

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**A CONTENT ANALYSIS:**

**International News Coverage Fits Public's Ameri-Centric Mood**

***FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:***

Andrew Kohut, Director  
Robert C. Toth, Senior Associate  
202/293-3126

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS COVERAGE FITS PUBLIC'S AMERI-CENTRIC MOOD

A new study suggests that the way the media covers international news may be doing little to change the American public's indifference to concerns about world events and foreign policy. A four-month analysis of over 7,000 international news stories now finds that newspapers and network television focus most often on world news that have a distinct American orientation, while local television (from which one-fourth of Americans get most of their news) may be all but ignoring the world. The study also concluded that the U.S. media carry few international articles that would broaden and educate Americans about the world beyond those hot spots where "breaking" news, usually about conflict, is occurring.

The study tracked international news coverage between March and June of this year, examining how traditional, elite news sources, such as The New York Times and ABC News cover the world compared to CNN, C-SPAN, daily regional newspapers, local television, and "populist" media such as "talk" radio and the Christian Broadcast Network. Over the study period, The Times averaged 26 stories per day compared to 12 per day in the regional newspapers and between two and three per day on both ABC and CNN. There was little evidence that CNN, although a global news network, gave American viewers more foreign news than ABC during the period (although ABC aired considerably more foreign news than CBS or NBC during the period<sup>1</sup>). CNN also carried more short foreign pieces than ABC: 47% vs. 15% under 90 seconds. The local Philadelphia evening television newscast carried fewer than one foreign story *per week*. -- 13 over the entire course of four months.

Past generalizations that the U.S. media during the Cold War was less detached and more inclined to express value judgments in its foreign coverage, compared to its domestic coverage, may be no longer valid.<sup>2</sup> The study found that American news coverage of international affairs was overwhelmingly neutral in "tone." Stories were coded positive or negative in tone only when the number of comments, quotes, or other references inclining the audience in that direction were at least twice as great as the number of references in the opposite direction.

Of those stories found to have such tone, the coverage sometimes leaned in the same way as American public opinion, and sometimes did not. Specifically, coverage was distinctly internationalist, multilateralist and humanistic, particularly in stories dealing with the United Nations; these attitudes parallel those of the public. In addition, the news coverage was supportive of the United Nations (as is public opinion). On the other hand, news stories about Bosnia leaned in the "interventionist" direction, which is directly at variance with the public's "stay out" attitude. Similarly, coverage of Russia and its president, Boris Yeltsin, was decidedly

negative, even though national polls continue to find the public feeling positive toward Russia and largely uncritical of Yeltsin. Closer to home, coverage was also critical of Mexico although public opinion is not openly hostile to that country.

Foreign news was highly selective, however, in the topics chosen. A very high proportion of international stories focus on the United States' relationship to another country -- not on other nations per se. An American connection was found in 44% of the ABC coverage, 38% of CNN's, 35% of regional papers, and 28% of The Times'. Only a small number of stories -- under 10% of total coverage -- informed Americans about the world beyond the breaking news. Almost two-thirds (62%) of newspaper coverage and three-fourths (75%) of ABC and CNN television coverage dealt with "hard" news. The rest consisted mostly of background pieces (20% in print, 24% on ABC, 15% on CNN), followed by a scattering of analysis, commentary, and editorials tied to those contemporary events. Among the "other" stories were feature pieces describing some interesting but off-beat condition in the foreign country (such as newly independent Khirghistan searching for ancient mythical roots).

In addition, of the entire coverage analyzed, almost two-thirds (62%) dealt with conflict, conditions in a country, or cooperation between parties. Stories about conflict were four times more prevalent than those about cooperation (36% vs. 8%) in the media overall, with wide variations among outlets: over ten times more frequent on ABC (53% about conflict vs. 5% about cooperation) and on CNN (46% vs. 4%) and almost four times more frequent in The New York Times (33% vs. 9%).

Opinion polls by the *Times Mirror Center* have consistently found a growing isolationist minority in the country in recent years. The "populist" media provides a refuge for this isolationist sentiment, the study found. On Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcast Network, none of the stories were judged pro-internationalist while some were judged isolationist in tone. Rush Limbaugh's comments, when foreign affairs was discussed, were hostile more than two-thirds of time toward the U.S. individual, institution, or policy under discussion. The hosts of C-SPAN's "call in" show were virtually always neutral in this regard (99% of the time) and the local talk show host was judged either neutral or supportive more than half of the time (although in much fewer cases).

## INTRODUCTION

Alexis de Tocqueville believed that foreign policy is the achilles heel of democracy. Foreign affairs must be developed in secrecy and their consequences awaited with patience, he observed. But democracies "obey impulse rather than prudence;" its masses are "led astray by ignorance and passion." As he summed it up, "Almost all the defects inherent in democratic institutions are brought to light in the conduct of foreign affairs."<sup>3</sup>

His concerns have not disappeared despite the efforts by leaders in democracies to persuade and regularly reassure the electorate of the merits of their international activities, and efforts of the media to keep the people fully informed about foreign policies and international events. Whether the American press does a good job of covering foreign affairs, both in quantity and quality, is a matter that has been debated by scholars and journalists for several decades. There are the repeated complaints that too little foreign news gets to Americans today, although television has probably enlarged rather than shrunken the overall audience for foreign news.<sup>4</sup> As for quality, Doris Graber decided that "the American media often present a distorted world image" to the public, whether because of limits of time and space, or some other constraint.<sup>5</sup> Simon Serfaty, in "The Media and Foreign Policy," went further to raise the question of whether American coverage of the world might be "even biased".<sup>6</sup>

