. According to the Swedish scholar Håkan Hvitfelt (1985), the probability that something will become news also increases if it concerns politics, pertains to events and conditions that are sensational or surprising and that are within a short geographical and cultural distance, and takes place with established authorities as sources. That applied more to the terror attacks against the USA and the outbreak of the war in Iraq than to the war in Afghanistan.

Another important explanation for the difference in the coverage is the availability of pictures. The terrorist attacks against the USA were unique not only in themselves, but also in that they could be witnessed live across the globe and important parts of the ensuing events photographed and recorded on video. In contrast, during the war in Afghanistan there was a lack of pictures and for the first five days of the war no Swedish journalist managed to get into Afghanistan to report what they saw. There were fewer pictures of the outbreak of the Iraqi war than there were of the terrorist attacks, but more than in the case of the war in Afghanistan.

Sources in the news

In Swedish journalism, there are certain ethical guidelines and traditions concerning the use of sources. One such guideline, by no means unique to Sweden, is that journalists should always use balancing sources and report the views of all sides in a conflict. The traditional interpretation of this guideline is the so-called two-source rule: that journalists should use at least two independent sources, especially if the 'facts' being reported might be controversial. Furthermore, there is also a tradition that the use of anonymous sources should be restricted (Fichtelius, 1997; Leth and Thurén, 2000; Sahlstrand, 2000).

However, when thousands of articles and news features about a dramatic event are published within a few days, there is always an obvious risk that quantity will push quality aside. The demand and search for fast news might compromise the demand and search for correct news.

To see whether this was the case in the media coverage of the terrorist attacks against the USA and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, we studied the

Table 2 Percentage of articles/news features which include at least one anonymous source

	Media coverage of the terror attacks against the USA	Media coverage of the US attacks in Afghanistan	Media coverage of the war in Iraq
Dagens Nyheter (BS)	54	43	67
Svenska Dagbladet (BS)	56	26	67
Aftonbladet (T)	50	29	48
Expressen (T)	49	13	47
Rapport (PS)	49	29	56
Aktuellt (PS)	53	30	57
TV4 Nyheterna (C)	50	13	45
Average percentage	52	26	57

Note: BS = Broadsheet, T = Tabloid, PS = Public Service, C = Commercial. Numbers of sources and percentages have been rounded off.

percentage of articles and news features that explicitly included at least one anonymous source. In this case, only individuals count as a source, which means that if a news article refers to an institution such as 'Pentagon', that will count as anonymous sources. The results are shown in Table 2.

The results show that anonymous sources were used most frequently in media coverage of the war in Iraq. In reports on the Iraq war, there was at least one anonymous source amongst an average of 57 percent of the articles and features. This is somewhat higher than in the coverage of the terror attacks, and considerably higher than in the coverage of the war in Afghanistan.

These results can be compared to how the same Swedish media covered the 2002 national election. In that coverage, on average at least one anonymous source was used in no more than 17 percent of the articles and news features in the same media outlets as in this study (Strömbäck, 2004). This comparison indicates that the journalistic quality, as measured by the use of anonymous sources, was higher in the 'domestic' case of the national election in 2002, than in the 'foreign' cases of the terror attacks and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The results also show that the extent to which anonymous sources were used varied between the different media types. Interestingly enough, the news media that most frequently included anonymous sources were the two broadsheet newspapers that in Sweden are traditionally considered to feature the highest quality journalism. Obviously, these results cannot be explained by

structural factors such as media category (TV vs. newspaper), media type (tabloid vs. broadsheet papers) or ownership (private vs. public service).

Another crucial question is to what extent the articles and news features are based on fewer than two sources that are either quoted or mentioned by name. The results can be seen in Table 3.

The results clearly show that a large percentage of the articles and news features included fewer than two sources that were either quoted or mentioned by name. On average, a larger percentage of the coverage of the terror attacks and the war in Iraq had fewer than two sources compared with the US attacks in Afghanistan. Again, this percentage is larger than in the coverage of the 2002 national election in Sweden. In that coverage, on average 36 percent of the articles and news features included fewer than two sources (Strömbäck, 2004).

