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Putting Objectivity to the Test: A Study of How the Kurdish/Turkish Issue is Represented in the News

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Putting Objectivity to the Test: A Study of How Turkey and the Kurds are Represented in the News

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Putting Objectivity to the Test:

A Study of How Turkey and the Kurds are Represented in the News

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Abstract

Although the public generally thinks of the news media as sources of factual, complete and objective information, due to the routines of production through which journalists are trained to use to present and gather news, they cannot be objective. The sources journalists rely on for information, and the choices they make in deciding what is newsworthy and how to frame stories influences what and how information is portrayed to the public. Thus, the media can unintentionally influence the way in which audiences understand the events and the knowledge they have to question the decisions being made. Studies have shown that the news media reflect the foreign policy objectives of the United States in their coverage of international events. This study examines the different foreign policy objectives of Great Britain and the United States toward the conflict between the Turks and the Kurds, specifically regarding the Kurd leader’s flight and capture in late 1998 and early 1999. Eighty articles from The Times (of London) and The New York Times were analyzed textually to see how the Kurdish and human rights issues, and the political circumstances were framed. My analysis demonstrated that news coverage mirrored the foreign policy objectives of their respective countries.
Although the news media lack coercive power (a newspaper cannot draft you and send you off to a foreign war or put you in jail), their influence and persuasiveness are beyond a doubt. —William Hachten, 1998, page 1.

I got off the plane in Istanbul, looked around, and immediately thought I was surrounded by terrorists. I was fearful of the Turkish people around me, even though I had never before had any first hand contact with Turkey. A week later I was in the same airport reflecting on the generous, hospitable, and hardworking nature of the Turks I had encountered. Once in Turkey, I realized my initial thoughts did not accurately reflect the nature of the people. My beliefs about Turkey and its people may have been formed from the various different kinds of media I have been exposed to throughout my life.

Our lives are filled with mediated information, from the music and radio programs we listen to, the movies and television shows we watch, to the newspapers, magazines and books we read. While the media serve to entertain us, they are also a major source of information. The primary function of the news is “to report happenings in the world” to the public (Fishman 1980, p. 27). Because of the world’s vastness, it is impossible for us to know about everything that is going on in the world, so we turn to the news to inform us of important events. People need the information the news media provide to be responsible citizens and make decisions that best serve their communities. Geographical and cultural differences inhibit the public from obtaining first hand knowledge of other countries, so people are particularly reliant on the news media for information regarding international events.

We turn to the news to gain knowledge about world events and assume the news reports all the information we need to make responsible decisions. However, by the nature of news, not all the world’s happenings can be covered (Adams 1986). We trust journalists to provide us
with all the information we need, in an accurate and objective way. However, as Herbert Gans, author of *Deciding What’s News*, states “journalists try hard to be objective, but neither they nor anyone else can in the end proceed without values” (1979, p. 39). John McManus, author of *Market Driven Journalism*, concurs that “no human activity . . . is value free” (1994, p. 42). Since journalists cannot be completely free of their values, the information we receive from the media may not be as comprehensive or as objective as we expect.

In the Istanbul airport, I realized that mediated sources must have influenced my view of the Turkish people, which caused me to question the objectivity of the messages I receive from the media. The way the news frames political issues influences how I understand those issues and further affects the decisions I make. I embarked on this project to better understand the extent to which the news media shape my comprehension of issues. Because my experience in Turkey caused me to question the media’s objectivity, I decided to study how the conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdish political party (the PKK), specifically the party’s leader’s flight and capture, was represented in *The Times* (of London) and *The New York Times*.

**Literature Review**

Many factors determine what we see and read in the news. In order to decide what becomes news, journalists learn specific criteria for deciding the newsworthiness of events (Schulman 1990). Newsworthiness is a term used to describe an event or person who is deserving or credible enough to be the subject of a news article. These criteria include the physical proximity and timeliness of the event, impact it has on the audience, prominence of the
people involved, unique qualities of the event, or conflict involved in the event. Additional criteria the US news media uses to determine the newsworthiness of international events include the population of the country, the Gross National Product of the country, extent to which the country votes with the US in the United Nations and receives aid from the US, and how close the country is culturally with the US (Adams 1986).

Since editors are often pressured by owners to make a profit, the financial situation of the media organization also determines what becomes news (Ostgaard 1965, McManus 1994). Economically, newspapers cannot produce stories of infinite length; editors must choose what to report to the public within the allocated time or space (McManus 1994). As the authors of Manufacturing Consent, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, (1988) state, the media cannot afford to send reporters everywhere, so they choose to send reporters to locations where newsworthy events most often occur. Thus, for financial reasons, editors are not always able to have reporters cover every event that might be of importance to the public. Economic forces also dictate how stories are written. Media organizations often write stories in a way that aims to build drama in order to attract audiences and maintain advertisers, since they rely on advertisers for funding (Herman 1985, Tuchman 1978).

With limited resources, editors have difficulty covering international events. Reporters are often assigned to cover large areas of another country or continent. When reporters are responsible for large areas, they may have to report on an issue with little knowledge of the historical, social or cultural background of the event (Underwood 1998). In this case, the reporter is not equipped to put the information in a meaningful context. Since the public relies heavily on the media for international information, countries or events that fail to get
representation in the media remain outside the public’s body of knowledge.

As McManus (1994) indicates, timeliness is also used to determine newsworthiness, since information must be presented in a timely fashion in order for it to be valuable to the public. Because reporters work with limited resources and on deadline, they cannot get information from every potential source of information; they must choose where and from whom to gather information (McManus 1994). Because of time restrictions, journalists may only use one or two sources, and often rely heavily on information from press releases (Underwood 1998). In addition, the information in press releases is often presented in a way that aims to further the goals of the organization that submitted the press release (McManus 1994).

The news media commonly rely on official sources, such as press releases, press conferences, government reports, documents, and officials, for information. Government sources are often used because the information is easily available (Hamilton & Krimsky 1996), and politicians are considered inherently more newsworthy than other citizens (Ostgaard 1965). The news media depend on official sources particularly when covering foreign events that are difficult to report first hand. As McManus (1994) states, the government presents the information in official sources in a way that serves the interests of the United States. Herman implies that the media use this information intentionally to “serve the ‘national interest’ when this is needed and/or when national or international events present useful opportunities” (1985, p. 137). While the government’s motives may be intentional, the media may not be so purposeful; journalists may use information obtained from official sources because it is more accessible. Herman (1985) also suggests journalists must carefully present their sources’ information, so they do not offend their sources and risk losing them. This may lead to the presentation of news
in a way that pleases the sources. In addition, journalists may unconsciously feel they must alter the news to represent government views because of the subtle pressures the government has through legal, economic, and investigative means to stop the media's business (Gans 1979).