The impact of the foreign news coverage on public opinion is yet another dimension of the issue. Although convincing proof is difficult to find, Graber concluded that available data suggests the coverage does affect public attitudes.<sup>7</sup> That it can deeply and quickly affect government actions today is widely acknowledged; the phenomenon was seen most recently in the rapid withdrawal of American forces from Somalia after televised coverage of the deaths of 18 U.S. Army Rangers there.<sup>8</sup> Until a generation ago, elites were probably the only Americans interested in foreign news, and they were largely immune to its content by virtue of their education and experience. Today, much broader and less sophisticated U.S. audiences are exposed to the world, but because most Americans lack much knowledge about international affairs<sup>9</sup>, they can be easily stirred to demand action by dramatic stories that they read and particularly that they see.

Americans are more ignorant of foreign events than other peoples, and television is usually blamed. A survey of eight nations by the *Times Mirror Center* two years ago -- five in Western Europe and three in North America -- found Americans least knowledgeable in a current events quiz about foreign subjects.<sup>10</sup> Several scholars, after examining that data in depth, point their fingers at the superficiality of American television news, from which almost two out of three Americans get most of their news.<sup>11</sup> American television news, it found, "rates the

lowest in information value of any TV news" among the countries polled.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, since the end of the Cold War has been accompanied by a decrease in foreign news on television and probably in newspapers as well. One study of the three broadcast networks from 1973 to 1993 found that the number of international stories dropped from an average of 33% per newscast during Cold War years, to 41% in the transition period immediately following the Cold War, to 29% in 1992 and 24% in 1993. The amount of time devoted to foreign news stories was reduced along with their frequency.<sup>13</sup> A Times Mirror content analysis study in 1990 of the four television networks and four national newspapers found that the two media devoted essentially the same coverage to foreign events: 34% of television, 32% of print.<sup>14</sup> A more recent Freedom Forum study of the three networks and three newspapers during January, 1995, found that "the stories most likely to disappear from network news coverage, given newshole constraints, are continuing international stories."<sup>15</sup> Finally, there is some evidence that whether the coverage was positive or negative toward a subject, the "sheer volume" of coverage significantly affects public opinion on that subject.<sup>16</sup>

### **THE TIMES MIRROR CENTER PROJECT**

Against this background, the *Center for The People and The Press* embarked on an effort to learn how much and what kind of foreign and international news gets to Americans through three kinds of media: the traditional, "new," and "populist." As representatives of the traditional media, this study included one national newspaper (The New York Times); eight daily regional newspapers<sup>17</sup>; the most-watched national broadcast television network (ABC's World News Tonight); and one local early evening broadcast television news program (Philadelphia's Channel 3). As the "new" media, the study examined two news programs on CNN, Early Prime and the International Hour, and a morning "call-in" show on C-SPAN (Washington Journal). Finally, the study also included a category we have termed the "populist" media; outlets examined were the Christian Broadcast Network and two "talk" radio programs (Rush Limbaugh and a local Philadelphia show<sup>18</sup>).

The Times, acknowledged for its expertise and breadth of coverage, was monitored daily. The eight other newspapers were selected on the basis of geographic distribution and recognition as influential and serious dailies; two of the eight were monitored daily via a rotation system. The ABC program and CNN's Early Prime and International News Hour programs were taped daily in Washington; all were subject to preemption by local affiliates for local sporting events. The weekday CNN shows were often abridged as a result of O.J. Simpson trail coverage. CBN was monitored Monday through Friday, as was the second, 6-6:30 p.m. segment of the evening

news program on Philadelphia's WKWY, a local NBC affiliate. C-SPAN's call-in show on cable, the Limbaugh show on nationally syndicated radio, and the local Philadelphia talk show were taped Monday through Friday. For the Limbaugh show, a rotation system selected a two-hour segment from each broadcast for coding; for the local radio show, a one-hour segment was rotated in daily for coding.

Over a four-month period, March 1 through June 30, 1995, a total of 7,061 news stories dealing with foreign affairs -- 6,115 from print sources, 946 from television -- were examined. Stories were coded for simple variables such as length and position, as well as for the issues and countries that were their subjects. In addition, particular attention was given to coverage of two countries -- Russia and Mexico -- and to the United Nations. Articles about these entities were also analyzed for any discernible tone, or imbalance, with regards to 21 variables, all told. These ranged from attitudes toward broad concepts like isolationism and internationalism to attitudes toward the leadership of the country/organization and toward U.S. government policy regarding those three entities.<sup>19</sup>

Tone or balance was based on the comments, quotes, references and innuendo found in the piece. If the number of such items leaned in one direction by a margin of two or more to one, it was judged to positive or negative; if less than two to one, it was judged balanced. Editorials and Commentary/Op Ed pieces were excluded in considerations of tone. An imbalance need not reflect bias on the part of the reporter, editor or producer. News stories which straight-fowardly report events may be unbalanced in the coding scheme simply on the basis of the number of factual citations. However, the effect of a two-to-one imbalance, whether deliberate or not, was deemed to have an impact on the reader or viewer in the direction of the imbalance. Intercoder reliability tests were conducted and no significant systematic errors were found in the results.

