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**Introduction: “But do we want to change America into Sweden?”**

In early spring 2013, the influential British newspaper *The Economist* joined the growing ranks of international observers claiming that the longstanding view of the Nordic countries as ‘socialist’ is mistaken and obsolete. The newspaper noted that the Nordic countries, including Sweden, have scaled down welfare expenditure, pushed through tax cuts, and promoted economic growth through increased labour market flexibility. The Nordic countries are thus on the way to transforming the supposedly Social Democratic Nordic welfare state model into a more liberal “super model” – in itself a good reason “why the world should look at the Nordic countries” despite their global insignificance and apparent smallness, according to this British newspaper.¹

Nevertheless, the socialist stereotype of Sweden remains widespread in conservative political and ideological quarters, not the least in the USA.² For example, when US President Barack Obama proposed partial government ownership of the auto industry, the banks and insurance companies as a way to save these branches of the economy from recession in February 2009, several US conservative political commentators sounded the alarm, warning that the Democrats were on the road towards turning the USA into a socialist state. In his program *The O’Reilly Factor*, Fox News Channel television host Bill O’Reilly asked rhetorically: “We’ve got to defeat this recession. But do we want to change America into Sweden?”³

At present, then, there are at least two competing images of Sweden prevalent in contemporary US debate. On the one hand, there is the conservative US understanding that Sweden – and to a lesser extent the Nordic countries more generally – represent some form of socialist system. By inference, any policy inspired by Swedish or Nordic precedents can thus be rhetorically...
branded as socialist in the USA, even if the policy in question would in Sweden itself rather be understood in terms of deregulation or neoliberalism. On the other hand, there is the progressive US view that Sweden – again together with the other Nordic countries – represents a ‘third way’, combining comparatively high tax levels, relatively generous universal welfare provision, and progressive social values with high levels of competitiveness, innovation, market freedom, and socio-economic mobility. Likewise, this characterisation is made irrespective of the political profile of the respective Nordic governments. Possibly, this image is akin to European descriptions of the USA as ‘capitalist’, regardless of whether the current administration happens to be Democratic or Republican.

In view of this observation, this chapter addresses the reciprocal relationship between American images of Sweden and Swedish attempts at shaping those images. Here, Swedish public diplomacy has been tasked with the complex challenge of achieving two distinct aims vis-à-vis a multifaceted ‘global opinion’. On the one hand, it makes use of and relies upon already pre-existing views of Sweden as socialist and solidaristic in some regions, such as in the Third World. On the other hand, it aims at nuancing this image and eventually directing it away from the old image of the socialist Swedish model, to a new one of Sweden as an efficient, free, prosperous, and ultimately liberal society for parts of the world such as the USA.

This chapter tracks various views of Sweden as evidenced in US public debate, primarily through media reporting. Particularly valuable source material can be found in the reports compiled annually by the Press Bureau of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs from 1968 intermittently until 2002, tracking the press reporting of Sweden and things Swedish for official use at home. Combining these two sets of sources – US press reporting on the one hand and Swedish official ‘reports on reporting’ on the other – does not only provide insights into the development of views of Sweden abroad, it also allows us to trace how these images were relayed back to Sweden with a view of identifying the perils as well as the promises of providing ‘Sweden-information’ and ‘Sweden-publicity’ abroad as elements of official Swedish public diplomacy.

The diversity and richness of this material makes it necessary to focus on particular themes and individual media events. The chapter first looks at a series of high-profile issues in American-Swedish relations, ranging from the Swedish criticism of the USA’s involvement in the Vietnam War, via the US questioning of Swedish Cold War neutrality, to the increased Swedish

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5 Egerstrom, Prosperity Ahead.
6 Marklund, “From the Swedish model to the open society”.

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concern with the image abroad of domestic Swedish conditions from the late 1960s and onwards. In particular, it underlines the significance of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme (1969–76, 1982–6) as a key media figure in all three of these contexts. It then turns to the growing international criticism of the ‘Swedish model’ during the late 1970s and early 1980s, including the non-socialist governments of 1976–82, and Swedish attempts at dodging or ignoring this criticism. Finally, the chapter revisits the gradually more relaxed American-Swedish relations of the late 1980s, culminating in the Swedish charm offensive directed at the US public in conjunction with the 350 years’ commemoration of the founding of the New Sweden colony in 1988 and Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson’s official visit to the White House. Here, affinities and similarities were reasserted on both sides, in a clear attempt to affirm the end to earlier tensions.

Ranging from Palme to Carlsson, the chapter relies on these experiences of Swedish information efforts abroad to raise more general questions about the (im)possibility of purposive public diplomacy and active image management in framing perceptions about states, societies, and peoples. First, it follows up on the preceding phases of the history of Swedish public diplomacy as analysed elsewhere in this volume. Secondly, the chapter theorises on the importance of mutually constitutive images in any attempt at public diplomacy and the tendency towards auto-exoticisation on the part of public diplomats. In particular, it analyses the way in which representations of the nation abroad can be used as a ‘diversionary tactic’ in domestic political debates. By attracting the attention of foreign audiences, critically engaging with global opinion, and representing Sweden’s official foreign policy position as aligned with a significant and outspoken public opinion at home, public diplomacy fulfilled an important function in forming a remarkably persistent globally competitive identity for Sweden as being particularly progressive, solidaristic, or even ‘socialist’. This identity or ‘brand’ served both as an asset and as a liability throughout the period under examination here.

The Swedish image in the 1960s and the 1970s

By the time Olof Palme became Prime Minister in September 1969, Sweden already had a long record of generating positive interest abroad. Moreover, during the 1950s and 1960s Swedish officials had, with some considerable success, consciously sought to support the favourable view of

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7 For discussions on Palme as a media figure, see e.g. Elmbrant, Palme; Åsard, Politikern Olof Palme; Östberg, När vinden vände; Berggren, Underbara dagar.