As stated, because of time, space, and money restrictions, the media must choose from whom to gather information, what events to cover, how to present the stories, and where to send reporters. This decision making process is a natural part of journalistic procedures (Schulman 1990). However, through their choices, the media imply that the chosen sources, information, places, and events are important. Journalists often make these choices based on logistical or organizational goals, their personal worldview, or governmental or economic influences (Adams 1986).

The values of the media organization, government, or journalist are reflected in the choices reporters and editors make; their choices attach value to the events and people covered in the news. Journalists may need to use values to make choices and determine the newsworthiness of an event so they can do their job of gathering and creating news in a timely manner (Bird & Dardenne 1988, Gans 1979). Gans (1979) states that the "values [found] in the news are rarely explicit and must be found between the lines--in what actors and activities are reported or ignored, and how they are described" (p. 40). The values in the news are often enduring; they "can be found in many different types of news stories over a long period of time," (Gans 1979, p. 41). The values in the news are often difficult to detect because enduring news values usually reflect society's dominant values (Schulman 1990).

Gans says news values are communicated through "preference statements" (1979, p. 39). By unintentionally making statements that show preference for certain views of the world, the
media suggest which beliefs are “normal” and “deviant” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). In this way, the news can tell individuals what the common assumptions of the world are. The public believes they must act according to those assumptions in order to be accepted by society, which persuades them to do so (Gans 1979). The news “reminds the audience of values that are being violated and assumes the audience shares these values” (Gans 1979, p. 40). Stories with negative word connotations attach negative values to an event, and describe what is undesirable in society, and vice versa with positive word connotations (Gans 1979). For example, an alternative political group labeled “freedom fighters” suggests their actions are positive, but “terrorists” implies they are dangerous. The media’s continuous use of negative images may lead the public to oppose those negatively portrayed people or events (Sotirovic 1999).

The language the news uses frames the issues, which guides public perceptions of those issues (Tuchman 1978). In this way, “communication is power, and the road to power is through the mass media” (Ismach 1998, p.1). By delivering public messages to mass audiences, the media have power to persuade and influence the public’s attitudes, learning, and even behavior (Ismach 1998, Hatchen 1998). The media establish what ideas the public debates by suggesting what is important about an issue (Croteau & Hoynes 2000). By controlling public perceptions, the media can potentially influence policy makers by affecting voters’ decisions (Starkey 1995, Ostgaard 1965).

The news media also help construct a larger system of values and beliefs through which the public understands reality. This system is ideological: “ideology is basically a system of meaning that helps define and explain the world that makes value judgments about that world” (Croteau & Hoynes 2000, p. 157). Herman and Chomsky believe the role of the media is to
communicate this ideology so the public acts according to larger institutional structures: "it is [the mass media's] function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into institutional structures of the larger society" (1988, p. 1). While the ideology of the mainstream mass media may not so intentionally manipulate the public, the "news focuses on powerful people and institutions and generally reflects established interests" (Croteau & Hoynes 2000, p. 167). In this way, the news serves those who are in positions of power. Since people have been socialized to view the world a certain way, they do not think to question the common sense assumptions contained within the mainstream news media (Bennett 1982).

In situations in which the government is looking for public support, it may attempt to intentionally influence journalists, in order to use the media's power to communicate to mass audiences (Starkey 1995). Media writer, Jacqueline Starkey, states "civilian and military leaders believe if they can control journalists' perceptions, they can in turn control public perceptions" (1995, p. 10). In addition to the government's possible attempts to alter public views through the media, Herman and Chomsky (1988) also believe the media are intentional in manipulating public perceptions. They suggest that similar events in two different countries are covered differently because the media were manipulating their coverage in order to serve the nation's political interests (Herman & Chomsky 1988). For example, they believe that two events in Cambodia and East Timor, that were relatively alike in content, were covered differently because the US foreign policy objectives toward these two nations were contradictory (1988). Using their research, they explain how the experiences of two victimized groups of people are treated differently by the media depending on how the government is best served (Herman & Chomsky
1988). ‘Worthy’ victims are humanized and their victimization is detailed in order to create sympathy, because the government may be better served by emphasizing their suffering, whereas, ‘unworthy’ victims are not humanized, only slightly detailed, and their well being is overly depicted (Herman & Chomsky 1988). Ultimately, Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) research show the placement, tone, context, and completeness of news reporting depend on the political ends trying to be achieved. Another study, by Kuang-Kuo Chang, also concluded “the US foreign policy with other nations does play a key role in influencing how the press covers certain issues” (1999, p. 13).

While the government may aim to control public perceptions, the media’s coverage may not be so purposeful in their intent. The media may reflect governmental goals simply because of the routines of production that they use to operate (Gans 1979). Whether the media is intentional or not, many studies suggest that international reporting does reflect the foreign policy objectives of the nation (Herman & Chomsky 1988, Chang 1999, Wang & Lowry 1999). Bob Drogin, Los Angeles Times bureau chief in South Africa, also agrees that the subjects covered in the news often follow government goals (Americans’ 1997).

Due to the routines of production, the news media are limited in how they gather and present news. Such restrictions result in the representation of values in the news. In order to examine the extent to which coverage of the conflict between Turkey and Kurds was value laden and reflects foreign policy objectives, a complete understanding of the actual circumstances must be established so incomplete or subjective information can be identified. Thus, a broad understanding of the situation in the region and issues surrounding the Turks and Kurds is presented here.
The Turkish Kurdish Issue

The Kurds are an ethnic group residing in the mountainous regions of southeastern Turkey, eastern Iran, northeastern Iraq, and northern Syria. The Kurds consist of 25 million people, half of whom live in Turkey (Mathiu 1999). “In the absence of an independent state, Kurdistan is defined as the areas in which Kurds constitute an ethnic majority today” (Kurdistan Web). Because of the political persecution they face, many Kurds have relocated to other parts of Europe, including Germany and Italy. In Turkey, the Kurds are facing cultural genocide because the Turkish government fears Kurdish autonomy will cause the breakup of Turkey. Since 1984, the PKK and the Turkish military have been fighting a guerilla war over Kurdish independence. In an effort to fight for an independent Kurdish state, Abdullah Ocalan began the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in 1978.

As a university student in the 1970’s, Ocalan advocated for the national rights of the Kurds (Kutschera 1999). Until 1978, when the party was officially founded, the party web site claims it “existed as an ideological group,” whose “fundamental approach . . . was researching, examining, and creating revolutionary thought, followed by propaganda designed to spread this revolutionary thought to win over the intellectuals and the youths to the movement.” In 1980, there was a military coup in Turkey, which caused thousands of people loyal to the PKK to be arrested (Kutschera 1999). Due to the dangers he faced in Turkey after the military coup, Ocalan established party headquarters in Syria near the Lebanese border. In 1984, the party began a war against Turkey to fight for an independent Kurdish state. While the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs web site states that the PKK “has been waging a vicious campaign of terror against Turkey,” the PKK aims at obtaining Kurdish independence and cultural freedom. The war
between the PKK and the Turkish military has devastated southeastern Turkey and forced hundreds of thousands of Turkish and Kurdish villagers to flee (Scott 1999). It has claimed the lives of anywhere from 20,000 to 30,000 people, according to various news sources. Although some sources try to downplay the severity of the issue, the deaths are difficult to account for since much of the fighting occurs in unpopulated, forested areas.

