

# The Norwegian Media Image of the War in Afghanistan

## *Peacekeeping or Aggression?*

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the framing of Norwegian media coverage of the war against terror in Afghanistan with special emphasis of the coverage of the Norwegian military presence in Afghanistan. Two main issues are discussed: 1. How was the start of the war covered in the media in October 2001? 2. In what context was the Norwegian military presence covered? The two newspapers analyzed are Aftenposten and VG. The choice of these two newspapers was made to include Norway's largest and potentially most influential morning paper (Aftenposten) and its largest tabloid, as well as largest newspaper (VG). Quantitative as well as qualitative methods are used to analyze the coverage. Both Aftenposten's and VG's coverage on the first day of the war in Afghanistan are dominated by pro-US framing and the use of Western sources. The pro-US framing is more obvious in Aftenposten than in VG.

**Keywords:** journalism, news coverage, war, afghanistan,

### Introduction

The attack on Afghanistan began on October 7 2001, and was an expected response to the attacks of hijackers on several targets in the US on September 11 of the same year. The attack was expected because US President George W. Bush had warned in several speeches that such an attack would come. "Either you are with us or with the terrorists" he said in his television speech of September 20. This was the warning of a dicotomized global conflict, divided into two groups, "friends" and "enemies". The attack was also the beginning of "the war on terror", with the declared aim of chasing potential al-Qaida members from their bases in the Afghanistan mountains and removing the Taliban regime<sup>1</sup> (Ottosen 2002b).

Norway and the Norwegian media had to take a position in this new landscape in the war against terror. Norway has traditionally been a close ally with the US and has been a loyal NATO member since 1949 (Ottosen 2001). After the Cold War and the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact NATO developed a new activist policy, representing a break with the traditional collective self-defence concept. Norway has played an

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active role in the NATO-led IFOR and SFOR forces in Bosnia and the KFOR forces in Kosovo. Norwegian forces were involved in a military intervention for the first time since the Second World War when the former Yugoslavia was attacked in April 1999. At that time, Norway provided a military support function in the attack and placed fighter planes and Norwegian pilots at the disposal of the attacking NATO force. The war in Afghanistan represented an additional dimension, with Norwegian ground forces taking part in the hunt for al-Qaida forces in the mountains of Afghanistan. With the exception of the Socialist Left party (SV), all parties in Parliament (Stortinget) agreed to answer in the affirmative when US requested Norwegian military support in Afghanistan. Under US command Norway contributed fighter planes, transport planes, helicopters and ground forces. A central task of the Norwegian forces was to clear undetonated mines on the ground. However, some of the Norwegian forces' tasks were kept secret, explained to be for security reasons. (Garbo 2002:40-50).

The historical dimension of this military action was underlined when NATO formally took over leadership of the international peacekeeping forces (ISAF). This was the first time in history that NATO assumed such a responsibility outside Europe, although no one doubts that the US will remain the dominant force within ISAF. As a commentary in a Norwegian newspaper put it, "In practice, ISAF is the lifeguard for a president, hoping to be president also outside Kabul" (*Dagbladet* 10 September 2003).

In Afghanistan, Norwegian soldiers were using live ammunition instead of blanks for the first time since the Second World War. This brought important legal issues to the surface in the public debate, with several serious issues being raised. Did the action have a legal basis in international law? Would the US or Norwegian officer have control over the Norwegian soldiers? In a situation in which Norwegian soldiers had the potential to violate international law, should they then refer to Norwegian or US law? These issues raised in the public debate in Norway were followed by similar issues when Norway sent troops to Iraq in the spring of 2003<sup>2</sup>.

An interesting aspect of the Norwegian debate was that military personnel participated in the debate to a larger extent than they usually have, since Norwegian officers traditionally have kept a low profile in discussions concerning foreign and security policies. Now, many officers and their professional organisations were active. If they were going to war they wanted clear answers from the politicians<sup>3</sup>. This debate must be seen in the light of discussions during the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. At that time, Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik was criticized for refusing to call the action a war, calling it instead a humanitarian intervention. Four years later Bondevik criticized his own position at that time in front of a large audience of NATO officers, now admitting that it should have been called a war in the first place (*Dagbladet*, 3 September 2003). This self-criticism was an attempt to meet discontent within military circles with Norwegian politicians who were criticized for not properly standing behind the soldiers.

Besides the running news coverage of the military actions in Afghanistan, the media also served as a forum for public debate through editorials and comments from editors and journalists. There were also many letters from readers expressing concern over these issues.

## The Issues

The purpose of this article is to give a picture of Norwegian media coverage of the war in Afghanistan, with a special emphasis on the coverage of Norway's role in the con-

flict. As a small country with traditionally close relations to US, Norway had to balance, like many other small countries, between the need to be loyal to its traditional aim of keeping its actions within the framework of international law, and on the other not to provoke US with criticism and behaviour that could be regarded as disloyal and thus harm the bilateral relationship. This dilemma must also be seen as a back carpet for the main stream media which traditionally has been loyal to Norwegian security policy (Ottosen 2001).