However, the differences between the coverage of these three 'foreign' events are rather small compared to the differences between the media studied. In the coverage of both the terror attacks and the war in Iraq, *Rapport* (PS) was the medium whose news features most often failed to include at least two sources. In the coverage of the war in Afghanistan, that position was held by *Expressen* – the same medium that, conversely, most often included at least two sources in the coverage of the terror attacks.

The fact that as much as about half of the news articles and news features did not include at least two sources is remarkable, given both the ethical principle of using two separate independent sources, the comparison with the

Table 3 Percentage of articles/news features including fewer than two quoted or mentioned sources

	Media coverage of the terror attacks against the USA	Media coverage of the US attacks in Afghanistan	Media coverage of the war in Iraq
Dagens Nyheter (BS)	54	46	50
Svenska Dagbladet (BS)	48	59	42
Aftonbladet (T)	59	55	59
Expressen (T)	37	62	46
Rapport (PS)	60	43	72
Aktuellt (PS)	59	48	35
TV4 Nyheterna (C)	45	20	68
Average percentage	52	48	53

Note: BS = Broadsheet, T = Tabloid, PS = Public Service, C = Commercial. Numbers of sources and percentages have been rounded off.

coverage of the Swedish national election in 2002, and the fact that what we are counting here are number of sources used – not whether they are independent from each other. Thus, it is obvious that a considerable amount of the media coverage of the war in Iraq and the other two events did not comply with demands for following the two-source rule.

Besides the number of sources, it is important to note what kind of sources the different media used. Since the sources provide much of the information that journalists transmit to the audience, the use of different types of source inevitably has consequences for the journalistic content (Gans, 1980; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Manning, 2001). Table 4 shows the five most common types of source during each of the three events.

One thing that is notable is the absence of spokespersons for the United Nations as sources (c.f. Tumber and Palmer, 2004). Even though all these three events were international in scope and global in their political consequences, spokespersons for the United Nations were not used as sources in more than four percent of the news articles and news features regarding any of the events.

The results in Table 4 show that in the coverage of the terror attacks against the USA, American politicians and Swedish experts were the two most frequently used sources. Next comes the victims of the terror attacks, which includes relatives, friends and colleagues of those who died due to the terror attacks, and in some cases even those who actually died. The latter may sound strange, but the explanation is that in some articles and news features, quotes that are said to come from passengers in the hijacked planes or persons who died in World Trade Center are included as if they were alive.

In the coverage of the US attacks in Afghanistan, the most frequently used type of source was again the Swedish experts, followed by official Afghani sources. American military sources and American politicians dominated the coverage of the Iraqi war. Non-Western political leaders, including Iraqi officials, were used as sources in 16 percent of the news articles and only 10 percent of the news features.

These results indicate that there was a bias in the media coverage of these events, a bias that favoured the American side of the conflict and the American perspective. This becomes even more marked if one looks at the frequency of official American sources and official Afghani or Iraqi sources, including politicians, administrative leaders and military leaders.

The results clearly show that Swedish media favoured American official sources, either anonymous or mentioned by name, in front of Afghani or Iraqi official sources. In that sense, the coverage was biased. These results should not, however, be seen as an indication that the Swedish media intentionally wanted to be biased in the selection of sources. The more likely explanation is that American official sources – as well as Swedish official sources and experts

Table 4 Analysis of news articles and features showing the five most commonly used types of individual sources in the coverage of the terror attacks against the USA, the US attacks in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq

Media coverage of the terror attacks against the USA		Media coverage of the US attacks in Afghanistan		Media coverage of the war in Iraq	
Type of source in news articles (%)	Type of source in news features (%)	Type of source in news articles (%)	Type of source in news features (%)	Type of source in news articles (%)	Type of source in news features (%)
American politicians 17%	American politicians 20%	Swedish experts 22%	Swedish experts 25%	American military 25%	American military 18%
Swedish experts 12%	Swedish experts 11%	Official Afghani sources 14%	Official Afghani sources 18%	American politicians 16%	American politicians 16%
American victims 8%	American citizens 10%	American politicians 10%	Official Pakistani sources 12%	Non-Western political leaders 16%	Political leaders from EU-countries 11%
American citizens 8%	Non-Western political leaders 9%	Political leaders from EU-countries 8%	American politicians 11%	Political leaders from EU-countries 12%	Swedish experts 10%
Political leaders from EU-countries 8%	Swedish politicians/ political leaders from EU-countries 7%	Swedish politicians 6%	bin-Laden/al-Qaida 10%	Iraqi citizens/Swedish experts 9%	Non-Western political leaders 10%

Note: The percentage includes both anonymous sources and sources mentioned by name. Included in the category 'non-Western political leaders' are political leaders from countries such as Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan and Russia. Percentages have been rounded off.

Table 5 Use of American, Afghani and Iraqi official sources in the coverage of the terror attacks against the USA, the US attacks in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq (%)

	Media coverage of the terror attacks against the USA		Media coverage of the US attacks in Afghanistan		Media coverage of the war in Iraq	
	TV	Newspapers	TV	Newspapers	TV	Newspapers
American official sources	23	19	29	19	24	26
Afghani official sources	10	4	18	14	–	–
Iraqi official sources	–	–	–	–	8	13

Note: Percentages have been rounded off. Due to the lack of governmental structure and differentiation between political and military leaders during the Taliban regime, different kinds of official Afghani sources have been grouped together into the category ‘Afghani official sources’.

– were more accessible and ultimately more credible than Afghani and Iraqi official sources.

Another likely explanation is the fact that, in their reporting, Swedish journalists were very dependent on American news media and their reporting, as well as on international and American-based news agencies. In a lot of cases it is obvious that what appears to be original reporting from the Swedish journalists, is actually re-writes of articles or news features from different American media or news agencies. That is the case particularly in the coverage of the terror attacks. However, if one judges from explicit references in the articles and news features, the media in this study used other media as sources in no more than ten percent of their coverage of the terror attacks and in no more than 26 percent of the news features about the US attacks in Afghanistan.

Even though they did not always explicitly state their use of other sources, the significant use of foreign and international media as sources by the Swedish media raises a question concerning the credibility of the news. In a situation of confusion, pressure on time and a lack of reliable information, it is especially important for readers and viewers that the media provides correct factual information. Every time journalists choose or are forced to rely on other media instead of doing their own original reporting, there is a risk that disinformation and errors keep circulating throughout the news pages and the news shows. Several examples from the coverage of the terror attacks illustrate this (Leth and Thurén, 2002). For example, on the first day of reporting one could learn from the Swedish media that a bomb had exploded outside the State Department, which later proved to be incorrect. If at all possible, the media should rely primarily on their own original reporting. If this is not

possible, at least they should state clearly where they obtained their information, whether it is from other media or other types of source. In this respect the Swedish media often failed, which made it harder for readers and viewers to separate fact from fiction and information from disinformation.

Moreover, the results so far also show that Swedish journalism often failed to fulfil the journalistic virtues that journalists themselves theoretically hold as very important. While this might be understandable due to the chaotic situation that characterized the terror attacks and their immediate aftermath and given the lack of access to Afghanistan during the US attacks, it is more difficult to explain in the case of the Iraqi war. Even though it is always difficult for journalists to cover wars, in the case of Iraq, they both had time to prepare and some journalistic routines existed since the media coverage of previous wars. Besides, it is no less important for journalism during situations like these to act as responsible gatekeepers. The usage of two separate independent sources, the task of providing reliable information and acting as a watchdog are no less important in times of crises and wars. On the contrary, it can be argued that those journalistic virtues are more important during such times than under more ordinary conditions.

The occurrence of speculations

For journalism to be reliable, one of the most important things is that the line between verified facts on the one hand and non-verified facts, speculations and fiction on the other, should always be clear. However, previous research has shown that speculations are rather common in journalism today (Nord and Strömbäck, 2003; Strömbäck, 2004). In this study, we therefore examined how frequently speculations occurred in each of the three events analysed here. The results are displayed in Table 6.