8 This identity soon evolved into a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the government was regularly expected by public intellectuals and the media to take a progressive, solidaristic position on various global matters while promoting economic and social policies which could serve as an example, or a model, for foreign politicians. This identity could in its turn evolve into a disciplinarian argument in domestic Swedish policy debates, where foreign interest in the Swedish model became a political resource in its defense at home.
Sweden that was already internationally widespread, not the least in the USA. As the polarisation between negative and positive views of Sweden grew during the 1960s however, Swedish official representatives began to worry about Sweden’s international reputation. Partly in response to this concern, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs began to compile annual reports entitled *Sverige i utländsk press* ['Sweden in the Foreign Press', hereafter referred to as SIUP].

The purpose of these news reports was not to provide full coverage of foreign ‘published opinion’ – as distinct from ‘public opinion’ – on Sweden, but to chart trends in the so-called *Sverigebild* ('the Swedish image' or ‘the image of Sweden’). The first report noted that while there were several competing Swedish images in some places, people in many other countries had no idea about Sweden at all. While official Sweden had neither the capacity nor the intention to alter or construct anew the Swedish image abroad, implying a kind of arm’s length principle with regard to Sweden-information activities, it was nevertheless considered valuable to monitor the most common “misconceptions” about Sweden internationally.

The core issue concerned Swedish criticism of US engagement in the Vietnam War and corresponding US criticism of Swedish neutrality. In February 1968, Olof Palme, who was then the Minister of Education, participated in an anti-war demonstration in Stockholm and was photographed together with the North Vietnamese ambassador to the Soviet Union. At the time, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs was engaged in a classic example of behind the scenes diplomacy – what the Swedes called silent diplomacy – to bring North Vietnam and the USA to negotiations (codenamed Operation Aspen). The USA was irritated by the Swedish moves to acknowledge North Vietnam, to offer aid of 45 million USD, and to provide asylum for US deserters and draft dodgers. Together with official Swedish criticism of the US engagement in Vietnam, these events led to an abrupt end to the previously cordial American-Swedish relations, resulting in the severing of diplomatic ties until early 1970. In April 1970, to make matters worse,
the incoming US ambassador to Sweden, Jerome H. Holland, was attacked by anti-war protesters who reportedly used racial slurs. A surge of anti-Swedish reporting in mainstream US press followed that incident.\textsuperscript{14}

With ordinary channels of diplomatic contact damaged by these altercations, other instruments and arenas for political communication became all the more important.\textsuperscript{15} In an attempt to control the situation, Palme undertook an unofficial visit to the USA in June 1970. From the publicity point of view, Palme’s trip was considered a major success by the Press Bureau of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, generating some 700 articles and making Palme a well-known media figure in the USA.\textsuperscript{16} Importantly, the trip allowed Palme to engage actively with the American audience, speaking directly to US media, and explaining the Swedish position on Vietnam among other things. He spoke at the National Press Club, the Women’s National Democratic Club, both in Washington, D.C., as well as at his alma mater Kenyon College in Ohio. Palme also got airtime on nationwide television programs such as the \textit{Meet the Press} and \textit{Today} shows on NBC network and \textit{The David Frost Show} on the Group W television stations.\textsuperscript{17}

Palme’s visit saw violent protests by anti-communist US trade unionists of the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA), who threatened to refuse to handle Swedish goods in American ports. The ILA enjoyed the support of conservative columnist Victor Riesel, who had been instrumental in pitting workers against students at previous anti-war rallies, following the Kent State shootings in May 1970 that had taken place in Ohio only a few weeks before Palme’s visit to that state. By being denounced by ILA and Riesel, Palme and Sweden naturally generated sympathy from the US anti-war movement.\textsuperscript{18}

A later visit by Palme to the United Nations in New York during the autumn of 1970 served as a kind of control device to test the media impact of the summer trip. The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs reported that the US press coverage on Palme and Sweden was considerably calmer but also more favourable than during Palme’s June visit, confirming the perception that continuous direct contact between Swedish politicians and the US press and public did pay off. Unsubstantiated and ultimately false rumours of Swedish attempts at liberating downed

\textsuperscript{14} SIUP 1968; SIUP 1969.
\textsuperscript{15} SIUP 1970; SIUP 1971; SIUP 1972.
\textsuperscript{16} SIUP 1970, 21.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 17.
US pilots from North Vietnamese internment may also have contributed to this shift in US opinion.\textsuperscript{19}

In June 1972, the Swedish Prime Minister hosted the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. The conference had been in preparation since 1968, but with the notable exception of Indira Gandhi, it did not gather many heads of states and governments. However, it did draw some 1 300 journalists to the Swedish capital, giving Palme an opportunity to situate the current tension between Sweden and the USA in the broader context of the global North-South conflict, citing US military involvement in Vietnam as a form of environmental warfare.\textsuperscript{20} While this generated widespread negative press in the USA – US critics spoke of “political pollution” taking precedence over environmental degradation – press in the Third World applauded Palme. In July 1972, the readers of the influential magazine 	extit{Afrique Asie}, founded by Franco-Egyptian journalist Simon Malley in 1969 and edited in Paris, voted Palme “l’homme de l’année 1972”. He had already been named “the ‘Nehru’ of the Seventies” by the Indian press.\textsuperscript{21} This, 	extit{Afrique Asie} explained, was to be seen as recognition of Sweden’s solidarity with the Third World, and the fact that Palme had proved that rich Western countries did not necessarily have to subscribe to egotistical exploitation.\textsuperscript{22} The accolade, and the reasons given for awarding it, provides a fitting illustration of how the image of Sweden as a nation began to fuse with the image of Palme as an international statesman in the emerging global public opinion of the early 1970s.