I will raise two main issues:

1. How was the start of the war covered in the media in October 2001?
2. In what context was the Norwegian military presence covered?

The official American picture of the war was that it was a necessary step in the “war against terror” after September 11. The critics, however, saw it as one of several examples of American hegemonism and imperialism (Chomsky 2001). After presenting the Norwegian media image of the war I will discuss the framing of the Norwegian military presence in the selected newspapers. In all wars, involved parties try to place their own acts and motives in the most favourable light. This is the very purpose of war propaganda. According to Jowett and O'Donnell, propaganda “is the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of propagandist” (quoted from Jowett & O'Donnell 1992).

All modern wars are also media wars. Since the Gulf War in 1991, when CNN had its commercial breakthrough with 24-hour satellite broadcast, the battle to win hearts and minds in a global context has also been a media battle (McLaughlin 2002). Media strategies are developed by involved parties to win the propaganda war, and all sides try to control and influence the journalists (Solomon 2001). Different methods are used in this process, including persuasion and physical control over the journalists' movements. If it is not possible to keep journalists away from the battlefield through restrictions, censorship security regulation they will be included in different systems of mutual corporations such as pools and embedded systems (Ottosen 2001).

The purpose of all media strategies is to have the war coverage represented in the media on a track as close to the official propaganda version as possible. Through the embedded programme during the Iraqi invasion, the Pentagon changed from its policy during the Afghanistan war when heavy restrictions were placed on journalist access to the battle zone. Through the embedded programme, journalists were given military ranks and operated closely with soldiers at the front (Lewis et al. 2003). It is outside the framework of this paper to discuss the embedded system, however it should be noted that during the Afghanistan war journalists had little access to the military operations, if any at all. Working conditions and access to information are naturally of great importance for the coverage. In a summary of the working conditions for journalists in Afghanistan, *Colombia Journalism Review* wrote that journalists had been denied access to American troops to a larger extent than in any other conflict (Ottosen 2002a:53).

One of the consequences of lack of access to the battlefield is a fragmented news picture. Lack of access to sources and first-hand information is also a potential ethical issue. Less information and opportunity to check sources means a higher likelihood of “falling into the propaganda trap” and for journalists being used in propaganda strategies and will have consequences for the framing of the news coverage (McLaughlin 2002:15).

## Media Frames for Norwegian Military Presence

One issue to be discussed in this article is what possibilities the Norwegian government had to create an image of the Norwegian military presence in Afghanistan that was different from that of the US presence. The issue must be raised since there was a potential conflict for the media to simultaneously defend the Norwegian self image as a “peacemaker” and be involved in a military operation that some critics said was a violation of international law (Garbo 2002).

The framing by the media of an event to a large extent decides the framing of the public debate (Tuchmann 1978, Parenti). In this situation, the media image of the Norwegian military presence is important. Is it framed as a “peace effort” or a violation of international law? The answer to this question is important in understanding the character of this conflict in the global conflict picture.

An important issue in this respect is the framing of the Norwegian military presence. Irene E. Rossland, a student in the masters program in journalism at Oslo University College, conducted a study of the media coverage of a press tour to Afghanistan organized by the Norwegian Military. Her findings show that Norwegian journalists portray the potential problems of the Norwegian military presence only to a small extent. The coverage’s main focus was on positive connotations linked to the ambitions of preventing terror and helping the civilian population (Rossland 2003).

In connection with the coverage of “Norwegian” issues, it can be useful to see it in the light of Pierre Bourdieu’s interpretation of “doxa” (based on Ottosen 1994). Doxa is a room with closed doors and is thus excluded from public debate. The term doxa is taken from the Greek doxa, meaning the non-political or the issues not up for discussion. According to Bourdieu, there are doxic rooms in all societies, something one does not question since it affects fundamental structures in a society being taken for granted. According to Bourdieu, the opinion has access to two forms of discourses, the heterodox (the questionable) and the orthodox (the correct). But the doxic room itself is not open for discussion (von der Lippe 1991).

In this context issues such as access to oil, US strategic interest and geopolitical aims are all part of doxa and are thus not discussed in the running news coverage. Such issues, which John Pilger calls a hidden agenda, are left to dissidents and are not brought into the framework of mainstream media (Pilger 1998).

## Sample

My research material includes both television (the traditional public service channel NRK and the commercial channel TV 2) and newspapers (*Aftenposten* and *VG*). In this paper I will concentrate only on the newspapers.

The choice of these two newspapers was made to include Norway’s largest and potentially most influential morning paper (*Aftenposten*) and its largest tabloid, as well as largest newspaper (*VG*). Both newspapers are owned by Schibsted, one of three major mediacompanies in Norway controlling the majority of the newspapers in the country. It should be noted here that *VG* as a tabloid should not be compared to British and German tabloids like the *Sun* and *Bild Zeitung* since *VG* is regarded as a serious newspaper in tabloid format. The choice of these two newspapers as a sample should not be regarded as representative of the Norwegian press, since open critics among the newspapers such as the left-wing *Klassekampen* and the more liberal-oriented *Dagbladet* are not included. But the sample is an indicator of the Norwegian mainstream media picture of the war, including the fact that *VG* was the highest selling newspaper in Norway

at the time with a daily circulation of 390,000 with an additional 100,000 on Saturdays (figures from 2002).