The results show that speculations of different kinds are rather common, and that it is obviously wrong to view modern journalism as merely descriptive. This is particularly true regarding speculations about who might have been responsible for the terror attacks and how the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq might develop, which occurred frequently.

The results also show, once again, that it is hard to generalize from structural factors when trying to explain journalistic content. As before, neither media type (TV vs. newspaper) nor media category (tabloid vs. broadsheet papers) nor ownership (private vs. public service) can explain these patterns.

Furthermore, these results illustrate how facts, interpretations and speculations intermingle even in what are seemingly ordinary news articles or news

Table 6 Occurrence of speculations in the coverage of the terror attacks against the USA, the US attacks in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq (%)

Speculations about . . .	<i>Dagens Nyheter</i> (BS)	<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i> (BS)	<i>Aftonbladet</i> (T)	<i>Expressen</i> (T)	<i>Rapport</i> (PS)	<i>Aktuellt</i> (PS)	<i>TV4 Nyheterna</i> (C)	Average
. . . the number of dead due to the terror attacks	11	22	12	13	18	22	19	17
. . . those responsible for the terror attacks	27	28	30	27	20	24	35	27
. . . how the US might respond to the terror attacks	20	15	12	17	25	24	22	19
. . . the number of dead due to US attacks in Afghanistan	10	10	12	10	21	12	20	14
. . . the future development of the Afghani war	27	16	17	20	32	24	47	26
. . . about future terror attacks after the war in Afghanistan	18	20	27	25	18	18	13	20
. . . the number of dead due to US attacks in Iraq	11	12	10	10	11	11	8	10
. . . the future development of the Iraqi war	29	31	28	32	33	42	37	33
. . . about the development in Iraq after the war	17	15	13	9	14	16	17	14
Average	18	24	18	18	21	21	24	

Note: BS = Broadsheet, T = Tabloid, PS = Public Service, C = Commercial. Percentages have been rounded off. Speculations are defined as statements about reality based on 'facts' that do not yet exist.

features, which contributes to a blurring of the line between fact and fiction. This is especially true since it might often be hard to discover the speculation if one does not read the texts carefully. The speculations are often reported as if they were facts.

Partisan supporters or neutral observers?

In the Swedish debate following the terror attacks and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Swedish media were accused of being too pro-American and too anti-Islamic in their coverage. As well as using the sources to ascertain whether this criticism is warranted or not, this study sought to find out how often different rhetorical figures were featured within the news articles and the news features. By rhetorical figures we mean the usage of certain stereotypical descriptions, such as 'Muslims are fanatics' – or the rebuttal of such stereotypical descriptions. In both cases the rhetorical figure is part of the journalistic content, since, for example, an argument that Muslims are not fanatics would not be made without the assumption that they might be considered to be fanatics.

The usage of these stereotypical descriptions must not be explicitly stated. If, for example, one Muslim is portrayed as a fanatic and at the same time it is implicit that he or she acts as a representative of Muslims generally, then it is counted as if the rhetorical figure 'Muslims as fanatics' occurs in the article.

In this study the occurrence of six rhetorical figures were examined, as shown in Table 7. The table shows several results. One is that the occurrence of these rhetorical figures was, generally speaking, more frequent in the coverage of the terror attacks than in coverage of the other events. Perhaps this is a reflection of the fact that journalists had more time to prepare for the coverage of the wars, and that the debate about the coverage made them conscious of the risk of portraying Muslims in an unjustifiable and non-favourable way.

A second result is that the occurrence of these rhetorical figures, to some extent, mirrors the underlying events. For example, the anti-Muslim rhetorical figures are more prominent in the coverage of the terror attacks, where Muslim individuals actually were responsible for the attacks, than the rhetorical figure 'Muslims are oppressed by the Western world', which occurred more often in the coverage of the war in Afghanistan. Muslims were, to some extent, actually the targets of the US-led attacks in the latter event.

