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**NAVAL
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THESIS

**NAVAL DIPLOMACY IN LATIN AMERICA: THE
INFLUENCE OF PORT VISITS**

by

Shane R. Ralph

March 2021

Thesis Advisor:

Christopher N. Darnton

Second Reader:

John M. Sheehan

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE March 2021	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE NAVAL DIPLOMACY IN LATIN AMERICA: THE INFLUENCE OF PORT VISITS			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Shane R. Ralph				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) This thesis examines the port visits of two U.S. naval deployments to Latin America (USS AMERICA [LHA 6] in 2014 and the USS GUNSTON HALL [LSD 44] in 2018) to find what strategic effects the United States is achieving through this aspect of naval diplomacy. Using an original framework, the study compares primary Latin American news sources to U.S. press releases that cover the visits to identify influence and relates those findings to bilateral relationships, theater objectives, and routine operational activities. Overall, the United States is attaining positive diplomatic influence through the use of port calls; however, there is room for improvement and the Navy's approach can be optimized to better achieve effects in support of strategic regional objectives. Particularly, matching U.S. actions and events in-port to overall U.S. security policies and enlisting the support of the relevant U.S. embassies can increase the opportunities and likelihood of success in acquiring influence. Attaining U.S. soft power through naval diplomacy in Latin America will only continue to grow in importance with the return to great power competition and the need to counter the encroachment of Chinese influence throughout the region.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS naval diplomacy, gunboat diplomacy, naval presence, influence, soft power, port visits			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 87	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	

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NAVAL DIPLOMACY IN LATIN AMERICA: THE INFLUENCE OF PORT VISITS

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Lieutenant, United States Navy
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(WESTERN HEMISPHERE)**

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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the port visits of two U.S. naval deployments to Latin America (USS AMERICA [LHA 6] in 2014 and the USS GUNSTON HALL [LSD 44] in 2018) to find what strategic effects the United States is achieving through this aspect of naval diplomacy. Using an original framework, the study compares primary Latin American news sources to U.S. press releases that cover the visits to identify influence and relates those findings to bilateral relationships, theater objectives, and routine operational activities. Overall, the United States is attaining positive diplomatic influence through the use of port calls; however, there is room for improvement and the Navy's approach can be optimized to better achieve effects in support of strategic regional objectives. Particularly, matching U.S. actions and events in-port to overall U.S. security policies and enlisting the support of the relevant U.S. embassies can increase the opportunities and likelihood of success in acquiring influence. Attaining U.S. soft power through naval diplomacy in Latin America will only continue to grow in importance with the return to great power competition and the need to counter the encroachment of Chinese influence throughout the region.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AoR	area of responsibility
COMREL	community relations event
DCA	defense cooperation agreement
DOD	U.S. Department of Defense
DoS	U.S. Department of State
KLE	key leader engagements
SMEE	subject matter expert exchanges
SOUTHCOM	U.S. Southern Command
SPS18	Southern Partnership Station 2018
SS18	Southern Seas 2018
SSA	security sector assistance
TCO	transnational criminal organizations

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the most important person in my life, my awesome wife, Paula. Thank you for all the support and sacrifice you have given me over the past year! I would not have been able to get through writing a thesis in a pandemic without you. To my advisor, Chris, I cannot thank you enough for your expert advice, patience, and coaching through this process. Your class on Latin American International Relations was the best I took while at NPS; it simultaneously provided the bedrock for this thesis and got me interested in the region. To my second reader, John, thanks for your guidance and recommendations on defense diplomacy and fulfilling the role as both reader and writing coach. Finally, thanks to my parents, Mike and Cheryl, for all the encouragement and honest feedback they provided from afar.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Port visits by foreign warships follow a long tradition of fulfilling a diplomatic role. This tactic of naval diplomacy involves operations designed to accomplish the strategic objectives of strengthening alliances, building relations, and deterring hostile actions by known and potentially unknown adversaries.¹ In my first two operational sea tours, most of the port visits we conducted in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of responsibility (AoR) (i.e., Europe and Africa), supported one or more of these objectives outside the more standard tasks of re-supply or crew-rest that are commonplace in naval deployments. Significant strategic and operational level value was achieved in the ports we visited through the execution of diplomatically oriented tasks such as showing U.S. naval presence, hosting and attending events with host leadership, and conducting joint in-port security cooperation exercises.² Since becoming a Western Hemisphere major at the Naval Postgraduate School, I have often questioned how this facet of naval diplomacy translates to the 4th Fleet AoR, which includes the countries of Central and South America and the Caribbean. More specifically, **What are the effects of conducting U.S. naval port visits in Latin America, especially those that pertain to U.S. interests in the region?**

This research question becomes particularly puzzling when taken in the context of the history of U.S.–Latin American relations. The region, over time, has developed an intense animosity toward American interventionism that has been earned in good part by U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Expeditionary Forces.³ Consequently, the study considers the historical and current relations between the U.S. and its Latin American partners as a

¹ “The Port Call Issue: Nordic Considerations,” *Bulletin of Peace Proposals* 21, no. 3 (July 1, 1990): 337–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/096701069002100311>.

² “USS Donald Cook Welcomes President of Romania,” *U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet Public Affairs*, April 15, 2014, https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=80370; “US Navy Destroyer Welcomes Ukrainian President during Port Call,” *Navy Times*, February 26, 2019, <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/02/27/us-navy-destroyer-welcomes-ukrainian-president-during-port-call/>.

³ Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World*, Fourth (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), chaps. 2, 7.

critical piece of its investigation into the achieved influence and diplomatic effects of naval port calls.

To answer the research question, this study investigates the port visits of two recent U.S. naval deployments to the AoR using an original framework for analysis. First, this framework identifies any relevant background contextual factors for the particular deployment, such as the type of warship or the overarching theater-specific objectives for the voyage. After establishing the deployment's context, the framework transitions to examine each port call independently to identify the achieved impact and what factors either contributed to or hampered U.S. diplomatic efforts. Within this visit-specific analysis, the investigations into the U.S. actions while in-port and the cross comparisons of U.S. press releases and host nation/Spanish-language news sources offer the most significant and telling components of the framework and research.