## Methodology

I will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology.

The quantitative method will be used in registering articles by genre, use of sources and framing the article. The tendencies in the framing will be coded on the basis of different ideological positions towards the conflict. The coding of each article is documented in a report made by my research assistant Trine Ustad Figenschou (Figenschou 2004). Here I will merely summarise the main findings. The strength of this method is that it allows us to identify the presence of certain ideological positions (or styles) and use of sources in a quantitative manner. However, this analysis must be used carefully since it does not give a clear picture of the main story in each article; with *main story*, I refer to Teun van Dijk's definition (main framing, title and lead) (van Dijk 1988). This quantitative presentation must therefore be analysed together with more detailed analysis of the coverage of the first day of the war (October 8), the editorials, etc.

The framing will be analysed according to the following five categories:

- A) US hatred: The US was attacked because it itself is the largest evildoer and terrorist. In the September 11 attacks, US tasted its own medicine. The attacks on US targets will not stop before the Americans have left Saudi Arabia, Israel has left Palestine and the sanctions against Iraq are lifted.
- B) US-critical: The US was attacked. The terrorists are criminals who should be prosecuted by an international court and the conflict should be solved through diplomacy. This is an issue for the UN and should not be dealt with by the US or NATO on its/their own. The enemy is not a nation but a loose network of individuals, thus Article 5 in the NATO charter is irrelevant. (This position might be combined with a critical stand against the Taliban and al-Qaida)
- C) Norwegian angle: What is the consequence for Norway? Norwegians are at the centre of the events because we are also threatened, as a Western nation and NATO member). As a nation we must take precautions to defend ourselves. The story defends its place because Norwegians are in focus. (Stories in which Norwegians are interviewed or comment are not included)
- D) Neutral: Straightforward situational description of events, comments on facts, rescue operations, etc.

## *The Political Background*

After the terrible events of September 11 there were fewer doubts as to what means could be justified in fighting terrorism compared to the case of the war against Yugoslavia. There was a political consensus that "something had to be done" to answer the attacks in New York and on the Pentagon. The question was when and where the counterattack would come. In an earlier work I have shown how President Bush's speech to the nation on September 20 was covered in *VG* and *Aftenposten*. At the time, *VG* referred to the speech in a somewhat more uncritical way than did *Aftenposten*, and supported its content in an editorial. *Aftenposten* had a more analytical approach and expressed some doubts in its editorial as to whether President Bush's harsh rhetoric was the right solution in the battle against international terrorism (Ottosen 2002b). My hy-

pothesis is thus that we will find similar differences between *Aftenposten* and *VG* in the coverage of the war in Afghanistan.

President Bush's rhetoric was obviously a propaganda discourse, intended primarily for the US audience. It left no doubt about Bush's agenda. Obviously there existed true empathy with the 3,000 human beings left dead in what once was the World Trade Center. We were reminded of their destiny through their pictures and names in the newspapers and the media images of their mourning relatives closing ranks with their president. These "worthy victims" were visible, to use an expression of Noam Chomsky (Herman & Chomsky 1988). The "unworthy victims", the Afghan civilian population who died as innocent victims of the warfare in similar numbers in the months to come, were however not represented in the media with pictures and names. They should remain anonymous, as "collateral damage" in a "just" and seemingly unavoidable war (Ottosen 2002b).

One issue discussed in this article is the media coverage of the Norwegian military presence in Afghanistan. A hypothesis is that the image of the Norwegian presence will be framed as "good-doing", to borrow an expression from the Norwegian historian Terje Tvedt.

In an analyses of the image of the Norwegian development aid, Tvedt has identified a segment in Norwegian society including the Ministry of development aid, NGO's receiving funding from the government and journalists writing about north-south issues, defending Norwegians as "good-doers" regardless of the actual policy. The good will of the Norwegian efforts to help the poor in the south out of poverty is protected against any form of critical discourse (Tvedt 2003).

This image of Norwegians as being by definition "good-doers" can easily be transferred to Norway as a "peace factor" in the international arena. This image is cultivated in the Israeli-Palestine conflict with the Oslo channel as bridge builder in the conflict, even though this channel in the end proved to be a dead end. The political content of the Oslo channel is never blamed, because Norwegians are by definition good-doers. The same approach can be used to analyse the role of Norway as mediator in conflicts in countries such as Sri Lanka, Guatemala and Sudan. Norway is never blamed if the peace process fails, because as good-doers we can never be responsible for anything bad or evil (Tvedt 2003). My hypothesis is that the media image of the Norwegian military presence in Afghanistan will be coloured by this concept of Norwegians as good-doers. This was actually clear from the very beginning, when the military force sent there was defined as a humanitarian force with the main purpose of clearing mines and taking care of security. Potentially problematic side effects of the Norwegian military presence, such as the potential killing of innocent civilians, were closed in the doxic room, to use Pierre Bourdieu's expression (von der Lippe 1991).

