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Core Concern: Structural imperialism and the impact of Sept. 11 on U.S. coverage of international news

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Introduction

As the shocking events of Sept. 11, 2001 morphed into the war on terrorism, introspective journalists wondered what the developments would mean for U.S. media coverage of the rest of the world. A few years before the Sept. 11 attacks, veteran international correspondent Peter Arnett had written about declining international news coverage in American papers (Arnett 1998), and in the wake of Sept. 11 others anecdotally noted increased interest in coverage of foreign affairs but wondered: would it last? (Seplow 2002). This study is an attempt to address a related question from a theoretical and empirical framework, specifically, whether in a post-Sept.11 world, the U.S news media would report in ways that marginalized certain parts of the world at the expense of others.

International news and information flow are a heavily studied area in communication research. A perceived imbalance in the flow of international news was at the heart of the 1970s-'80s debate over a New World Information and Communication Order. This same concern is addressed by many of the best known and widely used theories of international communication, such as Galtung's Structural Imperialism Theory, Schiller's Cultural Imperialism, Boyd-Barrett's Media Imperialism, and the Dependency Theories associated with Latin American scholars. All of these theories proceed from the perspective that the developed world dominates the less-developed world with respect to communication between the two.

Much of the research in this arena has concerned the impact of news and other information flows on less-developed regions, commonly called the Third World. The basic thesis for much of this research is that international media are dominated by news

about the developed world, with the result that the Third World gets news produced by, and mostly about, the developed world. But imbalance of flow, by definition, implies concerns about the reverse direction as well: the amount and type of news about the Third World that reaches the developed nations. Of the various theories, structural imperialism addresses <u>this</u> issue most directly, arguing that news about the Third World receives inadequate attention in "core" countries such as the United States.

News does not happen in a vacuum; an event is judged as newsworthy in the context of other events around it. By any standards of news judgment, one of the most significant news events of the past generation was the terrorist attack on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001. Structural imperialism offers a theoretical perspective to help assess how an event of such magnitude might shape the news agenda for some time after. Specifically, the theory would predict that such a major news event involving a core country would shift the balance of coverage in ways that worsen the situation in which Third World news fails to get its fair share of U.S. media coverage because the attention and resources devoted to covering the aftermath of this major event would crowd out other news.

A research question that investigates this perspective is whether the events of Sept. 11 had an impact on the volume and subject matter of international news coverage in U.S. media. The approach selected here is a longitudinal item-count content analysis of stories about other countries as they appeared in a number of prestigious U.S. newspapers for the year before and year after September 2001. The findings provide some support for structural imperialism's claim that coverage of Third World news is neglected in core countries, especially the United States, and support for the hypothesis that the U.S.

media's reaction to Sept. 11 made the situation worse. The data that were collected and analyzed showed that news about many parts of the world was marginalized by the imperatives of Sept.11-related coverage.

Theoretical bases and background

While international news flows can be studied from a variety of theoretical viewpoints, the one that best fits this investigation is Galtung's theory of structural imperialism. If the notion of "balanced" flow were translated into a literal metaphor, it could be visualized as a gram-balance scale weighted down on one side by an overwhelming volume of news, information and cultural products from the core countries, with little volume of Third World information offsetting it in the other tray. Dependency, cultural imperialism and media imperialism theories all relate to the phenomenon of news flow primarily from a Third World perspective, and largely contend that imbalanced information flow has a negative impact on the less-developed countries. As such, they're concerned with the heavier side of the scale. Investigating coverage of international news (particularly concerning Third World nations) in a core country such as the United States requires examining the high side of the balance, something more directly addressed by the structural model.