The study's findings show that the U.S. is achieving positive diplomatic effects that complement U.S. Southern Command's (SOUTHCOM) strategic objectives of strengthening partnerships and building partner capacity. The analysis, however, reveals that these effects can vary due to several factors. Fortunately, a number of these factors are controllable and, therefore, optimizable with proper planning and coordination. Examples of these variables include matching U.S. actions in-port with overarching bilateral security cooperation policies and enlisting the support of the relevant U.S. Embassy to amplify the visit's diplomatic messaging throughout the host country.

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This research on Latin American port visits has plenty of policy implications for naval leaders and planners, ranging from those stationed in 4th Fleet and SOUTHCOM headquarters to those State Department and Foreign Area Officers stationed in Latin America. If able to correctly identify the desired effects these port calls and, more specifically, what does and does not work in achieving U.S. national interests via the visits, leaders and planners could tailor their security cooperation and forward presence policies accordingly.

This research contributes to the overall knowledge surrounding naval diplomacy, security cooperation, and forward presence operations while simultaneously filling the gaps concerning port visits within these larger U.S. naval missions. Up to this point, most scholars in the field have centered their research on theoretical aspects that identify the mission's characteristics but rarely its effects.

Measuring diplomatic influence is notoriously difficult, and therefore, little scholarship focuses on the impact of routine port visits. This gap is especially apparent in the Latin American region, where studies on peacetime maritime operations are exceedingly sparse. While the field has struggled to accurately track the impact of diplomatic actions, this study's original framework, which examines primary news sources from the host nation, provides a promising new approach for identifying influence and effects. The real strength of the framework lies in its ability to relate influential effects to overarching and contextual factors like operational objectives or the historical and bilateral relationship of the relevant countries. Analysts can utilize this new approach in future projects that concern security cooperation, influence, diplomacy, and soft power.

Research on achieving influence in Latin America will only continue to grow in importance as the U.S. military continues to transition to a focus on great power competition.⁴ Acquiring influence and building relationships in the region gives the U.S. an advantage over traditional rivals like Russia and China, two states vying for influence and power within resource-rich Latin America.⁵

While this the primary audience of this research is leaders and planners focused on the SOUTHCOM/4th Fleet AoR, the findings apply to other U.S. naval fleets and their relative regions. In other words, this study's results can help develop policies and procedures for ships operating outside the waters of Latin America.

⁴ Ronald O'Rourke, "Renewed Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 7, 2020).

⁵ Sam LaGrone, "Faller: Navy Deployments to SOUTHCOM About More Than Just Drug Trafficking," *USNI News*, February 7, 2020, sec. News & Analysis, <https://news.usni.org/2020/02/07/faller-navy-deployments-to-southcom-about-more-than-just-drug-trafficking>.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is broken down into three sections: Defense and Naval Diplomacy, Diplomatic Influence, and U.S.-Latin American Relations.

1. Defense and Naval Diplomacy

The political objectives sought by warships visiting ports of friendly countries fall squarely in the concept of naval diplomacy, which is further nested under the more encompassing subject of defense diplomacy. Starting at the higher level, Cottey and Forster define defense diplomacy as the “peacetime cooperative use of armed forces and related infrastructure (primarily defence ministries) as a tool of foreign and security policy.”⁶ Essentially, defense diplomacy covers a wide range of activities, from high-level discussions between senior military and civilian defense leaders to the lower-level interactions included in the port visits discussed here. A rich and well-researched subject,⁷ defense diplomacy is critical to filling in the gaps between the front-line diplomatic influence obtained in port visits and the broader strategic-level international relations policies.

The concept of naval diplomacy is the maritime contribution to defense diplomacy. Scholars often argue it to be the most effective and versatile in obtaining influence among different service types.⁸ In his writings on the theory of naval diplomacy, J.J. Widen defines the concept as “the use of naval force as a political instrument short of war.”⁹ Inherently broad for a reason, Widen left his definition fairly open-ended as there are

⁶ Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, “Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance,” *The Adelphi Papers* 44, no. 365 (May 1, 2004): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/714027953>.

⁷ See Cottey and Forster, “Reshaping Defence Diplomacy.”; See Seng Tan, “Military Diplomacy” in *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, ed. Pauline Kerr and Paul Sharp (London: SAGE, 2016); Juan Emilio Cheyre, “Defense Diplomacy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, ed. Andrew Cooper, Jorge Heine, Ramesh Thakur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Anton Du Plessis, “Defense Diplomacy: Conceptual and Practical Dimensions with Specific Reference to South Africa” *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 30, no. 2 (2008), <https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/10381>

⁸ See Laurence W. Martin, *The Sea in Modern Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 134; J. J. Widen, “Naval Diplomacy: A Theoretical Approach,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2011.625830>.

⁹ Widen, “Naval Diplomacy: A Theoretical Approach,” 719.

several reasons and ways to employ naval force in a diplomatic role. To better understand the diplomatic role of navies, it is best to review the original theorists of naval diplomacy: Ken Booth, James Cable, Edward Luttwak, and Laurence Martin. Written in the 1970s, the analysis of these theorists centered on the new peacetime roles that the large navies of the United States and the USSR found themselves in as notions of détente and deterrence began to pervade naval operations. Although heavily influenced by the cold war, much of the analysis within these theories has remained authoritative and has given rise to an expansive research field.

Scholars and planners often break naval diplomacy down into two distinct policies for obtaining influence: those that seek to coerce and those that seek to support. Kevin Rowlands illustrates this distinction by separating the policies into those of enmity and amity.¹⁰ Those policies that pursue coercion, deterrence, or information gathering are enmity, while those that seek cooperation, reassurance, and assistance are amity. While the field generally agrees upon this distinction, two separate camps have formed, with one side focusing on enmity and the other giving equal time to both or solely focusing on amity.