In addition, we have the cultural issue linked to the tendency of Western media to see the world through Eurocentric lenses. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said has traced the historical roots of Eurocentrism back to Western colonialism. Elisabeth Eide has documented how Eurocentrism colours the contemporary media coverage of Afghanistan, using an example from BBC News on March 14 2002 in which it was stated "Eight US servicemen have died and 49 have been wounded in the action so far. Several allied Afghans have also been killed".

Eide asks the rhetorical question "Were any Afghans wounded? How many? Is it too much trouble to count the local victims?" (quoted from Eide 2003).

## Content Analysis

The following time spots have been selected for analysis of the coverage in *VG* and *Aftenposten*:

- The use of sources and framing in the first week of the war (8-14 October 2001)
- All articles reviewed from the coverage on the first day of the war (8 October)
- Additional relevant articles collected on a random basis to analyse the Norwegian military presence

In the following content analysis I will look at the framing of articles and use of sources, with basis in the following variables<sup>4</sup>:

### 1. Nationality (country of origin of sources)

- A) America
- B) Norway
- C) Other NATO countries
- D) Afghanistan
- E) Russia
- F) Other Arab countries
- G) Others

### 2. Genre

- A) News
- B) Feature/reportage
- C) Commentaries
- D) Editorials
- E) Petit
- F) Briefs
- G) Interviews

## Findings

*Aftenposten* featured 104 articles the first week of the war and *VG* 100. There were few differences between the two newspapers regarding genre. Most articles were news stories (68% in *Aftenposten* and 63% in *VG*). *VG* contained more editorials (4 vs. 3) and but *Aftenposten*, on the other hand, contained more commentaries (16 vs. 7).

As we can see, *Aftenposten* and *VG* have politicians as their main sources the first week of coverage, indicating that the political framing of the coverage was quite substantial.

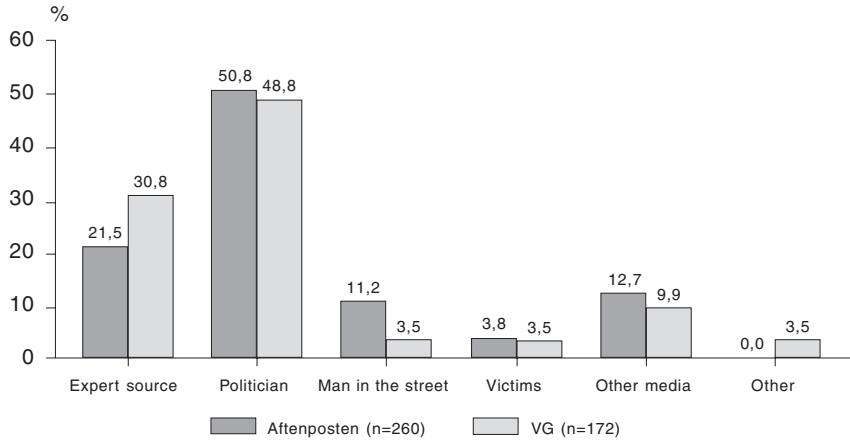
In both newspapers nearly 50% of the sources were politicians. *Aftenposten* contained more use of “man on the street” sources than did *VG* (11.2% vs. 3.5%), whereas *VG* contained more use of “expert sources” than did *Aftenposten* (30.8% vs. 21.5%). Over all, this is an indication that *VG* had a somewhat more elite-orientated coverage than did *Aftenposten*.

**Table 1.** Overview by Genres on the Coverage of the war in *Aftenposten* and *VG* October 8.-14. 2001

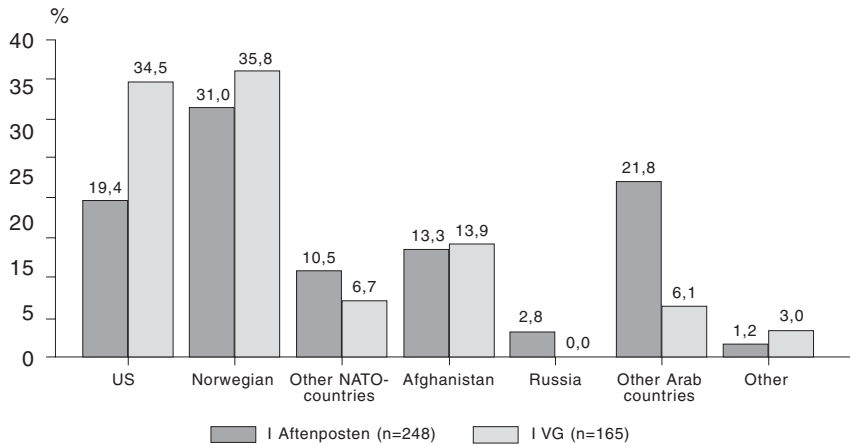
	Aftenposten		VG		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
News	71	68,3	63	63,0	134	65,7
Feature-/reportage	2	1,9	4	4,0	6	2,9
Commentaries	16	15,4	7	7,0	23	11,3
Editorials	3	2,9	4	4,0	7	3,4
Notes	12	11,5	21	21,0	33	16,2
Interviews	0	0,0	1	1,0	1	0,5
Total	104	100,0	100	100,0	204	100,0