According to Vera Eccarius-Kelly, instructor of political science at St. John’s University with a concentration in Middle East politics, (November 1999, Unpublished Personal Interview) practicing the Kurdish culture is illegal within the Turkish State. Turks are attempting to eliminate the Kurdish culture by eliminating their rituals, language, songs, stories and memories (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). Until 1991, the Turkish government attempted to ignore their cultural identity by labeling the Kurds “Mountain Turks” and outlawing their language (Springtime 1999, The Wat 1999). In 1920, the western powers agreed to the Sevres Treaty, which divided the Ottoman Empire, so the Kurds would have their own state (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). Since then, Turkey has viewed struggles for autonomy as a threat to the integrity of the Turkish territory. The Turkish government blames the deaths on the PKK and considers the party a terrorist group.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs web site states, “the PKK engages in organized crimes such as drug trafficking and arms smuggling, extortion, human smuggling, abduction of children and money laundering in an attempt to recruit militants and to obtain financial resources needed to carry out its terrorist activities.”

In order to drive out supporters of the PKK, the Turkish military has instituted a “scorched-earth policy,” in which entire towns are burned down so no one has a place to hide (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). The military forces the Kurdish people from their homes with suspicions
that all Kurds are sympathetic to the PKK. As Kutschera states, "since 1990 the Turkish armed forces have carried out the largest wave of deportations Turkey has known since the end of the 1930's--with one aim: to uproot the Kurdish people from its soil and to obliterate its identity" (1999, p. 7). By destroying the Kurdish identity, the Turkish government is attempting to secure the existence of the Turkish nation.

Despite the group's claim that it is fighting for Kurdish independence, many Kurds do not support the actions of the PKK. The "silent majority of Kurds living in Turkey opposes the PKK and reviles Ocalan" (Goltz 1999). The Kurds that believe the PKK is a violent terrorist organization are caught in a brutal war between the PKK and the Turkish military (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). They are victimized by the Turkish military when villages are burned, yet many have also died at the hands of PKK soldiers (Eccarius-Kelly 1999, Goltz 1999). Still other Kurds are fully integrated into Turkish society and are not seeking Kurdish independence. Kurds make up about one third of the members of parliament and even serve in the army (Wat 1996). Kurds living outside the Kurdistan region often claim their "parents were Kurds," when asked about their cultural background. Although they may be integrated into Turkey's society so much that they do not consider themselves Kurds, Eccarius-Kelly (1999) suggests they may be trying to protect themselves from discrimination.

Because of the way the Turkish government has portrayed the Kurdish people, Turkish public opinion generally does not acknowledge the human rights issues involving the Kurds (Barkey 1998). Because the government has tried to squelch the Kurdish identity, Turkish knowledge of the Kurds is limited and the Turks are genuinely confused about the Kurdish issue (Barkey 1998). Few Turks even debate the issue; even the intellectual and academic classes in
positions of power fail to question or examine Kurdish policies (Barkey 1998). “Turkey denies that there is a Kurdish question in Turkey” (Mathiu 1999). When they do address the Kurdish issue, the government frames them as threat to Turkish well being (Barkey 1998). Even lawyers who do come to aid human rights organizations fighting against the atrocities often disappear at the hands of secret Turkish agents (Barkey 1998). The business world is becoming more aware of how the Kurdish issue is affecting Turkey internationally. They “are pressing the government for a solution because Turkey’s human-rights record is damaging the country’s international standing” (Wat 1996, p. 16). Some political parties have hinted they may give the Kurds more cultural freedom. But Turkish politicians have a habit of forgetting their promises to the Kurds by the time they get in office (Springtime 1996). However, since Ocalan’s arrest in February 1999, the Turkish public seems to be becoming more aware of the Kurdish issue.

The United States is generally supportive of the Turkish government because Turkey is of strategic economic and geographic interest for the US. Turkey is close to the Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which supply oil to the US. The US supplies military aid to Turkey so that Turkey will assist the US in containing Iran and Iraq (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). In addition, both the US and Turkey are allied as members of NATO. Further, the US does not support an independent sate of Kurdistan. Should Kurdistan become independent, the landlocked area would be unstable, poor and unsafe (Springtime 1996, Wat 1996). Because of the political and economic advantages, the US supports Turkey in its war against the Kurds.

The US aids the Turkish army with weaponry, including helicopters, and intelligence against the PKK, despite Turkey’s human rights policies (Springtime 1996). The US even showed support to Turkey when the European Union (EU) would not accept Turkey because of their human
rights practices (Hitchens 1999).

In their support of Turkey, “the US government helped track Ocalan’s movements when he was on the run and the CIA also assisted in his arrest by Turkish commandos in Nairobi” (Hitchens 1999). Even Ocalan himself stated in an interview with The Middle East that “there was American influence” involved in his forced departure from Russia (Kutschera 1999, p. 10). Ironically, the US aided Turkey’s efforts to capture Ocalan, but the US government also receives assistance from the Kurds of Iraq in the US’s struggle with the Iraqi government (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). This demonstrates the US’s concern for their own foreign policy objectives, rather than the Kurdish issue. However, since Ocalan’s death sentence, the US has started to question Turkey’s human rights record and “will find it harder to go on providing weapons” to Turkey, if they do not change their human rights policies (Merits 1999).

Although the EU is opposed to an independent Kurdish state for similar reasons as the US, relations between the EU and Turkey are tense. The EU has been unwilling to allow Turkey to join the union, because of their human rights violations against the Kurds, even though Turkey has allied with European countries in the past. All of Western European countries have abolished the death penalty; Western European countries feel Ocalan’s capture is justified by his terrorist actions, but they do not support the Turkish government because Ocalan may be executed (Eccarius-Kelly 1999).

Great Britain’s view towards Turkey largely reflects that of the EU. Great Britain is also a member of NATO and trades with Turkey more than any other Middle Eastern or Balkan country; in addition, Turkey hosts a million British visitors a year (Sanberk 1999). Despite these ties to Turkey, Britain does not support Turkey’s treatment of the Kurds or the possible execution
of Ocalan. They believe he ought to be brought to justice for his terrorist actions but in a more humane way. Britain fears he will not be treated fairly in a Turkish court and will be executed.