On 23 December 1972, Palme called the US bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong a “form of torture” comparable to Nazi war crimes, causing the Nixon Administration to delay the arrival of the new Swedish ambassador to the USA. The majority of American press voices declared Palme’s comparison tactless and undiplomatic, 	extit{New York Daily News} nicknaming him “the peacenik Premier of Sweden”. The newspaper commented that “[w]e seem to recall they smugly sat out World War II and turned a neat profit doing business with Hitlerite Germany”, i.e., implying that the Swedes should consider their own reputation before criticised others.\textsuperscript{23}

With regard to the Vietnam War, Palme’s initiative has been seen as something of a failure as it did little to end the bombings but caused a new freeze in American-Swedish relations.\textsuperscript{24} Predictably however, US opponents of the Nixon Administration began to speak in favour of Sweden. In this sense, Palme’s criticism of US policies in Vietnam can be seen as an attempt to

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{20} SIUP 1972, 58.
\textsuperscript{21} “The ‘Nehru’ of the seventies”, 	extit{The Hindustan Times}, 11 April 1970.
\textsuperscript{22} SIUP 1973, 52; see also SIUP 1969.
\textsuperscript{24} Jerneck, “Sitting on the balcony”. See also SIUP 1972, 47.
engage in a kind of global public diplomacy through addressing US public opinion directly. By bringing Swedish public opinion – expressed through a petition of some 2.7 million Swedes against the US bombings in 1973 – into contact with the American liberal opposition at a time when US public opinion was already deeply divided, Sweden’s and Palme’s stance became part of the American political landscape. In January 1973, Washington Post reproached the US State Department for having stated that “[w]e are dealing here with an unfriendly country” while speaking of Sweden, noting that:

This is, of course, nonsense. … For Sweden is anything but an unfriendly country. … But the way to cope with a friend’s disagreement is, at the least, to get in closer touch, to try to explain, not to react in pique and close off the symbolic channel of communication between nations.

The Washington Post continued by noting the obvious double standards of the Nixon Administration in freezing diplomatic relations with Sweden while maintaining full diplomatic contacts with its Cold War enemies, such as the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, not to mention questionable alliances with human rights violating regimes in for example Latin America, Greece, Spain, and South Africa.

By now, Palme had become a global media figure in his own right. In interviews with US news outlets, including the influential Time Magazine, Palme pointed out that Sweden had also protested against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. He expressed regret that the new Swedish ambassador to the USA, Yngve Möller, a Social Democratic newspaperman, and “someone who could represent Swedish public opinion”, had not been welcomed in the USA. Having failed to put Möller in Washington, the Swedish government made a fairly overt attempt at old-fashioned public diplomacy damage control by simply inviting a designated journalist, Ofield Dukes of St. Louis Sentinel, on a two-week tour of Sweden in 1971. Dukes’ visit provided Palme with the opportunity both to reminisce about his own experiences of “white bigotry” during his travels around the American south in the 1940s as well as to discuss contemporary US policy

priorities, contrasting the resources spent on the space program with the efforts directed at domestic
issues, such as the “race problem” and the war on poverty. 29

To some US observers, as already mentioned, the freezing of diplomatic relations
between Sweden and the USA seemed disproportionate. As such, they provided some comic relief
to the massive external and internal problems facing the country in the aftermath of the moral defeat
in Vietnam. In February 1973, satirist Art Buchwald noted that “every country needs an enemy to
call its own” in order not to fall apart. Now, Buchwald worried that the USA would find itself
desorientated as US President and long-time hawk Richard Nixon was busy negotiating peace not
only with North Vietnam, but also with Mao’s China and Brezhnev’s Russia. Luckily enough,
Buchwald reported with relief, United States National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and his
aides had identified the next great danger to America and its values: “It’s Sweden”. The Swedish
aggression was just all too obvious for the Nixon Administration to ignore:

Ideologically, Sweden is against everything we believe in. They’re for free medical
care, free help for the poor, free homes for the aged and free love for everyone. The
United States cannot sit by and allow them to spread their message to the rest of the
globe. … The FBI has incontrovertible evidence that Sweden has financed Swedish
massage parlors all over the United States. These parlors are being used to lull
American men into a false sense of security. Swedish films have been used to subvert
the young and the disenfranchised. We know for a fact that the Sexual Revolution is
being plotted and administered directly from Stockholm. 30

To make matters worse, Buchwald observed in his delightfully acerbic take on US foreign policy,
the Swedes had also done “the unforgivable” by criticising “President Nixon’s Christmas bombing
of Hanoi”. There could be no question of resuming diplomatic relations with Sweden “as long as
Sweden continues to enslave its people and spread its diabolical massage parlors around the
world”. 31

Buchwald’s reference to Swedish enslavement relied upon Roland Huntford’s much
publicised 1971 book The New Totalitarians. Basing his work on classic dystopias such as Aldous
Huxley’s Brave New World (1932) and George Orwell’s 1984 (1947), Huntford argued that Sweden

29 Dukes, “Palme says it’s a question of U.S. will and resources”, St. Louis Sentinel, 9 November 1971.
30 Buchwald’s text on how the so-called “yellow danger” was about to be replaced by the “yellow-haired danger” was
approached these nightmarish visions of a thoroughly collectivised society, where powerful elites manipulated the population into what to feel and think, seeking to replace family life and traditional values with rational, socialistic mores. Serious social problems such as crime, drug abuse, mental illness, and venereal disease were the end result, Huntford claimed.\footnote{Huntford, \textit{The New Totalitarians}; see also Nikolas Glover’s chapter in this volume.}