Those in the enmity camp tend to center their writings on the popular theory of gunboat diplomacy. The early works of both James Cable¹¹ and Admiral Stansfield Turner popularized the concept.¹² More recently, the approach has expanded with the publications of contemporary authors like Christian Le Mière, who defines it as “the overt display, demonstration, threat or use of limited sea-based force by a state or non-state actor designed to coerce an opponent to further a political goal, often unstated, by compellence or deterrence.”¹³ Though the use of gunboat diplomacy has declined since the end of the cold

¹⁰ Kevin Rowlands, *Naval Diplomacy in 21st Century: A Model for the Post-Cold War Global Order* (Routledge, 2018), 52, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429460951>.

¹¹ James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy 1919–1991: Political Applications of Limited Naval Force*, Studies in International Security (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1994), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-23415-8_7.

¹² Stansfield Turner, “Missions of the U.S. Navy,” *Naval War College Review* 27, no. 2 (June 15, 2018), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol27/iss2/2>.

¹³ Christian Le Mière, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Drivers and Challenges* (Routledge, 2014), chaps. 1, 2, 7, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203555590>.

war,¹⁴ the coercive side is still pertinent to a study on port visits in Latin America for a few reasons. The first reason is that otherwise friendly port visits can contain coercive, deterrent, or compellent undertones. The port visits can “act as a reminder to the intended audience [host country] of the capabilities of the visiting navy and hence a possible deterrent to aggression,”¹⁵ even though that same host country has to extend some sort of invitation or diplomatic clearance before the visit.

The second reason is that a friendly port visit might fulfill amity objectives to the host state while at the same time signal enmity to a neighboring state.¹⁶ As an example, Admiral Caperton’s multi-ship visit to Brazil during WWI signaled support for the Brazilian termination of diplomatic ties with Germany and, at the same time, sent coercive signals to Argentina, which had yet to do the same.¹⁷ The third reason is the history of diplomatic intervention conducted by the U.S. Navy throughout the region of Latin America, which this review details in a subsequent section.

On the amity side of the spectrum, the writings of Ken Booth, Edward Luttwak, and the contemporary Kevin Rowlands offer salient analyses to a study on port visits. Rowlands describes the amity side as diplomacy that “professes to further national interests not through threat or the limited use of force but through outreach, international engagement, and conflict prevention.”¹⁸ Present in this body of work are frameworks for analyzing the different aims, means, and effects of the amity side naval diplomacy, including Luttwak’s seminal discussion on “suasion,” which offers a way to connect the specific influence sought with the employment of maritime components in a diplomatic role.¹⁹ Also contained in this body of work are specific sections dedicated to port visits’ characteristics and effects. Of particular importance is Booth’s partition of port visits into

¹⁴ Rowlands, *Naval Diplomacy in 21st Century*, 52.

¹⁵ Le Mière, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century*, 23.

¹⁶ Le Mière, 23.

¹⁷ David Healy, “Admiral William B. Caperton and United States Naval Diplomacy in South America, 1917–1919,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 8, no. 2 (1976): 297–323.

¹⁸ Rowlands, *Naval Diplomacy in 21st Century*, chap. 1, pg. 13.

¹⁹ Edward Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1974).

two types: routine operational visits conducted during a standard deployment and goodwill visits completed solely for diplomatic purposes.²⁰

Although fairly vast, the literature on defense and naval diplomacy contains little on the Latin American region outside the historical instances of gunboat diplomacy or significant historical events. No literature includes an analysis of the effects of recent port visits within Latin America. Further research is required beyond defense and naval diplomacy to fill this gap in scholarship.

2. Diplomatic Influence

The seminal publications on naval diplomacy outlined in the previous section often include dedicated portions on influence and effects. However, the writings tend to focus on the coercive side as it is the more popular subcategory within the literature. Port visits, though, are naturally amity-seeking, and therefore, this review requires further discussion on diplomatic influence, especially the impact obtained through means other than coercion or compellence.

Well suited to the amity side of naval diplomacy is Joseph Nye's concept of soft power and the large body of research that has followed. Though technically a type of power and not influence, the terms are practically synonymous as Nye defines power as "the ability to influence the behavior of others."²¹ Nye identifies soft power as an alternative to the inducements or threats (carrots or sticks) associated with hard power and holds that soft power is "getting others to want the outcomes you want" and that it "co-opts people rather than coerces them."²² In the dichotomy of naval diplomacy, states exercise hard power through coercive gunboat diplomacy and soft power through amity-seeking, supportive diplomacy. Nye's concept of soft power was first published in 1990 and has spurred a large field of research on the topic. Ernest Wilson's writing on smart power is of considerable

²⁰ Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy* (Routledge, 2014), chap. 2, pg. 41, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315769646>.

²¹ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 2.

²² Nye, Jr., 5.

relevance to this field and port visits in general. Wilson's policy application incorporates both hard power and soft power aspects and, therefore, encompasses naval diplomacy in toto.²³

Stemming from the theory of soft power is public diplomacy, a concept described by Nancy Snow as "the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly and indirectly those public attitudes and opinions that bear directly on another government's foreign policy decisions."²⁴ Essentially, public diplomacy is one government influencing the public opinion within another to obtain some national objective. Port visits naturally include interaction and engagement of the local population. Therefore, port calls are uniquely equipped to influence public opinion through public diplomacy.

To understand the effects of port visits in Latin America, research is required on the nature of influence inherent to naval diplomacy. For the most part, authors agree that the diplomatic effects sought through naval means (1) are difficult to measure, (2) have significant limitations, and (3) vary based upon execution and context. To the first point, Linton Brooks argues that naval diplomatic influence "is likely to be subtle and indirect and not as easy to discern or to measure."²⁵ Though difficult to measure, Brooks explains that naval diplomacy is still a useful tool, and U.S. planners and leaders should not overlook this aspect when seeking to advance American interests. To the second point, naval diplomacy is relatively limited when analyzed independently, primarily when directed at the host nation's domestic institutions, social infrastructure, cultural norms, and inequality.²⁶ It is better, then, to analyze naval diplomacy as one element in a larger

²³ Ernest J. Wilson, "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 111, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312618>.

²⁴ Nancy Snow, *Rethinking Public Diplomacy* (Routledge Handbooks Online, 2008), 6, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203891520.ch1>.

²⁵ Linton F. Brooks, *Peacetime Influence Through Forward Naval Presence* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 1993), 7.