The EU and US are not the only powerful players invested in the politics of the region. Syria and Greece have both supported the PKK, largely because of their disagreement with Turkey over borders (Glotz 1999). Although most of the Arab countries do not favor Turkey, because Turkey is trying to become part of the EU, Turkey does have good relations with Israel. The US supplies Israel with military goods, which often get resold to Turkey (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). Because of their own poor human rights policies regarding the Palestinians, Israel does not question Turkey’s human rights policy toward the Kurds (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). Although both Greece and Turkey are part of NATO, they do not have favorable relations, partially because the US gives military support to Turkey (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). The Greeks feel mistreated by the US; they feel as though the US is using them, because they have received little support for reuniting Cyprus under Greek control (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). Due to their long-standing hatred of the Turks, the Greek government was willing to provide aid to Ocalan.

Abdullah Ocalan became a prominent figure in international news in the fall of 1998. In October 1998, Turkey threatened to take action against Syria if it continued to harbor the PKK leader, who set up headquarters in Syria following the military coup in 1980. Syria and Turkey signed an agreement in which Syria acknowledged the PKK as a terrorist group, led by Ocalan, and he was forced to leave Syria (Ministry 1999). He fled to Russia where he asked the Russian Parliament for political asylum. Despite the parliament’s support, Ocalan was asked to leave by the Russian government, under pressure by the United States. Russian and Armenian officials helped smuggle him out of Russia.
His was apprehended at the Rome airport, during passport check, in November 1998. Arrested on a German arrest warrant for his terrorist actions in Germany, Ocalan was held at a hospital in Rome after being taken into custody. Italian law prohibits the extradition of prisoners to nations that allow the death penalty. Despite US pressure, Italian officials did not extradite Ocalan, since capital punishment is legal in Turkey. Turkey tried to sway the Italian government into releasing Ocalan by drafting a preliminary bill to outlaw capital punishment, then by offering to release an Italian prisoner and boycotting Italian goods. With demonstrators in Rome protesting the Italian government and other protests occurring throughout Europe, officials were caught in a political dilemma. By not releasing Ocalan, Italy risked angering a trading partner, NATO ally, and EU neighbor, but if Ocalan was extradited the Italians felt he would be sentenced to death in an unfair trial.

Greece was supporting Ocalan, and the US was urging Italy to extradite him. However, the Italian Parliament voted against extraditing Ocalan to Turkey, but was then left to decide what to do with him. Italy wanted to extradite him to Germany, but because of violent protests by Kurds in Germany, the German government withdrew their arrest warrant. As the Italian government continued to debate over whether to grant political asylum to Ocalan, he left of his own free will in January 1999. His whereabouts were unknown until February of 1999 when he was denied landing rights in the Netherlands. Ocalan then traveled to Athens for refueling, but was denied entrance, and continued on to Nairobi, Kenya, where he stayed at the Greek Embassy. Turkey accused both Greece and Kenya of conspiring with Ocalan. According to Mathiu, because of the controversy over aiding Ocalan, “three Greek cabinet members were dismissed for letting Turkey capture Ocalan, [and] a top Kenyan official lost his job for allowing him into the
country” (1999). With the aid of American and Israeli secret service officials, Ocalan was captured in Nairobi by Turkish officials and brought to an island prison in Turkey in February 1999.

In June 1999, he was tried in Turkey and sentenced to death for his terrorist activities. The Turkish Parliament must ratify his sentence before it is carried out. Some believe this will not happen, because ratification of his sentence has serious political implications for Turkey. The country will not be considered for membership in the EU if Ocalan is executed. For this reason, Turkey’s Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit, has “declared his aversion to capital punishment” (Merits 1999). Ocalan’s lawyers intend to appeal his sentence to the European Court of Human Rights, which could take years. With so much pressure urging Turkey to reconsider Ocalan’s punishment, many believe his death is unlikely. The Italians have offered to put him in jail for life so he will not die, but the Turkish government is unsure of what to do with him (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). Although Ocalan currently has no power, many feel his death could cause an uprising and Europeans fear he will become a martyr. Without Ocalan and other leaders controlling the PKK, the violent elements within PKK control could collapse and turn toward nonviolent actions like lobbying and education (Eccarius-Kelly 1999). The Turkish military claims Ocalan and the PKK’s new efforts toward non-violence are an attempt to save him from hanging (Turkey’s Kurds 1999).

**Methodology**

The literature indicates that due to the established routines of production and other
financial considerations, the news media tend to reflect foreign policy agendas. As shown, the US and Europe have different goals in regards to the issues involving Turkey and the Kurds. Based on this information, the following research question guided my research: are there differences in the way a US and British newspaper cover Turkey and the Kurdish issue, since the foreign policies of the two countries differ? To answer this, I studied the coverage of Abdullah Ocalan’s flight and capture as reported in The Times of London (called The Sunday Times on Sunday) and The New York Times (The NYT). Chang (1999), Herman and Chomsky (1988), and Wang and Lowry (1999) all did similar studies examining the relationship between US foreign policy and the media, by looking at the US newspapers’ coverage of two different, yet related, events. I, in turn, studied the coverage of one event, as reported in two international newspapers from different countries. In order to study the objectivity of the news, I choose to look at the events surrounding Ocalan out of my interest in Turkey; however, I could have chosen any event in any media source.

Since the US and Europe have differing views of Ocalan, Turkey, and the Kurds, I chose a US and European paper in order to investigate whether their coverage would reflect the different regional views. Reporting “All the News that is Fit to Print,” I chose The NYT because it maintains a circulation of over a million, according to Bacon’s Newspaper Directory (1998), and it is prestigious and prominent (McManus 1994, Hodenberg 1995). The NYT is a national US paper that covers a variety of international and domestic events fairly substantially, and the Columbia Journalism Review (1999, November/December) ranked it one out of 21 on its list of America’s Best Newspapers (p. 14). The Times was chosen because according the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database, it is Britain’s paper of record, and it reflects the interests of
Britain's conservative upper middle class (Walker 1985). This event was not highly publicized, yet both papers contained an adequate sampling of articles. While both papers contained adequate coverage for an analysis, these papers were also chosen because they are well respected for their international news coverage. In addition, McManus (1994) states that coverage from prestigious news sources, like The NYT and The Times, may influence public perceptions more than coverage in less notable ones.

The focus of this study is the coverage of Ocalan's flight and capture, beginning with the agreement between Syria and Turkey made on October 21, 1998, in which Ocalan was forced to leave Syria, until his capture on February 17, 1999. The time periods from slightly before and slightly after were included; all "hard news" articles between October 1, 1998 to March 15, 1999 were studied. The articles were obtained from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database, using the search words "Abdullah" and "Ocalan." Articles from Section A (during the week) and Section 1 (on Sundays) of The NYT, Section 1 of The Times, and the Oversees News section from The Sunday Times are included. These sections are the front-page news sections of the two papers. I chose to study "hard news," since it is considered informative and factual, so I could examine the objectivity of these supposedly "factual" accounts of what happened (Bird & Dardenne 1988). Feature stories, editorials, and travel stories are not included because they are not considered "hard news." Two articles that contained travel were included in the study because they appeared in articles appearing in the "hard news" sections of the papers. Articles from the Editorial Desk appearing in front-page news sections were also excluded since they reflect an opinion of the editors and do not claim to be objective. In addition, "World Briefs" and "Week in Review" articles were excluded under the assumption the information was covered
in the full-length articles. In total 46 articles from The NYT and 34 from The Times or The Sunday Times were studied.