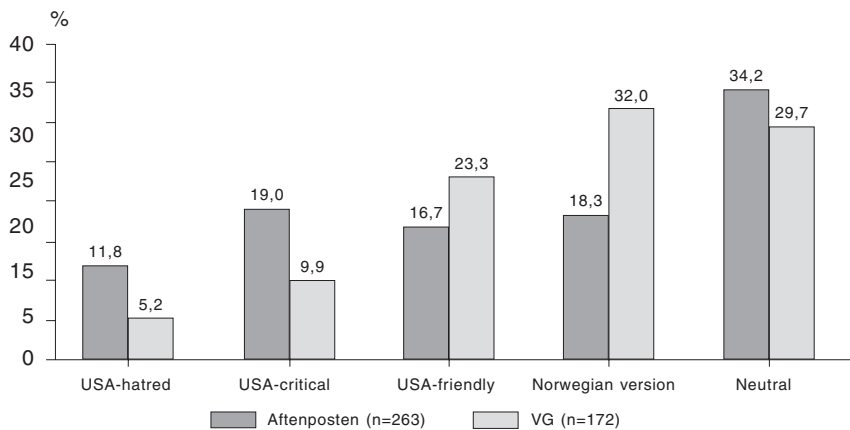
**Figure 1.** Sources by Category in VG and Aftenposten October 8-14 2001 (per cent)



**Figure 2.** Sources by Nationality in VG and Aftenposten October 8-14 2001 (per cent)



**Figure 3.** Framing of Articles in VG and Aftenposten October 8-14 2001 (per cent)





If we look at the national origin of the sources, *VG* had more US sources than did *Aftenposten* (34.5% vs. 19.4%). *VG* also had more Norwegian sources than did *Aftenposten* (35.8% vs. 31%). We can conclude that western sources dominated in both newspapers, but that *Aftenposten* featured substantially more Arab sources than did *VG* (21.8% vs. 6.1%).

The tendency in the framing confirms my hypothesis that *VG* had a more “Norwegian”-oriented and “US-friendly” framing than did *Aftenposten*. It should be noted, however, that the “neutral” framing was the largest category in *Aftenposten* (34.2%) but was also quite dominant in *VG* (29.7%). It is also noteworthy that the category US hatred was larger than one might expect (11.8% in *Aftenposten* and 5.2% in *VG*). This is due to quite a few quotations from Arab sources. One should be careful in drawing overly wide conclusions based upon this framing analysis since it is based on findings statements at any level in the text and not performed according to what Teun van Dijk (1988) calls “the main story”, i.e. title, lead and angling of the article. Thus, this framing must be seen in connection with the following detailed analysis of the first day of the coverage.

## **The Qualitative Analyses**

### **The Coverage in *Aftenposten* on October 8**

*Aftenposten* featured 19 articles on the first day of its coverage, on five pages (in addition to the front page). Much of the space on page 2 is used to present the US perspective and justification for the attack. Other countries’ reactions to the attack are also presented here. For me it is of special interest to see the framing of the Norwegian government’s position on “the war against terror”. On the front page, we see a reference to Somalis in Norway under investigation, suspected of whitewashing funds for potential acts of terror. One story, with no sources referred to, has the title “Oslo bought competence to meet terror”. It is a story about the municipality of Oslo buying advanced equipment to deal with potential gas attacks. The journalist explains the lack of sources in this way: “Because of the local government’s fear of frightening its own population it is not easy to have the story of these precautions confirmed by open sources”.

In another story, the focus is on the threat of terror against Norway under the title “Norway: Increased risk of terror” and is based on a press conference with Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg. Another story, entitled “Norway’s support for the war”, features an interview with Norway’s Foreign Minister, Torbjørn Jagland, expressing Norway’s support for the US and underlining the fact that Norway is not at war. The only story focusing on the civilian population in Afghanistan is an interview with the leader of the Afghan association in Norway who expresses mixed feelings about the attack. He expresses his understanding for the war but also talks about his fear for civilian casualties (Title: “Fears the the death of innocent civilians”).

On this day *Aftenposten* featured an editorial with the title “Operation Enduring Freedom” Here, support is expressed through the words “The US has broad international support and sympathy”. The US position is expressed by President Bush in the reference to a speech in which he stated that this was not an attack on the Afghan people, but on terrorists and their supporters. Bush also promised the Afghan people massive humanitarian support. He also expressed fear for a long-lasting military operation, but the main focus is on the sympathy for the operation: “Because of the cruelty of the acts on September 11, an alliance has been formed in the period following the attacks, based on the sympathy and support for the US attacks from the larger part of the world”. With reference to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, *Aftenposten* underlined that this was not

a war on Islam. It is also pointed out that all wars are human tragedies. The language portrayed the attack in neutral terms such as “military operation” and “military attack”.

The title and beginning of the editorial are clearly within a US-friendly framing, whereas later in the article there is a mixed message stressing the need for humanitarian aid, diplomacy and political initiatives. Here we see US-critical tendencies in the words “Broad alliances and non-simplified enemy images must be the basis for the war against terror in the time to come.”