Huntford’s views on Sweden became so central to the image of Sweden abroad that the officials of the Press Bureau of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs began to refer to this type of “Sweden criticism” as “the Huntford theses”.\footnote{SIUP 1972, 14–17.} As coincidence would have it, the credibility of Huntford’s eloquent but highly exaggerated criticism received unlikely support from a 1972 report on the relationship between the human environment and psychological well-being, commissioned by the Swedish Government and written by Swedish psychiatrist Hans Lohmann. In the US press, Lohmann’s report was often presented as providing official confirmation of Huntford’s basic view of Swedish society as cold, heartless, and manipulated.\footnote{Ibid., 18.} However, ironically enough and in direct contrast to Huntford, Lohmann located the causes for maladjustment in the Swedish welfare state in competitive capitalism and technological advancement, citing Palme favourably on the goal of the welfare state to ensure “quality of life” as a countermeasure to capitalist modernity. In vain, Lohman repeatedly sought to clarify his disapproval of the “Huntford theses” in several letters to the editors of US newspapers which incidentally tended to work at cross-purposes with regard to Lohmann’s intentions, rather confirming US observers in their belief that Sweden indeed had serious problems.\footnote{Ibid; Lohmann, \textit{Psykisk hälsa}. Frederick Hale has studied in detail how Swedish officials responded to Huntford’s diatribes, but does not discuss the role played by Lohmann’s report. Hale, “Brave New World”, 167–90.}

In this complex interplay between generalisations on global developments, (inter)national stereotypes, domestic political needs, global media events, and individual political statements, the consequences of personal reputations, individual fates, and freak occurrences proved virtually impossible to foresee, let alone control, for Swedish public diplomats. For example, in 1976, the Press Attaché of the Swedish Embassy in Washington believed that the visit to the USA scheduled for April of the newly installed King Carl XVI Gustaf was poised to generate positive attention in the USA.\footnote{Kastrup, \textit{Med Sverige i Amerika}, 326.} But reports on Swedish tax policies and “tax spies” in conjunction with the taxation issues that vexed internationally acclaimed cultural figures such as film director Ingmar Bergman and author Astrid Lindgren, largely nullified the expected returns. Inspired by their altercations with the Swedish tax authorities, both \textit{Time} and \textit{Newsweek} ran specials on “Sweden’s
Surrealistic Socialism” and “Utopia’s Dark Side”, respectively, elaborating on the Huntford theses later that summer.37

The randomness of the process by which images of societies are formed and transmitted was further enhanced by the importance of individuals and their degree of ‘star quality’. Palme, Lindgren, and Bergman were well-known, media-friendly, verbally proficient figures with an international reputation. They apparently managed to have, at times through their personal efforts, more impact on the image of their country than any official attempts at managing that same image.

While these individual activities had a demonstrable impact upon the image of Sweden abroad, it is also evident that Palme and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs made use of public diplomacy and direct outreach to US public opinion in an attempt to compensate for the freezing of traditional diplomacy. The increased importance placed on US public opinion in the absence of direct diplomatic contacts is reflected in the voluminous and detailed analysis of US media reporting on Swedish foreign policy in the SIUP series during these “years of frost”. Seen in this way, public diplomacy can indeed be understood as a kind of complementary or even compensatory diplomacy, once ordinary channels for diplomacy have broken down or otherwise been compromised.

The Swedish model in the early 1980s

The Swedish image abroad became increasingly complex from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, giving rise to both hopes and concerns at home. The US-Swedish tensions of the late 1960s and the early 1970s contributed to a global fusing of an originally positive interest in Palme, the supposedly ‘socialist’ welfare state, small state neutralism, active foreign policy, and Third World solidarity in many places around the world – not the least in France – with an emerging criticism of Swedish domestic policies. This brought about an increased entanglement between the image of the country of Sweden and the notion of a particular ‘Swedish model’ of social, political, and economic organisation.

With regard to traditional, closed-door diplomacy, normal contacts were re-established between Sweden and the USA in 1974, well before the Centre-Right election victory in September 1976.38 At the top level, the US relations with Sweden improved substantially.39 For example, Secretary of State Kissinger paid an official visit to Palme for a day in May 1976 in a bid to

38 Thorsell, Sverige i Vita huset, 205ff; see also Wachtmeister, Som jag såg det.
39 Leifland, Frostens år, 145–70; 179–83.
improve relations amidst widespread popular Swedish protest. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger’s visit in October 1981 was marked by “elaborate demonstrations of Swedish military power” in sharp contrast to the anti-war protests which greeted Kissinger five years earlier.

However, the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the change of government in Sweden 1976 did little to change popular views of country in the USA. While American reporting on Sweden declined during this period, the relatively negative view of Sweden lingered on in the US press. Familiar themes, such as supposedly slanted and pro-Soviet Swedish neutrality, Swedish support of Third World liberation movements, and the alleged coordination of Soviet and Swedish initiatives on disarmament and nuclear free zones were noted unfavourably in the US press, alongside more isolated events such as the illegal transfer of US technology to Comecon states via Swedish companies.

Additionally, Sweden’s growing economic problems in the wake of the 1979 energy crisis led to a labour market conflict in the spring of 1980 with circa 19% of the Swedish workforce either on strike or locked out. This conflict gained widespread attention in the US press, where it was widely interpreted as a sign of both the shortcomings of the Swedish model as well as mounting internal Swedish discontent with its socio-economic system. For example, Marquis Childs, author of the 1936 bestseller *Sweden: The Middle Way* returned with a sceptical review of Swedish society in his 1980 book *Sweden: The Middle Way on Trial*.

Yet, the Swedish crisis of the 1980s – which does not appear to have been very much worse than what the UK and the USA went through at the same time – did not seem to signal the “death” of the Swedish model to the mainstay of American observers, with the obvious exception of fringe radicals on the extreme right. Rather, it was Swedish journalists, politicians, and public officials who wrote its obituaries. Several titles on the “fall of the Swedish model” were produced by Swedish academics for the international scholarly community. Prominent Social Democrat (and later Prime Minister) Ingvar Carlsson warned that the reputation of Sweden as a model society had been shaken by the inability of the bourgeois government to handle the labour conflict of 1980, underscoring the importance of foreign exemplarity in Swedish politics. Significantly, the notion

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40 Kissinger’s visit was followed by visits by Prime Minister Ola Ullsten, Vice President Walter Mondale, King Carl XIV Gustav, and Vice President George H. W. Bush in the coming years.
44 Childs, *The Middle Way on Trial*.
of the ‘image of Sweden’ was no longer reserved for foreign policy issues, but migrated to domestic political debate around this time, as did the concept of ‘the Swedish Model’.