The articles are analyzed solely according to the text based on my understanding of the Kurdish issue in Turkey, as established above. Specifically, I looked for patterns in what topics were chosen to be included or omitted, and in the negative and positive words used to describe the people and groups involved. In addition to looking at the papers independently, I also compared and contrasted the coverage.

I also included an examination of the headlines. Since headlines are the first statement the audience reads about an issue, the headline can influence how a reader interprets an article. However, reporters typically do not write the headlines, so it is possible the context of the headline may differ from the focus of the article. Also, headlines are written to fill in a certain amount of space, which influences what is stated in the headline.

My initial look at the articles indicated no particular difference in the reports by different authors. In general, the bylines corresponded to the locations of the stories. For example, one author writes on most of the stories taking place in Italy. I was more interested in the general viewpoints expressed by the papers as a whole, since the organization typically has established journalist procedures for gathering and reporting news that are not up to the reporter.

Results & Analysis

My results indicated significant differences in the prevalent language patterns and prominent details used to explain the flight and capture of Ocalan. The dissimilar language and content The Times and The NYT used to cover Ocalan’s flight and capture frame these issues to
Valorose 20

reflect the two nations’ foreign policy agendas. The results fall into two meaningful aspects of
the Kurdish issue: the image of the Kurds and human rights issues, and the political situation in
the region.

Images of the Kurdish and Human Rights Issues

The language and details most often used in The NYT imply the PKK and Ocalan are at
fault for all of the Turkey’s devastation, and the group represents all Kurdish people. The
prevailing perceptions in The NYT fail to acknowledge the PKK’s goals to obtain independence,
the human rights atrocities Turkey has instigated, the destruction the Turkish military has caused,
the many Kurds who do not support the PKK, or the treatment of Ocalan in jail and at his trial.
In general, while the PKK does use violent means in their attempts to gain Kurdish
independence, The NYT neglects to address the complex situation of the Kurds’ fight for
independence. The NYT suggests capturing Ocalan will solve the Kurdish issues confronting
Turkey and Europe. While I do not know the specific reasons behind The NYT reporters’
choices to present the issues in this way, the coverage corresponds to the US’s foreign policy
objectives to support Turkey’s efforts to stop the PKK and arrest Ocalan. By framing the issue in
this manner, The NYT does not provide the public with complete information; without that
knowledge it is difficult for readers to question the morality of US involvement in Ocalan’s
capture and death sentence, or the human rights atrocities involving the Kurds.

The negative framing of the PKK and Ocalan is evident in the language patterns used in
The NYT. The words employed to describe the PKK and Ocalan have negative connotations.
The PKK is referred to as a “violent separatist movement,” and as a group that should be
"outlawed," and "banned" (10, 7, 41). Ocalan is called "diabolical," "the world's bloodiest terrorist," "Turkey's most wanted fugitive," a "tyrant," a "Marxist," "tragic," "the country's most wanted and most widely hated fugitive," and an "ally" with Russia (7, 25, 11, 13, 22, 2). One third of the headlines in The NYT refer to Ocalan as "Turkey's Most Wanted Kurd," a "Fugitive Kurd," a "Rebel," a "Rebel Leader," "Fugitive Rebel," "Rebel Chief," "Rebel Leader," "Rebel Kurd," and "Kurdish Guerilla" (2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 15, 16, 17, 20, 23, 25, 26, 32, 34, 39). In other headlines, Ocalan is simply referred to as "Kurd Leader" or "Kurd" (6, 8, 22, 24, 31, 35, 38). None of the headlines distinguish between the Kurds who follow him and those that do not. While The NYT does state that Ocalan "portrays himself as the leader of a struggle against oppression," and even says he has given up violence, overwhelmingly, the dominant language used to describe the PKK and Ocalan is negative (22, 15). In addition, The NYT uses positive language to frame his capture as successful; it is "Turkey's most spectacular success," and the Turks are in a state "ecstasy and jubilation" because Ocalan was arrested (23, 25). Additionally, The NYT headlines frame the capture as successful by stating "In snatching a fugitive rebel, Ankara wins opportunities on several fronts" and "Jubilation in Turkey, and a fierce debate" (25, 30).

The details included in The NYT, and the exclusion of other facts, is also evidence of how the coverage downplays the complexity of the Kurdish issue and blames the PKK and Ocalan for Turkey's devastation. The NYT blatantly states the Kurds are a "Europe issue," and says Kurdish independence would destroy Turkey (14, 3, 24). The PKK's violent actions are described in a report about Kurds shooting down a Turkish helicopter, and the personal account

1 Note: the articles are referenced by the corresponding numbers in Appendix A.
of Turkish mothers talking about their sons dying in the war (11, 30). The NYT blames the PKK and Ocalan for the deaths in the war, and claims Ocalan should be “brought to justice” for those deaths, calling them “heinous crimes” (14, 23, 20, 31, 38). The NYT even claims Ocalan is at the “center of the dispute between Turkey and its NATO allies,” which ignores the contribution of Turkeys’ human rights policies to their political problems (45). With all this blame being placed on Ocalan, ironically only two articles state what Ocalan will be charged with at his trial (31, 38).

The NYT fails to report on the Turkish military’s role in the war, even though the army is at fault for burning villages and other destruction. Also The NYT fails to mention any possible negative effects that would occur if Ocalan were sentenced to death, and provides reassurances that Ocalan will receive a fair trial (14, 25, 27, 30). While The NYT does express concern that Ocalan is not allowed to be visited by his lawyers, an article two days later says the lawyers report he is well (38, 40). In addition, when The NYT reports on Europe’s concern that Turkey will not allow foreigners at Ocalan’s trial, justifiable reasons for this are also stated (30, 38). Thus, by not questioning his treatment in jail and at the trial The NYT suggests Turkey’s actions are justified.

Although this image of the PKK and human rights issues prevail, coverage in The NYT shifts from this dominant view after Ocalan is captured. At this point the US has already aided Turkey in arresting Ocalan; this altered image of Ocalan comes out after it is too late for Americans to question US involvement. Additionally, this subsequent framing of the Kurdish and human rights issues questions Turkey’s actions yet fails to examine the US’s actions. By

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2 The NYT does question Turkey’s human rights policy and treatment toward the Kurds briefly in four articles prior
portraying the Kurds in this way, journalists do not provide all the information necessary for audiences to be more aware of the complex issues involving Turkey and the Kurds. Without an awareness of these issues prior to US involvement, the readers are unable to question US actions while they are taking place. Evidence of how The NYT divergently frames Ocalan after his capture is clear in the description of the PKK as working towards “self-rule” and “civil rights,” and labeling Ocalan as both a “demon” and “hero.” In addition, Ocalan’s treatment in jail is questioned; an expert says his capture is not the end of the Kurdish issue, that not all Kurds support him, and says Turkey’s human rights is poor (24, 30, 26, 36, 39, 33, 37). An article reprinted from the Istanbul Journal even highlights Kurdish culture (43). Since US goals of capturing Ocalan have already been met, it is expected the coverage would more widely examine the issues surrounding the Kurds in Turkey.