²⁶ Douglas M. Fraser, "Examining DOD Security Cooperation: When It Works and When It Doesn't," § House Armed Services Committee (2015).

diplomatic strategy that incorporates political and economic means in addition to those of the military.²⁷

To the third and possibly most salient point, effects achieved from conducting port calls vary based on the visit's execution and the surrounding context. On the execution side, the impact can vary based on several factors, including how often the visits are conducted or the type of ship used. On the latter point, Brooks argues that aircraft carriers often send signals of coercion, while amphibious ships send interventionist signals.²⁸ Context is perhaps the most crucial factor when determining the effects of port visits. Contextually, a U.S. port visit to Latvia has much more potential to achieve both support (Latvia) and deterrent (Russia) based effects than a routine visit to Canada. The context surrounding Latin America is incredibly nuanced and therefore worthy of detailed discussion.

3. U.S.–Latin American Relations

Essential to understanding the effects of naval port visits in Latin America is the historical relationship between the region and the United States. Booth maintains that context matters when conducting ship visits, especially the historical experiences, world outlook, and ideology of the local populace.²⁹ In Latin America, these contextual factors are substantially complex and heavily influenced by a history of U.S. hegemony, neocolonialism, and intervention. There is a wide-ranging breadth of literature on the relationship, especially within the field of international relations.

U.S. hegemony within the Western Hemisphere has had a profound effect on U.S.–Latin American relations. After its territorial expansion, the U.S. sought to build a sphere of influence over Latin America using economic and political means at the European powers' expense.³⁰ Once established, the sphere of influence formed a one-sided relationship between the U.S. and Latin America that was economically exploitative and

²⁷ Brooks, *Peacetime Influence*, 22.

²⁸ Brooks, 16.

²⁹ Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, chap. 2, pg. 67.

³⁰ Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, chap. 2.

extractive. Scholars and politicians from Latin America often refer to this phenomenon as either U.S. imperialism or neocolonialism.³¹ The idea was that Latin American states fulfilled many roles of traditional colonies to the U.S. through exploitation and dependence, even though they were technically independent countries.

Throughout the 20th century, the U.S. interventions in Latin America were abundant and have had a lasting impact on the region. The U.S. Navy and Marines usually carried out the earlier interventions to collect the debt owed to foreign lenders or to install democratic regimes in place of authoritarian ones.³² During the Cold War, the later interventions took place as the U.S. oversaw or supported regime change that saw leftist governments replaced with anti-communist ones, regardless of regime-type (democratic or authoritarian).³³

This history of neocolonialism and interventionism has shaped how Latin Americans view the United States and its military. These historical factors could have significant consequences on achieving influence and the host nation's perception of U.S. port visits. Any effects either sought or obtained through naval diplomacy should take into consideration this context.

C. RESEARCH DESIGN

The remainder of this thesis is comprised of three chapters which include two case studies and a conclusion. The case studies examine the USS AMERICA's 2014 homeport-shift to San Diego and the USS GUNSTON HALL's 2018 deployment to the Caribbean in support of multiple theater-specific exercises.

To ascertain the effects of conducting port calls in Latin America, this research examines primary sources covering recent 4th Fleet deployments to the region. Case studies consist of the visits that a single U.S. warship conducted throughout one SOUTHCOM

³¹ See Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (Macmillan, 2006).; Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (NYU Press, 1997).

³² Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, chap. 2.

³³ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

deployment to the Latin American AoR. This method allows for a cross comparison of visits within different countries while limiting variables by using the same ship and deployment. The most salient sources analyzed are Latin American newspaper articles, editorials, press releases, or analytical pieces covering the deployments and their respective port calls, followed by U.S. governmental press releases of the same focus. Other primary sources evaluated include reports and articles produced by the respective U.S. warship, host-nation naval component, SOUTHCOM, and any other sources with pertinent information or opinions related to the visits.

a. Case Study Selection

In order to find relevant cases for analysis, I searched within the U.S. Navy's Lessons Learned Information System (unclassified version),³⁴ which is regularly updated by the navigation officers of each U.S. naval ship and contains data on all of port visits the ship has completed. The two selected deployments stood out for the number of port calls the ship had conducted and the relatively recent timeframe in which they were executed. Essentially, ships on recent deployments to 4th Fleet usually do not visit more than a couple ports. Even when the deployments consist of more port calls, the visits are often brief stops for fuel, where the ship is only in-port for a few hours for re-supply. In this sense, the deployments of the AMERICA and GUNSTON HALL were distinct in that they each had at least three visits where the ship spent a significant amount of time in-port.

USS AMERICA's deployment to the Caribbean and South America offers an excellent case study for analyzing the effects of port visits on the region. A unique voyage, the AMERICA transited from its building shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi, to her eventual homeport in San Diego. The case study is exceptional due to the large number of ports called and the heightened publicity resulting from the deployment's diplomatic undertones and objectives. The visits offer a sizable sample group for comparison and analysis. Countries visited include Cuba, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, and Peru. This sample

³⁴ "Navy Lessons Learned Information System," U.S. Navy, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.jllis.mil/navy>.

group is reasonably varied, primarily geographically as the Caribbean, River Plate, Southern Cone, and Andean regions are all represented.

The 2018 GUNSTON HALL deployment provides an interesting case for analyzing port visits of a more routine nature. As a regularly scheduled deployment in support of three multinational exercises, the case offers a compelling examination of how the bilateral diplomatic priorities of achieving influence compete with the theater-specific objectives of the overarching exercises. Countries visited include Cuba, Honduras, Trinidad and Tobago, and Colombia. The deployment's concurrent exercises, including Southern Seas 2018, Southern Partnership Station 2018, and UNITAS 2018, lent to increased media coverage and a more extensive sampling of host-nation news sources.

D. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The most significant finding of the research is not that the U.S. Navy is achieving influence, but that the U.S. can improve its approach to naval diplomacy in order to optimize the effects from the execution of port visits in Latin America. First and foremost, U.S. naval leaders and planners should recognize that each port visit offers excellent opportunities for achieving influence and soft power through the use of public diplomacy. One recommendation the study suggests is the inclusion, whenever possible, of in-port events that include interactions with host-nation media and press. These interactions allow U.S. naval leaders to shape the latent signaling and effects provided by ship's presence, while host-nation news-cycles spread the influential messaging from the local port to the rest of the host country.