Within the theory of structural imperialism, the world consists of core and peripheral countries that relate to each other "vertically," with one core (economically developed) country related to one or more peripheral (developing, Third World) countries. Galtung defines the imperialistic relationship as a "harmony of interest" existing between the center (elite individuals and institutions) of the core nation and the center of the periphery nation, combined with an absence of such common interest

between the peripheries of each or between the countries as wholes. On balance, the
structural result is beneficial primarily to the central portion of the core countries in the
relationships. (Galtung 1971)

The primary mechanisms of imperialism are these structures, through which all of
a peripheral nation's international relations are all channeled. According to Galtung,
peripheral nations tend to interact only (vertically) with "their" core nation and not
(horizontally) with each other. The dominant vertical relationship creates inequities
between the periphery and the core, and the lack of horizontal relationships within the
periphery maintains and reinforces the inequitable relationship. This plays itself out in
economic, military, political, cultural and communication arenas. A key expression of
this, according to Galtung, is control of the major international media by core countries,
with the result that "center news takes up a much larger proportion of periphery news
than vice versa … The periphery nations do not write or read much about each other, and
they read more about 'their' center than about other centers.' " (Galtung 1971 p. 93)

This part of Galtung's theory was emphasized by proponents of NWICO. At the
time the "Big Four" news agencies (Associated Press, United Press International, Agence
France Press and Reuters) were cited as the major factors in maintaining the imbalanced
flow (Masmoudi 1979). Today, UPI is not as dominant on the international scene but a
new player from the core, CNN, has emerged as a major purveyor of world news.
NWICO also addressed inequitable distribution of communication resources such as
technology, but the relevant portion of the debate here is the issue of news flows.

NWICO used the term "imbalance" but was largely concerned about news flow
into and among Third World nations. The only news available in many Third World

nations, it was argued, was news provided by core nations about core nations. News about the Third World that did make it into the international news wires was mostly negative, focused on war, political strife and natural disaster. ("Coups and earthquakes" was one description for it.)

But "imbalance" flows two ways: Stevenson and Cole (1984a) made the point that imbalance of information and domination of news flow by core countries creates distorted perceptions <u>at both ends</u> of the core-peripheral model. So this research project looks at the core end, that is, news about the rest of the world as published in U.S. newspapers, and some of the implications for distorted perceptions of the world that could result from any imbalance. Structural imperialism predicts that this imbalance could develop in the wake of an event with such significance to the United States as Sept. 11, because it would lead to coverage that was more focused on U.S. interests and less focused on other countries.

Literature review

Two prominent threads emerge in reviewing research about international news. One is investigations of the determinants and components of international news and the other is research into whether the periphery really is dominated by the core, as structural imperialism and the other theories suggest. It's important to note that the question is not a settled one; studies can be found that both support and challenge the position.

A few years before the landmark research defining structural imperialism, Galtung and a colleague investigated structural factors that determine whether an event receives international news coverage. They studied reporting of several distant events in Norwegian newspapers and concluded that international news tended to be about elite

nations and elite individuals, to be framed in personal terms such as the actions of
political leaders; to be focused on negative consequences (political and military turmoil,
natural disasters); and to have a familiar context or "consonance" with the publishing
nation's own language and culture. (Galtung and Ruge 1965) Ambiguity and novelty also
were reported to be factors; events that were easy to understand (unambiguous) and
unexpected (novel) were reported more often. The more of these criteria an event
satisfied, the more likely it would be to make news. Similar results were reported by
Kariel and Rosenvall (1984), who studied Canadian newspapers and found that a
country's population was a key coverage determinant, with more stories written about
larger countries. They also found that elite individuals and institutions also draw more
attention.

With respect to U.S. media, Lent (1977) suggested four factors account for
international news coverage: (1) It focuses on governmental affairs (diplomacy and
military) and historical-cultural heritage; (2) It tends to be crisis oriented; (3) It's affected
by the "news management" polices of other countries; and (4) It's been affected by a
decline in the number of correspondents abroad. The first of these closely parallels the
"consonance" concept postulated by Galtung and Ruge and the second factor matches
their view that negative news dominates the international scene. Stevenson and Cole
(1984b) found that journalistic definitions of news -- such as timeliness, proximity and a
focus on events and political activities -- have a major effect on selection of news by the
agencies that provide most international news coverage. Ahern (1984) used a content
analysis of 1,106 articles from *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Washington
Post* to determine that the quantity of coverage a nation received in these elite U.S.

newspapers depended on three primary variables: economic productivity, trade with the United States, and political relations with the United States. Chang and Lee (1992) surveyed newspaper editors and concluded that "gatekeepers" of international news favored stories with potential for significant impact on U.S. security or national interests. These editors, however, did not appear to regard a country's physical distance, U.S. trade relations, or economic development level as important factors in selecting foreign news, a finding that runs counter to the one noted by Ahern (1984).