In contrast to the coverage in The NYT, The Times (of London) more inclusively examines the human rights issues involving the Kurds, which mirrors Great Britain’s foreign policy objectives to stop human rights atrocities and the violence caused by the Turks and Kurds. The divergent language patterns and content included in The Times articles also suggest the that the PKK is violent, yet focuses on the PKK’s violence toward civilians, which could lead to readers to fear migrant Kurds. However, the coverage also addresses the violence of the Turkish military, Turkey’s human rights policies toward the Kurds, and the broader effects the Kurdish issue has on Europe. While The Times uses negative statements to describe the PKK, they also include content illustrating the hardship the Kurds are going through. Their reporting more widely examines the effects of the war on all people involved, giving readers of The Times more

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To his capture, the overwhelming coverage ignores Turkey’s human rights policies and praises Turkey (4, 13, 9, 14)
knowledge of the Kurdish issue, which enables them to question the decisions being made about Ocalan’s arrest.

The language used in The Times verifies the framing of the PKK as a violent organization, but also one that is fighting for freedom from persecution. The Times’ reports refer to the PKK as “Marxist,” and say they are “responsible” for 30,000 deaths (51, 67, 69). A quote by the Turkish Prime Minister says Ocalan is the head of a “bloody terrorist organization,” and a “fugitive” (58, 59). In addition, The Times also refers to the PKK as a “liberation movement” and, incorrectly, as the “Patriotic Worker’s Party” (52, 79). The NYT emphasizes the capture’s success, yet The Times refers to Ocalan’s capture in varying ways, as a hunt, kidnapping, and abduction, and says Turkey is “boasting” about is capture, and that “euphoria over capture remains high” (65, 75, 78, 70). These two varying images of his capture acknowledge the different aspects of Ocalan’s capture.

In contrast to The NYT, less than one forth of the headlines negatively identify Ocalan with statements such as “Terrorist,” “Kurdish Rebel,” “Fugitive,” “Rebel Kurd,” “Rebel Leader,” and “Rebel Kurdish Chief” (51, 52, 53, 55, 58, 60, 65). The remaining headlines that directly refer to him by his names, as a “Kurd Leader,” or even a “Folk Hero” (54, 57, 63, 73, 77). One headline acknowledges his complex role in the region: “Uncle Abdullah: psycho or ray of sunshine?” (73). Due to the variety of words used to describe Ocalan, readers of The Times are more likely to judge Ocalan and the PKK with a more complex understanding of the issues and event than readers of The NYT, who only read negative words associated with Ocalan. In contrast to The NYT headline which emphasizes Turkey’s success at capturing Ocalan, The Times headline reads “Turks inherit Ocalan dilemma” (61), which clearly indicates that the
issues involving Ocalan are complicated.

In addition, the facts and details included in the news coverage exemplify *The Times'* more neutral representation of the Kurdish issue, yet focus on the PKK violence toward innocent people. Articles in *The Times* suggest that Ocalan’s trial will not solve the Kurdish issue, even saying the fighting has continued or increased despite his capture, and he may become a martyr if executed, which are all details omitted in *The NYT* (71, 63, 73, 75, 78, 61). The Kurds who hold protests and demonstrations throughout Europe, to express their views of Ocalan, are the focus of five articles in *The Times* (49, 50, 57, 59, 60). This serves two purposes. First, it shows how the Kurdish issue is broad enough to affect all of Europe, and it further associates the PKK with violence. In comparison, *The NYT* only includes two brief reports on the protests (24, 33).

*The Times* focuses on the PKK’s violence toward civilians in their address of a bombing where “at least 13 were killed,” in which the PKK is suspected to be involved, and reports on British tourists being captured by the PKK (79, 74). These accounts of violence toward innocent people are less predominant in *The NYT*; their report says “13 people were killed,” and the killings were probably not due to the PKK (45, 46). Even *The Times* headlines, “Bombers linked to Kurds kill 13 in Istanbul” and “Ocalan avengers kill 13 in Istanbul,” directly blame the PKK for the bombing (79, 80). *The Times* shows overwhelming concern for the violent actions of Kurds in Europe, and the protests being held, which could lead readers to fear any actions of the PKK.

Although the coverage emphasizes the danger of PKK, *The Times'* inclusive look at the human rights issues is apparent in the description of a Kurdish family’s personal struggle to survive, and expression of the Turkish troops “in pursuit” of the Kurds, “crushing the rebels,”
and “cracking down” and “brutally suppressing” the Kurds (62, 64, 69, 74). In addition, The Times reports more complete information about Ocalan by including articles on Ocalan asking for mediation with Turkey, his history, rise to leadership, and the PKK’s history and goals for Kurdish independence (50, 51, 73). The Times reports on Ocalan’s treatment by discussing the improbability of a fair trial being held in Turkey, Ocalan’s lack of defense lawyers, Turkey’s refusal to allow foreigners at the trial, and Turkey’s attempts to belittle Ocalan (55, 69, 75, 76, 77, 65). The Times also reports on Ocalan’s unfair treatment in the jail, even saying Europe is sending a delegation to ensure he is being treated fairly (57, 69). The headline also expresses the extreme circumstances Ocalan is in: “Island jail is cleared so special forces can guard their lone” (67). The diverse content in The Times frames the Kurdish issue as complex and multi-sided, and emphasizes the inhuman treatment of Ocalan and the Kurds, in addition to their focus on the PKK’s destructiveness throughout Europe.

The Political Situation

The US is heavily invested in the political situation occurring in Turkey, and the reports in The NYT on Ocalan's flight and capture reflect the US's interests. The language patterns and details included illustrate Turkey’s importance to the US and provide explanations for US involvement. Framing the political situation in this way may lead readers to believe the US is justified in aiding Turkey. The NYT coverage does not provide readers with the context necessary for citizens to question the US government’s choices. The NYT also constructs a view of the Italian government, emphasizing how Italy’s decisions about Ocalan negatively impact the country, and suggesting the Italian government was not warranted in releasing Ocalan. This view
of Italy allows for further justification of US involvement to counteract Italy’s wrongful actions.