In order to maximize the opportunities for attaining influence through host-nation news, naval leaders and planners should enlist the support of the relevant U.S. Embassy for each port call. This study finds that an embassy press release has outside effects in generating host-nation publications that contain messaging beneficial to achieving positive effects within the host population.

Another recommendation this study puts forward is to include events that match overarching U.S. security and diplomatic policy toward the relevant country. Influence

through diplomacy is optimized when actions match policy.³⁵ It is because these events provide a tangibility to U.S. policies of support and commitment that they are able to bolster the favorability of opinions and views held by the host nationals toward the U.S.

Finally, naval leaders and planners should recognize situations where influence attainment is suboptimal. One such situation is realized when theater-wide objectives are prioritized over bilateral diplomatic aims. Whenever possible, port visits should devote time and effort to both theater and bilateral objectives in order to avoid missed opportunities for achieving influence. Another situation suboptimal for influence is when larger concurrent events or exercises overshadow the port visit. In order to avoid missed opportunities, naval leaders should shape messaging to include the port visit's diplomatic objectives along with those of the concurrent event.

³⁵ Nye, Jr., *Soft Power*, 111.

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II. *AMERICA VISITS THE AMERICAS, 2014*

The first case study involves analyzing the deployment of the amphibious landing ship, USS AMERICA (LHA-6), during its maiden voyage from the shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi, to its eventual homeport in San Diego, California.

A. **DEPLOYMENT BACKGROUND**

Though the overarching purpose of the AMERICA's transit was to deliver the ship to Southern California, the primary objective of the deployment and associated port visits was entirely diplomatic. Upon the ship's arrival to San Diego, the ship's commanding officer, Capt. Robert Hall Jr. emphasized the transit's diplomatic aspects when he stated, "from community service projects to meaningful exchanges with various countries, everyone on this journey has contributed to something much greater than the ship. They have contributed to the strong bond that exists between the U.S. Navy and navies throughout South America."³⁶ In this case, the diplomatic effects of the deployment were not latent byproducts of routine presence. Instead, U.S. naval leadership actively sought to use the deployment's port visits to achieve soft power influence and strengthen partnerships

The deployment presents a significant case study for analysis in determining the influence from port visits for several reasons. First, the voyage was genuinely unique as most U.S. naval ships shift homeport once or twice in their lifetimes. This is significant because as a homeport shift, the transit was devoid of military-related operations and objectives inherent to more routine deployments (e.g., next chapter's GUNSTON HALL deployment). The result allows for a shift to a more diplomatically focused deployment and port visits.

Second, the transit generated a high level of publicity in host-nation news cycles. The increased attention resulted from the immense military power represented by the

³⁶ Jennifer Vigil, "Brand New Assault Ship America Heads to San Diego Home," Times of San Diego, September 10, 2014, <https://timesofsandiego.com/military/2014/09/10/the-navys-uss-america-heads-to-san-diego-monday/>.

AMERICA, an aircraft-carrying warship whose size is amongst the world's largest if you omit the United States' own supercarriers.³⁷ Additionally, AMERICA was the first produced ship of its class and the newest design of American large-deck amphibious ships since the Wasp-class launched in 1987.³⁸ The ship's namesake also aided in the increase of publicity as the deployment and the port visits within were headlined in newspapers and editorials with interesting catchphrases such as "America visits the Americas" or "América visita las Americas" in Spanish.³⁹

Ultimately, using the following framework, this chapter's analysis proves AMERICA's trip to South America successfully achieved diplomatic influence with the United States' Latin American allies.

B. FRAMEWORK

On July 10, 2014, USS AMERICA left Pascagoula and arrived in her new homeport of San Diego two months later, on September 15. Unable to transit the Panama Canal due to size limitations, the AMERICA traveled south through the Strait of Magellan, which allowed for port visits in Cuba (Guantanamo Bay), Colombia, Brazil, Chile, and Peru.⁴⁰ For analysis, the visits have been broken up into two categories: the North Andean region comprised of Cartagena de Indias, Colombia and Callao, Peru, and the Southern Cone region, which includes Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Valparaíso, Chile. This case study purposely excluded Guantanamo Bay's port visit due to its status as an overseas U.S. military base and lack of contact with or influence on host-nation peoples.

The analysis of each port visit begins with an examination of the U.S. and the host nation's current relations regarding security cooperation, security assistance, and other areas of bilateral convergence like trade and academic exchange. After this analysis, an

³⁷ Alex Pape, *Jane's Fighting Ships 2019–2020* (London, U.K.: Jane's Information Group, 2019).

³⁸ "Navy to Commission Amphibious Assault Ship America," U.S. *Department of Defense*, October 10, 2014, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/605218/navy-to-commission-amphibious-assault-ship-america/>.

³⁹ "Future USS America Arrives in San Diego," U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs, September 15, 2014, <https://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/lha6/Pages/FutureUSSAmericatoArriveinSanDiego.aspx>.

⁴⁰ U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs.

examination will follow that details the considerations of conducting naval diplomacy in that particular host nation based on the previously analyzed relationship. The research concludes with a comparison between U.S. governmental press releases (military included) and local news publications covering the port visit to identify whether or not U.S. diplomatic messaging is being reflected and pushed by local news sources.

C. ANALYSIS

1. North Andean Region—Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

The AMERICA anchored off the coast of Cartagena de Indias on July 17, 2014 for a two-day port call.

a. *U.S. Relations with Colombia*

The foundation of the modern U.S.–Colombia relationship has been the security cooperation policies, namely Plan Colombia, that have been implemented by the two nations to fight narcotrafficking, violent insurgents, and transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) within Colombia’s borders.⁴¹ Plan Colombia started in 1996 as an \$860 million aid package that targeted the production of cocaine within Colombia by strengthening the country’s security institutions, particularly the military and police. The package included military equipment that ranged from helicopters to signal exploitation devices, expert instruction on using the new equipment, and training on counternarcotic tactics.⁴² Plan Colombia initiated an extensive U.S.–Colombia aid program that has continued to the present day and included several subsequent packages that expanded on the original focus of counternarcotics to include both counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. The expansion into these other mission areas transpired because of the U.S. shift toward counterterrorism that occurred post 9/11 and the government of

⁴¹ Rex A Hudson, *Colombia: A Country Study*, Fifth, Area Handbook Series (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2010), 344.