### **The Coverage in *VG* on October 8**

*VG* had 19 stories on 17 pages on its first-day of coverage of the war. It is rare for *VG* to have so much foreign news, so this underlines the significance of the event. The focus on bin Laden on the front page is a typical tabloid framing compared to the more political approach in *Aftenposten*. Earlier research on war coverage found similar personification of the conflict expected to simplify complex issues on the front page at the news stand (Ottosen 1994).

The first pages inside the paper are dominated by heavy US sources such as Donald Rumsfeld, informing readers that there will be secret operations, and a statement from President Bush underlining that this war represents a “new front” in the war on terror. *VG*, to a larger extent than *Aftenposten*, focuses on the issue of refugees and the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. A spokesman from UNCHR expresses a fear of there being a million refugees. A statement from English Prime Minister Tony Blair (referred to from a television speech) underlines that everything is being done to avoid civilian casualties. In a comment, Donald Rumsfeld claims that the war is not directed towards Afghans or Afghanistan. This is a typical propaganda discourse within the framework of the “humanitarian intervention” known from the war in Kosovo (Nohrstedt, Höier and Ottosen 2002). As was the case in the Kosovo coverage, *VG* does not reflect the fact that the war in itself might represent a humanitarian threat. In a statement in another article, Donald Rumsfeld is quoted as saying that since the Taliban, and not civilians, are the target, planes have started dropping aid at the same time as bombs are dropped (p.6). What is not commented on by *VG* in the news during the first week (but is mentioned by columnist Marie Simonsen in her October 14 column) is the strange practice of dropping bombs and aid in the same operation. When these actions also included cluster bombs that looked like toys, the situation became problematic for the NGOs trying to concentrate on humanitarian aid. This was also heavily criticized by many NGOs. Another peculiarity about the coverage in *VG* was the massive documentation of the war in the form of graphics, maps and other illustrations (pp. 6 & 12-13).

*VG* also focused on the danger of new terror attacks since the war would represent a provocation to al-Qaida. On pages 10-11 are stories on the fear of terror in the US and London. Within a discourse analytical framework these stories remind us of the “worthy” victims of September 11 and serve as justification for the current attacks.

*VG*, like *Aftenposten*, used the Afghan exile groups in Norway to express worries about the civilian population. Tariq Bazger, editor of the newspaper *Dawlat* published in Norway for refugees, expressed mixed feelings about the war in the same way as his fellow Afghan colleague at *Aftenposten* did.

“Don’t touch the civilians” is the message expressed in his title (p.14). “The Norwegian angle” is even clearer in *VG* than in *Aftenposten*. The title “Increased fear of terror (pp. 15-16) focuses on the danger of terror attacks on Norway. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg expresses a fear of terror as he simultaneously gives his support to the US,

and claims without counterarguments that the attack on Afghanistan has a solid foundation within international law. This interpretation of international law is later modified by one of Norway's most prominent experts on international law, professor Geir Ulfstein (Ulfstein 2003). Minister of Foreign Affairs Thorbjørn Jagland says in a comment that Norwegian authorities might mobilise Reserve Forces against the danger of terror. In the article "Secure more Norwegian cities" authorities suggest increased protection against potential gas attacks on Norwegian targets. In a story under the headline "Stay at home", the Norwegian Civil Defence advises Norway to stay in their houses if Norway is attacked with chemical weapons. Claus Hagen, Director for the Council for Civil Defence is quoted as saying that in the case of a chemical attack people are safer in their homes than in shelters.

This focus on Norway as a potential victim is contrasted by the toning down of Norway as potential aggressor. The only focus at this time on Norway's potential contribution to the war is in the form of a denial expressed in the title "Norwegian ships *not* in the war zone" (author's emphasis). In this article, the Norwegian Minister of Defence underlines that the Norwegian warships that Norway has placed at NATO's disposal are not being activated at this stage. *VG* and *Aftenposten* have one editorial each on October 8. What is unusual about the editorial in *VG* is that it covers an entire page while it is usually no more than a column. On September 12 *VG* also runs a full-page editorial. Already in the title ("Retaliation"), the war is linked to September 11. Through two pictures from the ruins of the World Trade Center, the link to September 11 is obvious. One picture is from the memorial at which fire-fighters and rescue personnel are mourning with their heads hung, under the Stars and Stripes. The editorial is unconditional in its support for the war and has a clear-cut US-friendly framing: "Norway must wholeheartedly support the US and UK attacks against bases and military installations. There must be no shred of doubt that our country is fully behind the advances to stop the threat that resulted in mass deaths at Manhattan". *VG* also claims that Norway is committed by paragraph 5 in the NATO charter to join the "war on terror". In an article in a juridical journal, Professor Geir Ulfstein later argued against this interpretation of paragraph 5 but concluded that the attack on Afghanistan could be justified according to the principle of right to self defence (Ulfstein 2003).