In addition to the news stories, 447 talk show broadcasts were examined. Some 360 hours of discussion was coded for such data as most frequent topics and nations under discussion, positions of the host and caller, and source of news under discussion. A variety of demographic statistics was recorded including some, like age, which might be inferred when not stated directly.

All newspaper, television broadcasts, and the selected radio segments were reviewed in their entirety. To be included in the study, one-third or more of a story or discussion had to be related to foreign or international news, with some exceptions. For print, only stories 100 words long (roughly three paragraphs) or longer were included. For television, all references were coded but anchor lead-ins of less than 35 seconds were generally considered part of the

upcoming report.

## WHAT WE FOUND

◇ Critics who believe foreign news is significantly distorted or *biased as to text* or content are mostly wrong. For about three-quarters of the variables for which imbalance in "tone" was sought, at least 90% of the stories were either neutral or not applicable. These included 10 of 16 variables about the United Nations; 14 of 19 variables regarding Russian stories; and 17 of 20 regarding Mexican stories. For most of the remaining variables, at least 80% of the stories had no codable tone.

Nonetheless, some slant toward the left that reflects the prevailing American political culture was found. Of United Nations stories with a significant degree of imbalance, the tone was more inclined by far toward internationalist than than isolationist (49% vs. 2% of stories, with 11% neutral), interventionist rather than "hands-off" (35% vs. 4%, and 15% neutral), and multilateralist rather than unilateralist (47% vs. 1%, and 10% neutral). Trace evidence of similar tone was found in stories about Russia as well. Exceptions to this slant were found among the populist/religious media.

	<u>All</u> %	<u>Bosnia</u> %
<i>INTERNATIONALISM:</i>		
Pro-Internationalist	49	50
Neutral	11	14
Pro-Isolationist	2	2
<i>INTERVENTIONISM</i>		
Pro-Interventionist	35	39
Neutral	15	25
Anti-Interventionist	4	7
<i>MULTI-LATERALISM:</i>		
Pro-Multilateral	47	44
Neutral	10	16
Pro-Unilateral	1	2

◇ Critics who believe the American media is *highly selective about foreign topics*, including the regions and countries that are covered, are mostly correct:

- One-third of all stories (and 44% of those on one television network) has a U.S. angle, emphasis or orientation; and 22% of all stories (36% of network stories) had U.S. datelines on their foreign stories. These stories were essentially about the United States in the world, rather

than about the world. Fully 90% of the rare foreign news on local television had a U.S. connection, and the ethnocentric focus was almost total on the "talk" shows.

**TABLE 2: Major & Secondary Subjects of Foreign News Stories**

	<u>NYT</u>	Regional <u>Papers</u>	<u>ABC</u>	<u>CNN</u>	<u>CBN</u>	<u>LOCAL</u>
United States	28	35	44	38	50	92
Russia	7	8	14	8	4	-
Mexico	4	4	1	1	1	-
United Nations	8	8	11	12	5	-
Japan	8	8	12	10	7	23
China	4	3	1	*	5	-
East Asia & Pacific Rim Region	16	16	16	16	20	23
Western Europe	16	14	11	13	4	8
Central/Eastern Europe*	10	8	22	18	10	8
Central & South America/ Caribbean Basin	7	11	6	7	4	-
Middle East	8	10	10	16	23	15
North Africa	2	2	*	1	-	-
Subsahara Africa	5	6	7	9	3	-

\* Excludes Russia & Former Soviet Union

-Events overwhelmingly drove foreign news coverage, probably more than they do domestic news since foreign events and disasters usually must be more dramatic and violent to compete successfully against national news.<sup>20</sup> Almost two-thirds of all coverage and three-fourths of television coverage consisted of "hard" news about immediate events. Most of the rest consisted of backgrounders, analysis, commentary or editorials tied to the breaking news. Less than 10% served to educate or expand the knowledge of Americans about the world.



**TABLE 3: Types of Stories**

	<u>PRINT*</u>	<u>BROADCAST**</u>	<u>CBN</u>
	%	%	%
News Event	62	75	47
Backgrounder	20	19	22
News Analysis	2	1	21
Commentary/Editorial	9	*	5
Lengthy Interview	*	2	3

\* Includes N.Y. Times and regional papers.

\*\* Includes ABC and CNN.

- Key subjects and huge regions of the world were largely ignored by the U.S. media. In four months, merely 9 stories dealt with agriculture, 11 with demographics, and 21 with education. Similarly, only 16 of the 7,061 story total dealt with Australia and the Pacific Islands, and 157 (2% of total) with the South Asia subcontinent (including India). Somewhat contrary to conventional wisdom, very few (3%) of these Third World stories dealt with the environment and disasters per se. Long-neglected Africa was covered with 421 stories, including 353 from the sub-Saharan region and the rest from North Africa. Terrorism and politics were the chief topics in North Africa, while politics and health/medicine subjects (including AIDS and Eboli virus stories) were the largest in the south.

- Conflict was the dominant topic, confirming the "bad news is news" rule of journalism. Overall, almost two-thirds (62%) of foreign stories dealt with conflict, cooperative efforts between nations, or conditions in a nation, or some combination of the three. Less than one-in-ten stories (8%) dealt with cooperation. Conflict was the direct driving event in 36% of stories, plus indirectly (with "conditions") in another 4%. On ABC, conflict was directly or indirectly the subject of almost six-of-ten (59%) of foreign stories.

