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The American Empire: a content and textual analysis of the media coverage of the 2009 U.S. and Colombia military base agreement

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THE AMERICAN EMPIRE: A CONTENT AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIA
COVERAGE OF THE 2009 U.S. AND COLOMBIA MILITARY BASE AGREEMENT.

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Mass Communication

In

The Manship School of Mass Communication

By

Britt Don Christensen

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ABSTRACT

The United States maintains a worldwide network of military bases and spends more on military expenses than the rest of the world combined. This project seeks to analyze how the U.S. mainstream media cover and discuss the American Empire both broadly and specifically. I conducted a quantitative content analysis and a qualitative textual analysis of the Media coverage of the 2009 U.S. – Colombian military base agreement, which was protested by Latin American leaders. I analyzed the coverage in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *CNN.com*, and *The Miami Herald* regarding the US military’s use of bases in Colombia in 2009. I used the alternative news sources *Democracy Now!* and *Venezuela Analysis* to compare to the mainstream outlets coverage and search for alternative arguments and omitted information. The “White House” frame emerged as the dominant frame due to its repetition across multiple sources from the U.S. and Colombian governments, as well as the U.S. media. With the near absolute exclusion of opposing domestic voices from the United States and Colombia, the “base opposition” frame was seriously disadvantaged. The coverage focused extensively on Hugo Chavez as the primary objector to the base agreement and the framing of the coverage largely undermined his arguments. Critical and dissident voices and perspectives did not appear in the U.S. mainstream media coverage sampled here. The story told by the U.S. media reflected the explanations for the base agreement through the lens of policy makers. This project demonstrated that while traditionally analyzing the content that appears in the U.S. media proved useful, the greater discoveries came from the less researched area of information omitted from the coverage.

INTRODUCTION

The United States experienced a turbulent opening decade to the new millennium. The attacks on September 11, 2001 sent shock waves through the nation. The U.S. government responded by leading the country into two different wars in the Middle East. The attacks had a detrimental effect on the U.S. economy, which further imploded in 2008 (Isidore, 2010). The struggling economy and lack of confidence in the financial systems increased unemployment upwards of nine percent. Millions of people have lost their jobs due to the recession since 2008 (Isidore, 2010). Many people are looking to the government to stimulate the economy and create jobs, but do not want to increase the national debt (Pew, 2010). Tremendous amounts of resources have been devoted to fighting, covering, watching, and talking about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In regards to US foreign military operations, much of Americans' attention falls to Iraq and Afghanistan; however, the United States is no stranger to military operations abroad.

The United States military maintains bases on every continent outside of Antarctica and task force carriers in every sea and ocean in the world (Johnson, 2004). American armed forces deploy over a half a million personnel, ranging from soldiers to teachers, in dozens of countries spanning the globe. Thus, as Arthur Schlesinger (1986) asks, “who can doubt that there is an American empire?—an ‘informal’ empire, not colonial polity, but still richly equipped with imperial paraphernalia: troops, ships, planes, bases, proconsuls, local collaborators, all spread around the luckless planet” (as cited in Bacevich, 2002, p. 30). Seemingly, a salient issue in the media is the national deficit and balancing the budget. However, an issue that seems absent from public discourse and media representation is the enormous US military budget, and the cost of sustaining and expanding the American empire. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars garner ample

media attention and public debate, but the expansive network of military bases and operations around the world seem relatively invisible.

The U.S. spends as much or more on defense as the rest of the developed world combined (Bacevich, 2010; Jensen, 2010; Johnson, 2004). The concept of standing armies in foreign countries has seemingly become normal to many Americans. The national deficit is a salient topic among media pundits and government officials, but a discussion on the size and scope of the American empire seems relatively absent. Walter Lippmann (1922) argues that in a democratic society, the press possesses the responsibility of informing people about the outside world. Agenda setting theory argues that individuals consistently reference the issues and events currently covered by the media as the most important (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). As a result, if Americans are going to engage in a public discussion about the role of government and federal spending, then the media must report on the enormous network of military bases and worldwide operations.

A qualitative textual analysis and a quantitative content analysis of mainstream and alternative news sources is the empirical focus of this paper. In a recent case of U.S. military expansion, in October 2009, Colombia and the United States signed an agreement granting the U.S. access to seven additional military bases in Colombia (Associated Press, 2009c). I analyzed the coverage in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *CNN.com*, and *The Miami Herald* regarding the US military's use of bases in Colombia in 2009. I used the alternative news sources *Democracy Now!* and *Venezuela Analysis* to compare to the mainstream outlets coverage and search for alternative arguments and omitted information. Due to the stark contrast in information between the U.S. mainstream media and the alternative media sources, I included several secondary sources attempting to fact-check the arguments. In what way was the new

agreement regarding the U.S. use of military bases in Colombia covered by mainstream news sources? What were the predominate frames of the coverage?

The American Empire

Bacevich (2002) argues that the United States, being the sole standing super power after the Cold War, would reshape the world in its image. Many leaders and political theorists saw America's new role as a "good empire" and encouraged U.S. leadership to embark on "humanitarian" intervention around the world, promoting democracy, fair elections, and free market capitalism (Bacevich, 2010; Johnson, 2004). Withdrawing our forces and focusing our resources on peaceful means would be "isolationism."

In the decade following the Cold War, the U.S. further expanded its "good-will" military operations to parts of South and Central America, Africa, the Persian Gulf, Eastern Europe, and Haiti, while continuing operations in East Asia and the Pacific (Johnson, 2004; Bacevich, 2008). Bacevich (2002) states, "After the Cold War, the measure of adequacy was no longer simply military strength; it had become military supremacy, a position endorsed by liberals as well as conservatives, Democrats as well as Republicans" (p. 126). The United States stationed over 100,000 troops in Europe and approximately the same amount in Japan and Korea following the Cold War (Bacevich, 2002; Johnson, 2010).

According to Bacevich (2002) George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush accepted and accelerated the military expansion of post-Cold War US foreign policy. He argues that globalization became synonymous with freedom, free markets, and freedom of information. Globalization would spread capitalism by way of American companies. "Belief in the uniqueness of the American experiment is deeply embedded in the nation's psyche," states Bacevich (2002,

p. 43). Furthermore, Bacevich (2008) states, "...Americans became accustomed to thinking of their country as 'the indispensable nation'" (p. 2).

U.S. foreign policy, committed to "openness," asserts that a world shaped by U.S. economic opportunities forges freedom and democracy in other nations (Bacevich, 2002). Globalization is the meshing of political and economic policies (Bacevich, 2008). As the leaders of the technological-information revolution and globalization, the U.S. maintains and expands its military capabilities in the name of protecting American foreign interests. U.S. leaders subscribe to the notion of the benefits of global expansionism, evidenced by former Secretary of State Madeline Albright when she said, "...protecting our territory is a more complex issue than before. Protecting our citizens is more complicated...And then our way of life. Our way of life is extremely complicated and depends on a global economy..." (as cited in Bacevich, 2002, p. 36). Bill Clinton further espoused such a sentiment that America, through the opportunities provided by a global economy, could lift the standard of living worldwide and create a "global middle class" (Bacevich, 2002).

The events of September 11, 2001 served as a catalyst in the minds of many American leaders and their perceptions of the role of the U.S. on the world stage. Johnson (2004) claims that our leaders envisioned the U.S. as the "new Rome," a military power unlike any in the history of humankind outside the jurisdiction of international law and above answering to its allies. For the first time in history, the U.S. rationalized the use of "preemptive strikes" and "preventative war" to secure the safety of its citizens and the world, which became known as the "Bush Doctrine" (Bacevich, 2005, p. 227). Johnson states, "Americans may still prefer to use euphemisms like 'lone superpower,' but since 9/11, our country has undergone a transformation from republic to empire that may well prove irreversible" (2004, p. 4).

Bacevich (2008) argues that the post-9/11 Bush administration's procedures increased aggression and force in attempting to bring the Islamic world in line with American policies – using diplomacy if possible and force if necessary. President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and senior Pentagon officials talked about the military campaign in permanent terms, projecting that the war may last decades, even generations, and that exit strategies were a ridiculous presumption. The “War on Terror” included potential territories in over sixty countries, including the “Axis of Evil,” named by Bush, as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea (Johnson, 2004; Bacevich, 2008). Defining the war as a “War on Terror” gives the U.S. unprecedented flexibility in defining who the “terrorists” are, and where to point the missiles.

Enchanted by military power unlike anything the world has experienced, worldwide militarism is the nucleus of the United States' national image (Bacevich, 2005). “Writing in the spring of 2003, the journalist Greg Easterbook observed that ‘the extent of American military superiority has become almost impossible to overstate,’” states Bacevich (2005, p. 1). He argues that the nation is engrossed with military supremacy and our leaders remain committed to its continuation. Even when the U.S. suffers military setbacks such as Vietnam and the current trouble in the Middle East, America's value driven foreign policy, many believe, will prevail. “In that regard, George W. Bush's vow that the United States will ‘rid the world of evil’ both echoes and amplifies the large claims of his predecessors going back at least as far as Woodrow Wilson,” writes Bacevich (2005, p. 2). Americans have become accustomed to associating the greatness of the nation with the force of the military, inextricably fusing national identity and militarism (Bacevich, 2005).

The United States' empire is not like the traditional empires of Rome and Great Britain. The purpose of the U.S. Empire is not to annex territories and make them colonies; rather, the U.S. either takes or leases land for building an empire of military bases, which protects U.S. foreign interests (Johnson, 2004; Lutz, 2009). In discussing the 2005 Pentagon report, Johnson states, "The size of these holdings was recorded in the inventory as covering 687, 347 acres overseas and 29,819,492 acres worldwide, making the Pentagon easily one of the world's largest landlords" (2006, p. 140).

According to the Department of Defense 2008 report, the annual Pentagon budget is now upwards of \$700 billion, which nearly equals all other countries' military spending combined. The U.S. military possesses approximately 400,000 troops and personnel, stationed in over 761 sites. Department of Defense data from 2004 reported U.S. military presence in more than 130 of the 192 countries in the world (*Active Duty*, 2004). These numbers do not include the troops and bases in Iraq and Afghanistan or the 6,000 military facilities in the United States. "The Pentagon has divided up the planet (and universe) into 'unified commands,' each headed by a four-star general or admiral," states Bacevich (2010, p. 25). Specifically, the territories are broken down as follows: *Pacific Command* covers the Asia-Pacific region, *Central Command* covers the Middle East, *Southern Command* covers South and Central America, *Northern Command* covers North America, *European Command*, *Africa Command*, and *Space Command* all cover their respective regions. Finally, there is *Strategic Command*, which is capable of deploying missiles, nuclear warheads, and cyberwarfare, by land or sea, to anywhere in the world (Bacevich, 2010).

Media, Government, and Elites

With the military and its enormous cost commanding such a major aspect of American life, one might assume that media would consistently discuss the scope of the American empire. Considering the economic challenges the United States is facing, an issue such as defense spending, which commands over one-quarter of the federal budget (CBO Report, 2009), should be a salient topic in the media. McCombs and Shaw (1972) argue that for rational discourse to thrive in regards to public affairs, particularly foreign affairs, the media assume the responsibility of providing accurate information. In a democratic society, the press possesses the responsibility of informing people about the outside world (Lippmann, 1922; Said, 1997).

Media Coverage of the American Empire

In an effort to gauge how much the mainstream media covers the American empire, I conducted a search in LexisNexis database using a random constructed¹ week in 2009 of *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *CNN.com*, and the *Miami Herald*. I searched for stories that mentioned U.S. military activity other than Iraq and Afghanistan. I also excluded stories about Pakistan and Guantanamo Bay because stories regarding these places pertain to US involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The most prominent story of U.S. military activity by all four news entities occurred on 4/14/09 regarding the U.S. Navy involvement in taking out Somali pirates who attempted to overtake a U.S. cargo ship off the coast of Africa. *The Washington Post* ran three stories

¹ As there are fifty-two weeks in the year, I used 52 index cards numbering 1-52. I then randomly selected a card for each day of the week, Monday-Friday, and applied the number on the card to the week of the year for each day.

² “Concepts and courses of action directed toward securing the objectives of national and multinational policies and strategies through the synchronized and integrated employment of military forces and other instruments of national power,” (DOD,2011].

(McCrumman, 2009; Tyson, 2009; Wilson and Tyson, 2009), *The New York Times* featured two articles (Bumiller and Mazzetti, 2009; Ibrahim, Otterman, and Goudnough, 2009), *CNN.com* (Mount, 2009) and *The Miami Herald* (“Rescue,” 2009) produced one story each about the pirates. *CNN.com* published an additional story, which broached the issue of taking the “battle against the pirates ashore.” The article discussed the potential necessity of moving U.S. military operations to the mainland of Somalia in order to combat the pirates (“Pentagon,” 2009).

On 3/13/09, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* published one story each addressing a confrontation between U.S. and China, where five Chinese navy ships surrounded a U.S. vessel, which China says was conducting illegal surveillance in the South China Sea. The *New York Times* article mentioned the issue as part of a story regarding Tibet (Wong, 2009), while the *Washington Post* piece pertained to the U.S. responding to the perceived threat from China by deploying a Navy destroyer from Hawaii to protect the threatened vessel (Tyson, 2009).