Research about whether information flows are directed by and beneficial to core countries and their media has been conducted primarily from a contextual, content-analytical framework of case studies or limited samples of wire service coverage. For example, Chang (1998) studied Reuters news service reporting of a World Trade Organization conference in Singapore using the perspective of Wallerstein's World Systems Theory and concluded that more reporting was done on core countries (especially the United States, Japan, Canada and the European Union) and that coverage of peripheral countries was mostly in the context of their relationship with the core.

Attempting to get beyond the case-study and content analysis approaches, Kim and Barnett (1996) used a network analysis of international trade in newspapers and periodicals to describe the structure of international news flow. Computerized analyses of the data indicated that core nations dominate the flow and that peripheral countries are marginalized by news exchange among the core. The study "revealed inequality in the structure of international news flow, which may be interpreted as dependency." (p. 347).

While these studies support the proposition that the core dominates the periphery, other research has reached the opposite conclusion. Weaver and Wilhoit (1981) studied

wire service offerings and determined that less-developed countries were not neglected in U.S. coverage. In follow-up studies (1983, 1984) they did find the same emphasis on diplomacy/politics/conflict/disaster that other researchers had noted. Link (1984) studied newspapers from Mexico, Brazil and Argentina for evidence of dependency theory, especially whether the papers seemed to depend on major Western wire services. The conclusion was that they did not; the papers had a variety of sources and news-coverage agendas that were similar to, but not dictated by, coverage patterns of the major wires.

Haynes (1984) found evidence of structural imperialism as a determinant of international news coverage patterns but not wholesale support for the theory. Looking at coverage of the Third World by the major news agencies for evidence of the "vertical" and "feudal" patterns identified by Galtung, Haynes concluded that "some vertical dominance does exist, but it is neither as direct nor as pervasive as the theory would suggest." (p. 213) Haynes also found a lack of reporting in the Third World about other parts of the Third World. But whereas Galtung had attributed this to a feudal structure of international interactions, Haynes concluded it was based on proximity as a criterion of news coverage. News in a region of the world, such as South America, is largely about that part of the world. He further found that the large news agencies were the major suppliers of news to the Third World, but were not monopolistic or overwhelmingly dominant ones. In only four countries did more than 50 percent of the coverage surveyed come from the (then) "Big Four" news agencies and in most countries news was dominated by reports from their own news agencies.

So the matter of whether structural imperialism is a determinant of international news flow is still a matter of debate, particularly as regards reporting about the Third

World in Western media. Weaver and Wilhoit (1984) note that this is an area that hasn't received much study.

Research methods

The purpose here is to examine whether the reaction of U.S. media in the aftermath of Sept. 11 affected coverage of international news in ways that would be predicted or explained by the theory of structural imperialism. Specifically, does news coverage before vs. after that date show any differences in the balance of news flow, as indicated by coverage of lesser-developed countries in U.S. media?

To accomplish this, an item-count content analysis of international news in 17 prominent U.S. newspapers was conducted for the 12-month periods before and after September 2001 (Sept. 1, 2000 to Aug. 31, 2001 and Sept. 1, 2001 to Aug. 31, 2002). This was accomplished through searching an electronic database of news stories for occurrences of countries' names in the headlines of stories. Countries were selected for inclusion in the search based on population of more than 1 million in 2002, as listed in the CIA's World Fact Book (2002). This resulted in inclusion of 152 of the world's 235 nations. For each search, the total number of stories returned was recorded for use as an independent variable in the analysis.

Other studies that have sought to document broadly based quantities of coverage, such as Weaver and Wilhoit's, have focused on stories supplied by the wire services (news agencies). A different approach is used here: a focus on published stories. Many international stories that are published, of course, come from the wires. But the wires also move many stories that go unpublished in the majority of papers. Also, the method in this research includes stories that are staff generated, particularly from newspapers (such as

The New York Times) that have a network of foreign correspondents. This research also differs from previous studies that have focused on published work, which have tended to be case studies of a small number of newspapers or even single ones, e.g. Beaudoin and Thorson (2001), rather than a quantity count of a large number of stories.