**TABLE 4: Conflict vs. Cooperation**

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PRINT*</u>	<u>BROADCAST**</u>
	%	%	%
Story prompted by conflict	36	35	49
Story describes conditions within nation or region	13	13	8
Story prompted by cooperation between two parties	8	9	4
Both a conflict and a condition story	4	4	5
Both a cooperation and condition story	1	1	*
Not applicable***	<u>38</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>34</u>
	100	100	100

\* Includes N.Y. Times and regional papers.

\*\* Includes ABC and CNN.

\*\*\* Stories not primarily driven by conflict, conditions or cooperation, i.e., features dealing with people/personalities.

◇ The television and print media covers foreign news both alike and different from each other, but even within each type of media, there are substantial differences:

- The primary international topic of the media overall was "politics," with 21% of all stories dealing with political issues, systems or events. Closely following were economics (20%, including trade and finance) and national security (16%, including defense, wars, etc.). But 22% of print stories dealt with economics compared to only 8% of broadcast stories. And 27% of broadcast pieces dealt with national security compared to 15% of print pieces.

**TABLE 5: Issues**

	<u>PRINT*</u>	<u>BROADCAST**</u>	<u>CBN</u>
	%	%	%
Political Issues, Systems & Events	22	15	21
Economics, Finance & Trade	22	7	8
National Security/Intelligence/Military/Defense	15	27	16
Crime/Drugs	8	6	1
Immigration & Borders	3	5	7
Terrorism	4	8	6

\* Includes N.Y. Times and regional papers.

\*\* Includes ABC and CNN.

- The New York Times carried twice as many foreign stories as the average regional newspaper (26 vs. 12 pieces daily), and put half again as many of them on Page One (9% vs. 6% of regionals). Television show-cased its foreign news more prominently than print, with about one-third of its international stories airing at the "top" of the broadcast (as first, second or third item). The regional papers also editorialized about foreign issues as much as The Times (4% both). Almost one-fourth of Times' foreign news dealt with economics/trade/financial affairs (28%); the Bloomberg Business News service accounted for 6% of its foreign coverage.

- Newspapers on the coasts printed more, but not all that much more, foreign news than the heartland papers. The top four papers carried 56% of the total regional output, while the bottom four carried 44%. Heartland papers were considerably briefer, however: 82% of those in the Rocky Mountain News were under 500 words, vs. 38% in The New York Times. The Times monthly file was relatively constant, ranging from 771 to 815 pieces per month, while the regional papers' foreign file could as much as double from month to month (68 in April to 139 in June in the Houston Chronicle, for example).

**TABLE 6: Foreign News Frequency**

	REGIONAL			
	<u>NYT</u>	<u>PAPERS</u>	<u>ABC</u>	<u>CNN</u>
	%	%	%	%
March	24	23	21	29
April	25	25	16	27
May	26	25	29	24
June	<u>25</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>20</u>
	100	100	100	100

- Television had similar monthly ups and downs. ABC's largest number of foreign stories in one month was 104, its least was 50. CNN's output was less variable: 123 down to 83. Surprisingly, the networks did not rise and fall in tandem, however: when ABC broadcast the most, CNN aired the least number of pieces; and when CNN broadcast the most, ABC aired only a fraction of that total. CNN stories were also shorter: 35% under one minute, vs. 9% on ABC; and under half (47%) of CNN's pieces were two minutes or longer compared to two-thirds (65%) of ABC's.

## **THE POPULIST MEDIA**

The "populist" media really are different. In their effort at mass appeal, local television news programs have emphasized crime and turned a blind eye to international events. The Philadelphia evening news show effectively ignored foreign news, carrying only 13 stories in four months that could be coded as foreign news. The Christian Broadcast Network, while inclined opposite to traditional and "new" media in its attitudes, carried two-thirds as many international stories as ABC (210 vs. 306) during the period<sup>21</sup>. CBN's output, however, was skewed toward the non-hard news coverage, particularly toward "news analysis:" 21% of its stories fell into this category, compared to 1% each for ABC and CNN. Besides religious subjects, CBN was also much more concerned about the Middle East, China and South Asia/India than the other networks, but much less so about Bosnia (3% vs. 16% of stories).

"Talk" and "call-in" shows are different again. C-SPAN's program dealt with foreign news four times more often than Limbaugh's, while the local Philadelphia show barely touched the subject. Overall, the callers overwhelmingly cited newspapers when attributing some comment or fact to a source (27% of references), rather than a television network (2%).

The most frequent topic on the talk shows during the period was Bosnia and the possibility of U.S. forces being dispatched there (30%), and second was the threat of a U.S.-Japan trade war (15%). These were the big stories in all media at the time. The talk shows were largely silent on the other news of the day, however. Military actions were the single most frequent topic overall (35%), followed by economic matters (26%). Economics came up much more on Limbaugh's program than on C-SPAN's.

President Clinton and his administration were the subjects far most often on these shows (18%), but twice as often on Limbaugh as on C-SPAN. The unabashedly conservative Limbaugh was hostile or critical to the U.S. figure or institution being discussed fully 59% of the time, and hostile or critical to U.S. policy on all topics 77% of the time. C-SPAN hosts were judged neutral 98% of the time.