Additionally on 3/13/2009, the *Washington Post* produced an article titled, “Inter-American Relations Roiled; Ouster of Several U.S. Officials Highlights Strains in Hemisphere” (Partlow, 2009, p. A12). The article discussed the decision by the Bolivian government to dismiss U.S. Embassy secretary Francisco Martinez from the country for allegedly meeting with spies and political opposition. The ejection of Martinez constituted the second U.S. Embassy secretary asked to leave Bolivia. Moreover, Venezuela and Ecuador both dismissed U.S. diplomats. “The departures do not include Bolivia’s decision to banish 38 Drug Enforcement Administration agents and support personnel, its request to remove U.S. Agency for International Development employees from the coca-growing region of Chapare...” stated Parlow, (2009, p. A12).

The Miami Herald published three articles on 7/1/09 regarding the military coup in Honduras that ousted democratically elected President Zelaya. One of the three articles mentioned U.S. troops in the region and U.S. Southern Command:

The Pentagon's Southern Command on Wednesday ordered U.S. troops in Honduras to "minimize contact" with the Central American nation's armed forces in light of Zelaya's ouster. None of the 600 U.S. troops here was recalled, and U.S. forces at an air base at Soto Cano, 60 miles from the capital, were authorized to assist in humanitarian relief missions, said Southcom spokesman Jose Ruiz. (Robles, 2009)

Overall, the mainstream media do not appear to cover U.S. military operation in abundance. The stories that did make the news were conflicts involving the U.S. military. The Somali pirate stories focused on the heroic acts of the U.S. troops, and the China issue centered on an incident with Chinese military vessels challenging the actions of the U.S. military. The coverage lacked any context of why the U.S. military operates in these regions. The *Washington Post* published an article on 3/13/09 that indirectly talked about the American empire (Lynch, 2009). The piece discussed the massive construction of new, highly secure U.S. embassies around the world. The article did not address the fact that U.S. embassies span the globe; rather, it discussed the aesthetics of the new embassies highly secure design sending an offensive signal to the countries within which they reside.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In discussing the American Empire, the potential lack of coverage and the framing of the stories pertain to, in part, the environment in which the media operate. When exploring the functionality of the mass media and its relationship with society, many scholars argue that important considerations are media ownership, institutional structure, and the reliance of journalists on authoritative sources (Bennett, 1990; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Entman, 2004).

Cook (2005) goes further and argues that the attention the media receive from political officials makes them less like an organization and more like a governmental institution. The news media are empowered due to the integral part they serve in the communication process of political debate, yet are ill prepared to handle such a role. Journalists lack the training and the media organizations lack necessary resources to research policy issues thoroughly; as a result, journalists gravitate toward easily accessible news. Hallin (1994) argues that the symbiotic relationship between journalists and government officials results in the media's portrayal of the outside world through the lens of policy makers. The news media do not simply reflect governmental policy issues; the media help prioritize those issues (Cook, 2005).

Journalists attempt to meet the criteria of objectivity by excluding personal values and ideologies from their news stories. Gans (2004) argues that journalists' adherence to objectivity allows them to disregard the implications of their stories because they believe that they are reporting the facts.

Like social scientists and others, journalists can also feel objective when they assume, rightly or wrongly, that their values are universal or dominant. When values arouse no dissent or when dissent can be explained away as moral disorder, those who hold values can easily forget that they are values. (Gans, 2004, p. 186)

When reporting on issues of foreign affairs, journalists could potentially believe they are meeting the standards of objectivity by supplying quotes and sentiments of foreign leaders, but still present the story from a U.S.-centric standpoint (Hallin, 1989; Lippmann, 1922). In addition, objectivity could technically be achieved in a story by the presentation of facts, but still contain biases due to the omission of other facts and the framing of the story (Entman, 2004; Herman and Chomsky, 2002). “The effect of ‘objectivity’ [is] not to free the news of political influence, but to open wide the channel through which official influence flow[s],” states Halin (1989, p. 25).

How do the media cover and discuss the American Empire? Agenda setting argues that through the prioritizing of commonly held “news values” the individuals in charge of the selection of the news supply people with the issues to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The vast majority of agenda-setting and framing research focuses on manifest or latent news content rather than on what is routinely omitted from the news. “Although omissions are sometimes significant, a sound general strategy from research in this area is to concentrate on the origins and transformations of frames that successfully move from agenda to agenda and to bypass those frames that became the dross of the communications process,” states McCombs and Ghamen (2003, p. 70). The preceding quote demonstrates the scholarly bias of focusing on what makes news rather than the omissions from the news, leaving a large gap in academic research.

Do the U.S. mainstream media marginalize non-dominant issues and dissenting voices? Unlike authoritarian regimes that use direct intervention and violence to prevent dissent and radical views from reaching public discourse, the suppression of information in the United States requires much more sophistication and is a result of many institutional constraints. “The term suppression is especially appropriate for a study that focuses on the United States, where direct

violence isn't used nearly as frequently as subtler forms of social control" states Boycoff (2006, p. 11). Boycoff (2006) focuses mainly on the suppression of social movements in the United States and argues that the mass media marginalize dissenting voices.

The omission of certain issues is an area that scholars gloss over, but deserves more attention. If it is important to pay attention to what makes the agenda, why is it not equally as important to attempt to explain what gets left off of the agenda and why? Cobb and Ross (1997) refer to this as "agenda denial," that is, the strategies employed by elites in an effort to suppress an issue from reaching public discourse and ultimately, the formal agenda.

Cobb and Ross (1997) refer to the formal agenda as the issues that reach governmental deliberation. "Agenda conflicts are not just about what issues government chooses to act on; they are also about competing interpretations of political problems and the alternative worldviews that underlie them" (Cobb & Ross, 1997, p. 4). The media play an instrumental role in agenda setting and agenda denial. People consistently cite the issues that are currently in the news as the most important problems facing the nation (Iyengar, 1991; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Consequently, if the news media do not discuss an issue the probability of a public conversation regarding the issue is low. Even if an issue makes it into the media, the selection and omission of information determines the portrayal of the story.

Herman and Chomsky (2002) contend that the institutional structure of the private media determines which issues make the agenda. The concentration of media ownership by profit driven corporate conglomerates, which rely on advertising from other major commercial industries, heavily influences news content. In addition to profit incentivized ownership dependent on advertising, the media's reliance on government and business experts as primary

sources constitutes elite command of the media. These institutional constraints severely restrict dissenting views from entering the media discussion, further benefiting powerful interests.

Regarding issues of foreign affairs and intervention, Herman and Chomsky (2002) argue that the media are dogmatically patriotic and typically portray U.S. military actions as virtuous. The fall of the Soviet Union solidified Americans' beliefs in the benevolence and superiority of free market capitalism as the dominant ideology. "This ideology helps mobilize the populace against an enemy, and because the concept is fuzzy it can be used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property interests or support accommodation with Communist states and radicalism," assert Herman and Chomsky (2002, p. 29). Invoking ideology or terminology that counters dominant American perspectives can act as an opinion control mechanism. Historically and currently, rhetorically skilled political leaders invoke stereotypes regarding enemies in order to gain societal support for international conflicts (Herman and Chomsky, 2002; Lippmann, 1922). Consequently, the media are unlikely to challenge foreign policies framed by elites as promoting or defending American values, particularly involving perceived anti-American or anti-capitalistic nations (Herman and Chomsky, 2002).

Robert Entman (2004) defines framing as, "...*selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution*" (p. 5). He uses framing to help identify which frames, set forth by the White House and other elites, make their way into the news and are either accepted or challenged. "But we need to understand better why such wrangles arise in some cases and not others, and what role the media play in triggering or suppressing dissent" (Entman, 2004, p. 12). Specifically, he argues that frames focus on "political events, issues, and

actors (who may be individual leaders, groups or nations)” (Entman, 2004, p. 23). News stories often contain multiple frames, embedding related information to pertinent issues or actors.

According to Entman (2004), the media have the responsibility to provide the public with enough information, independent of the White House framing of the issues, so that the public can produce their own “counterframe.” Reporting the issues strictly from the executive branch’s point-of-view does not provide enough information to individuals to form alternative interpretations of issues and events. This study seeks to explore how the media cover U.S. foreign military operations and policies. Are dissenting opinions included in the coverage of foreign policy issues, and what kind of counterframing information do the media supply? If the dominant elite frame goes unchallenged by the press, are there substantial omissions?

The U.S. and Latin America

The United States has a history of intervention and military presence in Latin America. The U.S. government played key roles in the coup of “popularly supported governments in Guatemala (1954), Cuba (1961), Dominican Republic (1965), Chile (1973), Grenada (1983), and Nicaragua (1984-90)” (Johnson, 2004, p. 163). There is strong suspicion of U.S. involvement in the 2002 Venezuelan coup against Hugo Chavez, and the 2009 Honduran coup ousting President Zeyala (“Chavez reveals,” 2009; Planas, 2009; Vulliamy, 2002).

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) is a social, political, and economic movement in Latin America comprised of Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Antigua, Barbuda, San Vicente, the Grenadines (Mather, 2010). Most of the nations are socialist-democracies, seek regional independence, and promote the integration of Latin American economies through bartering, social-welfare, and

egalitarian economic aid (Mather, 2010). The ALBA nations view neo-liberal and free trade economic policies as detrimental to the majority of society, and strive to free their countries from foreign influences and dependence (Mather, 2010). The social programs enjoy immense popularity, as do the most of democratically elected presidents of the member nations. Brazil, Argentina, and other Latin American countries trade with and support the ALBA nations, but are not official members. Hugo Chavez refers to the Latin American movement as the Bolivarian Revolution, named after 19th-century Venezuelan revolutionary leader Simon Bolivar (“Chavez: ready,” 2009).

In 2009, Colombia and the United States signed an agreement increasing U.S. military access to Colombian military bases (Forero, 2009a). The U.S and Colombian governments cooperate in fighting cocaine production in Colombia. Several countries in Latin America are skeptical of U.S. military presence in the region, which contains vast natural resources, and do not favor neo-liberal and U.S. free trade policies (Janicke, 2009). The Colombian-U.S. base agreement presented a situation where democratically elected governments, with political ideologies different from the United States, protested an increased U.S. presence in the region. The 2009 Colombian-U.S. military agreement provides a case-study opportunity to analyze the U.S. media coverage of U.S. foreign military expansion, the empire in action so to speak.

The Story

In March 2008, President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela ordered troops to the Colombian-Venezuelan border after Colombia bombed a FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) camp in Ecuador, which contributed to Ecuador eventually cancelling their military base agreement with the United States (Brice, 2009). Chavez temporarily froze trade relations with

Colombia. In early July 2009, the Colombian magazine *Cambio* reported that Colombian and U.S. officials were holding secret meetings pertaining to an agreement allowing for increased U.S. military access to Colombian military bases (Forero and Sheridan, 2009; Planas, 2009). Shortly after the media exposure, President Uribe of Colombia publically announced the agreement. In late July 2009, the day after Hugo Chavez of Venezuela publically expressed his opposition to the U.S. bases in Colombia, the government of Colombia accused Chavez and Venezuela of supplying the FARC rebels with weapons (Brice, 2009). Chavez strongly denied these allegations, claiming that they were a distraction ploy because he voiced his opposition to the base accord; as a result, he again froze trade relations with Colombia (Brice, 2009).

Several Latin American leaders also voiced concerns about the base accord. In response, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe visited seven Latin American countries the first week of August 2009, including Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, attempting to calm the situation (Barrionuevo, 2009a). On August 10, 2009, the leaders of several Latin American countries participated in a summit in Ecuador and discussed the base accord (Forero, 2009a). A second summit regarding the same issue, took place in Argentina on August 28, 2009 (Forero and Sheridan, 2009). On October 30, 2009, three Colombian ministers and the U.S. ambassador to Colombia, William Brownfield, signed the agreement in a private meeting, which allowed U.S. military access to seven additional Colombian military bases for 10 years, including strategically located Palanquero air base (Associated Press, 2009c; Livingstone, 2010). On August 17, 2010, the Colombian Constitutional Court suspended the agreement, ruling that it must receive approval from the Colombian Congress (Schumacher-Matos, 2010).

The U.S. and Colombian governments claimed that the primary purpose of the base agreement simply granted U.S. personnel expanded access to additional bases in order to enhance counter-narcotics capabilities. Colombia is the world's leading cocaine producing nation and the United States consumes over 90 percent of Colombia's cocaine (Barrionuevo and Romero, 2009). Colombia receives the most U.S. financial aid, over \$7 billion since 1999, of any country outside of Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, and Egypt (Schumacher-Matos, 2010). "Plan Colombia" is the official title of the drug eradication program informally known as the drug war (Reuters, 2010b). The U.S. and Colombian governments argue that the FARC rebels earn money from drug trafficking, which helps fund their forty-five year battle with the Colombian government. The U.S. assists Colombia in this ongoing struggle (Forero and Sheridan, 2009). In addition, the U.S. says they need the bases in Colombia to fill a void due to Ecuador ending its U.S. base agreement ("Colombia US," 2009). The approval from Colombia granting the U.S. access to these military bases is the subject of the following research question.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What Were the Predominate Frames in the media coverage of the agreement regarding the U.S. expanded use of military bases in Colombia?