The selected newspaper sample was based on convenience, consisting of the newspapers available through the "U.S. newspapers" search database offered by ProQuest Information and Learning Company. However, the set works exceptionally well as a purposive sample for elite U.S. newspapers. It includes all three national papers (USA Today, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal) as well as many large, prestigious metro papers that have foreign correspondents, such as the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post and the Boston Globe. These opinion-leading papers also set the agenda for coverage by smaller news outlets around the country. Overall, the papers in the set include the five largest in the nation and seven of the top 10. Their combined circulation of around 10 million encompasses 18 percent of U.S. newspapers' total daily circulation of around 55 million (NAA 2002). [Newspaper list in Appendix A.]

The search of keyword results based on country names was selected to get numerical results for use in a statistical analysis. Headlines should summarize and report the most significant aspects about the story (Harrigan 1993), so occurrence of country names in headlines was selected as an indicator that the story's focus was on a particular country. This approach differs from much prior research, in which content analyses examined a small number of newspapers or a few days of wire service offerings, often with a focus on story text to ascertain the subject matter of individual stories, such as whether they seemed to be about conflict, politics or natural disaster in a country.

Advantages of the electronic search methodology include its speed, thoroughness and ability to generate ratio-scaled numbers over a wide range of values. This makes it efficient in searching for occurrences of coverage related to more than 150 nations from around the world within a large number of sources over a two-year time frame. The final database included references to more than 48,000 stories.

But the method does have some weaknesses, including one associated with item counts generally. With item counting, all stories are represented equally, even though they may present drastically different amounts of information. A 200-word brief about a country has the same presence in the analysis as a 2,000-word news enterprise story.

Other potential concerns with the search methodology are:

● Spurious inclusion. Most countries have unique names, and a keyword search of headlines for "Botswana" returned results all related to the small African nation. But the same can't be said for "Chad," which returned results both about the sub-Saharan country and individuals with that name (not to mention stories about tiny bits of paper attached to presidential election ballots in Florida). In this and a few other instances the results were reviewed to eliminate incorrect entries. The search tool allowed specification of terms as geographic names, which also helped to mitigate this problem, such as searching for "Jordan" as a geographical term to remove references to prominent individuals such as NBA superstar Michael Jordan; the same was done with "Turkey" to eliminate references to Thanksgiving dinners. The large number of searches and volume of results meant not all of them could be examined closely to remove all such incorrect references; some spurious entries may have been included in the analysis. But the size of the database itself is another mitigating factor: with more than 48,000 total results

included, a few non-authentic references should be within acceptable sampling error.

● Arbitrary exclusion: The other side of the spurious inclusion problem is that not all stories about a country include the nation's name in the headline. Sometimes a leader's name or national capital, for instance, serves as a surrogate. Ideally these stories should be included in the database but given the constraints of the search they were not.

● Uncertainty of location: Story origin or dateline is often used to define whether a story should be considered an international one. But not every headline occurrence of a nation's name relates to a story originating in a particular country, which means the definition of international news here is necessarily broader than in some other studies. For instance, the time frame of the search included the Sydney and Salt Lake City Olympics, so references to nations' Olympic teams and athletes surfaced in searches for country names. Thus, a story about an Olympic runner from Kenya would be counted as a story about Kenya, although it originated in Australia. Similar references occurred in business news, such as "Ford to close Mexico assembly plant," which might have a Detroit dateline. But these still may be interpreted as news about the country identified in the headline, so their inclusion does not weaken the overall purpose of the database.

● Multiple inclusions of a single story: This happened in two ways. First, a specific story that appeared in more than one of the newspapers could surface multiple times -- once for each paper -- in the search. Also, sometimes headlines included names of multiple nations, e.g. "IMF approves loans to Brazil, Argentina and Mexico." This story would then be included in the database three times because it would occur in the search for each country. It can be argued, however, that these multiple inclusions contribute to the goal of measuring quantity of coverage about international news. A

story that is counted multiple times because it appeared in multiple papers has, by definition, reached more readers than one that appeared in a single newspaper. A story that has three nations' names in its headline tells readers about three countries at once. In each case the heavier "weight" that each story has in the database because of its multiple inclusion reflects that it was a device for reaching more readers with more international news than a story about a single nation that appeared in a single paper.