Limbaugh's legendary hostility attracted less frequently callers who criticized the U.S. figure or institution under discussion (often President Clinton and his administration) than it did callers who criticized various aspects the major story of the day, mostly the U.S. policy involved in that event. C-SPAN hosts were neutral but its callers were distributed much as with Limbaugh -- somewhat more critical than supportive of the U.S. figure or institution, but much more critical than supportive of U.S. policy in discussing the big story of the day.

Men called in over three times more frequently than women. Californians were most

often heard from on the shows: 10%, almost three times more often than New Yorkers (3%). And whites were dominant among the race stated or inferred.

## CONCLUSIONS

The principle findings of the project -- that the U.S. media's foreign coverage is essentially not biased in the text but is somewhat biased in its choice of topics -- is understandable in view of the education of American journalists and the pressures of contemporary market journalism. Unlike those of other countries, ideological nations in particular, American correspondents are trained to be objective and balanced in their reporting. Advocacy journalism is growing in domestic news coverage, and while the nation's mood framed many stories during the Vietnam War and the Cold War, opinionated coverage is not a major criticism of U.S. foreign news coverage today.

The parochial choice of topics is also understandable if more lamentable. Many charge that American journalism has become more focused on entertaining rather than educating audiences with deregulation of the electronic media and heightened competition throughout the media. At the same time, the attraction of an American angle and the avoidance of "far away places with strange sounding names"<sup>22</sup> is obvious and considerable. Audiences identify with American players and interests and can often fit them easily within their own personal contexts. But the overemphasis on U.S.-related stories caters to the self-centered concerns of Americans during this period of rising isolationist sentiment. Such stories usually provide no new information on distant parts of the globe that would broaden and stimulate viewers and readers and perhaps prepare them for tomorrow's story.

Still, it is far from clear that American audiences would read or watch extended foreign news coverage. Judged by Nielsen ratings, American audiences refuse to sit still for foreign television news in depth, and entertainment shows are eager to lure dial "surfers" away from substantive programs. Tom Brokaw, anchor of NBC's Nightly News show, has noted that when Bryant Gumbal took the "Today" show to Africa for a week of reportage, its normally huge audience dwindled day by day. Moreover, Brokaw complained, "if one network scheduled a foreign-affairs documentary in prime time, the predators at Fox would swiftly counter in the same hour with sex and song."<sup>23</sup> The social norms of what Americans are expected to know about international affairs -- i.e., much less than Germans or the British -- may explain best why American television rates so low in the information value of its news programs.

Beyond that, while foreign news coverage can obviously affect public opinion in specific

tragic situations (i.e., the bring-home-the-boys outcry after the Ranger deaths in Somalia), it is not certain whether the media leads or just reflects public opinion on the less dramatic issues where public attitudes are rooted in American political culture.

For example, this study found that the tone of U.N. coverage was pro-internationalism, and opinion polls have found that most of the public favors an internationalist approach to foreign affairs. Some 60% of Americans disagree that the United States "should go its own way in international matters," and 51% disagree that the country "should mind its own business internationally."<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the coverage was pro-multilateralism, and the public supports a multilateralist approaches to foreign affairs; three out of four (74%) Americans say the country should take into account the views of its allies in making foreign policy decisions, according to the same *Times Mirror* poll in June.

But the media has been unable to lead, or has refused to follow, public opinion in other examples found by our study. The U.N. coverage of Bosnia was pro-interventionist, and the Clinton administration has been so inclined as well. But the American public has steadfastly opposed that course: roughly two to one (61% vs. 32%) against sending U.S. forces to help end the fighting in Bosnia, according to the same *Times Mirror* poll in June. On the question of intervening in Bosnia, at least, the American media and the Clinton administration have not been leading the American public.

Similarly, the tone of coverage of Russia, which dealt largely with Chechnya, leaned in the same direction: internationalist and interventionist. Most of the stories with a perceptible tone were negative about Russia as a nation and overwhelmingly negative toward its current leadership, specifically including president Boris Yeltsin. The coverage was also negative in outlook for the current regime and for the current political system there. About the only policy issue regarding Russia on which the coverage was positive was the attitude toward U.S. involvement in that country.

But here, too, the media tone did not coincide with American public opinion. Only about one-third of the public believes Russia is a military power that poses a critical threat to the United States now; the public has the same "warm feeling" toward Russia as it has toward Israel, according to a Chicago Council on Foreign Relations poll conducted last October.<sup>25</sup> Slightly more Americans have a favorable than an unfavorable view of Russia (49% vs. 44%), an April, 1995 poll by Gallup found. And in contrast to the very negative coverage of Yeltsin, the American public seems to be rather favorably inclined toward the Russian president. In fact, they have essentially the same degree of "warm feeling" toward Yeltsin as toward Bill Clinton, the

Chicago Council poll found. A Time/CNN poll in May, 1995 found Americans felt it was in the best interests of the United States for Yeltsin to remain in power in Russia by an almost two to one margin (45% vs. 24%).