METHODS

I conducted a qualitative textual analysis and a quantitative content analysis of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *CNN.com*, and the *Miami Herald* regarding the U.S./Colombia military base accord from 2009-2010. I selected *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* because they are two well-known, prominent newspapers that have Latin American foreign correspondents. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are also widely used by other media outlets regarding political issues, thus they have agenda setting capabilities. Both of these news outlets make their content available online. Regarding the cable news networks, CNN devotes the most time (23%) to foreign news, and online news ranks the highest in foreign affairs coverage, so I selected *CNN.com* as my third source (The State, 2010). I selected the *Miami Herald* due to the demographic makeup of Miami; the *Miami Herald* may cover Latin American news more often and potentially in different ways.

I used the alternative news sources *Democracy Now!* and *Venezuela Analysis* to compare to the U.S. mainstream media's coverage of the U.S.-Colombia base agreement. I selected these sources because they have different institutional structures than the U.S. mainstream media. They do not rely on advertising for their operating revenue; rather, they rely on consumer donations for sustainability. Both *Democracy Now!* and *Venezuelanalysis.com* claim that independence from profit incentivized corporate shareholders reliant on advertising revenue provides greater independence and allows for the inclusion of dissident and alternative voices in their news coverage (democracynow.org, 2011, venezuelanalysis.com, 2011). The alternative news sources provided the possibility to discover possible counterframing information omitted from the U.S. mainstream media coverage, given the institutional differences and their stated desire to include dissenting opinions.

Democracy Now! refuses donations from advertisers, corporations, and the government (democracynow.org, 2011). *Democracy Now!* is hosted by award winning journalists Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzalez and airs on over 900 TV and radio stations, making it the largest public media collaboration in the United States. In addition, *Democracy Now's* podcast is a popular news programs on the Internet (democracynow.org, 2011).

Venezuelanalysis.com also relies on donations and is part of Venezuela Analysis, Inc., which is a registered non-profit organization in New York State (venezuelanalysis.com, 2011). The stated purpose of *Venezuelanalysis.com* is to provide depth and breadth to issues pertaining to Venezuela and the international community and is "...targeted towards academics, journalists, intellectuals, policy makers from different countries, and the general public" (venezuelanalysis.com, 2011). *Venezuelanalysis.com* produces opinion pieces from dissident scholars and independent journalists based in the United States and other countries as well as grassroots socialist activists in Venezuela. The website has regular contributors and is an aggregator that publishes other Latin American related articles from a variety of alternative online news sources. While *Venezuelanalysis.com* publishes primarily opinion pieces, it strives for fact-based content and regularly provides source citations for major claims made in published content. *Venezuelanalysis.com* aims to be the leading English language source of information regarding Venezuela (venezuelanalysis.com, 2011). The contributors to *Venezuelanalysis.com* that I referenced in this project are Eva Golinger, Michael Fox, James Suggett, Benjamin Dangl, Grace Livingstone, Kiraz Janicke, James Patras, and Roque Planas.

During the analysis several topics, issues, facts, and arguments emerged from the alternative media coverage that received little or no coverage in the U.S. mainstream media sample. I recognized counterframing information during my analysis by the mentioning of major

topics, issues, arguments, and opinions by the alternative media outlets and their elite/non-elite sources. In an effort to confirm the major claims and arguments made by *Venezuelanalysis.com* and *Democracy Now!* I sought additional sources attempting to fact-check the information provided in the section of this paper titled, “The untold story: Counterframing and Omissions.” The potential counterframing information provided by the alternative media outlets was substantial. Seeking additional sources led to the discovery of a wide array of online sources, including official U.S. documents from U.S. governmental websites, academic journal articles, non-governmental organizational websites, and blogs and opinion pieces. These primary and secondary sources are available to anyone with an internet connection. (For more detailed biographical information regarding *Democracy Now!* and *Venezuela Analysis* contributors see Appendix 1.)

Quantitative Content Analysis and Qualitative Textual Analysis

I used LexisNexis database to search for articles that appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *CNN.com*, and the *Miami Herald* pertaining to the U.S. and Colombian base agreement in late 2009. Due to the base agreement signing in 2009 and the cancellation in 2010, I included the complete years of 2009 and 2010 in my search. I searched each media entity independently and used the following search terms: “Colombia,” “Colombia and 2009,” “Colombia and 2010,” “Colombia and US,” “Colombia and US military,” “Colombia base,” “Colombia agreement,” “Colombia pact,” “Colombia accord,” “Colombia military base,” “US bases in Colombia,” “US military bases in Colombia,” “US military in Colombia,” “US Colombia military base agreement,” “US and Colombia base agreement,” “Colombia and Venezuela,” “Venezuela weapons,” “Venezuela and Colombia relations,” “Colombia and Venezuela weapons,” “US base agreement,” “US base agreement cancelled.” I selected all

articles from 2009 and 2010 that mentioned the U.S. and Colombian military base agreement. For *Venezuelanalysis.com* and *Democracy Now!* I searched their individual websites using the same search terms as listed above.

The LexisNexis search results regarding the U.S. mainstream media articles mentioning the 2009 U.S. and Colombian military base agreement are as follows: *New York Times* = 18, *Washington Post* = 13, *CNN.com* = 19, and the *Miami Herald* = 1. The *Miami Herald* content for 2010 did not appear to be available through the LexisNexis database, so the *Miami Herald* may have produced articles that I could not access for this study. I did search the *Miami Herald* website for additional articles but only returned a single article produced by the *New York Times*, which was already included in the sample. The *Democracy Now!* website search yielded 8 transcripts related to the U.S. Colombia base agreement, including 1 interview. The *Venezuelanalysis.com* internal search returned 29 articles. In total, I retrieved 88 articles across all media entities used for the purpose of this study. In addition, I searched for articles pertaining to the U.S. - Colombian base agreement in the *Dallas Morning News*, *San Diego Union Tribune*, and the *Chicago Tribune* using the search terms listed above and found zero articles in the LexisNexis database. Therefore, I think the sample of U.S. mainstream media coverage here offers good insight into the U.S. mainstream media coverage overall.

For the quantitative content analysis I included all 88 articles from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *CNN.com*, the *Miami Herald*, *Democracy Now!*, and *Venezuelanalysis.com*. Coded items included the foreign country or countries mentioned in the story, the focus of the story, and sources used to provide insight and opinions about the topic. I also codes for any foreign authority figures mentioned in the story, as well as any criticism or support regarding the

U.S. government or its foreign policies. I coded each article twice. (For a more detailed coding scheme, see Appendix 2)

For the qualitative textual analysis, I used only the U.S. mainstream media articles that primarily focused on the U.S. and Colombian base agreement. I discarded articles for this section that merely mentioned the U.S. and Colombian base agreement in passing. This narrowed my analysis to 33 total articles, which included 13 *New York Times* articles, 9 *Washington Post* articles, 10 *CNN.com* articles, and the single *Miami Herald* article.

I inductively coded the articles looking for predominate frames of the stories and with the following questions in mind: Are there any oppositional views to the Drug War in the stories? Is there pertinent information for the audience to form an opinion outside of the White House position, also referred to as a counterframe? Is anyone discussing it from the standpoint, "We are doing this because..."? Is there any discussion about the right of the U.S. to perform military operations in foreign sovereign nations? This question gets at the issue of American militarism and national identity. Are these events reported in a way in which it seems natural that we are expanding our military operations in South America? Is there any critical coverage? This would include information provided by a press figure or source that does not agree with that question, or that offers any alternative or dissenting views of current U.S. foreign policy or government. Do the reporters use the same sources of authority, including editorials? Do the authority sources use the same or similar explanation/ justification for the need of the bases? I will code each of the articles twice.

RESULTS

In the U.S. mainstream media, the frame handed down from the U.S. and Colombian governments defined the problem as needing additional U.S. troops to fight drug traffickers and the FARC rebels. The U.S. and Colombian officials defined Ecuador ending U.S. troops' access to their bases as the problem, and providing U.S. troops access to additional bases in Colombia as the solution. These reasons for additional U.S. military support set forth by the U.S. and Colombian governments are what I call the "White House" frame.

A few political actors were particularly vocal in opposing the base accord, specifically President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, President Rafael Correa of Ecuador, and President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner of Argentina. These foreign leaders warned of war, invasion, and imperialism at the hands of the United States (Barrionuevo, 2009a). The frame from the opposition, namely Chavez, defined the problem as a threat to the sovereignty of the region, and the cause as U.S. imperialism. The frame's solution demanded the dismissal of the base agreement and the preparation for potential U.S. invasion. These objections to the base agreement are what I call the "base opposition" frame.

Competing Frames

Reporting the "White House" frame, *CNN.com* stated, "The United States says it needs bases to help fight against terrorists and narcotraffickers especially since the closure a few months ago of a U.S. base in Ecuador" ("Colombia US," 2009). Juan Forero (2009b), foreign correspondent in Colombia for the *Washington Post* wrote, "Uribe told the presidents meeting in the Patagonian resort of Bariloche that the U.S. assistance was necessary to fight drug-trafficking

and Marxist rebels but that the bases remained Colombian, not American” (p. A09). The *Miami Herald* editorial also peddled the “White House” frame:

The latest round of cooperation is designed to compensate for the loss of U.S. landing rights at a military base in Ecuador. One proposal would have U.S. troops working with Colombian forces on anti-narcotics and intelligence matters in at least seven Colombian military bases. (Uproar, 2010)

U.S. and Colombian officials consistently reiterated that the bases would remain under Colombian control and downplayed the agreement as simply renewed and continued cooperation. *Washington Post* Foreign Services writers Forero and Sheridan (2009) stated that, “The U.S military would be required to provide Colombian authorities with detailed information about every mission, Colombian Defense Ministry officials said, and a Colombian noncommissioned officer would be aboard every flight inside the country” (p. A12). Alexei Barrionuevo and Simon Romero (2009), *New York Times* foreign correspondents in Brazil and Venezuela, respectively, wrote, “In defending the agreement, Colombia and the United States have said that it simply expands their existing cooperation” (p. 6).

Forero (2009b) of the *Washington Post* stated, “Colombian officials have also said that U.S. servicemen and planes have been operating in Colombia for years and that the agreement merely formalizes a string of old accords and cuts bureaucratic hurdles” (p. A09). The editorials carried the same sentiments. The opinion piece in the *Washington Post* by columnist Edward Schumacher-Matos (2009) said, “The final details are still being negotiated, but Obama, Clinton and Uribe insist that the 10 year agreement is merely an extension on the existing training and intelligence-gathering to fight drugs and guerillas under Plan Colombia” (p. A25). In addition,

the U.S. media repeated the limits of U.S. personnel numbers, of 600 military contractors and 800 military soldiers, throughout the coverage (Barrionuevo, 2009a; Forero and Sheridan, 2009; Romero, 2009).

Domestic Opposition: U.S. and Colombia

Only two articles briefly and indirectly mentioned opposition to the base agreement from inside Colombia. In both instances, the criticism focused on the secrecy of the agreement, not the agreement itself. The *Associated Press* (2009a) article in the *New York Times* said, “At a public hearing Wednesday called in response to criticism of the secrecy surrounding the talks, three Colombian government ministers defended the negotiations as vital in the fight against drug trafficking and terrorism” (p. 11). The Forero and Sheridan (2009) of the *Washington Post* referenced two Colombian senators who said that they heard about the agreement through the media and that they were worried about the terms of the accord. Forero and Sheridan (2009) quoted the senators:

“Those are terms that are very ambiguous and broad,” Sen. Juan Manuel Galan said.

“Without seeing the text, it’s hard to understand exactly what was agreed upon.”

Sen. Ceiclia LaPez said the plan should have been debated in Congress. “Why is there so much secrecy?” she asked. (p. A12)

Forero and Sheridan (2009) also included U.S. Senators Christopher J. Dodd and Patrick J. Leahy expressing opposition to the base agreement in the form of a letter to Secretary of State Hilary Clinton.

In Washington, Sens. Christopher J. Dodd and Patrick J. Leahy, senior Democrats who help shape policy on Latin America, asked Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in a letter why they had not been consulted about the plan and wondered why the Obama administration was deepening its ties with a military they accuse of human rights abuses. (Forero and Sheridan, 2009, p. A12)

The response from the administration, if there was one, was not included in any of the coverage. Moreover, the above mention of the letter from the U.S. Senators was the *only* domestic challenge to the “White House” frame included in *any* of the 33 articles.

In fact, only one article quoted President Obama, and he reinforced the “White House” frame, saying, “‘There have been those in the region who have been trying to play this up as part of anti-Yankee rhetoric,’ Obama said, adding, ‘We have no intent in establishing a U.S. military base in Colombia’” (Forero, 2009a, p. A06). Only two articles in total referenced Obama, both in the *Washington Post*. The second reference pertained to Obama calling Pres. da Silva of Brazil to explain the need for an increase in counter-narcotics operations in Colombia (Forero and Sheridan, 2009). Secretary of State Hilary Clinton only appeared in one article that contained the “White House” frame, saying, “A new American security pact with Colombia that has angered some South American nations is aimed at fighting drug trafficking and terrorism and will not create American bases in Colombia, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in Washington on Tuesday” (Reuters, 2009a, p. 9).

The Obama administration and Colombian President Uribe benefited from the lack of exposure regarding this issue in the U.S. media. It is likely that Obama and Clinton did not comment excessively on this issue in an effort to trivialize the controversy keeping it out of the

press. If Obama accepted the multiple requests from the Latin American leaders for a meeting regarding the base agreement, it certainly would have attracted more media attention. Thus, Lula da Silva of Brazil received a simple phone call from the U.S. President.