Of course one can find examples of articles that, perhaps inspired by Huntington's theory about future clashes of civilization (Huntington, 1996), portray Muslims as fanatics in extremely stereotypical ways, and the Muslim world as a threat to the Western world. On balance, however, those articles and

Table 7 The occurrence of different rhetorical figures in the coverage of the terror attacks against the USA, the US attacks in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq (%)

	Media coverage of the terror attacks against the USA		Media coverage of the US attacks in Afghanistan		Media coverage of the war in Iraq	
	TV	Newspapers	TV	Newspapers	TV	Newspapers
The Muslim world is a threat to Western societies	10	4	6	4	2	1
Muslims are fanatics	19	13	3	3	5	2
Muslims are oppressed by the Western world	5	2	4	13	1	1
The USA is the defender of freedom and democracy	10	8	6	1	13	15
The USA is an oppressor of the poor in third world countries	5	3	3	7	0	0
USA acts as a self-approved world police force	14	14	6	5	7	9
<i>N</i>	482	179	272	76	794	336

Note: Percentages have been rounded off.

news features are exceptions. Overall, there is no reason to claim that the picture of Muslims in the Swedish media was particularly negative or that the coverage in this sense was particularly pro-American.

Conclusions: Journalism or pseudo-journalism?

What the study has shown can be summarized as follows: Generally, the journalistic coverage of the international conflicts studied did not always live up to the standards that it is reasonable to expect. There is an obvious distance between ideal and reality, even more so than in the coverage of domestic events such as the Swedish national election in 2002. The abandonment of the two-source rule, the reliance on anonymous sources, the amount of speculation and the haziness between confirmed and unconfirmed information are all clear indications of this. Even the imbalance between the use of sources that favoured the American perspective is problematic, but our assessment is that

journalism's problems are not so much due to ideology but to the mechanisms that enable or impede good journalistic quality.

The same journalistic failures appeared in all three events. In the case of the terror attacks in the USA, however, this could be explained by the total unexpectedness of the events, and the fact that the media were neither prepared nor had the routines for reporting them.

None of these explanations appears particularly likely in reference to the shortcomings in the Swedish media's coverage of the outbreak of the war in Iraq. Everyone knew that the war was coming, and even though some media predicted an earlier outbreak, the newsrooms had plenty of time to prepare themselves. Although all events bring surprises and unforeseen results, both preparedness and routines should have existed for covering the war in Iraq. And yet this study observed the same failures that appeared when studying the terror coverage and the war in Afghanistan, and these shortcomings, in some cases, were even more common in the coverage of the Iraqi war.

The media's good preparedness for the war in Iraq, or the fact that world opinion was divided, does not seem to have encouraged a greater balance between the use of cited and referred sources. Instead, other factors, such as journalistic practices and traditional news values, seem to have played a more important role. Players that usually dominate the news flow, who have the most power and greatest resources, have also found it easier to claim a place in the media.

Of course, there are numerous examples of articles and features that give undoubted expression for good journalistic practice. There are also many journalists that produce notable work under extremely difficult circumstances. At the same time, we cannot ignore this basic fact: if we are serious about the ethical rules of journalism and the standards that are reasonable to expect from the content of journalistic media, then some parts of the reporting were close to pseudo-journalism. This term covers media content that on the surface appears to be journalism, but on closer inspection fails to live up to the standards, such as using at least two sources, not reporting non-verified facts and not giving people a reasonable chance to sort facts from fiction.

To sum up, this study shows that there is often an obvious distance between journalistic ideals and practice in the Swedish media coverage of the terror attacks against the USA and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and that some parts of the coverage should be labelled pseudo-journalism rather than journalism. It also indicates that the existence of media routines and media preparations did not play such a *decisive* role for the quality of news journalism as hypothesized. The coverage of the war in Iraq was not generally of higher quality than the coverage of the war in Afghanistan – as measured by the use

of anonymous sources, at least two sources in articles and news features, the occurrence of speculations and of anti-American and anti-Muslim rhetorical figures. Instead, the coverage of the war in Afghanistan was of somewhat higher quality than the coverage of both the terror attacks against the USA and the war in Iraq.