1983 turned out to be a new high tide of international attention directed at Sweden. Just as a decade earlier, foreign interest again focused on negative issues. Unlike in 1973, however, it was not Swedish foreign policy that primarily troubled international observers. Now, it was mainly Sweden’s domestic problems that came under scrutiny. Reports concentrated on individual phenomena considered typical of the Swedish welfare state, such as taxation, surveillance, computerisation, intrusive child custody and overly bureaucratic regulation of private consumption.

Again, Sweden was depicted by numerous journalists and commentators as Orwellian – obviously in eager expectation of the magical year 1984. This theme became so prevalent in US and Western European press clippings that the press officers at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs termed it “the 1984 syndrome” in their annual compilations. They were thus acutely aware that there were serious problems in the international image of Sweden by the mid-1980s. But they were also keen to point out that Sweden no longer generated as much negative press in the USA itself. Now, it was rather Western European media that frowned upon Sweden, according the the Ministry.

This appears a somewhat too positive interpretation, as US newspapers increasingly began to comment upon new problems in Swedish society, including emerging racism and xenophobia. Importantly, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs failed to note that American social scientists, previously turning to Sweden for social policy solutions, now began to report an increased sense of self-doubt and bewilderment among their Swedish colleagues in view of mounting social problems. This theme however did figure prominently in the important and widely circulated journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Daedalus*, in its 1984 special issue on the Scandinavian countries. Notable Swedish and Scandinavian scholars and publicists were invited to provide commentary on the declining fortunes of these societies which for so long had been held in high esteem by US academics and intellectuals. By the mid-1980s, the Swedish model, including its proverbial socialism, had evolved into a given frame for the Swedish image – a fixture which foreign reporters on Sweden had to relate to, and a point of reference which Swedish public diplomats could not escape.

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47 See e.g. Expertgruppen för forskning om regional utveckling, *Offentlig verksamhet*.
48 SIUP 1983, 44.
49 Ibid., 44–71; SIUP 1984, 101–9. An alternative label was “the 1984 reports”.
52 Graubard, “The Nordic Enigma”.

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Swedish self-portrait in the late 1980s

In February 1986 Olof Palme was assassinated – a tragic and traumatic event that in retrospect has been considered the end of the welfare state in Swedish popular historiography. As such, it shook Swedish self-perceptions to the core.\(^{53}\) In March 1987, Palme’s successor, Ingvar Carlsson, argued that Sweden was troubled by two big problems – the unsolved assassination of his predecessor and the recurring allegations of illicit trafficking and kickbacks in various Swedish arms deals with Iran and India.\(^{54}\) Carlsson worried that Sweden’s reputation abroad may be suffering, as both events challenged the international view of Sweden as a proponent of social stability and world peace.\(^{55}\)

Officially in response to the need for economic evaluation of government funding of Sweden-information and cultural exchange, Carlsson’s government formed a committee tasked with overviewing the image of Sweden abroad.\(^{56}\) However, this originally outward oriented project soon evolved into a rather introspective endeavour. One report, entitled *Sverigebilder: 17 svenskar ser på Sverige* ['‘Swedish Images: 17 Swedes Look at Sweden’], provided an insight into the thoughts of key representatives of the Swedish cultural and diplomatic elite on their homeland.\(^{57}\) This tendency towards self-reflection through foreign outlooks – which can be seen as an exercise of classic *Verfremdung* or post-colonial auto-exoticisation – generated a simultaneous surge of publications by anthropologists, ethnologists, and sociologists on Sweden and ‘Swedishness’ at the end of the 1980s.\(^{58}\) References to the image of Sweden abroad became a crucial component in attempts at reimagining the nation at home and regaining a sense of self-identity.

The increased uncertainty about the character of Swedish life and Swedish identity which set in during the 1980s apparently upgraded another dimension of the task of public diplomacy: to not only disseminate information about home abroad, but also to bring information back to home. Through the eyes of the Other, the Self would possibly become more understandable. This renewed interest in Swedish ‘self-portraits’ for internal as well as external usage actualised an untimely return to long antiquated ideas such as ‘national character’, not only through mining historical accounts but also by generating new narratives at a time when nationalism was being

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\(^{53}\) Östberg, “Olof Palme i sin tid”.

\(^{54}\) Ingvar Carlsson cited in *Svergiformationen*, 7.

\(^{55}\) No SIUP was produced for 1985, most probably due to the excessive workload faced by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in the early months of 1986 in the aftermath of the assassination of Prime Minister Palme. However, the relaxation of utopian associations did not only reduce foreign interest, but also decreased foreign desires to unravel the hidden ‘dystopia’ in the Swedish ‘paradise’. SIUP 1986; SIUP 1987; Marklund, “The Social Laboratory”.

\(^{56}\) *Svergiformationen*.

\(^{57}\) It is significant that Ambassador Bo Heinebäck, the chief of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ Press and Information Unit, chose to entitle his opening chapter “Omvärlden är vår spegel” [“The surrounding world is our mirror”], Heinebäck, “Omvärlden”.

deconstructed as invented tradition and imagined community elsewhere. In this paradoxical combination of multiculturalism and essentialism, marketing and reconstructing, promoting Swedishness abroad appeared fully compatible with deconstructing it at home.