Investigation

After the database was assembled, it was examined for differences in coverage before and after Sept. 11 overall, and also based on level of development, which is the definition of core vs. peripheral nations. This variable was operationalized by per-capita gross national income. The investigations were stated as the following hypotheses; in each the hypothesis that coverage differs can be accepted by rejecting the corresponding null hypothesis that coverage levels were the same:

- H_1: Post-Sept. 11 international news coverage would differ from pre-Sept. 11 coverage.

- H_2: Overall coverage across the full time period would differ by level of economic development.

- H_3: Post-Sept. 11 coverage would differ from pre-Sept. 11 coverage according to level of economic development.

Economic classification was done according to per capita gross national income, as reported by the Population Reference Bureau (2002). Three categories were assigned:

- Per capita GNI less than or equal to $3,000 (U.S.) (N = 66 countries)

- Per capita GNI more than $3,000 but less than $10,000. (N = 51 countries)

- Per capita GNI greater than or equal to $10,000. (N = 33 countries)

The first two categories represent the less-developed world or periphery and the last category represents the core. The total of 150 countries reflects that two were not included in the economic analysis because no income data could be found either through the PRB documentation or in the CIA World Fact Book, which was used as an alternate data source for about 10 countries not included in the PRB data.

Results

H₁: Overall coverage of international news would differ before and after Sept. 11

H₁ was investigated by measuring differences across the entire database in stories published before Sept. 11 with those published after. A non-parametric test – the Wilcoxon matched-pairs, signed-ranks test -- was used rather than a matched-pairs t-test because of the wide variability and lack of a normal distribution among the individual story counts for each country.

For the year before Sept. 11, the total number of stories counted was 21,756 and the mean was 143 per country. The range went from more than 1,000 results for countries such as Japan (1,549), China (1,323), Israel (1,258) and Russia (1,074) to fewer than 10 for countries such as Uruguay (5), Oman (4) and several African nations (Tunisia, 6; Malawi, 3; Lesotho, Togo and Democratic Republic of Congo, 1 each). For the year after Sept. 11, mean coverage totaled 173 stories per country; the total number of stories counted also increased by about 20 percent, to 26,273. In the Wilcoxon test, a positive rank means a country received more coverage after Sept. 11 because the value is calculated by subtracting the pre score from the post score. The test indicated 90 positive

ranks (mean increase = 71.49); 58 negative ranks (mean decrease = 79.16), and four ties.

These results were moderately significant (Z = -1.76; p = .078 two-tailed test), indicating

that, in general, international news coverage differed after Sept. 11 from before it.

But testing of structural imperialism requires investigation of coverage levels by

income level. This was done with an ANOVA test using the income categories as factors.

H₂: Overall coverage across the two years would differ by economic level

The ANOVA using income as a treatment indicated that per capita GNI was

significant as a factor in overall coverage [F (2, 149 df.) = 4.088, p = .019], accounting

for about 5 percent of total variability (partial eta squared = .053). The mean number of

stories for the three income groups over the entire two-year data set was:

Group 1: (GNI ≤ $3,000 U.S.; 66 countries)   =   211.79

Group 2: ($3,000 < GNI < $10,000; 51 countries)   =   301.57

Group 3: (GNI ≥ $10,000; 33 core countries)   =   552.64

Between-groups post-hoc testing showed that the difference in coverage of Group

3 core countries as compared to the Group 1 countries was significant. (Mean difference

= 340.85, p = .014). Comparison of Group 3 to Group 2 countries came close to but did

not quite show significance, with a mean difference of 251.07 (p = .115). Coverage

differences were not significant for Group 1 compared to Group 2 (p = .668). On balance,

these results indicate that just being a country in Group 3 means greater likelihood of

coverage in U.S. newspapers.