The language in The NYT is evidence of how the political situation is framed. The NYT calls Turkey a “crucial” and “pivotal” NATO ally, thus emphasizing their importance (19, 31, 30). When Italy decides not to extradite Ocalan, The NYT says they “refuse,” they are “souring relations,” “inflaming a bitter diplomatic dispute,” and making an “error” (5, 6, 8, 13, 19). In addition, the headlines in The NYT stress the ill effects of Italy’s choice not to extradite Ocalan: “Turks’ anger with Italy deepens over extradition of rebel Kurd,” and “Italy rejects Turkey’s bid for the extradition of rebel Kurd” (5, 6). The final article in The NYT states, “Turkey suddenly finds itself facing deep uncertainties” (46). It is ironic the word “suddenly” is used when the Turkish government fell months before and has been dealing with the Kurdish fight for independence for over fifteen years (12).

The content included in The NYT aids in the development of the framing of the political situation to justify US involvement. The coverage creates a positive image of the Turkish Prime Minister, which suggests he is worthy of US assistance. The coverage contains a description of the good the Turkish government and Prime Minister have done for their country, a statement as to why the Prime Minister shouldn’t be replaced, a report on the agreement Turkey make with Syria, and three articles on the Turkish elections (1, 9, 12, 25, 19, 31, 30, 21, 45, 46). In addition, by providing a negative view of the Italian Prime Minister, The NYT suggests his decision to free Ocalan was not the best course of action. The NYT coverage says the Italian Prime Minister is new, a former “Communist,” pressured by “leftists,” not supported by the EU, and attempting to make peace with terrorism if they grant Ocalan asylum (3, 42, 5). The author even says Italy would be an “accomplices to every murder ever committed” (6). The NYT also
reports on how Ocalan’s release negatively effected Italy’s economics, further showing how Italy’s choice to release Ocalan was an “error” (5, 16).

In regards to the US’ involvement in Ocalan’s capture, The NYT clearly states the US’s view, even quoting the Secretary of State, as a way to justify it (5, 6, 7, 20). This coverage seems to lead up to the reports after his capture which cite an “unconfirmed” report that the US assisted Turkey, US denying “direct involvement,” hints that the CIA may have assisted, and lastly provided reasons for US involvement, the headline even says, “US helped Turkey find and capture Kurd rebel” (27, 29, 30, 34). This gradual indication that the US aided Turkey leads readers to accept US involvement and mirrors US goals to gain approve in their support for Turkey.

In contrast, The Times does not provide justification for US involvement and questions Turkey’s actions and treatment of the Kurds. This view mirrors the foreign policy objectives of Great Britain and the EU, who disapprove of Turkey’s human rights policies and fear Ocalan’s capture may lead to his execution and further violence. The language employed and content included in The Times creates an image of Turkey as aggressive and oppositional. In addition, the facts included provide an expression of disapproval that the Greek involvement in aiding Turkey, nor does not justify US assistance. This framing of the political situation in The Times provides readers with the context to question the validity of the actions of Turkey and the US.

The language The Times uses in the text and headlines exemplify the image of Turkey as forceful and uncooperative, suggesting Turkey’s actions are not warranted. The headlines aggressively describe Turkey’s actions: “Turkey threatens to hit Syria,” “Turk move rattles Syria,” “Turks demand terrorist,” “How terrorist was trapped by the Turks,” “Turkey rejects EU
call for open trial,” “Turkey Seeks death penalty,” “Ankara force storms into northern Iraq,” and “Ankara rounds up dissidents” (48, 65, 76, 77). In addition, The Times says Turkey is “demanding,” “refuses” to cooperate with Syria, and Ocalan was “thrown out” of Syria, in contrast to The NYT statement that Syria agreed to force Ocalan to leave (48, 74).³

The Times also shows agreement toward Italy’s decisions in the language used. In contrast to The NYT, which says Italy “ended house arrest,” The Times says Ocalan is “freed” when he was released; the headlines say “Italy Frees Kurdish Rebel awaiting asylum ruling” and “Turkish alarm as Italy ‘Frees’ Kurd Leader” (51, 57, 52). Since freedom is desirable, this word usage suggests Italy’s decision positively affects Ocalan. The Times headlines also employ words that suggest the Greeks should not have aided Ocalan: “Greeks Admit Hiding Rebel Kurdish Chief in Embassy” and “Greeks Applaud as Cabinet is Purged” (60, 68). On the contrary, The NYT headlines factually state “Greek Embassy in Nairobi hands rebel Kurd to Kenya, report says,” and “Three Greek officials removed over rebel Kurd’s capture” (23, 32). Thus, The Times coverage echoes British foreign policy objectives to treat Ocalan respectfully and keep him out of Turkey, where the Britons fear his execution.

Further, The Times examines the many sides of Turkey’s political problems by expressing the many reasons Turkey and Syria disagree, whereas The NYT suggests Ocalan is the only factor (47, 48). The Times also describes Turkey’s oppositional relationship with the EU, which further suggests Turkey is not taking the moral action toward dealing with the Kurds (55, 79). The Times does not lead readers to understand the reasons for the US’s involvement. Instead, many articles report that the US was not involved in helping to capture Ocalan (63, 65,

³ The NYT does state that Turkey is demanding in one article (1).
Valorose 30

73, 72). In addition, The Times says the US supports both the Turks and the Kurds of Iraq, a fact omitted from The NYT, possibly because it this information would not make the US government’s actions look favorable to the American public (61). The Times also describes the support the Italian Prime Minister has for granting Ocalan asylum, also absent in The NYT coverage perhaps because it would justify Italy’s decisions (49). By including all this information, The Times enables readers to understand the various causes for Turkey’s disagreement with Syria and the EU, and to question both the US and Italian governments’ involvement in Ocalan’s flight and capture.

Conclusions:

My experience in Turkey led me to believe the news media has influenced my perceptions of other cultures. Realizing how the media had shaped my view of Turkey caused me to question the objectivity of the messages the public receives from the news media. The media’s messages are significant because the media has the power to alter public perceptions. Gans’ (1979) research suggests that due to the routines of production, values are unintentionally, yet inherently, part of the news. Research has shown that foreign policy objectives are reflected in the coverage of international events. Perhaps this is due to the news media’s reliance on official sources, who may intentionally alter the information to manipulate the public. Using official source could influence the preference statements the media unintentionally make about international events.

Great Britain and the US have different foreign policies on Turkey, the Kurds, and the PKK. The US typically supports Turkey because they are strategically placed as a gateway to the
Middle Eastern countries, whereas, Great Britain does not agree with Turkey’s human rights policies. Using this information and the basis of previous studies, I looked at a US and British paper in order to see how objectively each paper covered Abdullah Ocalan’s flight and capture.