Finally, the tone of media on Mexico did not coincide with public opinion results. The Chicago Council survey found the public slightly "warmer" toward Mexico than toward Russia, and a Harris survey in April, 1995, found 57% of Americans believing Mexico is becoming more democratic (26% said less democratic). But the coverage during the study period was overwhelmingly critical of the current Mexican leadership and mostly critical of its regime and political system. It was also negative on the expected impact of Mexican government policy on the Mexican economy, and mostly inclined to see events in Mexico as contradicting (rather than advancing) the goals of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

**SELECTED TOPLINE FOR NEWS MEDIA**

**VARIABLE 05: STORY LENGTH**

<b>-----PRINT-----</b>		<b>-----BROADCAST<sup>1</sup>-----</b>	
<u># of Stories</u>	<u>Words</u>	<u># of Stories</u>	<u>Min:Sec</u>
1905 31%	<300	178 24%	:30-:59
1074 18%	300-499	71 10%	1:00-1:29
2122 35%	500-999	90 12%	1:30-1:59
773 13%	1000-1499	166 23%	2:00-2:29
201 3%	1500-2499	108 15%	2:30-2:59
40 <u>1%</u>	2500 +	76 10%	3:00-3:59
6115 100%		29 4%	4:00-4:59
		18 <u>2%</u>	5:00+
		736 100%	

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<sup>1</sup> "Broadcasts" includes ABC and CNN in these tables.



**VARIABLE 14a: PRINCIPAL TOPIC - NETS**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Print</u>	<u>Broadcast</u>
Total Number of Stories	7061 100%	6115 100%	736 100%
Agriculture	9 *	9 *	- -
Arts & Culture	229 3%	210 3%	18 2%
Celebrities % Glitterati	162 2%	136 2%	21 3%
Communications	36 *	33 *	2 *
Crime/Drugs	514 7%	469 8%	42 6%
Demographics	11 *	10 *	- -
Economics, Finance & Trade	1385 20%	1313 21%	56 8%
Education	21 *	20 *	1 *
Environment and Disasters (No Casualties)	117 2%	104 2%	12 2%
Environment and Disasters (With Casualties)	74 1%	61 1%	10 1%
Health & Medicine	157 2%	123 2%	24 3%
Human & Civil Rights	252 4%	225 4%	17 2%
Immigration & Borders	210 3%	160 3%	36 5%
Law/International Law	155 2%	136 2%	17 2%
National Security/Intelligence/Military/ Defense	1139 16%	907 15%	198 27%

**VARIABLE 14a: PRINCIPAL TOPIC - NETS cont ...**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Print</u>	<u>Broadcast</u>
Peacekeeping	207 3%	182 3%	23 3%
Political Issues	197 3%	168 3%	12 2%
Political Systems & Events	1283 18%	1160 19%	96 13%
Religion	212 3%	151 2%	18 2%
Science & Technology	96 1%	82 1%	13 2%
Social Welfare/Human Resources	29 *	20 *	9 1%
Terrorism	318 4%	243 4%	62 8%
Tribalism/Ethnicity	86 1%	54 1%	30 4%
Other	163 2%	139 2%	19 3%

**VARIABLE 16: CLINTON ADMINISTRATION TONE**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Print</u>	<u>Broadcast</u>
Total Number of Stories	246 100%	203 100%	39 100%
Supportive of Clinton Policies	10 4%	8 4%	2 5%
Neutral/Ambiguous	18 7%	12 6%	6 15%
Critical of Clinton Policies	8 3%	7 3%	1 2%
No Information/Not Applicable	208 85%	174 86%	31 79%
No Answer	2 1%	2 1%	- -

**VARIABLE 17: INTERNATIONALIST/ISOLATIONIST TONE**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Print</u>	<u>Broadcast</u>
Total Number of Stories	246 100%	203 100%	39 100%
Pro-Internationalism	121 49%	99 49%	22 56%
Neutral/Ambiguous	28 11%	16 8%	12 31%
Pro-Isolationism	5 2%	3 1%	- -
No Information/Not Applicable	90 37%	83 41%	5 13%
No Answer	2 1%	2 1%	- -

**VARIABLE 18: INTERVENTIONIST/HANDS OFF TONE**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Print</u>	<u>Broadcast</u>
Total Number of Stories	246 100%	203 100%	39 100%
Pro-Interventionism	86 35%	69 34%	17 44%
Neutral/Ambiguous	37 15%	18 9%	18 46%
Anti-Interventionism	11 4%	9 4%	- -
No Information/Not Applicable	110 45%	105 52%	4 10%
No Answer	2 1%	2 1%	- -

***VARIABLE 19: MULTILATERAL/UNILATERAL TONE***

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Print</u>	<u>Broadcast</u>
Total Number of Stories	246 100%	203 100%	39 100%
Pro-Multilateralism	115 47%	89 44%	26 67%
Neutral/Ambiguous	24 10%	15 7%	9 23%
Pro-Unilateralism	4 2%	2 1%	- -
No Information/Not Applicable	101 41%	95 47%	4 10%
No Answer	2 1	2 1	- -

**SELECTED TOPLINE FOR CALL-IN SHOWS<sup>2</sup>**

**VARIABLE 17: NEWS SOURCE CITED BY CALLER**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>C-Span</u>	<u>Limbaugh</u>	<u>Philadelphia Radio</u>
Total Number of Segments	447 100%	353 100%	83 100%	11 100%
Local Newspaper	24 5%	19 5%	5 6%	- -
Total National Newspaper	108 24%	92 26%	16 19%	- -
Total National Broadcast	10 2%	5 1%	5 6%	- -
Cable CNN	5 1%	3 1%	1 1%	1 9%
No Other Media Cited	281 63%	222 63%	52 63%	7 64%