Isolating the Opposition

The U.S. media made clear distinctions between the countries and leaders who expressed concerns regarding the base accord, and the leaders who sternly opposed it. For instance:

Mr. Uribe took to the road on his diplomatic offensive this week after some countries – including Venezuela, Ecuador and Nicaragua – denounced the plans to allow for increased American troop levels. Others like Brazil, expressed concern about the agreement, which Colombia and American officials insisted would only extend and formalize a continuing counternarcotics program between the countries. (Barrionuevo, 2009a, p. 8)

The *Washington Post* article on 8/8/2009 referenced the base agreement controversy and quoted Chavez warning of potential war in the region. The article continued:

The reaction from Caracas [Venezuela] was no surprise to Washington officials, whom Chavez frequently accuses of plotting against his government. But moderate, European-style leftist governments in South America, most of which have good relations with the United States, have also raised concerns that the proposed U.S. presence is greater than Washington needs for its anti-drug efforts. (Forero, 2009a, p. A06)

The editorials in the *Washington Post* and the *Miami Herald* attempted to isolate Chavez as the lone troublemaker. The articles expressed disappointment in the other Latin American leaders for objecting to the base agreement. The *Miami Herald* stated:

Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, never one to let facts get in his way, is stoking another anti-American controversy among his neighbors. This one involves non-existent U.S. military "bases" in Colombia.

Given the region's traditional sensitivity to claims of U.S. intervention, it's no surprise that he's getting the traction, but it's disappointing to see moderate leaders like Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva take the bait. "I don't like the idea of an American base in the region," Brazil's president said recently.

Neither would Congress, nor the Pentagon, nor the people of Colombia. That's why there are no U.S. bases in Colombia today, nor any plans to change that. Chavez has taken an innocuous proposal between the United States and Colombia to increase military cooperation and fanned that ember into a roaring fire over alleged U.S. imperialism. ("Uproar," 2010)

The *Washington Post's* editorial on 8/24/2009 opening paragraph directly accused Chavez of supplying FARC with weapons, stripping his country of democratic rights, buying weapons from Russia, and showing strong support for Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The article rather sarcastically continued, "So, naturally, Latin American leaders are planning a summit in Argentina this month to urgently confer about... an unremarkable U.S.- Colombian agreement for American forces to use a few Colombian military bases for counternarcotics and

counterterrorism surveillance operations” (“Advantage,” 2009, p. A14). The editorial then accused Chavez of supporting the FARC rebels and concluded stating:

So why the hubbub among Latin American leaders? In part, it stems from ingrained suspicion among leftists toward any American military initiative in the region. But mostly the controversy reflects another successful effort by Mr. Chavez to deflect attention from his own behavior while putting the Obama administration on the defensive. (“Advantage,” 2009, p. A14)

Not only does this editorial imply that the proposition of any malicious or ulterior motive by the U.S. military is absurd, but claims that Chavez’s opposition to the U.S. base agreement is a distraction ploy from his own behavior. Bernardo Alvarz Herrera, the Venezuelan Ambassador to the U.S., wrote a rebuttal to the above editorial titled “Maligning Venezuela” that appeared in the *Washington Post* on 9/4/2009. He stated:

The Aug. 24 editorial “Advantage, Mr. Chavez” recklessly spun slander as fact and once again befuddled your readers.

The ill-conceived decision by Colombia to allow U.S. military forces access to seven military bases constitutes a direct threat to Venezuela and the region. This move favors an increased militarized solution to Colombia’s internal conflict over a peacefully negotiated one. This has ramifications for neighboring Venezuela, which has felt the impact of this failed policy; hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled the violence in their homeland to find safe haven in ours, while our compatriots in border towns face the terrifying spillover effects of Colombia’s violence.

Venezuela wants only to stop this misery and has never supported irregular forces.
(Herrera, 2009, p. A22)

None of the other 32 articles quoted or referenced Mr. Herrera or his argument, who resided in the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in Washington D.C.

Despite the region-wide objections to the U.S.-Colombia base agreement in Latin America, the “base opposition” frame overwhelmingly featured Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, whose name appeared in 29 of the 33 articles. While discussing Uribe traveling to the summit to defend the agreement, Juan Forero (2009b) of the *Washington Post* stated, “The Colombian leader, a stalwart caretaker of Washington’s war on drugs, arrived in Argentina with the challenge of assuaging Chavez” (p. A09).

CNN.com focused almost exclusively on Hugo Chavez. The majority of the *CNN.com* articles either quoted or referenced Chavez speaking of war, and often recycled quotes and statements. The following quote appeared twice, ““The agreement of the seven bases is a declaration of war against the Bolivarian Revolution,’ Chavez added, referring to his socialist political movement, which he named after 19th century Venezuelan leader Simon Bolivar” (“Anti-Chavez,” 2009; “Chavez ready,” 2009). The statement, “Chavez accuses the United States of wanting the bases so it can attack Venezuela,” also appeared in two articles (Brice, 2009; “Chavez criticizes,” 2009). In addition, three articles featured the statement, “Chavez has likened the agreement to an act of war and accused the United States of wanting to stage military personnel nearby to destabilize his leftist government” (CNN wire, 2010; “Colombia US,” 2009; “Killings,” 2009).

The coverage by *CNN.com* focused so extensively on Hugo Chavez of Venezuela that no other country or foreign leader who objected to the base agreement received mention by name. Moreover, *CNN.com* did not mention either of the summits held by Colombia's neighbors. Only two articles even mentioned the fact that other Latin American countries were concerned about the base agreement. Both of the articles contained the same statement, "Colombia's agreement to host the Americans has come under criticism in Latin America, particularly from President Hugo Chavez" (CNN wire, 2010; "Colombia US," 2009). Even in the instance that they mentioned other countries' criticisms of the base agreement they continued to focus on Hugo Chavez.

With the opposition to the base agreement primarily attributed to Hugo Chavez, discrediting Chavez further hindered the momentum of opposing the dominant frame. A major portion of the "White House" frame featured the need to combat the FARC rebels inside Colombia, who allegedly fund their ongoing war with drug money. In late July 2009, the day after Hugo Chavez of Venezuela publically expressed his opposition to the U.S. bases in Colombia, President Uribe of Colombia accused Chavez and Venezuela of supplying the FARC rebels with weapons (Brice, 2009). The *AP* article in the *New York Times* quoted Uribe expressing the urgency of the situation, "President Alvaro Uribe of Colombia said over the weekend that if Colombia had kept quiet about the weapons 'they'll [FARC] fire them and obtain more and no one in the international community will halt their sale'" (Associated Press, 2009b, p. 9). The weapons allegations from Uribe successfully tied the leading voice of the opposition, Chavez, to the self-defined enemy of the United States and Colombia, FARC.

Regardless of the validity of the claims, the timing of the announcement is questionable. At the bottom of the article, the *AP* stated that, "Three launchers were recovered in October in a FARC arms cache belonging to a rebel commander known as 'Jhon 40'" (Associated Press,

2009b, p. 9). The fact that Colombia recovered the weapons *in October 2008*, nine months prior to Uribe going public with the allegations, did not appear in any of the other 32 articles.

Far from questioning the validity of the weapons allegations, the U.S. media drew conclusions regarding them. The *AP* article in the *New York Times* stated, “The confirmation strengthens Colombian accusations that the government of President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has aided the leftist group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC” (Associated Press, 2009b, p. 9). The opinion piece in the *Washington Post* by Schumacher-Matos (2009) discussed Chavez’s involvement with FARC as fact and his objections as false. He praised Ecuador’s superior opposition to FARC and stated, “While Venezuela clearly harbors and funnels arms to the FARC – despite Chavez’s patently false denials – American and Colombian officials say that Ecuador has been cracking down on the guerillas along its border” (Schumacher, 2009, p. A25). The *Washington Post* editorial on 8/24/2009 also indicted Chavez stating, “IN THE COURSE of the past month, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has been exposed as a supplier of advanced weapons to a terrorist group that seeks to overthrow Colombia’s democratic government” (“Advantage,” 2009, p. A 14).

The U.S. media coverage included objections to the weapons allegations, but again the objections were strictly from Chavez or another Venezuelan official. For instance, “Venezuela’s foreign minister, Nicolas Maduro, called the claims part of a ‘brutal campaign’ with a single objective: ‘to justify the presence of United States bases’ in Colombia” (Associated Press, 2009b, p. 9). In response to the weapons allegations, two *CNN.com* articles quoted Chavez as saying, ““What a coincidence that this information comes from Colombia one day after we start to raise our voice against the installation of Yankee bases in Colombian territory”” (“Chavez criticizes,” 2009; “Chavez ready,” 2009).

Colombia and Venezuela rely heavily on each other economically for trade. Rather than consider that Chavez froze trade relations because he was possibly telling the truth, the U.S. media either largely ignored his objections, as did the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, or further discredited him, as did *CNN.com*. The *CNN.com* article by Brice (2009) titled, “Venezuela freezes relations with Colombia” emphasized Chavez as anti-American. The article focused on Colombian and Venezuela trade relations and stated, “Analysts say Chavez’s actions toward Colombia are tied to his feelings toward the United States.” The article then quoted Myles Frechette, a former U.S. ambassador to Colombia, “Chavez hates the United States and he wants to lead a group of countries that don’t pay attention to the United States, ... ‘Uribe is a guy who is in tune with the United States’” (Brice, 2009).

US versus Them

Herman and Chomsky (2002) argue that including ideology in news coverage, which counters the U.S. dominant ideology, seriously discredits the labeled source. The majority of the articles, 21 of the 33, used terms such as “leftist,” “Marxist,” or “socialist” when referencing FARC and Chavez. Eleven of the articles invoked the term “terrorist” when referencing FARC, who were consistently linked to Chavez. In addition, the U.S. media included information regarding Venezuela’s weapons and energy trade with Russia, and highlighted Chavez’s relationship with Iran and Cuba. The U.S. media seemed to draw ideological lines in the sand between those countries who were with the United States and those who were against the U.S. in a narrative reminiscent of the Cold War.

Barrionuevo and Romero (2009) of the *New York Times* opened the article with the statement, “Left-leaning South American leaders criticized Colombia on Friday for agreeing to allow the United States to increase its military presence on Colombian bases” (p. 6). *CNN.com* stated three times that “Chavez has likened the agreement to an act of war and accused the United States of wanting to stage military personnel nearby to destabilize his leftist government” (CNN wire, 2010; “Colombia US,” 2009; “Killings,” 2009). The opening paragraph of the *Washington Post* editorial attacked Chavez and his policies stating, “A national water shortage, the latest product of Mr. Chavez’s ‘21st-century socialism,’ has led to mandatory rationing” (“Save water,” 2009) p. A20).

Two articles in particular highlighted Chavez’s relationship with Russia, sure to evoke a Cold War drumbeat. The *Reuters*’ (2009b) article that appeared in the *New York Times* highlighted Chavez’s trip to Russia in September 2009. The article connected the Russian and Venezuelan arms deals with the FARC weapons allegations. The article quoted Chavez talking about the decline of the US empire, and then stated:

Mr. Chavez, a former soldier who led an unsuccessful coup in the 1990s before later winning an election, has purchased more than \$4 billion worth of Russian arms to resupply the Venezuelan Army, including jet fighters and thousands of Kalashnikov assault rifles.

The Kremlin said that no major arms deals were expected during the visit but that Russia could lend Venezuela money to buy its military equipment. Mr. Chavez has said that he wants to buy dozens of Russian tanks to counter a planned increase in military cooperation between the United States and Colombia.

Venezuela and Colombia came close to war last year, and President Alvaro Uribe of Colombia has accused Mr. Chavez of supporting Marxist rebels who are fighting the Colombian government. (Reuters, 2009b, p. 16)

The *CNN.com* article by Arthur Brice (2009), titled, “Venezuela freezes relations with Colombia,” received the most prominence of all the articles from *CNN.com*, with 1413 words. In the second line of the article that follows Chavez saying he froze diplomatic relations with Colombia, Arthur Brice (2009) writes:

The televised announcement followed declarations from the Colombian government Monday that anti-tank weapons purchased by Venezuela ended up in the hands of the guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as the FARC. In addition, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe said the guerillas were trying to buy anti-aircraft missiles. Venezuela received a shipment of Russian SA-24 Igla shoulder-fired missiles earlier this year and showed them off at a military parade in April.

The rest of the article continued to tie Chavez, FARC, and Russia together in a Cold War style coalition, warning of the dangers of Chavez possibly dealing Russian anti-aircraft weapons to FARC. Susan Kaufmann Purcell, director of the Center for Hemispheric Policy at the University of Miami, directly asserts that Chavez has deep ties with FARC. Moreover, she likens him to Fidel Castro, “Chavez has been modeling himself more on what [former Cuban leader Fidel] Castro used to do in terms of helping insurgencies and destabilizing countries,’ Purcell said.” In responding to the notion that Chavez may not want to risk his relationship with the Russians by dealing arms to FARC, Brice writes, “Purcell said Russia might not care, pointing out that

‘Castro did all sorts of things that the Soviets didn’t like’ but still kept supporting him for decades” (Brice, 2009).

The U.S. media provided minimal information contrary to the dominant “White House” frame. The inclusion of contrary information came from foreign sources. The U.S. and Colombian officials and the U.S. media drowned the foreign sources in stereotypes and generalizations. The “leftist” and “Marxist” labels serve as reminders of the distinct ideological differences from the United States. By subverting the opposing frame, the dominant frame depleted the potency of the contrary information.