The two papers’ coverage illustrates contrasting images of the Kurdish and human rights issues and the political situation, which happens to mirror the two nations’ foreign policy objectives. Until Ocalan’s capture, The NYT frames the PKK and Ocalan as representing all Kurds, and as the sole cause of Turkey’s devastation. The coverage neglects to address Turkey’s abuse of the Kurds and treatment of Ocalan. The NYT also illustrates reasons for US involvement and claims the Italian Prime Minister choice to release Ocalan was unwarranted. Because The NYT frames the Kurdish issue in this way, readers may not have the understanding of the events with which to question US involvement or Turkey’s human rights policies, and may be lead to believe Ocalan’s execution will eliminate all problems with the Kurds. The subsequent change in The NYT after Ocalan’s capture coverage addresses the hardship of the Kurds and the violence caused by the Turks, perhaps because the US has reached their goal of aiding Turkey in his capture.

In contrast, The Times (of London) more broadly examines the Kurdish issue in relation to the rest of Europe. In referring the PKK and Ocalan, differing words are used to describe them, and the coverage focuses on the civilian violence of the PKK and the protests Ocalan’s capture has caused. By examining the trial’s fairness, The Times reflects British policy concerns over human rights. In their address of the political situation, The Times does not show support of the US government’s actions. Instead, they describe Turkey aggressive actions, show praise for Italy’s decision, condemn the Greeks for getting involved, and address the US’s support for
the Kurds of Iraq. Readers of The Times would largely believe Ocalan deserves fair treatment, and question whether these countries involvement in his capture and trial are justified. In general, because the views of the human rights and political situation surrounding Ocalan are portrayed differently in each paper, readers would likely have different views about what actions are best.

While my conclusions suggest a difference in coverage may be due to differing foreign policy agendas, which limits the understanding readers have about the issues, some limitations exist in my methods. Since I conducted a textual analysis, I cannot know the reasons behind journalists' decisions, nor can I know the exact sources The Times or The NYT used to gather information. Also, because I accessed these articles from a database, I did not look at the role pictures and/or placement played in the actual readers' interpretation of the articles. I provided an interpretation of the coverage of Ocalan based on my understanding of the events and the theoretical research presented here; however, I cannot know how actual audiences of The NYT and The Times conceptualized the information in the articles. My study also assumes audiences would only gather knowledge of the events from one of these two newspapers, yet readers may look to more than one source for information. Additionally, since this event was not largely covered in many alternative media, my understanding of the facts is limited to what is presented here. It is also reasonable that since I understand US politics more completely (as a US citizen), my results could be more critical of the US. Future research could examine other media types, the placement or photos, media sources from countries with more widely divergent foreign policies, media from the country where the event is taking place, and the influence of production on what is in the news. Despite these flaws, my research clearly indicates that differences in
coverage do exist in the two papers and reflect the difference in the countries’ foreign policies.

My results of the coverage of Ocalan’s flight and capture illustrate that the news is not objective. Because of the routines of production which force editors and reporters to make choices about what is covered, it is clear that the media cannot be objective. While my results particularly address the coverage of the conflict between the Turks and the Kurds, no news can be produced without values. Just as The New York Times and The Times reflected values about the PKK, Kurds, and Turkey, other sources of media could have influenced how we understood events like the Vietnam War, Tiananmen Square, or the Cold War. While I was drawn to this study out of my surprise that I had opinions about a subject outside my realm of knowledge, like these international political affairs, the news also shapes our views about domestic issues that directly affect us. For example, the news media can shape how we view minority groups, like African Americans or Native Americans, or how we understand the decisions our school boards, city councils, or governors are making.

As Hatchen (1998) says, the news media are influential. The news media do have power to influence how we understand events. However, the public is largely ignorant of that. Without an awareness of the views we obtain from the media, the media have power to alter public perceptions without the public’s knowledge. In addition, how we perceive events affects the actions we take. As conscientious citizens, we must act on what we think is right based on the information we gather on an event. We are consumers of the information the news media provides. Before we can make conscientious decisions, we must be aware of the fact that the media shape our understanding of the world. When we rely on only one media source we miss what that particular news organization chooses to exclude. While no source of information can
be completely objective or inclusive, by looking to a variety of news sources we can more fully understand the consequences of the events we read about in the news. With the knowledge that the media is able to shape public perceptions, we can more consciously be aware of the messages we receive through the media, and how they influence our view of what is happening in the world.
Appendix A

A list of the articles numbered in chronological order beginning with The NYT.


65. Evans, Michael, Pangalos, Philip, & Finkel. (1999, 18 February). How Terrorist was Trapped

67. Owen & Finkel. (1999, 19 February). Island Jail is Cleared so Special Forces can Guard Their Lone. The Times.


## Appendix B

*A comparison of some key headlines.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>The Times Headline</th>
<th>The NYT Headline</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 19</td>
<td>“Rome Asylum Hint Provokes Ankara Anger”</td>
<td>“Turk’s Anger with Italy Deepens Over Extradition of Rebel Kurd”</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 21</td>
<td>“Italy Frees Kurdish Rebel Awaiting Asylum Ruling”</td>
<td>“Italy Rejects Turkey’s Bid for the Extradition of Rebel Kurd”</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 17</td>
<td>“Turkish Alarm as Italy ‘Frees’ Kurd Leader”</td>
<td>“Italy Ending House Arrest of Rebel Chief of the Kurds”</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 17/18</td>
<td>“Kurdish Rebel Leader Slips Out of Italy”</td>
<td>“Kurdish Rebel Leader, Who is Wanted by Turkey, Leaves Italy”</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 17</td>
<td>“Greeks Admit Hiding Rebel Kurdish Chief in Embassy”</td>
<td>“Greek Embassy in Nairobi Hands Rebel Kurd to Kenya, Report Says”</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 17</td>
<td>“Turks Inherit Ocalan Dilemma”</td>
<td>“In Snatching a Fugitive Rebel, Ankara Wins Opportunities on Several Fronts”</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 18</td>
<td>“Israelis Open Fire on Kurds”</td>
<td>“Three Kurds Shot Dead by Israeli Guards at Berlin Protest”</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 19</td>
<td>“Island Jail is Cleared so Special Forces can Guard Their Lone”</td>
<td>“Kurdish Leader Isolated on Turkish Island”</td>
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<td>February 19</td>
<td>“Greeks Applaud as Cabinet is Purged”</td>
<td>“Three Greek Officials Removed Over Rebel Kurd’s Capture”</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 14</td>
<td>“Bombers Linked to Kurds Kill 13 in Istanbul”</td>
<td>“Thirteen are Killed by Firebomb at Busy Store in Istanbul”</td>
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References


The Wart the Cannot Speak its Name: There is no Kurdish Question, say the Turks. (1996, 8 June). The Economist, pp. 13-19.


Putting Objectivity to the Test:

A Study of How Turkey and the Kurds are Represented in the News

Jennifer Valorose
Honors Thesis Defense

Monday 3 April 2000
5:45 PM
QUAD 360

This study examines how the conflict between Turkey and the Kurds, specifically Abdullah Ocalan's (the Kurdish Worker's Party leader) flight and capture, was represented in The Times (of London) and The New York Times in comparison with the Foreign Policy objectives of the United States and Great Britain.