**VARIABLE 18: RECURRING LEAD/BIG STORY**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>C-Span</u>	<u>Limbaugh</u>	<u>Philadelphia Radio</u>
Total Number of Segments	447 100%	353 100%	83 100%	11 100%
US Airstrikes Contemplated in Bosnia	77 17%	57 16%	14 17%	6 54%
US-Japan Trade War	73 16%	33 9%	36 43%	4 36%
McNamara/Vietnam Retrospective/Book Controversy	37 8%	37 10%	- -	- -
Bosnia/Croatia/Yugoslavia - Conflict in the Balkans	36 8%	35 10%	1 1%	- -
Oklahoma Bombing - International Terrorists Suspected	20 4%	20 6%	- -	- -
Scott O'Grady Episode	15 3%	11 3%	4 5%	- -

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<sup>2</sup>

Totals as presented do not add to 100% because some very small categories were not included.

**VARIABLE 19: GENERAL TOPIC**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>C-Span</u>	<u>Limbaugh</u>	<u>Philadelphia Radio</u>
Total Number of Segments	447 100%	353 100%	83 100%	11 100%
National Security (Includes Military, Diplomatic and Defense Issues)	220 49%	188 53%	26 31%	6 54%
Economics, Finance & Trade	115 26%	64 18%	47 57%	4 36%
Immigration & Borders	34 8%	30 8%	3 4%	1 9%
Foreign Aid	19 4%	19 5%	- -	- -
Political Issues	13 3%	11 3%	2 2%	- -

**VARIABLE 23: U.S. FIGURES/INSTITUTIONS CITED**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>C-Span</u>	<u>Limbaugh</u>	<u>Philadelphia Radio</u>
Total Number of Segments	447 100%	353 100%	83 100%	11 100%
Clinton Administration (General)	45 10%	32 9%	13 16%	- -
President Clinton	79 18%	51 14%	26 31%	2 18%
Congress (General)	22 5%	21 6%	1 1%	- -
Special Interest Groups	25 6%	15 4%	8 10%	2 18%
"We"	36 8%	27 8%	6 7%	3 27%
"The U.S."	28 6%	25 7%	2 2%	1 9%
No principal U.S. focal point	107 24%	87 25%	17 20%	3 27%

**VARIABLE 24: HOST POSITION RE: U.S. FIGURE/INSTITUTION CITED**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>C-Span</u>	<u>Limbaugh</u>	<u>Philadelphia Radio</u>
Total Number of Segments	447 100%	353 100%	83 100%	11 100%
Mostly critical	36 8%	- -	36 43%	- -
Somewhat critical	13 3%	- -	13 16%	- -
Neutral	360 80%	350 99%	8 10%	2 18%
Somewhat supportive	- -	- -	- -	- -
Mostly supportive	22 5%	2 1%	16 19%	4 36%
Don't know/Can't tell	16 4%	1 *	10 12%	5 45%

**VARIABLE 25: CALLER POSITION RE: U.S. FIGURE/INSTITUTION CITED**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>C-Span</u>	<u>Limbaugh</u>	<u>Philadelphia Radio</u>
Total Number of Segments	447 100%	353 100%	83 100%	11 100%
Mostly critical	98 22%	73 21%	25 30%	- -
Somewhat critical	47 10%	38 11%	7 8%	2 18%
Neutral	3 1%	3 1%	- -	- -
Somewhat supportive	6 1%	5 1%	1 1%	- -
Mostly supportive	89 20%	64 18%	20 24%	5 45%
No Caller/Guest	115 26%	114 32%	1 1%	- -
No Caller/Host Commentary	34 8%	12 3%	20 24%	2 18%
Don't know/Can't tell	55 12%	44 12%	9 11%	2 18%

**VARIABLE 26: HOST'S POSITION ON CLINTON ADM. RE: BIG STORY**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>C-Span</u>	<u>Limbaugh</u>	<u>Philadelphia Radio</u>
Total Number of Segments	447 100%	353 100%	83 100%	11 100%
Mostly critical	52 12%	- -	52 63%	- -
Somewhat critical	12 3%	- -	12 14%	- -
Neutral	358 80%	347 98%	9 11%	2 18%
Somewhat supportive	6 1%	2 1%	1 1%	3 27%
Mostly supportive	3 1%	- -	1 1%	2 18%
Don't know/Can't tell	16 4%	4 1%	8 10%	4 36%

**VARIABLE 27: CALLER'S POSITION ON CLINTON ADM. RE: BIG STORY**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>C-Span</u>	<u>Limbaugh</u>	<u>Philadelphia Radio</u>
Total Number of Segments	447 100%	353 100%	83 100%	11 100%
Mostly critical	116 26%	82 23%	30 36%	4 36%
Somewhat critical	42 9%	33 9%	6 7%	3 27%
Neutral	- -	- -	- -	- -
Somewhat supportive	9 2%	6 2%	3 4%	- -
Mostly supportive	35 8%	25 7%	9 11%	1 9%
No caller/Guest	116 26%	115 33%	1 1%	- -
Host Commentary	35 8%	12 3%	20 24%	3 27%
Not a policy issue	2 *	1 *	1 1%	- -
Don't know/Can't tell	92 21%	79 22%	13 16%	- -