Quantitatively, the “base opposition” frame surfaced in more articles than the “White House” frame. The “base opposition” frame appeared in 30 of the 33 articles, including 10 of the 13 *New York Times* articles, 9 of the 9 *Washington Post* articles, 10 of the 10 *CNN.com* articles, and the single *Miami Herald* editorial. The “White House” frame appeared in 24 of the 33 articles, including 9 of the 13 articles in the *New York Times*, 8 of the 9 articles in the *Washington Post*, 6 of the 10 articles in *CNN.com*, and the single *Miami Herald* article.

The discrepancy in the number of articles in which the two frames appeared is due to the weapons controversies involving Colombia and Venezuela. The articles that did not contain the “White House” frame pertained to Venezuela buying weapons from Russia, the FARC weapons controversy, and the turbulent relationship between Venezuela and Colombia. These articles quickly referenced Chavez’s objections to the base agreement, usually in one or two lines. I included them in the analysis because the articles presented a relationship between the weapons controversies and the base agreement.

In the coverage that the controversy received, however, the “White House” frame emerged as the dominant frame due to its repetition across multiple sources from the U.S. and Colombian governments, as well as the U.S. media. With the near absolute exclusion of opposing domestic voices from the United States and Colombia, the “base opposition” frame was seriously disadvantaged. The overwhelming focus the media paid Hugo Chavez as the primary political actor opposing the agreement further hindered the opposition’s chances of succeeding in the framing battle.

In the articles that featured the “White House” frame, it garnered more prominence than the “base opposition” frame. In addition, the base accord appeared to have wide-ranging support in Colombia. The “White House” frame traveled uniformly and consistently from top officials, to other leaders in both countries, to the U.S. media nearly unscathed. Multiple sources from the U.S. and Colombia repeated the tightly wound narrative of the need for additional U.S. support to fight narco-traffickers and the FARC rebels.

Typically, opposing political actors attempt to win the framing battle with the salience of their frames in the media (Entman, 2004). However, considering that the Colombian and the U.S. governments both favored the base agreement, they would not benefit from media attention. This is likely the reason for the attempted secrecy surrounding the agreement. Media exposure to this issue would actually hinder the U.S. and Colombian goals of increasing U.S. troop levels in Colombia, sure to be a hot button issue in the region. Therefore, the White House benefited from the lack of attention that the issue received in the U.S. mainstream media.

Though the “base opposition” frame did not gain substantial momentum in the U.S. media, the Colombian Constitutional Court suspended the base agreement. A mere two articles covered the base cancellation, one by the *Washington Post* on 8/27/2010 (Schumacher-Matos, 2010), and one by *CNN.com* on 8/17/2010 (CNN wire, 2010). Both of the articles carried the “White House” frame. The *Washington Post* article, an opinion piece by Edward Schumacher-Matos (2010), stated, “The military pact, which governs U.S. use of seven Colombian bases, is seen by Chavez—whether rationally or not—as a threat...All this damages our interests against drugs and terrorism.”

Table 1. Prominence and Sources of U.S. mainstream media articles

	<i>CNN.com</i>	<i>Miami Herald</i>	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>
Prominence				
Total # of articles	10	1	13	9
Total word count	4726	516	4778	6094
Pg./section range	Section: World	Commentary	Pgs. 5 - 19	Pgs. 6 - 25
Date range	7/28- 11/9/2009 *8/17/2010	8/13/2009	7/16- 10/31/2009	8/8 - 11/12/2009 *8/27/2010
Sources				
Official	26	4	41	35
Non-official	5	0	3	3

*base cancellation article

The Untold Story: Counterframes and Omissions

The intent of this section is to highlight and discuss briefly mentioned or omitted information that could provide context to the broader issues addressed in the media coverage of the Colombian and U.S. base agreement. Again, according to Entman (2004) the media have the

responsibility to provide enough information, independent of the White House framing of the issues, so that the public can produce their own “counterframe.”

The dominance of the “White House” frame did not suppress all contrary information, other than the “base opposition” frame, in the U.S. mainstream media. The U.S. media included some information that briefly challenged the dominant frame and provided validity to the “base opposition” frame. However, how information is presented can subvert its potency, making counter-interpretations difficult for individuals who are not foreign policy experts (Entman, 2004; Herman and Chomsky, 2002). In addition, I will demonstrate the complete omissions of substantial counterframing information.

Documents

The *Washington Post* article on 8/29/2009 by Juan Forero briefly mentioned Hugo Chavez reading a document to the other Latin American leaders at the second summit. Forero (2009d) quoted Chavez claiming that the document provided evidence of U.S. intentions of war in securing the base agreement. Forero (2009b) then stated, “The document, which is public, is an unofficial, academic paper—some 14,000 words long—that explains the importance of more than 40 bases worldwide for U.S. air mobility” (p. A09). This is the only mention of any documents in any of the 33 articles, and it received four lines of total coverage.

The document that Chavez read at the summit to the Latin American leaders is titled, “White Paper: Global Enroute Strategy of the US Air Mobility Command” (Golinger, 2009a; Livingstone, 2010). The document is accessible through the *World Politics Review* database, which is an online-subscription database regarding international affairs and foreign policy information hosted by EBSCO Host (About World, 2011). The “White Paper: Global Enroute

Strategy of the US Air Mobility Command” is also available through a website Eva Golinger contributes to titled *centrodealerta.org*. The article demonstrates the broader vision of the U.S. military in relation to the primacy of the bases in Latin America, including global combat missions (“White Paper,” 2009; Fox, 2009a; Golinger, 2009a, Livingstone, 2010). The “White Paper” specifically references the primacy and desire of the Palanquero, Colombia military base by the U.S. (Fox, 2009a; “White Paper,” 2009).

Air Mobility Command, which is an official division of the United States Air Force (Air, 2010), produced the document that Forero (2009b) of the *Washington Post* referred to as “an unofficial, academic paper” and quickly dismissed (p. A09). It may be an “unofficial, academic paper” as Forero claimed, nevertheless, by omitting its production by the United States Air Force and failing to provide any content from the document essentially eliminated its validity in strengthening Chavez’s argument.

Perhaps the most substantial information omitted from the U.S. mainstream media pertains to the language of the official U.S. Air Force document that outlines the need for construction funds to improve the capabilities of the sought after Palanquero military base in Colombia. The document produced by the United States Air Force titled, “Department of the Air Force Military Construction Program, Fiscal Year 2010,” is a 346-page proposal from the U.S. Air Force submitted to the U.S. Congress in May 2009 for budgetary approval. The U.S. Air Force document outlines the need for funds regarding various construction programs at dozens of military bases around the world, including the U.S. desired base in Palanquero, Colombia (Department, 2009). Eva Golinger (2009a) in her *venezuelanalysis.com* article titled, “Official US Air Force Document Reveals the True Intentions Behind the US-Colombia Military Agreement,” provided a link to the complete official U.S. Air Force document, which I obtained.

The U.S. Air Force document (Department, 2009) provides substantial validity to the concerns of the Latin American leaders. The document states, “This Cooperative Security Location (CSL) enhances the U.S. Global Defense Posture (GDP) Strategy...Palanquero provides an opportunity for conducting full spectrum operations throughout South America including CN [counternarcotics] missions. It also supports mobility missions by providing access to the entire continent...” (Department, 2009, p. 215). According to the Department of Defense *DOD Dictionary of Military Terms* (2011), “Cooperative Security Locations [CSL] provide contingency access, logistic support, and rotational use by operating forces and are a focal point for security cooperation activities.” The document then details the proposed construction projects including widening and reinforcing the Palanquero runways in order to accommodate aircraft and refueling capabilities, justifying the need for the requested \$46 million from Congress. The document continues:

Location (CSL) at Palanquero best supports the COCOM’s [Command Combatant’s] Theater Posture Strategy² and demonstrates our commitment to this relationship.

Development of this CSL provides a unique opportunity for full spectrum operations in a critical sub region of our hemisphere where security and stability is under constant threat from narcotics funded terrorist insurgencies, anti-US governments, endemic poverty and recurring natural disasters. (Department, 2009, p. 217)

Not only is the U.S. Air Force concerned with “narcotics funded terrorists” but also “anti-US governments” (Department, 2009, p. 217).

² “Concepts and courses of action directed toward securing the objectives of national and multinational policies and strategies through the synchronized and integrated employment of military forces and other instruments of national power,” (DOD,2011].

The Air Force document then describes the cost benefits and prime location of the Palanquero base for fighting “narco-terrorists” in the Andean Ridge, among other advantages. According to the U.S. Air Force document, “Palanquero supports the mobility mission by providing access to the entire South American Continent with the exception of the Cape Horn region if fuel is available, and over half of the continent unrefueled” (Department, 2009, p. 217).

The section of Air Force document titled “IMPACT IF NOT PROVIDED” states:

If these upgrades are not accomplished, it will severely limit the ability of USSOUTHCOM to support the U.S. Global Defense Posture (GDP) Strategy which directs development of a comprehensive and integrated presence and basing strategy aligned with the principles of developing relationships with partner nations, ensuring mutual benefits between US and partner nations, limited restrictions on U.S. freedom of action by partner nations and appropriate sharing of costs. Not funding this project will limit USSOUTHCOM to four other CSLs which are restricted to supporting aerial counter narcotics missions only and two other locations that, while not mission restricted, are too distant to accommodate mission requirements in the AOR [area of responsibility]. (Department, 2009, p. 217)

Again, seemingly contradicting the dominant frame of needing the bases strictly for counternarcotics purposes, the document warns that not funding the Palanquero project limits USSOUTHCOM to “...four other CSLs which are restricted to *supporting aerial counter narcotics missions only...*” [Italics added]. In addition, the dominant frame repeatedly claimed that Colombian forces would possess the authority in all missions, while this document

highlights the benefits of, "...limited restrictions on U.S. freedom of action by partner nations..." (Department, 2009, p. 217).

The language of Air Force document continued contradicting the dominant frame, saying, "A presence [in Palanquero] will also increase our capability to conduct Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), improve global reach, support logistics requirements, improve partnerships, improve theater security cooperation, and *expand expeditionary warfare capability*" [Italics added] (p. 218). Furthermore, the U.S. Air Force document concluded expressing that the Air Force would maintain priority use over the Palanquero base; however, if needed, "Palanquero will provide joint use capability to U.S. Army, Air Force, Marine, and U.S. Interagency aircraft and personnel in addition to building partner capacity of the Colombian forces" (Department, 2009, p. 218).

Coincidentally or not, two weeks after Eva Golinger (2009a) published her article on *Venezuelanalysis.com* on 11/5/2009 exposing the document titled "Department of the Air Force Military Construction Program, Fiscal Year 2010," the U.S. Air Force submitted a revised edition of the proposal (Golinger, 2009b). According to Golinger (2009b), the modified document removed nearly all of the damaging language such as "full spectrum operations" and "anti-American governments." Nevertheless, the U.S. Congress approved the requested \$46 million Palanquero construction project before the addendum. The revised proposal only reduced the requested amount by \$3 million, which according to Golinger (2009b) is largely symbolic. She argues, "Furthermore, the monetary request is reduced by a mere \$3 million to \$43 million, evidencing that the original project remains almost 100% in tact" (Golinger, 2009b).

Regardless of the intent of the revised U.S. Air Force document, which occurred two weeks after the base accord signing on 10/30/2009, the U.S. mainstream media sampled in this study did not mention the construction proposal for the Palenquero base one time. The U.S. Congress received the original U.S. Air Force proposal in May 2009, meaning it was publically available for the entirety of the coverage period used for this analysis (Department, 2009; Golinger, 2009a). The language used in the “Department of the Air Force Military Construction Program, Fiscal Year 2010,” provided substantial potential counterframing information.

I also located a copy of the actual U.S. and Colombian base agreement through the U.S. Department of State website. The official title of the agreement is the “U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement” (*U.S.- Colombia*, 2009). The base agreement does not contain the clear, purposeful language set forth by the White House and the Colombian government. In fact, listed under the number one goal of the agreement, in addition to “counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism,” the agreement states the need for combined surveillance and reconnaissance missions “...in order to address common threats to peace, stability, freedom, and democracy” (*U.S.- Colombia.*, 2009, p. 4). Dubious terms such as “peace, stability, freedom, and democracy” as justifications for the use of military action seem to grant the U.S. and Colombian governments a great deal of operational autonomy.

The U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement does not explicitly state the limits of U.S. personnel levels of 800 troops and 600 private contractors, which the U.S. mainstream media repeated throughout the coverage; however, the accord referenced several previous agreements that remain in force that may include the troop limits. The majority of the agreement detailed the tax-exempt status of the United States. In addition, the base accord granted the U.S. access to more facilities than just the seven bases. The agreement includes, “...allowing access to

and use of other facilities and locations as may be agreed by the Parties or their Executive Agents” (*U.S.- Colombia*, 2009, p. 5). Again, vague language that appears to give the U.S. military unlimited access to Colombian facilities if deemed necessary by both governments. (To view the complete copies of the documents referenced above see footnote)³

Domestic Opposition: U.S. & Colombia, take II

On 7/27/2009 *Democracy Now* host Amy Goodman interviewed John Lindsay-Poland regarding the U.S.-Colombia base agreement. John Lindsay-Poland is the co-director of Fellowship of Reconciliation Latin America Program, and author of *Emperors in the Jungle: The Hidden History of the US in Panama* (Goodman, 2009a). Poland’s organization, the Fellowship of Reconciliation Latin America Program, sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urging her to drop the Colombia base deal and rethink the drug war. The letter contained signatures from over “...100 religious, community, and academic figures...” (Goodman, 2009b). In a single interview, *Democracy Now* provided more possible counterframing information from a domestic source than the totality of the U.S. mainstream media.