⁴² Hudson, 344.

Colombia's revitalized push against the longtime insurgent and terrorist threat posed by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).⁴³

These massive security cooperation operations and security sector assistance (SSA) packages brought the U.S. and Colombia's militaries and governments closer together in their shared pursuit of regional stability by targeting criminal and insurgent organizations' operations and limiting the number of illicit goods making their way to the U.S. border.⁴⁴ Though security cooperation was the primary basis for the U.S.–Colombian partnership initially, the two nations developed strong trade linkages as stability in Colombia grew, and U.S. investors were more comfortable pursuing opportunities in the Colombian markets. This enhanced trade relationship resulted in the signing of the 2012 U.S.–Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement, which drastically improved the trade status between the two countries as the new arrangement eliminated several tariffs indefinitely.⁴⁵ The economic relations have grown to the point that the U.S. is currently Colombia's largest trading partner for imports and exports.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Colombia is the United States' third-largest partner for imports and fourth for exports in the Latin American region.⁴⁷

The U.S. views Colombia as a security and stability re-exporter for the Latin American region. This role stems from the 2012 bilateral Action Plan on Regional Security Cooperation, which “focuses on capacity building for security personnel in Central America and the Caribbean by Colombian security forces” and addresses “hemispheric challenges, such as combating transnational organized crime, bolstering counternarcotics,

⁴³ Hudson, 345.

⁴⁴ Jason Marczak and Camila Hernandez, “The Untapped Potential of the US-Colombia Partnership” (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council US-Colombia Task Force, September 26, 2019), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/untapped-potential-us-colombia-partnership/>.

⁴⁵ “US Relations with Colombia” (US Department of State, July 27, 2020), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-colombia/>.

⁴⁶ “Colombia Trade Summary,” World Integrated Trade Solution, accessed January 8, 2021, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/COL/Year/LTST/Summary>.

⁴⁷ “United States Trade Summary,” World Integrated Trade Solution, accessed January 8, 2021, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/USA/Year/LTST/Summary>.

strengthening institutions, and fostering resilient communities.”⁴⁸ Essentially, the U.S.–trained Colombian forces use their experiences and resources to train other partners in the surrounding, allowing the U.S. to limit capacity-building involvement in the region.

b. U.S. Naval Diplomacy in Colombia

Security cooperation relationships between the U.S. and the host nations in this study generally fall into one of two categories: capacity-building focused, or interoperability focused. U.S. security cooperation with smaller countries with limited security capabilities or military force, think Central America or West Indies, have their basis in capacity-building. U.S. security cooperation with larger countries with more substantial military capacity, e.g., Brazil or Mexico, centers on achieving interoperability. Security cooperation in Colombia is an interesting case because it bridges the gap between these two classifications. Even though capacity-building was the basis of U.S.–Colombian security cooperation, Colombian security force capabilities have achieved a high enough level for interoperability-focused integration with the U.S. Why is the distinction within this dichotomy relevant? Soft-power influence and public diplomacy function best when diplomatic messaging and events match the overall strategic policy toward the host nation.⁴⁹ Since Colombia fits both categories, U.S. naval diplomacy directed toward Colombia can focus either on capacity-building or interoperability and still achieve influence effectively.

U.S. interests in Colombia involve maintaining stability for economic and security-related purposes, building partner capacity and interoperability, and eliminating the threat of drug trafficking and transnational crime. How exactly do U.S. warship visits to Colombia fit these policy objectives? Like AMERICA’s visit to Cartagena, port visits supplement these policies by providing a highly publicized show of commitment, partnership, and reassurance to the host nation’s government and populace. For this reason, naval stops in Colombia fit mainly within the amity-seeking category of the Rowlands

⁴⁸ June S Beittel, “Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations,” *Congressional Research Service*, no. R43813 (October 26, 2020): 48.

⁴⁹ Nye, Jr., *Soft Power*, 111.

framework. This categorization makes sense because U.S. naval diplomacy in the country centers on “support to allies, the building of relationships, coalitions, partnerships and the spread of goodwill.”⁵⁰

c. Analysis on U.S. Actions in Cartagena de Indias, U.S. Press Releases, and Colombian News Sources

The AMERICA’s visit to Cartagena involved two significant events concerning diplomacy. The first was a key leader engagement (KLE) and press conference that included General John Kelly, commander of SOUTHCOM, Kevin Whitaker, the U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, and Juan Carlos Pinzón, the Colombian Defense Minister.⁵¹ This type of event is a useful tool in achieving soft-power influence because it allows U.S. leaders to shape the latent signaling of the ship’s presence and properly message the purpose of the visit, which is critical to eliminating any misinterpretation by the host nation.

The second was a joint training exercise and exchange between the AMERICA’s marine contingent and the Colombian marines in nearby Covenas. The subject matter focused on aspects of counternarcotics, which, as noted previously, is the central tenet of U.S.–Colombian security cooperation.⁵² Therefore, this event and the resulting news coverage were optimal for achieving influence because they matched the overarching U.S. security policy toward Colombia.

The overriding message contained in many of the U.S. publications that covered AMERICA’s stop in Cartagena was that the visit presented an opportunity to build upon the U.S.–Colombian security relationship. This signaling is apparent in John Scorza’s article, which quoted U.S. Marine Captain Blaine Barby as stating, “the main purpose for the visit was to continue to develop the relationship between the Infanteria de Marina (Colombian Marines) and the U.S. Marine Corps,” and that “Colombia is a significant

⁵⁰ Rowlands, *Naval Diplomacy in 21st Century*, 21.