## ENDNOTES

1. Tyndall Report data for March-June, 1995. ABC devoted 31% of its time to foreign news during the period, compared to 26% on CBS and 22% on NBC.
2. "Deciding What's News." Herbert J. Gans. Vintage Books. New York, NY. 1980. p. 31. "Foreign news is generally treated with less detachment, and explicit value judgments that would not be considered justifiable in domestic news appear in stories about the rest of the world, particularly from Communist countries."
3. "Democracy in America," Alexis de Tocqueville, Vol. 1, pp. 232-6.
4. William Schneider, "Bang Bang Television: The New Superpower," in *Public Opinion* 5, 1982.
5. "Mass Media and American Politics," Doris A. Graber, CQ Press, Washington DC. 1989.
6. St. Martin's Press, New York NY, 1990.
7. Graber cited a content analysis by William C. Adams of television coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1970s and 1980s.
8. See also "Negotiating in the Public Eye," Marc A. Genest. Stanford University Press. Stanford CA. 1995.
9. "Public opinion polls have repeatedly shown that two-thirds or more of the public is often unaware of important foreign news even when the situation has received ample and prolonged coverage." Graber.
10. "Mixed Messages about Press Freedom on Both Sides of the Atlantic," Times Mirror Center for the People & the Press, Mar. 16, 1994. Washington DC. In addition to Canada, Mexico and the United States, the survey polled the publics in Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain in cooperation with national papers.
11. The public relies on network, local and cable news about equally. Of Americans who said they get most of their national news from television, 32% specified network broadcast television, 27% cited local television news, and 38% cited Cable News Network. "title of release," The Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press, Oct. X, 1995. Washington DC.
12. "Who Knows?: Political Knowledge in Comparative Perspective," Michael A. Dimock and Samuel L. Popkin, University of California at San Diego. Presented at the Midwest Political Science Association meeting, Chicago, Apr. 6-8, 1995. The authors also said that "Americans are more educated but not more knowledgeable than fifty years ago because so many Americans now rely on television instead of newspapers for their news, and American television conveys less factual information than do American newspapers."

13. "The Restless Searchlight: Network News Framing of the Post Cold-War World," Pippa Norris, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, Chicago, Feb. 21-25, 1995.
14. The Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press. Unpublished. The study examined ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC from January through June, 1990, and the Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, USA Today and the Washington Post from March through August. Only the common four months, March through June, were used for comparison. USA Today foreign coverage was about half that of the other papers, reducing the print average significantly.
15. "Headlines and Sound Bites: Is That the Way It is?" The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, Columbia University. New York, NY. The study also found that "the three network newscasts are remarkably similar to each other in terms of what stories they cover and how much time they spend on those stories."
16. "United Nations: 1974, 1984, 1994." Edward Peartree, seminar paper, Harvard Shorenstein Center, April, 1995. The study compared public opinion with coverage in The New York Times and The CBS Evening News during three sample periods. "Though the number of negatively coded stories shrank in 1994 for both media, the most significant independent variable influencing changes in public opinion appears to be sheer volume of coverage," it concluded.
17. The Buffalo News, Charlotte Observer, Hartford Courant, Houston Chronicle, Miami Herald, San Francisco Chronicle, St. Louis Post Dispatch, and Rocky Mountain News (in Denver).
18. The Susan Bray Show, on WWDB.
19. All stories were coded for whether they were driven by conflict, conditions, or cooperation. In addition, stories dealing with the United Nations, Russia and Mexico were examined for whether they contained discernible tone on 14 subjects: the Clinton Administration; Internationalism vs. Isolationism; Interventionism vs. Hands-Off; Multilateralism vs. Unilateralism; Ethnocentrism vs. Humanism; Economic Impact (of policy or action on the Major Player); Protectionism vs. Free Trade; Status Quo vs. Change; U.S. Cost/Benefit Analysis (of policy or action); Brave New Russia vs. Good Old Soviet Days; Support for Current Leadership of Targeted Country or Organization; Pro or Anti Targeted Country or Organization; Effect on Immigration to U.S. (of action or policy); and whether the Policy Issue Debate in the story was fair or unfair. Only stories about Russia and Mexico were coded for tone regarding four other issues: the U.S. Role (supportive or critical) in those countries, the Viability of the Current Regime; the Viability of the Current Political-Economic System; and the Effect on U.S. Relations (with those countries). Stories about Mexico only were coded for whether the action or policy Advances or Contradicts NAFTA's goals. Stories about the United Nations only were coded for whether they support a wide-ranging or limited (combat) Role for the Military in peacekeeping operations.

20. See Gans. Also, Graber attributes to Edward Diamond in "The Tin Kazoo" the useful formula for predicting news interest: "10,000 deaths in Nepal equals 100 deaths in Wales equals 10 deaths in West Virginia equals 1 death next door."
21. CBN's unique format consists roughly of a half-hour of news and analysis followed by a half hour of commentary, fund-raising appeals and religion-oriented efforts. Most of the foreign stories during the study period came in the initial half of the program.
22. To wit, the phrase "foreign news" is forbidden on CNN, apparently in the belief that "international news" is less foreign to Americans.
23. "Beyond the Shroud," By Max Frankel. The New York Times Magazine, Mar. 19, 1995, p. 30. Brokaw's comments are paraphrased rather than quoted by Frankel.
24. Public Opinion of the U.N.: Strong Support, Strong Criticism. The Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press. June 25, 1995. Washington DC.
25. "American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995." Feb. 15, 1995. The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, Chicago, IL.