1988: The year of New Sweden

If there’s one thing the Swedes seem to spend a lot of time thinking about, it’s their image overseas. They even have a special term for this – the Sverigebild – or literally the picture of Sweden … Foreign readers might wonder what all the fuss is about: after all, Austria and Israel have far more to worry about when it comes to their image. But the Swedes seem particularly sensitive to outside opinion and, in a rather masochistic manner, appear to lap up criticism.59

The increasingly negative reporting about Sweden abroad during the 1980s appears to have affected the self-confidence of official Swedish information efforts, as reflected in the above quote of the Stockholm correspondent of The Financial Times. The tone in official publications on Sweden changed accordingly. They abandoned the cheerful, if sometimes misplaced breeziness of the previous decade in favour of a less fancy editorial line of factual, even outright boring titles.60 Tellingly, and in contrast to earlier practice, the Swedes did not for example attempt to ‘hijack’ Scandinavia Today, a 15-month celebration of Scandinavian cultural and intellectual life starting in autumn 1982, sponsored by the US National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities. Swedish participants appeared rather content to ride the Scandinavian bandwagon.61

This, however, did not suit Swedish business interests well. Swedish exports and FDI in the USA expanded at a rapid pace, not least as a consequence of the devaluation of the Swedish krona by the incoming Social Democratic government in 1982. In autumn of 1983, the CEOs of a number of Swedish subsidiaries abroad called for more information efforts on the part of the state, in order to project a better Swedish image abroad and to boost business.62 These demands were met with little interest from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Swedish Institute. As a consequence, a number of Swedish corporations, in cooperation with American Express, established the private foundation Positiva Sverige as a means of promoting US tourism to Sweden.63 In 1983, the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce and liberal think tank Timbro with connections to the

59 Sara Webb cited in SIUP, 1987, 1; Lundberg, Bilder av Sverige, 14.
63 See issues of the short-lived bulletin Sverigebilder: Nyhetsbrev från Stiftelsen Positiva Sverige.
Swedish Employers Association took the initiative to commemorate the signing in April 1783 of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Sweden and the USA. The initiative emphasised the importance of economic and technical contacts between the American and Swedish business and research sectors. It was also endorsed by incoming Prime Minister Olof Palme, returned to office in 1982 and who provided a chapter entitled “Swedish-American Relations” to the ensuing publication, where he explained his long-time admiration of the US ideals of creativity and liberty as well as reaffirming his position as a “critical friend” of American democracy.  

Around the same time, a series of initiatives were being taken in the USA to commemorate the founding of the Swedish colony New Sweden (in present Delaware) in 1638. Behind these efforts lay long-serving executives of Swedish public diplomacy, notably Tore Tallroth, and Swedish-American civil society organisations and businessmen, including Curtis Carlson, founder of the hospitality business Carlson Companies. In 1985, when the prominent Wallenberg banking family through its holding company Investor AB began providing support in the form of logistics and human resources, the Swedish National Committee for New Sweden ‘88 could officially begin its operations. The Swedish Federation of Industries also provided support for the printing of the periodical New Sweden News for the duration of the celebrations. A highly acclaimed Washington, D.C.-based public affairs and strategic communications agency, Susan Davis Companies, was hired to manage the contacts with the US media. The agency published New Sweden News, and organised the publicity for the celebrations, including the planned state visits. The launching of the New Sweden jubilee was furthermore to be coordinated with a royal Swedish visit to the USA in April 1988.

In May 1986, the US Congress decided to ask US President Ronald Reagan to declare 1988 “The Year of New Sweden”, which eventually happened on 23 December 1987. Preparing the ground, First Lady Nancy Reagan visited Sweden in July 1987, followed up in September by Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson visiting the USA. At this point, the restoration of cordial relations between the two countries could finally be confirmed. Despite these high-profile measures, big Swedish companies often preferred to organise their own activities for the upcoming jubilee, frustrated by the lack of coordination and shared purpose between Swedish and Swedish-American sides of the operation. The sheer size of the undertaking appears to have overwhelmed the organisers themselves. It involved a multitude of...

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different forms of cooperation between public authorities, business interests, private persons, and civil society organisations. The jubilee ended up being mainly focused upon royal pageantry and cultural events, which appears to have generated less US publicity than anticipated on the Swedish side. This emphasis represented a significant break with the distinctly more politically charged presentations of Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s, with their focus on the performance of the Swedish welfare state and its underlying values.  

In conjunction with the massive celebrations in April 1988, a two-page advert in the form of an article was placed in Wall Street Journal. It demonstrated that Sweden had again returned to pole position in the six years since the Social Democratic comeback in 1982. The article underlined that Sweden’s success in the world had been achieved in “economic, industrial, and scientific fields and not through political power”. Accompanied by “A Message From King Carl Gustaf XVI” where the monarch noted that “Swedish society is based economically on a strong industry, more than 90 % of which is privately owned”, the article claimed that Sweden had again become the third richest country in the world after the USA and Switzerland in terms of GDP per capita, one of the strongest economies in the OECD, with the lowest unemployment rate, and a sound financial balance. On the basis of these impressive economic figures, the anonymous advert concluded that “[t]oday, Sweden serves as a model to many in economic policy, labor relations and, above all, industrial efficiency. Big business in Sweden is strong, active and profitable”.  

A survey of the the US press clippings from this time show that the concept of the Swedish model was again activated, but this time less with regard to the possible exemplarity of Swedish social policies, but rather with reference to its economic and technological prowess. Yet, to the Swedish backers of the commemorations, the two could hardly be separated. The Wall Street Journal article approvingly cited a New Sweden jubilee booklet, entitled Sweden Works, in which Prime Minister Carlsson compared the Swedish model to the bumblebee, noting that “[t]heoretically, its wings are too short and its body too fat for it to be airworthy. And yet it flies”. “The paradox is this”, the article went on to state, “the export industry supports a substantial part of

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68 New Sweden Commemorative Commission, New Sweden ‘88; Sverige i utländska media 1988, 68.
71 Nevertheless, representatives of the Swedish labour movement sometimes complained that business dominated the presentation of Sweden in the USA, see e.g. “Arbetarrörelsens arv har förskringrats”, Dagens Nyheter, 11 April 1988.
72 This metaphor has later gained widespread currency in Swedish public debate, see e.g. Kiels, “Flight of the Swedish bumblebee”. Sweden Works was produced by the Sweden Works Project Group, and counted Michael Hinks-Edwards and Victor Kayfetz among the otherwise anonymous contributors. They were probably Ministry for Foreign Affairs officials, presented somewhat vaguely as “a London-based industrial analyst” and “a Stockholm correspondent for various British publications”. Sweden Works Project Group, Sweden Works.
the welfare state. The welfare state, in turn, supports the export industry by providing good education, peaceful labor relations and a generally favorable business climate”.  