The existence of media routines and media preparations do make a difference, but what might be even more important is the amount of coverage. The larger the news hole devoted to covering an event and the more the different media report about an event, the higher the risk that striving for correct news will be less important than striving for fast and attention-grabbing news, and the higher the risk that journalism will be replaced by pseudo-journalism. It is always important for journalists to be where the events and actions are taking place to provide as truthful and verified accounts as possible. However, what might be more consequential regarding the quality of the coverage is the size of the news hole compared with how much and how fast the editors expect the journalists to report. To put it differently: If or when the striving for fast news becomes more important as a professional norm than the striving for correct news, the journalistic quality will inevitably suffer, but all things equal, being there continues to be essential for the quality of news journalism.

The media reporting more might therefore lead to a public knowing less. The media's image of an international conflict will in most cases determine people's information and knowledge. Frequently occurring speculations and failures in the criticism of its sources therefore risk jeopardizing or even preventing citizens from forming their own informed and enlightened opinions from different versions and accounts. Thus, the question of the quality of news journalism has broad democratic dimensions.

References

- Alström, Börje and Lars Nord (2003) *Den skånska modellen*. Sundsvall: Demokratiinstitutet.
- Altheide, David L. and Robert P. Snow (1979) *Media Logic*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Asp, Kent (1986) *Mäktiga massmedier. Studier i politisk opinionsbildning*. Stockholm: Akademitlitteratur.
- Beck, Sara and Malcolm Downing (eds) (2003) *The Battle for Iraq. BBC News Correspondents on the War against Saddam and a New World Agenda*. London: BBC.
- Bennett, W. Lance and David L. Paletz (eds) (1994) *Taken by Storm. The Media, Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Brandenburg, Heinz (2003) '“Security at the Source”. Military Doctrine, Practice and Consequences of Embedded Reporting During the Iraq War', Paper presented at the 16th Nordic Media Conference, August 2003.
- Brown, Ben (2003) 'Basra – The Second City Falls', in Sara Beck and Malcolm Downing (eds) *The Battle for Iraq. BBC News Correspondents on the War against Saddam and a New World Agenda*, pp. 29–32. London: BBC.
- Djerf-Pierre, Monica and Lennart Weibull (2001) *Spegla, granska, tolka. Aktualitetsjournalistik i svensk radio och TV under 1900-talet*. Stockholm: Prisma.
- Donsbach, Wolfgang and Thomas E. Patterson (2004) 'Political News Journalists: Partisanship, Professionalism, and Political Roles in Five Countries', in Frank Esser and Barbar Pfetsch (eds) *Comparing Political Communication. Theories, Cases, and Challenges*, pp. 251–70. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Eriksson, Therese (2002) 'Vanans makt – tidningsvanor 2001', in Sören Holmberg and Lennart Weibull (eds) *Det våras för politiken*, pp. 193–211. Göteborg: SOM-institutet.
- Fichtelius, Erik (1997) *Nyhetsjournalistik. Tio gyllene regler*. Stockholm: Utbildningsradion.
- Gans, Herbert J. (1980) *Deciding What's News. A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. New York: Vintage.
- Hadenius, Stig and Lennart Weibull (2003) *Massmedier. Press, Radio & TV i förvandling*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag.
- Hallin, Daniel C. (1986) *The 'Uncensored War' – The Media and Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hallin, Daniel C. and Paolo Mancini (2004) *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hernes, Gudmund (1978) 'Det medievidde samfunn', in Gudmund Hernes (ed.) *Forhandlingsøkonomi og blandningsadministrasjon*, pp. 181–95. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Hultén, Lars J. (1999) *Orden och pengarna. Om kamp och kapitulation i journalistiken*. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur.
- Huntington, Samuel P. (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Hvitfelt, Håkan (1985) *På första sidan. En studie i nyhetsvärdering*. Stockholm: Beredskapsnämnden för Psykologiskt Försvar.
- Hvitfelt, Håkan (2002) 'En ny medievärld', in Hvitfelt, Håkan & Nygren, Gunnar (eds) *På väg mot medievärlden 2020. Journalistik, teknik, marknad*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Kalb, Marvin (1994) 'A View from the Press', in W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz (eds) *Taken by Storm. The Media, Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, pp. 3–7. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Kennedy, William V. (1993) *The Military and the Media. Why the Press Cannot Be Trusted to Cover a War*. Westport: Praeger.
- Knightley, Phillip (1975) *The First Causality*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch.
- Kovach, Bill and Tom Rosenstiel (1999) *Warp Speed. America in the Age of Mixed Media*. New York: Century Foundation.
- Kovach, Bill and Tom Rosenstiel (2001) *The Elements of Journalism. What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. New York: Crown Publishers.