⁵¹ “El último buque de guerra de EEUU inicia en Cartagena su gira latinoamericana,” *el Economista*, July 18, 2014, <https://www.economistaamerica.com/politica-eAm/noticias/5950024/07/14/El-ultimo-buque-de-guerra-de-EEUU-inicia-en-Cartagena-su-gira-latinoamericana.html>.

⁵² John Scorza, “America Marines Help Combat Colombia IED Threat,” *United States Navy Public Affairs*, July 22, 2104, <https://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/lha6/Pages/AmericaMarinesHelpCombatColombiaIEDThreat.aspx>.

partner in our counternarcotics operations.”⁵³ This message highlights U.S.–Colombian security cooperation policy when it mentions counternarcotics and is amity-seeking in depicting cooperation between the U.S. and Colombian Marines.

This same message surfaced in Colombian articles, like Estefany Gomez Solórzano’s, which states, “Colombia seeks to continue strengthening its relations with the United States and other nations to fight against common threats, drug trafficking, terrorism, arms trafficking, and money laundering.”⁵⁴ Another host-nation article by *El Universal* describes the visit’s purpose as “carrying out tactical exercises that will reinforce the relations of friendship and mutual cooperation between the two navies.”⁵⁵ The amity-seeking signaling, present in both U.S. and Colombian publications, emphasized U.S. security policy and commitment toward Colombia and met Charles Allen’s definition of a show of resolve, “the purpose of which is to signal a commitment to a friend.”⁵⁶

2. North Andean Region—Callao, Peru

The AMERICA anchored off the coast of Callao on August 31, 2014 for a three-day port call.

a. U.S. Relations with Peru

As another country in the North Andes, Peru shares many similarities with Colombia in its relationship with the U.S. A U.S.–led crackdown on coca production in Colombia has pushed coca-growing operations into the Peruvian Andes.⁵⁷ Thus,

⁵³ Scorza.

⁵⁴ Estefany Gomez Solórzano, “Portaaviones estadounidense, en Cartagena,” *El Universal*, July 18, 2014, <https://www.eluniversal.com.co/cartagena/portaaviones-estadounidense-en-cartagena-164976-IXEU258617>.

⁵⁵ “Buque de guerra de Estados Unidos llegó a Cartagena,” *El Universal*, July 17, 2014, <https://www.eluniversal.com.co/cartagena/buque-de-guerra-de-estados-unidos-llego-cartagena-164899-LXEU258524>.

⁵⁶ Charles D. Allen, *The Uses of Navies in Peacetime* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1980), 23.

⁵⁷ Tim Walker, “How Peru Became the Cocaine Capital of the World,” *The Independent*, August 17, 2013, sec. News, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/how-peru-became-cocaine-capital-world-8771427.html>.

countering narcotraffickers and the criminal organizations that accompany the drug trade is a dominant point of bilateral security cooperation and SSA between the two countries, though nowhere near the levels seen in Colombia. To illustrate the difference, last year, the U.S. Department of State (DoS) provided Peru just \$51 million under its International Narcotics and Law Enforcement program,⁵⁸ which is significantly less than the \$267 million it gave to Colombia that same year.⁵⁹ Even though the bilateral cooperation on countering narcotics production and trafficking is not as robust as Colombia's, the U.S.–Peruvian relationship is in some ways more diverse as the two nations work together on a multitude of other programs that build Peruvian governmental institutions, collaborate on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions, and counter criminal activities that fall outside counternarcotics, like human trafficking.⁶⁰ From a more historical perspective, the U.S. and Peru share a longstanding tradition of naval exchange, cooperation, and even diplomacy.⁶¹

The U.S. and Peru share strong economic linkages, especially since the signing of the United States-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement, which improved the trade relationship so much that two-way trade has nearly doubled in the last ten years.⁶² The U.S. is second only to China as Peru's largest importer and exporter of goods.⁶³ Although bilateral trade is not as robust as the U.S.–Colombia partnership, Peru's economic and political stability remains a priority to U.S. interests. The U.S. seeks to expand upon the current trade situation that currently maintains a \$3.5 billion trade surplus in the U.S. favor.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ “Foreign Aid Explorer: Peru,” United States Agency for International Development, accessed January 9, 2021, <https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/PER>.

⁵⁹ “Foreign Aid Explorer: Colombia,” United States Agency for International Development, accessed January 9, 2021, <https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/COL>.

⁶⁰ “US Relations with Peru” (US Department of State, September 29, 2020), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-peru/>.

⁶¹ Joel C. Christenson, “From Gunboats to Good Neighbors: U.S. Naval Diplomacy in Peru, 1919–1942” (PhD, West Virginia University Libraries, 2013), 9, <https://doi.org/10.33915/etd.253>.

⁶² US Department of State, “US Relations with Peru.”

⁶³ “Peru Trade Summary,” World Integrated Trade Solution, accessed January 8, 2021, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/PER/Year/2018/Summary>.

⁶⁴ “US-Peru Trade Facts,” Office of the United States Trade Representative, accessed December 30, 2020, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/western-hemisphere/peru>.

b. U.S. Naval Diplomacy in Peru

As another partner state in the North Andean region, U.S. naval diplomacy objectives in Peru are similar to those in Colombia, with some key differences. Using port visits like the AMERICA's in Callao, the U.S. sought to bolster its security cooperation operations and SSA with publicized events that send a message of dependability, trustworthiness, strength, and presence to the Peruvian government and public. In this sense, the diplomacy sought based upon the bilateral relationship falls squarely in Kevin Rowlands' definition of amity-seeking preventative diplomacy, which he describes as "building relationships with an eye to the future, building capacity in allies and friends, and building on the influence wrought through other instruments of policy."⁶⁵ Like Colombia, U.S. security cooperation with Peru fulfills both capacity-building and interoperability objectives, though the preponderance is on the former.