Mr. Poland criticized the base agreement stating, “...these bases represent an institutionalization of the relationship between the US and Colombian military, at a time when the Colombian military is being heavily criticized for killings of civilians...for pay, in order to produce body counts” (Goodman, 2009a). Poland referenced the U.S. Air Force documents as evidence that the agreement is more than simply fighting illegal drugs. He also argued that

³ For a complete copy of the original “Department of the Air Force Military Construction Program, Fiscal Year 2010” visit <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/4917>; for a copy of the “*White Paper: Global Enroute Strategy of the US Air Mobility Command*” visit http://www.centrodealerta.org/documentos_desclasificados/globalenroutestrategy.pdf; and for a complete copy of “*The U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement*” visit <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/aug/128021.htm>

instead of seeking additional bases in Colombia after the Ecuador base closure, the U.S. should have reconsidered the approach to the drug war. The drug war, Poland stated:

...has been a total failure in terms—any way you measure it, whether you're talking about the amount of land in Colombia that's planted with coca leaves, if you're talking about the price of cocaine on the street in the United States, or the purity or the amount of cocaine that's available. (Goodman, 2009a)

The U.S.-Colombian base agreement granted U.S. personnel and their dependents full diplomatic immunity from crimes committed in Colombia, a point of contention in the country (Goodman, 2009a). Per the agreement, "...Colombia shall guarantee that its authorities verify, as promptly as possible, the immunity status of United States personnel and their dependents who are suspected of criminal activity in Colombia..." (*U.S.- Colombia*, 2009, p. 7). John Lindsay-Poland claimed several Colombian presidential candidates objected to the base agreement. Poland stated:

There's a lot of concern about immunity that would be offered to Colombian troops, because—I'm sorry, US troops in Colombia, because of crimes that have been committed by US troops, as well as private contractors, US contractors from the military, that have been committed on Colombian soil, including rapes and arms trafficking, that are not prosecuted in Colombian courts. The Colombian courts don't have jurisdiction under the current agreements and would not under the new base agreements. So there's criticism of that. (Goodman, 2009a, para. 19).

Articles regarding the base agreement that appeared on *Venezuelanalysis.com* contained several examples of domestic Colombian opposition to the accord. In the March 2010 issue of *The Progressive* magazine, freelance journalist and author Benjamin Dangl wrote an article titled, “U.S. Bases in Colombia Rattle the Region,” which *Venezuelanalysis.com* also featured. Dangl (2010) phone interviewed Colombian senator Jorge Enrique Robledo of the Polo Democratico Alternativo, the opposition party to President Uribe. Senator Robledo stated, “The main purpose of expanding these bases is to take strategic control of Latin America” (Dangl, 2010). He also included opposition from Enrique Daza, the director of the Hemispheric Social Alliance in Bogota. Daza, along with activist organizations in Colombia, the U.S., and Canada, sent President Obama a letter denouncing the base agreement and saying it contradicts Obama’s promise of a friendly relationship with Latin American countries. Daza stated, “This deal is a threat to the new governments that have emerged...demanding sovereignty, autonomy, and independence in the region, and this bases [sic] agreement collides directly with that” (Dangl, 2010). He continued:

Opposition to the military bases agreement is vocal in Colombia. In a column written in July 2009, Senator Robledo denounced it, saying, “There is no law that allows bases of this type in Colombia.” One struggle, Robledo said, is on the legal and political front. The other is among social movements in Colombia and beyond. “it is important to organize a type of democratic citizens’ movement, a national campaign against these foreign bases, as well as a continental social alliance that promotes the denunciation of this agreement,” he says. (Dangl, 2010)

James Suggett (2009b), a regular contributor to *Venezuelanalysis.com* featured opposition from Colombia and Brazil. Suggett (2009b) quoted Brazilian Presidential Advisor Marco Aurelio Garcia's interview with the Colombian newspaper *El Pais*, suggesting that Venezuela and Colombia sign a "non-aggression pact." Garcia said Brazil would provide technical support including surveillance planes to encourage joint border surveillance cooperation between Colombia and Venezuela. Suggett (2009b) continued:

In a recent radio interview, Colombian Ex-President Ernesto Samper said Colombians "should not deceive ourselves" about the fact that the accord will allow the U.S. to bring more advanced spy equipment into the country.

He also implied that the possibility of war as a result of the deal is not far-fetched, considering how Colombia-Venezuelan relations have deteriorated since July.

"I would say we are in a pre-war situation; the poorly managed issue of the bases, Venezuela feels threatened by the bases, the government signs on to the bases without a public discussion of the issue, and all this starts to accumulate," he said. "The situation can harden and reach extremes."

Freelance journalist, author, and *Venezuelanalysis.com* contributor Kiraz Janicke, quoted Senator Piedad Cordoba of Colombia's Liberal Party in an interview with Venezuelan news station *Telsur*. Senator Cordoba discussed the base agreement and stated, "Fundamentally, it is very shameful because we are left as some servants of the empire, doing errands, acting as scabs, handing over territory and losing dignity," she said" (Janicke, 2009).

Recall the sole instance of U.S. domestic opposition in the U.S. mainstream media, a letter to Secretary of State Clinton from Senators Dodd and Leahy in the *Washington Post* (Forero and Sheridan, 2009). Forero and Sheridan (2009) paraphrased the letter and stated the U.S. Senators "...asked Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in a letter why they had not been consulted about the plan and wondered why the Obama administration was deepening its ties with a military they accuse of human rights abuses" (p. A12).

Dangl (2010) provided an actual quote from the letter written by Senators Dodd and Leahy rather than a paraphrased statement as did Forero and Sheridan (2009). Dangle (2010) wrote:

In a July 2009 letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Senators Patrick Leahy and Christopher Dodd wrote: "What are the implications of further deepening our relationship with the Colombian military at a time of growing revelations about the widespread falsos positivos ("false positives") scandal, in which the Colombian military recruited many hundreds (some estimates are as high as 1,600) of boys and young men for jobs in the countryside that did not exist and then summarily executed them to earn bonuses and vacation days?"

The above quote provides explicit information regarding the human rights violations by the Colombian government, including the execution of hundreds of innocent boys and young men. Seemingly, in providing the only domestic U.S. objection to the base agreement in the U.S. mainstream press, Forero and Sheridan (2009) softened the objectionable language by Sens. Dodd and Leahy in their paraphrased interpretation. Furthermore, the last part of Forero and Sheridan's (2009) statement, "...a military that *they* accuse of human rights abuses," [italics

added] implies that Senators Dodd and Leahy are independently making the humans rights accusations against Colombia, which is far from true.

In addition to the “false positives” scandal, Colombia owns one of the worst human rights records in the world (Associated Press, 2009a; Begg, 2009; Livingstone, 2010; U.S. policy, 2011). Amnesty International accuses Colombia of severe human rights abuses and has demanded the end of U.S. aid to Colombia for over a decade (U.S. policy, 2011). According to Amnesty International, the human rights violations in Colombia include, “...torture, massacres, ‘disappearances’ and killings of non-combatants are widespread and collusion between the armed forces and paramilitary groups continues to this day” (U.S. policy, 2011).

The *New York Times* featured an *Associated Press* article on 8/12/2009 titled “U.S. Upgrades Colombia’s Human Rights Score” (p. 5). The article pertained to the U.S. State Department officially upgrading Colombia’s human rights record, despite wide-ranging objections from international human rights groups. According to the Associated Press (2009c), “The International Trade Confederation says Colombia is the deadliest country [in the world] for labor rights advocates...” (p. 5). The piece referenced the false positives stating, “A United Nations human rights investigator reported in June that soldiers had killed hundreds of civilians, falsely identifying them as guerillas slain in combat, to bolster body counts” (Associated Press, 2009c, p. 5).

A congressional regulation requires the U.S. State Department to certify human rights progress by the Colombian government prior to issuing the full amount of U.S. aid (U.S. policy, 2011). If the State Department does not officially upgrade Colombia’s human rights score each year, Colombia only receives 75% of the U.S. monetary aid. The U.S. State Department

upgraded Colombia's human rights score in 2009 in the face of condemnation from organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and United Nations Human Rights (Associated Press, 2009c; Livingstone, 2010; U.S. policy, 2011). The *AP* article in the *New York Times* (Associated Press, 2009c) featured the only mention of Colombia's human rights issues in the U.S. mainstream media sample here other than Forero and Sheridan's (2009c) toned down, one sentence inclusion in the *Washington Post*.

FARC and Civil War

The U.S. mainstream media repeatedly referred to the 45-year conflict between FARC and the Colombian government. For instance, "FARC has been fighting the Colombian government for more than 45 years" ("Chavez: Ready," 2009). However, historical context from the U.S. media regarding the FARC-Colombian conflict typically ended with the length of the battle.

Perhaps, terminology that is more appropriate considering the length and nature of the conflict is "civil war" (Dube and Naidu, 2010; Suggett, 2010a, 2010b). An ongoing, internal war lasting nearly five decades, one would assume, requires financial and personnel support within that country in order to sustain the war efforts. Considering the battle has raged for over 45 years, "civil war" seems like a safe assumption. Furthermore, the U.S. media supplied no alternative solution to the ongoing conflict other than increased U.S. military presence.

According to the Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a nongovernmental organization, the civil war in Colombia has displaced over 4 million people, the second largest displaced population in the world (*Displaced Colombians*, 2011). "The civil war in Colombia has spanned more than four decades and has resulted in the most urgent humanitarian crisis in our

hemisphere. Civilians are the real victims of this war between left-wing guerillas, right-wing paramilitaries, and the Colombian government's armed forces," states RCUSA (*Displaced Colombians*, 2011).

The increased militarization solution to the civil war consequently affects Colombia's neighbors. Between 120,000- 200,000 Colombian refugees are in Venezuela and over 130,000 are in Ecuador ("Colombia Reports," 2009). The letter to the editor in the *Washington Post* from Venezuelan Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez Herrera (2009), constituted the only mention of the refugee situation in Colombia by the U.S. media. Again, while discussing the ill-advised military increase by the U.S and Colombia over a peaceful solution, Herrera stated, "...hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled the violence in their homeland to find safe haven in ours, while our compatriots in border towns face the terrifying spillover effects of Colombia's violence" (Herrera, 2009).

Additionally, the notion of a peaceful solution pertaining to the Colombian-FARC conflict received no mention in the U.S. media other than Herrera (2009). According to Suggett (2010a) and Janicke (2009), FARC leadership showed willingness to negotiate a peaceful political solution to end the conflict, which the Colombian people largely supported. Referencing Colombian Senator Cordoba, Janicke (2009) stated, "Moreover, Cordoba declared, a clear majority of Colombians support a political and negotiated solution to the war with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), not a policy of escalation 'that jeopardises [*sic*] the safety of our neighbors.'" Suggett (2010a) stated:

On Thursday and over the weekend, many news sources reported that the FARC, the largest guerilla group in Colombia, said it was willing to talk to the incoming president,

Juan Santos. FARC leader, Alfonso Cano, said the group was willing to look for a political solution. A spokesperson for Santos said the government was prepared to talk to the FARC, on the condition that they lay down arms and release all hostages.

“The dilemma is between words and missiles, that is to say, between bringing the voluntary exercise of peace to the dialogue table of the peoples of the South, or maintaining an environment of confrontation in the region with an elevated danger of war,” Chavez wrote.

Plan Colombia-Drug War Criticisms

Criticisms or objections to the fundamental purpose or progress of Plan Colombia did not appear anywhere in my sample of U.S. mainstream media coverage of the base agreement. In discussing Colombian Senator Cordoba’s objections to the base agreement, Janicke (2009) stated, “Responding to Uribe, the senator argued that the Colombian government’s ‘war on drugs’ is a ‘total failure,’ and the agreement constitutes a ‘threat to the region.’” John Lindsay-Poland shared similar sentiments as the Senator regarding the drug war during his *Democracy Now* interview (Goodman, 2009a). Poland also called the drug war a “total failure” and claimed that cocaine production is up in Colombia along with the purity of cocaine on U.S. streets, while the price continues to drop (Goodman, 2009a).

Former Pulitzer Prize-winning foreign correspondent for the *New York Times* and current journalism professor at Stanford University, Joel Brinkley, wrote an opinion piece titled “Plan Colombia is a failure and should be shut down” on 3/16/2009, which I retrieved from the newspaper *The Cleveland Plain Dealer’s* website *Cleveland.com*. Brinkley (2009) provided statistics regarding Colombia’s cocaine production in 1999, the first year of Plan Colombia,

when Colombia produced 90 percent of the world's cocaine. He continued, "After 10 years of eradication efforts, Colombia now has more than 575,750 acres of coca-plant-cultivation—a 25 percent increase! The United Nations reports that cultivation increased by 27 percent over the last year, and Colombia still produces 90 percent of the world's cocaine" (Brinkley, 2009).

Brinkley (2009) interviewed former Vice President and current President of Colombia Juan Santos. Brinkley pressured Santos into commenting on if he thought that Colombia could handle Plan Colombia on its own, free from U.S. help. "That's not the official position," he [Santos] said. "But I have no doubt we can do it," Brinkley wrote (2009).