In some sense, the article placed in *Wall Street Journal* thus told the familiar story of the Swedish model, with a strong focus on business, efficiency, and innovation as well as tradition, very similar to the way it had been presented in the 1950s and 1960s. In another respect however, the New Sweden commemorations represented a fresh start for marketing the Swedish image in the USA. The main difference was that American policy-makers were not expected to be interested in copying or learning from the Swedish model, whether it was free-market or not. Now, the intended audience appears to have been business interests and foreign investors. This impression is further supported by the simultaneous establishment in 1988 of the nationwide Swedish-American Chamber of Commerce USA (SACC-USA).

### Conclusion: American mirrors and Swedish self-portraits

During the time period surveyed in this chapter – roughly speaking from Palme to Carlsson – American-Swedish relations oscillated from warm and friendly via cool and reserved to hot-temperered and back again. It is not possible to ascertain here to what degree Swedish public diplomacy contributed to either exacerbate or mollify these mood swings. Similar views of the Other have circulated throughout the period. But the political and social significance of these views have varied considerably over time, underscoring the importance of the context, alongside the content, of any exchange of public opinion across international borders.

Here the interrelations, reciprocity, and transfers between Swedish ‘intentions’ and American ‘receptions’ of Swedish images in USA – that is, the mutually constitutive circulation of ideas and images of the intended audiences and those who tried to affect these ideas – have played a key role. Public diplomacy is, as these experiences show, to some degree concerned with foreign and domestic public opinion about the values, positions, and foreign policy choices communicated through the traditional diplomacy of a given country. This makes it difficult to maintain a strict analytical separation between public diplomacy and traditional diplomacy.

The composition of the multifaceted, yet distinct, Swedish image has been a central concern of Swedish public diplomats throughout the time period surveyed here. It has been composed of foreign and domestic impressions of various phenomena such as the Swedish model,

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74 For a typical discussion of the imperative of attracting FDI, see e.g. Oxelheim, *The Global Race*.
75 Not to be confused with the Swedish-American Chamber of Commerce, Inc. also known as SACC New York, established in 1906.
76 Marklund & Petersen, “Return to sender”. 

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Swedish neutrality, Swedish socialism, Swedish sex, and of how life in general happens to unfold in a place called Sweden.\footnote{Glover, National Relations.} Here, Swedish public diplomacy has apparently been successful in embracing and promoting the Swedish image with regard to its welfare state component. But it has largely proven itself unable to control the ‘socialist’ component, once the latter entered into global circulation as a kind of ‘meme’.\footnote{Nicholas J. Cull identifies “‘memes’ as ideas capable of being spread from one person to another across a social network”. Cull, “Public diplomacy”, 31–54.} Swedish public diplomacy directed at the USA has long been tasked with the challenge of juggling these two aspects of the image. This task has been further complicated by the necessity of speaking to two distinct American audiences at the same time; to both sceptical US conservatives as well as sympathetic American liberals.

Another complicating factor has been the dual aspects of both Sweden and the USA – internal as well as external – activated in this transatlantic circulation of ideas and images. In the 1970s, the key confrontation in American-Swedish relations concerned Swedish as well as US foreign policy. Domestic policies played a less prominent role. By the 1970s, and in marked contrast to earlier Swedish public diplomacy, Palme neither sought to deny nor to nuance the American scripting of Sweden as a ‘socialist’ country – a characterisation he sometimes openly embraced at home, most notably in the election campaigns of 1973 and 1982, respectively.\footnote{Strand & Resén, “Socialdemokratiska”, 275.} As the US criticism of Sweden refocused in the 1980s from Sweden’s stand on international issues to the handling of Swedish domestic problems, these concerns were reversed. Now, American journalists cared less about Swedish neutrality than about the Swedish model, by now firmly coded as socialist both abroad and at home despite its mixed economy. Here, Swedish public diplomacy apparently responded to a deeper set of anxieties about the paradoxes of Sweden, the Swedish model and Swedishness – an anxiety which apparently could be to some degree soothed by a measure of auto-exoticisation on the part of public diplomats.

The public diplomacy of small states is primarily tasked with capturing attention. Here, conveying a concentrated ‘total image’ and a clear message can naturally be a key advantage. However, strong visions abroad – whether positive or negative, true or false – can also become traps that limit the freedom of movement of the nation’s diplomats. It then becomes the obvious task for public diplomacy to nuance the concentrated image which has begun to live a life of its own by providing a more pluralistic and fragmented narrative. The New Sweden Commemoration was not only an attempt at rejuvenating the Swedish image in the USA by reframing the Swedish model as to signify a free-market and explicitly non-socialist welfare state. Importantly, the New Sweden Commemoration was also an attempt to use the image of Sweden abroad as a tool for domestic
policy objectives. Knowing that US views would reverberate in Swedish debates, Prime Minister Carlsson could engage a foreign audience to make important political points at home. Views in the USA were important in Sweden for two reasons: first, for political usage at home; and second, for attracting business interests and foreign direct investment. Both of these objectives came together in the 1988 Swedish charm offensive, which served as a kind of ‘Swedish self-portrait’ reflecting internal Swedish aspirations towards change and using the intended American audience to enable introspective self-reflection.