This support for the first two hypotheses demonstrates two important things: first

that Sept. 11 had an impact on overall coverage trends, and second that, in general, core

countries received a disproportionately large share of coverage. Both of these results can

be interpreted as providing evidence that structural imperialism plays a role in determining news coverage. An event that jolted a major core country changed news-coverage patterns in that country, and those patterns were already predisposed to provide greater coverage of the core. But what of the combined impact? Recall that overall international news coverage increased; the structural imperialism theory would predict that even as coverage increased, it would become more focused on the core; i.e. that the coverage gap between core and non-core countries would grow.

H_3: Post-Sept. 11 coverage would differ according to level of economic development.

The combined effect of economic development level with coverage before and after Sept. 11 was tested both with the Wilcoxon test on the raw numbers and with an ANOVA design on the group means. The Wilcoxon test showed significantly greater coverage for Group 3 developed nations (18 positive ranks, mean = 15.42; 9 negative ranks, mean = 11.17; $Z = -2.13$; $p = .033$) but did not demonstrate similar increases for Group 2 or Group 1.

Meanwhile, the ANOVA discovered that for the year leading up to Sept. 11, the mean number of stories for each country in the core (Group 3) was 250.7, which was 176 more than the poorest countries (Group 1; mean = 74.6) and 89 more than Group 2. The first of these differences was significant ($p = .001$); the second was not ($p = .118$).

In the year after Sept. 11, the mean number of stories for both Groups 1 and 3 increased, while the mean for Group 2 decreased, providing solid evidence of the marginalization that structural imperialism would predict. The mean difference between Group 3 and Group 1 shrank slightly (from 176 more to 165 more), but remained statistically significant ($p = .023$) Meanwhile, the coverage gap between the mean

number of stories about Group 3 vs. Group 2 countries grew from 89 to 162, reaching a statistically significant level (p = .034) that did not exist in the year before Sept. 11.

Discussion

Structural imperialism theory predicts that level of economic development is a significant factor in how much news coverage a country receives. It can be used further to predict that the incidents of Sept. 11, because of their profound effect on a core nation, the United States, would have an impact on the world news agenda in U.S. media for some time afterward. The hypotheses in this research were designed to test these theoretical predictions, and the results provide evidence that supports the theory.

With respect to H_1, the measure of overall differences in coverage across all income boundaries, a pure count of stories showed a 20 percent increase in international news coverage in the year after Sept. 11. The Wilcoxon test also measured some difference, at a moderately significant -- 90 percent -- statistical level (p = .078).

However, the Wilcoxon test ranks a set of before and after scores according to the magnitude of their difference, giving heaviest weight to the largest differences. In the database, the countries with the largest differences in number of stories before and after Sept. 11 were Afghanistan (+1,653), Pakistan (+1,332), Iraq (+720) and Israel (+622). The 4,327 additional stories about these four countries alone account for most of the observed difference of 4,517 more foreign stories after Sept. 11 than in the year before. Afghanistan was the subject of an 18-fold increase in the number of stories about it, from 97 in the year before Sept. 11 to 1,750 in the year after, reflecting coverage of the war on terrorism and hunt for Osama bin Laden there during this time frame. Pakistan, which was prominent in the same coverage, had eight times as many stories (1,505 compared to

197) while Iraq coverage more than doubled, to from 457 to 1,177. With these increases accounted for largely by stories about U.S. interests and military operations in the countries, the measurements that were recorded and the further investigation into the nations most affected can be seen as supporting a structural imperialism viewpoint -- Sept. 11 led to more international coverage but with a core (i.e. U.S.) perspective.

With respect to income, results also may be interpreted as supporting the argument that U.S. news coverage follows the patterns predicted by structural imperialism. The mean number of stories about the developed world was found to be significantly greater than that of lesser-developed nations across both years of the data.

Evaluations of the final hypothesis, which sought to measure impacts of Sept. 11 together with income level, also support the predictions of structural imperialism. The Wilcoxon test showed significantly more coverage for core countries but no significant before/after differences for less-developed countries. ANOVA testing, meanwhile, found income to have a significant impact on coverage patterns, again with the coverage gap between developed and less-developed nations growing in the year after Sept. 11.