Brinkley (2009) mentioned the concept of treating demand for cocaine in the United States as an alternative to attempting to destroy the supply in Latin America. U.S. citizens are responsible for consuming the overwhelming majority of Colombia's cocaine, a seldom-discussed fact that appeared in the U.S. media coverage only one time. "About 90 percent of the cocaine produced in Colombia is smuggled into the United States, despite more than \$6 billion of American security aid to Colombia over the last decade to combat insurgents and trafficking," stated Barrionuevo and Romero (2009) of the *New York Times*. The preceding statement by Barrionuevo and Romero (2009) may seem like criticism of the drug war in this context; however, it appeared as a component of Uribe's reasoning of the need for continued American support.

Brinkley (2009) is not the only person calling for treating the demand for cocaine rather than the supply. Rouse and Arce (2006) conducted research pertaining to the "balloon effect." The "balloon effect" is notion that governmental efforts focusing on eradicating cocaine production in a specific area simply leads to the expansion of production in surrounding areas

(Rouse and Arce, 2006). They conclude that as long as cocaine farming is a lucrative practice, eradication efforts are challenging. “Therefore, as long as eradication practices continue to ignore the incentives for cultivating coca, the solution to the problem of drugs may not be on the supply side, but rather lies in U.S. and worldwide demand,” stated Rouse and Arce (2006).

New York City based freelance journalist Roque Planas, who wrote an article regarding the base agreement that *Venezuelanalysis.com* carried, stated:

The Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy, headed by ex-presidents Cesar Gaviria of Colombia and Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil, released a statement last February calling for a “paradigm shift” away from repressive policies and toward reducing drug consumption by treating it as a public health issue rather than a criminal one. The report notes that, “The United States allocates a much larger portion of resources to eradication and interdiction as well as to maintaining its legal and penal system than to investments in health, prevention, treatment and the rehabilitation of drug users.” (Planas, 2009)

Author, journalist, and former Yale professor Maggie Maher produces the blog *Health Beat*. She wrote an article titled “The Drug War versus Health Care” on 12/12/2007. Maher (2007) provided evidence of the effectiveness of drug treatment and lowering demand, rather than pursuing the suppliers and dealers, both domestically and abroad. Maher (2007) stated:

But as it turns out, a serious commitment to treatment would actually end up being cost-effective. A landmark RAND study from 1994 found that treatment is 10 times more cost-effective than efforts to prohibit and intercept drug shipments in reducing the use of cocaine in the U.S. The same study found that every additional dollar invested in

substance abuse treatment saves taxpayers more than \$7 in societal costs, where as additional domestic law enforcement costs 15 times as much as treatment to achieve the same reduction in societal costs.

Maher (2007) argued that American's tough drug stance, which aims to raise drug prices by pursuing dealers and suppliers using law enforcement, has failed. She continued:

As two researcher from Carnegie Mellon and the University of Maryland reported last year, "incarceration for drug law violations (primarily pertaining to cocaine and heroin) increased 11-fold between 1980 and 2002, yet...cocaine and heroin prices fell by 80 percent. Methamphetamine prices also fell by more than 50 percent...and marijuana prices...fell during the 1990s." For all our crackdowns, drugs have only gotten more affordable. (Maher, 2007)

Everything Else and More

Several other events recently occurred in Latin America involving the U.S. government and military that provide context for the concerns of the Latin American people. These topics could constitute individual research projects. In an effort to finish this particular project, I simply supply brief summaries.

In 2008, the United States government reestablished the Fourth Fleet of the U.S. Navy (Gragg, 2008). The U.S. government deactivated the Fourth Fleet following World War II in 1950. According to U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command Public Affairs Mass Communication Specialist, Alan Gragg (2009), the Fourth Fleet's responsibilities include, "...ships, aircraft, and submarines..." in the "...Caribbean, and Central and South America and the surrounding waters." Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead stated, "Reconstituting the Fourth

Fleet recognizes the immense importance of maritime security in the southern part of the Western Hemisphere, *and sends a strong signal to all the civil and military maritime services in Central and Latin America,*’ [Italics added] said Roughead. ‘Aligning the Fourth Fleet along with our other numbered fleets and providing the capabilities and personnel are a logical execution of our new Maritime Strategy’” (Gragg, 2009).

The “new Maritime Strategy” mentioned by Admiral Roughead (Gragg, 2009), is a collaborative maritime strategy encompassing the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Coast Guard (*Cooperative Strategy*, 2007). In describing the new strategy a U.S. Navy official document stated, “It describes *how seapower will be applied around the world to protect our way of life* [italics added], as we join with other like-minded nations to protect and sustain the global, inter-connected system through which we prosper” (*Cooperative Strategy*, 2007).

Brazil is particularly wary of the reactivation of the U.S. Navy Fourth Fleet in light of recent massive oil discoveries of its coast (Barrionuevo, 2009a; Planas, 2009). The U.S. media mentioned the Fourth Fleet one time in the Colombia base agreement coverage. In discussing Brazilian President da Silva’s concerns regarding the base agreement, Barrionuevo (2009) stated, “He also reiterated his concerns about the Fourth Fleet, which the United States reactivated last year in the Americas, and its ships’ ability to range over waters where Brazil would be developing large deep-water oil fields” (p. 5).

In late 2009, simultaneous to the U.S.-Colombian base agreement, Panama agreed to allow the U.S. Navy access to two bases (“Panama agrees,” 2009; “Panamanian president,” 2009). The access to Panama constituted the first U.S. military presence inside the country since 1999. In July 2010, the government of Costa Rica granted the U.S. permission to station 7000

marines, over 200 helicopters, 5 planes, and 46 warships in the country (“Costa Rica,” 2010; Petras, 2010). The United States professed the need to combat narcotrafficking as the need for the drastic increase of military presence in both Costa Rica and Panama (“Panamanian president,” 2009; “Costa Rica,” 2010).

I searched LexisNexis database for coverage regarding the U.S. military access to the Panama bases using the search terms “Panama,” “Panama and U.S.,” and “Panama bases” and then manually searched within the results for articles in late 2009 and early 2010, the time of the agreement. The LexisNexis search returned zero articles regarding the U.S.-Panama agreement in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. I then searched “Major World Publications,” which yielded a single *BBC* article that was an English translation from the Panamanian newspaper *La Prensa*. The article stated, “Government Minister Jose Raul Mulino, said that by October 30, the two countries are expected to sign a regional agreement to combat drug trafficking,” which “...would install naval bases in Bahia Pina in the Darien province, and Punta Coca in the southern region of Veraguas; both along the Pacific coast of Panama” (“Panamanian president,” 2009).

In 2002, Hugo Chavez was victim of a short-lived military coup. Chavez staunchly accused the Bush administration of orchestrating the coup, a view shared by the Organization of American States (“Chavez reveals,” 2009; Planas, 2009; Vulliamy, 2002). The Bush administration immediately endorsed businessman Pedro Carmona, who seized power from Chavez only to surrender to a popular uprising 48 hours later (Vulliamy, 2002). Additionally, Petras (2010) argues that the Obama administration backed the 2009 coup in Honduras, which ousted President Zelaya, a Chavez ally.

Other than mentioning the aid that the U.S. provided Colombia regarding Plan Colombia (over \$6 billion since 1999), the U.S. mainstream media did not address the U.S. military budget in any way during the base agreement coverage. The amount of money the United States spends on weapons and military equipment, or the level of arms aid provided by the U.S. to foreign governments did not appear anywhere in the coverage. Nevertheless, Venezuela's military spending constituted a portion of the U.S. mainstream media's conversation regarding the Colombian base agreement.

In addition to the articles previously discussed in the "US versus Them" section of this paper, CNN Producer Elise Labott wrote an article titled, "U.S. fears Venezuela could trigger regional arms race" (Labott, 2009). The article by Labott (2009), which featured Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressing concerns regarding Venezuela's weapons purchases from Russia. Secretary of State Clinton stated, "They [Venezuela] outpace all other countries in South America and certainly raise the question as to whether there is going to be an arms race in the region" (Labott, 2009).

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is either largely misinformed or recklessly exaggerating Venezuelan military expenditures in 2009. Suggett (2010a) referenced the Swedish based Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which "... is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament" (About SIRPI, 2011). Brazil earned top military spending honors in Latin America with \$27 billion, followed by *Colombia* with \$10 billion (SIPRI, 2010). Venezuela ranked fifth in the region with \$3.2 billion (not equating one-third of Colombia's expenditures) behind Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Chile. In terms of percentage of national GDP, Colombia ranks number one in Latin America spending 3.7% of GDP, more than double Venezuela (SIPRI,

2010). “Last year [2009], Colombia increased its military expenditure by 11% and its military spending as a percentage of GDP was the greatest in the region. Venezuela reduced its military spending by 25% last year...,” stated Suggett (2010a).

Considering the increased U.S. military presence in Panama, Costa Rica, the reactivation of the Fourth Fleet, and the attempted increase in U.S. troops in Colombia, the headline, “U.S. Base Access in Colombia Prompts Increase in South American Defense Spending,” by Roque Planas (2009) seems more appropriate than the Labbott (2009) headline warning of Venezuela triggering an arms race. To provide some context, the \$3.2 billion that Venezuela spent in 2009 is approximately the same amount that the United States *gives* to Israel each year, and is about 1/234th the size of the U.S. military budget (Sharp, 2010). Perhaps someone should urge Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who, “...urged Venezuela to be transparent about its weapons purchases” (Labott, 2009), to heed her own advice, as well as provide more accurate information regarding accusations targeted toward U.S. adversaries. “The U.S. government approved \$40 billion in worldwide private arms sales in 2009, including more than \$7 billion to Mideast and North African nations that are struggling with political upheaval, according to newly released government figures,” (“\$40 billion,” 2011).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Attempting to alleviate various ideological skepticisms regarding dissident academics, freelance journalists, and political activists, I provided numerous supplemental sources to qualify, what transpired to be, substantial claims and arguments. I assumed that personal biases for many readers' would greatly discount the information provided by the alternative media outlets without the inclusion of these additional sources. When taken in total, the briefly mentioned, toned down, and omitted information by the U.S. mainstream media in this study is extensive. This project demonstrated that while traditionally analyzing the content that appears in the U.S. media proved useful, the greater discoveries came from the less researched area of information omitted from the coverage.

As suggested by Boycoff (2007), Hallin (1994), and Herman and Chomsky (2002), critical and dissident voices and perspectives did not appear in the U.S. mainstream media coverage sampled here. The story told by the U.S. media reflected the explanations for the base agreement through the lens of policy makers, as argued by Cook (2005) and Hallin (1994). The U.S. media nearly strictly deferred to elite sources for insight and analysis regarding the base controversy, of which the overwhelming majority supported the "White House" frame. The softened paraphrased interpretation of the letter from Senators Leahy and Dodd by Forero and Sheridan (2009), the sole instance of domestic opposition, is troubling in its own right.

The U.S. media sample technically met the traditional view of objectivity by supplying quotes from opposing political leaders. However, is objectivity truly reached, or furthermore, is valuable content lost by journalists reporting events from the sidelines in a "we said, they said" styled sporting contest? Objectivity could technically be achieved in a story by the presentation

of facts, but still contain biases due to the omission of other facts and the framing of the story (Entman, 2004; Herman and Chomsky, 2002). The U.S. media repeatedly presented the opposition to U.S. military expansion nearly exclusively from foreign leaders who are ideologically different from the majority of U.S. leaders and citizens. This all but eliminated the potential for the formulation of counterframes by an American audience, who are infamously ethnocentric (Entman, 2004). An unintended opportunity of this study offers the comparison of the U.S. professed “objective” media and outspoken advocacy journalism.

Far from offering domestic criticism or dissent, the editorials and opinion pieces from the *Washington Post* and the *Miami Herald* expressed hostility toward the Latin American objectors. Seemingly, the suggestions from Latin American leaders that the U.S. government may possess motives other than valiantly fighting narcoterrorists, inspired scornful responses from the newspapers’ editorial divisions. In theory, editorials are separate from the news producing departments; however, Le (2010) argues that editorials “...are snapshots of media socio-cultural identities...crucial for the understanding of media actions and interactions on the political stage” (p. 1). Editorials function as the position of the media entity regarding a particular topic. The *Venezuelanalysis.com* articles were opinion pieces, yet provided substantial evidence to strengthen claims; whereas the U.S. media editorials and opinion pieces seemingly “shot from the hip,” offering little more than U.S. centric ideological criticisms and personal attacks targeted toward Chavez.

Possibly the journalists working for the U.S. media entities in this study, hindered by a lack of resources and demanding production standards, simply did not have time to research credible, domestic opposition to U.S. military enhancement in Latin America. However, U.S. citizen, MIT scholar, and internationally known political dissident Noam Chomsky appeared on

Venezuelan national television during the peak of the base agreement media coverage in September 2009, with President Hugo Chavez (Fox, 2009b). He addressed many of the issues presented in this paper including the rapid increase of U.S. military presence in Latin America. Chomsky is the believed to be the most cited living source in the world, and crosses multiple academic disciplines (“Chomsky,” 1992). His strong criticisms of U.S. foreign policy seemingly rarely air in the U.S. mainstream media and are completely absent in this case. Nevertheless, considering the amount of attention Hugo Chavez gained from the U.S. media, not noticing a prominent U.S. scholar appearing on Venezuelan national television to discuss the rapid increase of U.S. military forces in Latin America, is unlikely. Perhaps a microcosmic example of the indoctrination of dominant ideologies in the U.S., the inclusion of Chomsky as a source in professional or academic articles runs the risk of marginalizing one’s work.