On a general level, these objectives may distinguish small state public diplomacy from the goals of great power public diplomacy. Foreign images and self-reflections abroad appear to have played a mutually constitutive role for the small-state domestic identity politics of Sweden, where the importance assigned to foreign interest in the country gradually appears to have outsized the original foreign interest itself. It is in this small-state context that foreign views can indeed become political resources in domestic debates. If seen from this perspective, the slightly obsessive Swedish interest in relatively haphazard ‘sonar pings’ of Sweden and things Swedish in foreign public debate and media appears politically sagacious and socially relevant.\(^6\)

Partly due to successful profiling of Sweden as a critic of human rights violations and defender of the rights of small states in global politics, the foreign ‘total image’ of the domestic Swedish model developed into an ideological resource for various political actors at home – partly because of its clarity, its simplicity, and its persistence – as guaranteed by the relative distance between Sweden itself and various foreign audiences. This image was also far more stable than the Swedish society it professed to depict. As such, it could serve as a point of fixture for domestic political debate: on the one hand, the Swedish model had evolved into an ‘iron cage’ for representations of Swedish society abroad, as a kind of hyper-reality that sometimes took precedence over the mundane reporting on actual Swedish life, possibly in part due to the perceived lack of internationally newsworthy material from this comparatively calm corner of Earth. On the other, this socio-political model also worked as a particular kind of nation brand, preceeding the professional business of ‘nation branding’ as it is known today.

The New Sweden Commemoration was criticised by voices on the left for selling out the welfare state and socialism. Critics saw it as an illegitimate bid to conceptually move Sweden to the right. Interestingly, similar concerns were heard on the right at the height of the ‘years of frost’ of US-Swedish relations in the early 1970s. Conservative critics then claimed that domestic concerns motivated Palme’s criticism of the USA, rather than any desire to affect US wartime

\(^6\) Gustafsson, “Sverigeinformation”; Lundberg, Bilder av Sverige, 14–5.
policies, in an equally conceptual bid to move Sweden to the left.\textsuperscript{81} In both cases, the imaging of Sweden abroad was understood as largely deceptive, primarily attuned to ‘deflecting’ inner problems and relaying political messages back home than to engage with foreign audiences as such.

Traditionally, International Relations analysis of “diversionary foreign policy” has focused upon the use of force as a means of deflecting domestic problems or gaining domestic legitimacy.\textsuperscript{82} However, we may also consider the use of criticism of foreign agents as a tool of public diplomacy alongside the more traditional goal of attraction.\textsuperscript{83} If small states indeed have to fight for attention, one way of doing so is simply to make trouble, to raise uncomfortable issues and to make moral judgments where others are sticking to \textit{Realpolitik}, thus engaging with or awakening global opinion. By singling out specific political problems overseas, such as US aggression in Vietnam or the apartheid regime in South Africa, official Sweden did not only speak its mind and reflect domestic public opinion, but it also made itself attractive at home and abroad.

This understanding of public diplomacy as a type of ‘diversionary domestic policy’ differs from most cases of public diplomacy and nation branding which are usually uncontroversial and benign, often bordering on the bland, in their avoidance of any deliberate provocations. Here, the Swedish high-profile public diplomacy of the 1960s and 1970s provides a rather sharp contrast not only to the cases of Finland and the Baltic states analysed elsewhere in this volume, but also to the ‘normalising’ message relayed at the New Sweden Commemoration in the late 1980s. These shifts may indeed reflect domestic political concerns. But the blandness of the late 1980s also resembled the mostly successful Swedish public diplomacy efforts in the USA of the early 1960s – a benign message combining the freedom of capitalist economy and liberal democracy with the security and social care of the welfare state. This attracted the attention of both US conservatives and liberals and caused the first outburst of American anti-Swedish sentiment among the former in the early 1960s, due to their view of the welfare state as a theoretical impossibility as it challenged the very roots of their ideological beliefs. Republicans reacted strongly to Swedish domestic policies because of the successful combination of freedom and security through the welfare state that those policies appeared to present. This made it important for US conservatives to attempt to disprove that the Swedes actually managed to achieve what they were claiming to achieve.\textsuperscript{84}

The diverse representations of Sweden in both these cases – Palme’s criticism of the USA and Carlsson’s embrace of free market ideology – were, because of the presence of the

\textsuperscript{81} For an influential statement of this thesis, see Bohman, \textit{Inrikes utrikespolitik}. For a critical analysis, see Bjereld & Demker, \textit{Utrikespolitiken som slagfält}.

\textsuperscript{82} Smith, “Divisionary foreign policy”.

\textsuperscript{83} Jerneck, \textit{Kritik som utrikespolitiskt medel}.

\textsuperscript{84} For a discussion of this, see Marklund, “A Swedish Norden”, 263–87.
globalising media, just as much attuned to affect the national imaginings of Swedish constituents as they were intended to shape the foreign public’s image of Sweden. In the first case, it was a question of situating Sweden as a progressive and solidaristic country in a world plagued by Cold War tension and North-South inequality. The quarrel with the Americans served to strengthen this profile of Sweden abroad and at home. In this way, Palme’s personal and Sweden’s official stance on the Vietnam War underlined how Sweden was more American than America itself — more *liberally* American, that is. ⁸⁵ Again, Sweden thus became simultaneously attractive and dangerous to US observers, less in its own right, and more as an ‘American mirror’ showing another America.

In the second case, the ‘Swedish self-portrait’ as seen in the USA could serve as a mirror for the utopian domestic project of revamping the supposedly stagnating Swedish model of old, into a new vision of an open, efficient and competitive society. In this sense, both these experiences of Swedish public diplomacy directed at US audiences exemplify the way in which public diplomacy can be understood as not only a way of reaching out and engaging with foreign audiences as is traditionally held. On a fundamental level, public diplomacy can also be concerned with providing a particular kind of ‘heterotopia’, as an ‘other space’ for internal political projections and cultural self-reflections — just as the reflection that you see in the mirror does not exist, yet the mirror is a real object that shapes the way you relate to your own image. ⁸⁶

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⁸⁵ A possible parallel could be found in Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal’s 1944 formulation of ‘the American Creed’ as a specifically US moral standard which the discrimination against African-Americans violated. See also SIUP 1973, 51.