The editorial is a rather detailed review of the global conflict picture in the world as a whole after September 11 and addresses the risk of terror by referring to bin Laden's "Insane quasi-religious message". Still it underlines that "The West has a great deal to be ashamed of and humanitarian and diplomatic efforts are necessary to correct mistakes of the past". After this passage, which can be read partly as a US-critical remark, *VG* returns to its full support for the war with the sentence "In this conflict it is impossible to react differently from what Bush and Blair have expressed during the past month: the battle must be fought on all fronts, political, diplomatic and military".

The editorial has many loaded and strong words about the terror: "awful attack" "the same disgusting companionship" "this evil and its causes". The American attack is on the whole portrayed in a more cautious manner, for example "the attack on bases and military installations". The exception is the argument for the need of a military attack, where it is stated that the terrorists will not be stopped "without the brutal use of military force". Several expressions are used to underline the editorial's main message, that that Norway must support the US: "There must be no shred of doubt that our country is fully and wholeheartedly behind (the war)". War resisters, on the other hand, are described as naïve: "It would be naïve to believe that the enemy of the international community that we here face will be broken down without the use of brutal military power". The editorial also com-

ments on the danger of loss of civilian lives, but the wording here is different from that of the descriptions of the deaths of September 11, which are described as “mass deaths”. The danger of new terrorist attacks with potential mass death is described as “new terrible attacks on civilian targets”. Unwanted deaths because of the warfare in Afghanistan are likened more to collateral damage through the expression “will undoubtedly also hit civilians”.

The editorial is overall US-friendly in its framing, but has an element of US-critical tendencies, especially in the urgent need for humanitarian aid and diplomacy (particularly towards the Palestinians).

### **Norway as Good-doer or Bad-doer: When Bombs Hit a Wedding**

In February 2002 *The New York Times* revealed that after September 11 the Pentagon had opened a new office called the “Office of Strategic Influence”. The office was to be headed by General Simon Worden, and was opened when President Bush wanted to expand the “war on terror” to Iraq and other “rogue states”, defined by Bush as the “axes of evil” (including Iraq, Iran and North Korea). An important task for the new office was to steer foreign media and western politicians towards a more pro-US attitude, allegedly with a method that was a mixture of truths and lies (*Aftenposten* 28 January 2002). Shortly after the existence of the office became public, it was closed due to the controversial issue of the use of black propaganda (lies). But according to the *Los Angeles Times* the same propaganda activities continued under the name “Special Plans”, under Central Command (Arkin 2003).

In a conflict situation such as in Afghanistan we must be prepared to face propaganda and media strategies since the war zone is also under the constant influence of PSYOPS operation, including the spreading of leaflets and small radios that can only be used when tuned to a channel broadcast from aeroplanes. In addition we have factors mentioned earlier in this article, including the issue of “worthy” and “unworthy” victims whereby the people “down there”, to borrow Elisabeth Eide’s expression, have a tendency to be counted among the “unworthy” (Eide 2003). When civilians are killed by “the enemy” it can be portrayed as the “true character” of the “evil” others. But civilians killed by “our side” are “collateral damage”, as it is called in the propaganda language (Eide & Ottosen 2002).

When Norwegian soldiers are fighting side-by-side with US troops in the mountains of Afghanistan and Norwegian pilots can shoot from their F-16 planes over Afghanistan as they did beginning in autumn 2002, in my mind there should be an ethical debate in the media to discuss the purpose of the Norwegian military presence. A part of this discussion should be open arguments concerning the very justification for a war. In this debate the journalists should look at the role of Norway from “outside”. As a nation at war we must answer to international law and the Geneva Convention. Thus, quality journalists should judge their own military according to principles laid down in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and other well accepted rules of international law (Ottosen 2003). I will use an example from *Aftenposten* on July 2 2002 to analyse the contextualisation of the presentation of Norway’s military presence.

### ***Aftenposten*’s Coverage of the Bombing of a Wedding**

On July 2 2002 *Aftenposten* ran two separate news stories about Afghanistan. Both were small articles, one on the news page and the other on the foreign page. On the news page there was a small article about the Norwegian soldiers in Afghanistan entitled “Norwe-

gian war efforts in Afghanistan praised". The lead speaks for itself: "Minister of Defence Kristin Krohn Devold is impressed by the effort of the Norwegian forces in Afghanistan". The praise continues in the text: "Just good words". Devold had visited the Norwegian forces and explained that she had received "crystal-clear feedback" from "top military officers in other countries" on Norway's war efforts. The story was a report from a press conference celebrating six months of Norwegian military presence in Afghanistan. Together with Chief of Armed Forces Sigurd Frisvold, Defence Minister Devold marked the celebration by giving positive news about "our boys" doing their job under US command: "(the minister) underlined that Norway has developed good competence in some specific niche areas. She mentioned that at the NATO meeting in June the Americans recommended that small countries should specialize in niche capacity and mentioned Norway as an example" (*Aftenposten* 2 July 2002 p. 2). With a language that could have been taken from the business community, there are few connotations of Norwegian soldiers' involvement in war and potential death. Nothing in the text whatsoever hints that Norwegians could be involved in battle or killing.

If we proceed to the second article on the foreign page, we are reminded of the brutal reality in Afghanistan. But this story is in no way linked to the fact that Norwegian pilots at that time were also present in the air space over Afghanistan.