Similarly, the notion that the U.S. mainstream media’s Latin American foreign correspondents were unaware of some or all of the arguments, concepts, and perspectives provided by the alternative media sources in the counterframing section, is unlikely. Considering the lack of domestic opposition to the military increase in Colombia, obviously the fundamental purpose of the drug war went unchallenged. Even if the U.S. government’s intentions to increase military presence in Colombia to fight narcotraffickers were genuine, the alternative media supplied convincing empirical data questioning the very validity of Plan Colombia. U.S. citizens are certainly entitled to information regarding Colombia’s human rights records and statistics about millions of displaced people due to cocaine eradication programs; as well as U.S. participation in a civil war, and the utter failure of the drug war in terms of results.

Taking a satellite view of the entirety of the situation, the justification of seven additional military bases in Colombia, the reactivation of the 4th Fleet, and increasing military presence in Costa Rica by 7000 marines, among others, all in the name of fighting drugs, seems at least questionable. For the media to accept the drug war justification from governmental elites and not questioning the validity of a 12 year ongoing war requires a tremendous amount of faith in the benevolence of U.S. authority sources.

Perhaps Andrew Bacevich's (2010) concerns regarding the fusion of U.S. national identity and militarism are valid. Possibly the U.S. mainstream media do not view military expansion as newsworthy. Considering that the base agreement barely constituted a blip on the radar in the U.S., it is feasible that the U.S. mainstream media would not have covered the issue had the Latin American leaders not intensely objected. I realize that a single case study does not lend itself to broad generalizations; however, if this instance is an indication of the larger scope of U.S. militarism, then it is obvious the U.S. media do not question the fundamental principles of U.S. presence on foreign soil.

The United States has permeated public discourse and official documents with justifications for the use of its tremendous military force against anything that constitutes a threat to national interests, freedom, democracy, or perceived terrorist threats. Again, defaulting to governmental sources to define the individuals and countries that constitute these threats requires faith in authority sources. If the mainstream media are not demanding greater justification from the government for military action other than the repetition of dubious terms, such as the "drug war," "terrorist threats," and "protecting national interests" then the media's governmental watchdog status is highly questionable. Has a public conversation ever occurred defining what "American interests" are, or what constitutes an "anti-American" government?

Clearly, the consistently increasing United States military budget crosses Democratic and Republican party lines. From 2001-2011 the U.S. defense budget increased over 80% (*SIRPI*, 2010). President Obama's 2011 record setting defense budget received approval from Congress. Of the \$708 billion, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan require \$159 billion, leaving \$549 billion to command and patrol the rest of the world (Reuters, 2010a). Since taking office, Obama has increased troops in Afghanistan, drastically amplified U.S. military presence in Latin America, and unleashed a bombing campaign on Libya. This paper provided evidence of the perceptions in Latin America concerned with U.S. military intervention and imperialism. A recent Brookings Institute Arab public opinion poll reported that Arabs view the United States and Israel as the biggest threats to the region. Moreover, the majority of Arabs polled favored Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, saying that a nuclear armed Iran would make the region safer (Telhami, 2010).

The United States acting as the world's sole super power and possessing the largest most advanced military in history requires a skeptical, persistently critical media, consistently checking the motives of applying such force. A military power that has no real rival has to operate openly and responsibly when justifying the use of force pertaining to national interests and spreading perceived superior ideals. The media has to challenge the seemingly inherent humanitarian motives of U.S. military action. Not doing so, again, requires a tremendous amount of trust in the benevolence of the people in positions of power. It is imperative, and logical once realized, to ask the media and U.S. citizens to apply the same level of scrutiny to the U.S. government as they do foreign governments.

Future research should continue to compare various media organizational models, and search for substantial omitted information from foreign policy issues. The arguments by Boycoff (2007), Entman (2004), Hallin (1994), and Herman and Chomsky (2002), that advertising based

media reliant on popularity, exclude dissenting voices and omit important information, deserves greater exploration and discussion. The fast declining profitability of advertising based U.S. media companies is a topic that seems salient amongst journalists, reporters, and mass communication scholars. The conundrum of the internet has advertising driven media entities scrambling to recapture the attention of the consuming public. Perhaps the apparent decline in the mainstream media provides the opportunity for greater development of news media models that are not corporate media conglomerates dependent on advertising.

Future research could compare the representation in the U.S. media between U.S. foreign allies and non-allies, as well as the justifications for the use of U.S. military force. The popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa publically exposed the United States as providing aid to unpopular dictators. What constitutes an anti-American government? Is an anti-American government a government that does not cooperate with the United State economically and militarily? How do the media cover these issues? Do the media and governmental elites invoke non-capitalistic ideology more during coverage regarding countries that oppose the U.S.? Is the American public aware of the size and scope of the U.S. military? Do they care?

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APPENDIX 1: DEMOCRACY NOW! AND VENEZUELA ANALYSIS CONTRIBUTORS

Amy Goodman is the recipient of several journalism awards including the inaugural *Right Livelihood Award*, which is “developing an innovative model of truly independent grassroots political journalism that brings to millions of people the alternative voices excluded by the mainstream media” (democracynow.org, 2011). She is the author of four *New York Times* bestselling books, the latest of which is titled *Breaking the Sound Barrier*.

Eva Golinger is a Venezuelan-American writer and attorney from New York. She is a graduate of CUNY Law School in New York and moved to Venezuela in 2005 (Romero, 2011). Inspired by the 2002 coup that temporarily ousted President Hugo Chavez, Golinger began investigating and writing about U.S. intervention in Venezuela (Golinger, 2011). She is the author of several books including *Bush vs. Chávez: Washington’s War on Venezuela* and *The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela*, the latter of which is available in eight languages (Golinger, 2011). According to *New York Times* Latin America correspondent Simon Romero (2011), Golinger uses her U.S. citizenship status to access U.S. governmental information by invoking the Freedom of Information Act, and is an outspoken advocate of ALBA and Hugo Chavez’s Bolivarian Revolution. She translates official U.S. documents into Spanish and Venezuelan news and analysis into English using multiple websites (Romero, 2011; venezuelanalysis.com, 2011). Romero (2011) quoted Washington investigative journalist Jeremy Bigwood saying, “No one else has been able to bring so much attention to declassified documents over such a long period.” Golinger’s work received international attention in 2009 when she earned the International Award for Journalism in Mexico (Golinger, 2011). She also gained the attention of Hugo Chavez and accompanied him on a seven-country tour to Europe

and the Middle East (Romero, 2011). “Critics and supporters alike agree that she has influenced the public debate here [Venezuela] and in neighboring countries,” stated Romero (2011).

Michael Fox is a former *Venezuelanalysis.com* staff writer and currently resides in Brazil. Fox works as a documentary filmmaker, freelance journalist, translator, and radio reporter (Michael, 2011). He is the co-director of the documentaries *Crossing the American Crisis: From Collapse to Action* and *Beyond Elections: Redefining Democracy in the Americas*. Fox has several published works including co-author of the book *Venezuela Speaks!: Voices from the Grassroots* (Michael, 2011).

James Suggett attended the University of California, San Diego, where he studied History and Social Science. Suggett moved to Venezuela five years ago and worked on several projects including “...journalism, cooperativeism, indigenous issues, education, and international delegations” (J. Suggett, personal communication, April 10, 2011). He also worked at the Institute for Policy Studies as a graduate assistant.

Kiraz Janicke is a journalist for *Green Left Weekly*, which is an independent, alternative Australian news organization. *Green Left Weekly* is devoted to progressive causes including global peace, civil rights, and promotes the inclusion of diverse of opinions in their coverage. Kiraz Janick has dozens of publications relating to Latin American affairs on *Green Left Weekly* and *Venezuelanalysis.com*

Benjamin Dangl is a U.S. born citizen and studied Latin American history and literature at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo in Argentina (Benjamin, 2011). He works at Burlington College in Vermont where he teaches politics, globalization, and Latin American history. He is the author of two books titled *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia* and

forthcoming *Dancing with Dynamite: Social Movements and States in Latin America* (Benjamin, 2011). Dangle earned two Project Censored Awards from Sonoma University regarding his work on Latin America and the U.S. military. Several alternative media publications feature his work including *The Progressive* magazine, which published the article found on *Venezuelanalysis.com* regarding the base agreement (Dangle, 2010).

Grace Livingstone's article regarding the base agreement first appeared on *Morning Star Online* (Livingstone, 2010). Livingstone is a freelance journalist and author of the book *America's Backyard: The United States and Latin America from the Monroe Doctrine to the War on Terror*. She contributes to alternative media organizations including the *Morning Star*, which is a socialist newspaper dedicated to peace and socialism founded in 1930 in the United Kingdom ("For peace," 2011).

James Petras Ph.D. is a Professor (Emeritus) of Sociology at Binghamton University, New York, and contributed an article regarding the base agreement to *Venezuelanalysis.com* (About James, 2011; Petras, 2009). He has published over 600 academic and professional articles and 62 books in 29 languages including *Unmasking Globalization: Imperialism of the Twenty-First Century* (2001) and *The Dynamics of Social Change in Latin America* (2000) (About James, 2011). Petras spent 11 years in Brazil advocating labor rights and was a member of the Bertrand Russell Tribunal on Repression in Latin America. He contributes to several websites and writes a monthly article for *La Jornada*, a Mexican newspaper (About James, 2011).

Roque Planas produced an article published on *Venezuelanalysis.com*, which NACLA published (Planas, 2009). NACLA or North American Congress on Latin America is a non-profit organization and publication dedicated to human rights issues and injustices in Latin America

and the Caribbean (NACLA, 2011). Planas is a freelance writer and graduate student at the New York University Arthur Carter Journalism Institute, where he is a Global Joint Master's student in Journalism and Latin American Studies (Roque, 2011). His works has been published in *Foreign Policy Magazine* and World Politics Review, which is an online-subscription database regarding international affairs and foreign policy information hosted by EBSCO Host (About World, 2011; Roque, 2011).

APPENDIX 2: CODING SCHEME

1. **Show:** The New York Times=1, The Washington Post=2, CNN.com=3, Miami Herald=4, Democracy Now! =5, Venezuela Analysis = 6
2. **Date:** enter date
3. **Day of the week it appeared:** Sun=1, M=2, T=3, W=4, TH=5, F=6, S=7
4. **Prominence:** Word count of story, section in which the story appeared, page number
5. **Title of the article**
6. **Name of Reporter,** or Editorial, opinion, wire service
7. **Focus of the piece:** 1 = U.S. Colombia base agreement, 2 = Drug War (also includes mention of cocaine production), 3 = Venezuela/Colombia weapons controversy, 4 = Colombia's neighboring countries, 5 = FARC and/or "leftists guerillas," 6 = U.S. military budget, 7 = Colombia/ Venezuela relations, 8 = other_____
8. **Official sources used:** government officials
 - A source is a person who is included in the story to add information or insight. Sources can usually be determined by the use of quotation marks or by phrases such as "according to," "said," etc.
 - U.S. Officials= __1__, Source Name:____, Source Affiliation: ____
 - Foreign Officials=__2__, Source country of origin____, Source Name:____, Source Affiliation:____
9. **Non-Official expert sources:** Sources used in stories that are not government officials
 - U.S non-offical= __1__, Source Name____, Source Affiliation____
 - Foreign non-official= __2__, Source Name____, Source Affiliation____

10. Criticism or support of US policy: Neither criticism or support=0, Criticism= -1, Support= 1

- Criticism is any information provided by press figure or source that is critical/ not agreeing with, questioning, or any alternative or dissenting views of current US foreign policy
- Support is any information provided by press figure or source that is supportive of/ in agreement with US foreign policy

11. Criticism or support of the US government: Neither criticism or support=0, Criticism= -1, Support=1

- Information provided by the press figure or source/s that is critical/ not agreeing with, questioning, or any alternative or dissenting views about the US government
- Support being information provided by press figure or source that is supportive of/ in agreement with US government

12. Criticism of Hugo Chavez: Neither criticism or support= 0, Criticism= -1, Support= 1

13. Criticism of base agreement from a source inside Colombia: no= 0, yes= 1

14. Drug War mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

15. Colombia/Venezuela weapons controversy mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

16. FARC or “leftist guerillas” mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

17. Colombia’s neighbors summits mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

18. Colombian/Venezuelan relations mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

19. Ecuador FARC bombing by Colombia/ US Ecuador base agreement: no= 0, yes= 1

20. Protection U.S. interests mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

21. Threat to U.S. interests mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

22. U.S. Military budget mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

23. U.S aid mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

24. U.S. intervention mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

25. U.S. role in Latin American coups mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

26. “Terrorism” mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

27. Political ideology mentioned, specifically “leftist,” “socialist,” “Marxist”: no= 0, yes= 1

28. “Empire” mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

29. Honduran military coup mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

30. Other topics/issues mentioned_____

31. Countries mentioned: no= 0, yes= 1

- Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Cuba, Other country_____

VITA

Britt Christensen grew up in Ogden, Utah. He earned his bachelor's degree in Communication Studies from the University of California, Long Beach, in May 2009. Britt earned a Master of Mass Communication degree from the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University in May 2011, and will enter the Manship School's doctoral program of media and public affairs in the fall.