These findings are significant on a couple of levels. First, while much has been written about the core vs. periphery issue in news coverage, the question has not been definitively resolved. Also, as previously mentioned, most of the research in international news flow has focused on the impact of coverage in developing nations; coverage of the developing world within the core is a relatively under-researched area. In particular, no other study was found that took a longitudinal look at large amounts of published work (as opposed to snapshot content analyses) among U.S. news outlets. So this research contributes some new insights to both of those conversations. It can be seen as the U.S.-

side companion piece to Link's (1984) study of Latin American papers that found evidence (of a limited nature) for structural imperialism as a determinant of news.

But more significantly, the finding that news about a large part of the world is marginalized in U.S. newspapers is something about which journalists should take heed. International coverage already commands only a tiny share of overall newshole, as Arnett (1998) documented. In the days shortly after Sept. 11, a commonly heard statement was "This changes everything," or "The world is different today than it was before these events." If that's the case, it would seem that greater understanding about people, places, events and issues around the world is something that U.S. journalists and their audiences should desire. In this light, moving toward news that is more U.S.-centric and less sensitive to the rest of the world is a disappointing development.

The negative impact of this was well stated by Galtung and Ruge (1965) in their seminal work on structural determinants of international news flow. They were writing about the general system of international news, but the cautionary words apply equally to U.S. media and audiences in a post-Sept. 11 world:

> "The consequence of all this is an image of the world that gives little autonomy to the periphery but sees it as mainly existing for the sake of the center … This may also tend to amplify more than at times might seem justified the images of the world's relatedness. Everything's relevance for everything else, particularly for us, is overplayed. Its relevance to itself disappears." (Galtung and Ruge 1965 p. 84)

Several of their prescriptions for improving the balance of news apply in the current context as well, including less of an event orientation in the news, more emphasis on complex and ambiguous events, more reporting from culturally distant zones, and more coverage of non-elite nations and people. But the results of the current study indicate that these prescriptions are not being followed by U.S. editors.

In a similar vein, <u>Los Angeles Times</u> foreign editor Simon K.C. Li suggests papers need more stories that "illustrate different cultures. There are more ways of living, thinking than the American way. And there are different values. They exist and need to be taken into account." Or, as <u>Los Angeles Times</u> director of marketing research Ed Batson put it, "attention to national and international news is not only good journalism. It is in our enlightened self-interest." (Both quoted in Seplow [2002])

Seplow sought to document, albeit anecdotally, greater interest within the industry for international news coverage (a finding that runs somewhat counter to this study, except for its finding about total number of news stories published). But even in so doing, Seplow cautioned: "The changed attitude should not be overstated. Local news is still comfortably atop the food chain. Foreign is just not as far down. Further, when editors send reporters abroad, it is often for *stories that have some hometown connection* (emphasis added)."

That practically sounds like a formula for structural imperialism determining the news, and is exactly what Galtung and Ruge warned against nearly 40 years ago. The American public's understanding of a changed and difficult world could suffer dangerously from a news report constructed according to that formula.

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World Population Data Sheet. Available: www.prb.org

Appendix A

Papers in ProQuest newspaper set as of time of data collection in March 2003

American Banker; New York, N.Y. (1996 - current)

The Atlanta Journal - Constitution; Atlanta, Ga. (2001 - current)

Barron's; Chicopee (1988 - current)

Boston Globe; Boston, Mass. (1987 - current)

Chicago Tribune; Chicago, Ill. (1996 - current)

Christian Science Monitor; Boston, Mass. (1988 - current)

Denver Post; Denver, Colo. (1988 - current)

Houston Chronicle; Houston, Tex. (1997 - current)

The Los Angeles Times; Los Angeles, Calif. (1988 - current)

The New York Times; Late Edition (East Coast) (1999 - current) Also New York Times

Magazine and New York Times Book Review.

San Francisco Chronicle; San Francisco, Calif. (1996 - current)

St. Louis Post - Dispatch; St. Louis, Mo. (1993 - current)

Times - Picayune; New Orleans, La. (1993 - current)

USA TODAY; McLean, Va. (1997 - current)

Wall Street Journal; Eastern edition (1984 - current)

The Washington Post; Washington, D.C. (1996 - current)