The title of this story is "Mistaken bombing may have killed 120 Afghans". The story with a byline from Reuter/NTB (The Norwegian News Agency, author's remark) quotes a Pentagon source, admitting that a bomb was accidentally dropped on a wedding party. The following day, *Aftenposten* followed up with a larger story about the incident in which the number of casualties was reduced to "at least 40". In this story the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Abdullah, criticizes the Americans at a press conference and at the same time reveals that Afghan intelligence has proven that Osama bin Laden is still alive. It is perhaps no coincidence that these two pieces of information are presented at the same time if we remember earlier requests from the Pentagon that the media should mention who is responsible for the war every time civilian casualties are mentioned (Ottosen 2002a).

To modify the critique of *Aftenposten*, it should be mentioned that several times after this story was printed, the newspaper followed up with critical articles on the wedding incident, including a major story in the evening edition, *Aftenposten Aften* on July 29 2002. Here it was revealed that in a UN report on the wedding it was stated that US forces came to Kararak, the site of the incident, shortly after the attack and removed evidence that could link the Americans to the bombing, thereby obstructing the investigation. Since the Pentagon had refused to release air photos that could shed light on what happened, we still do not know all the facts about this incident. One theory is that the American were misinformed by Afghan intelligence sources who wanted to provoke the US forces into bombing and thus show them in a bad light. Another theory was that what the Americans thought was gunfire was actually fireworks from the wedding celebration, and mistakenly saw it as an attack on their planes. (*Aftenposten* 29 July 2002).

Even though *Aftenposten* followed up the wedding incident in a critical manner, this tragedy was never seen in connection with the Norwegian military presence. The Norwegian soldiers are praised because they are clever, but their skills are never linked to their roles as potential "bad-doers". Since the Norwegian pilots and soldier are by definition "good-doers" they are in no way linked to potential war crimes or violation of international law. In my mind this raises some ethical issues. Should not the Norwegian newspaper readers also be challenged to also see potential problems regarding the Norwegian military presence? The defence minister did not establish any links between the

“praise” of the Norwegian soldier and innocent wedding guests being killed by our closest ally and Commander in Chief. Would it not be the task of the journalist to establish this discourse?

If we turn this around and see the framing of a potential al-Qaida attack on a similar wedding, mainstream media would surely not hide the story in a small note on the news page. It would probably be a front-page story, framed as a proof of the evilness and cynicism of the terrorists. It would most likely also be followed up with commentaries and the conclusion that this proves the true nature of extremists with no respect for human life, etc. The fact that the West has chosen warfare as a means in the “war on terror”, with the consequence that many civilians have died in Afghanistan, was not commented upon. This link between the response to September 11 and innocent dead civilians in Afghanistan is not established – it is a closed door (a *doxa*). In my mind it should be an ethical issue that Norwegian journalists focus on this (based on Ottosen 2003).

## Conclusion

Both *Aftenposten*'s and *VG*'s coverage on the first day of the war in Afghanistan are dominated by US-friendly framing and the use of Western sources. The US-friendly framing is more obvious in *Aftenposten* than in *VG*; thus my hypothesis is confirmed. The editorial in *VG* is more unconditional than is the editorial in *Aftenposten*. *VG* is also much clearer in its framing of Norway as a potential victim of future acts of terror. Norway's role as a potential military actor in the region is at this stage virtually absent in both newspapers. The legal aspects are mentioned in the two newspapers, though in a very superficial manner. (i.e. Geir Ulfstein's later discussion on this issue). Neither of the newspapers focuses on potential “hidden agendas” in their news coverage (Pilger 1998). No point is made of the US's potential global interest or the issue of controlling the oil flow from the region. The US's own interest in the region is a part of *doxa*.

*Aftenposten*, through its coverage of the bombing of a wedding, treats this incident as “collateral damage” and in no way connects it to Norway's military presence. Norway is simply the “good-doer” who receives praise from the US for doing a “good job”. One can argue that this is just one example and should not be regarded as representative of *Aftenposten*'s coverage. But it should raise the issue of *doxa* surrounding Norwegian military presence in war zones such as Afghanistan and Iraq. My hypothesis for further research is that Norway's military presence in the “war on terror” will continue to be separated from problematic issues such as innocent deaths, human suffering and potential violation of international law and human rights.

## Notes

1. The Bush-doctrine was announced later in State of the Union address, Jan 2003 with three main strands (Ottosen 2002b). 1. The concept of ‘pre-emptive war’ 2. Regime change in hostile countries housing potential terrorist. 3. Aggressive promotion of US-style democracy.
2. See the article “Norwegian soldiers at war in distant countries” (Norske soldater i krig i fjerne land), *Aftenposten* on 5 May 2003.
3. See, among others, the article “The US, NATO and Norwegian Security” (USA; NATO og norsk sikkerhet) by Jacob Børresen in *Aftenposten* on 26 June 2003.
4. My research assistant, Tine Ustad Figenschou, is responsible for the content analyses and Jarle Havnæs has coded the material to SPSS.



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