- Leth, Göran and Torsten Thurén (2000) *Källkritik för Internet*. Stockholm: Styrelsen för Psykologiskt Försvar.
- Leth, Göran and Torsten Thurén (2002) *11 september 2001 – en undersökning av informationsförmedling och åsiktsbildning i svenska medier*. Stockholm: Institutet för Mediestudier.
- McManus, John H. (1994) *Market-Driven Journalism. Let the Citizen Beware?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McNair, Brian (1998) *The Sociology of Journalism*. London: Arnold Press.
- Manning, Paul (2001) *News and News Sources*. London: Sage.
- Nord, Lars W. (2001) *Vår tids ledare*. Stockholm: Carlssons.
- Nord, Lars W. and Jesper Strömbäck (2002) *Tio dagar som skakade världen*. Stockholm: Styrelsen för Psykologiskt Försvar.
- Nord, Lars W. and Jesper Strömbäck (2003) 'Making Sense of Different Types of Crises: A Study of the Swedish Media Coverage of the Terror Attacks against the United States and the US Attacks in Afghanistan', in *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 8(4): 54–75.
- Rosen, Jay (2002) 'September 11 in the Mind of American Journalism', in Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (eds) *Journalism after September 11*, pp. 27–35. London: Routledge.
- Sahlstrand, Anders (2000) *De synliga. Nyhetskällor i svensk storstadsmorgonpress*. Stockholm: JMK/Stockholms universitet.
- Seib, Philip (2001) *Going Live. Getting the News Right in a Real-Time Online World*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Shoemaker, Pamela J. and Stephen D. Reese (1996) *Mediating the Message. Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*. New York: Longman.
- SOU (1995) *Vårt dagliga blad – stöd till svensk dagspress*. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- Spelregler för Press TV Radio* (2001) Stockholm: Pressens Samarbetsnämnd.
- Strömbäck, Jesper (2000) *Makt och medier. Om samspelet mellan medborgarna, medierna och de politiska makthavarna*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Strömbäck, Jesper (2004) *Den medialiserade demokratin. Om journalistikens ideal, verklighet och makt*. Stockholm: SNS Förlag.
- Tumber, Howard and Jerry Palmer (2004) *Media at War. The Iraq Crisis*. London: Sage.
- Underwood, Doug (1995) *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Zelizer, Barbie and Stuart Allan (eds) (2002) *Journalism after September 11*. London: Routledge.

Biographical notes

Lars W. Nord is Associate Professor in Political Communication, Institute for Democratic Communication in Sundsvall, Sweden. He received his doctorate from Stockholm University in 2000, and has written several books in Swedish about media and politics.

Address: Centre for Political Communication Research, Mid-Sweden University, S-851 70 Sundsvall, Sweden. [email: lars.nord@miun.se]

Jesper Strömbäck is Assistant Professor in Journalism, Institute for Democratic Communication in Sundsvall, Sweden. He received his doctorate from Stockholm University in 2001, and has also written several books in Swedish about media and politics.

Address: Institute for Democratic Communication, Mid-Sweden University, S-851 70 Sundsvall, Sweden. [email: jesper.stromback@miun.se]