When considering naval diplomacy, the primary difference between Peru and Colombia is that the U.S.–Peruvian relationship is simply not as strong or integrated, which is reflected in the opinions of the Peruvian citizenry. A 2017 Latinobarómetro polling report showed that only 71% of Peru's citizenry viewed Peru's relationship with the U.S. favorably. In contrast, the same question garnered 83% favorable views in Colombia (tied for the highest in Latin America).⁶⁶ Though this weaker relationship may at first seem to be a detractor from naval diplomacy, the opposite is more likely to be true when considering that weakness actually provides a more meaningful opportunity to achieve influence. L.W. Martin best explained this dynamic when he observed that friendly, benign, and routine port visits do not provide as great of potential for effect as those that occur in situations with more political tension.⁶⁷ Essentially if the Peruvian bilateral relationship was more robust and the public had a significantly high opinion of the U.S., there would be little left to gain through naval diplomacy.

⁶⁵ Rowlands, *Naval Diplomacy in 21st Century*, 13.

⁶⁶ Corporación Latinobarómetro, *La Era de Trump: Imagen de Estados Unidos en América Latina* (Santiago, Chile: Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2017), <https://www.latinobarometro.org/latNewsShowMore.jsp>.

⁶⁷ Martin, *The Sea in Modern Strategy*, 141.

c. *Analysis on U.S. Actions in Callao, U.S. Press Releases, and Peruvian News Sources*

During AMERICA's port call in Callao, the crew executed two events specifically for diplomatic effect. The first was a reception hosted aboard for Peruvian leaders and dignitaries that included a joint press conference.⁶⁸ These affairs are excellent opportunities to achieve influence with the host nation's decision-making elite. The face-to-face exchanges inherent to a reception allow for the development of lasting personal relationships, which is a crucial dimension of Joseph Nye's public diplomacy concept.⁶⁹ The press conference successfully provided an environment for achieving influence due to its involvement of the same message-shaping as observed in the Colombian case.

The other significant diplomatic event was a humanitarian and disaster relief exercise between the U.S. and Peruvian marines, which included bi-lateral exchanges on medical aid and explosive ordnance disposal.⁷⁰ The joint training matched the overarching U.S. security policy in Peru at the time as both countries had agreed two years prior that cooperation would center on "humanitarian assistance, such as joint disaster response training," in addition to counternarcotics.⁷¹ The inclusion of the humanitarian exercise in the port visit allowed the U.S. to highlight the underlying policies upon which U.S.–Peruvian security cooperation is built.

As expected from an amity-seeking port visit, the consistent message within U.S. press releases was increased naval interoperability and consolidating the relationship between the two nations. Many of these articles conferred this message with the words of top dignitaries present during the visit, like the *Diálogo* article which quoted the Commander of SOUTHCOM, General John F. Kelly with, "the name of Peru always

⁶⁸ Donald Holbert, "USS America Makes Final Port Visit in Peru," *USS America (LHA 6) Public Affairs*, September 8, 2014, <https://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/lha6/pages/ussamericamakesfinalportvisitinperu.aspx>.

⁶⁹ Nye, Jr., *Soft Power*, 109.

⁷⁰ Holbert, "USS America Makes Final Port Visit in Peru."

⁷¹ Maureen Taft-Morales, "Peru: Overview of Political and Economic Conditions and Relations with the United States," *Congressional Research Service*, no. R42523 (June 7, 2013): 11.

appears in the first places,” when the U.S. considers its closest allies and partners.⁷² Another example is Donald Holbert’s article, which quoted the Commander of Expeditionary Strike Group 3, Admiral Frank Ponds, with, “to celebrate our last and final port visit, I can think of no other place we would rather spend it at than here, in Peru. Most people see our countries as being separated by water, but for me, it signifies what joins us together.”⁷³ Charles Allen contends that there is a fair amount of messaging that takes place during a port visit just by the presence of a foreign warship.⁷⁴ In this case, however, we see that same message manipulated with rhetoric by high-ranking U.S. military diplomats to ensure that the signaling of friendship and cooperation is relayed to the Peruvian public.

Same message was reflected in Peruvian press publications, with quotes of both U.S. and Peruvian officers prevalent throughout the news cycle. For example, *RPP Noticias* quoted the Commander General of the Peruvian Marines, General Carlos Tejada, with, “what we seek is to achieve interoperability in the matter of communications and procedures to follow with our friends in the U.S. Navy.”⁷⁵ Alonso Marín’s article on the visit provides another example with its quote of the Peruvian Defense Minister, Pedro Cateriano, who said, “this visit ratifies the bilateral relations between our two countries. We are working together in aspects of collaboration in defense and security to improve on both with our country.”⁷⁶

Through these publications, the influence that Allen contends is realized by warship presence is amplified and pushed throughout Peru as every citizen with newspaper or internet access can see the message of cooperation and U.S. support to Peru highlighted in

⁷² “Peru and the U.S. Conducted Maneuvers Onboard the USS America to Aid Civilians,” *Diálogo U.S. Southern Command*, September 8, 2014, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/peru-and-the-u-s-conducted-maneuvers-onboard-the-uss-america-to-aid-civilians/>.

⁷³ Holbert, “USS America Makes Final Port Visit in Peru.”

⁷⁴ Allen, *The Uses of Navies in Peacetime*, 22.

⁷⁵ Jussy Pizarro, “Infantes de Marina y buques peruanos participarán en entrenamientos de USS América,” *Radio Programas de Perú Noticias*, August 31, 2014, <https://rpp.pe/lima/actualidad/infantes-de-marina-y-buques-peruanos-participaran-en-entrenamientos-de-uss-america-noticia-721305>.

⁷⁶ Alonso Marín, “Cuatro Peruanos Navegan en Poderoso Buque de EEUU,” *La Republica*, September 1, 2014.

this rhetoric of American and Peruvian diplomats. This phenomenon is essential to the U.S. soft power influence in a country where the opinions and views of the U.S. are not as high as others.

3. Southern Cone Region—Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The AMERICA moored to the Maua Wharf in Rio de Janeiro on August 5, 2014 for a four-day port call.

a. U.S. Relations with Brazil

As multi-ethnic and young democracies, the U.S.–Brazil relationship has always had the potential to become a great partnership. Instead, frustrating miscommunication, faulty assumptions, and missed opportunities have hamstrung the alliance’s consolidation.⁷⁷ Despite this dynamic, relations have grown relatively secure in recent years, especially when considering security cooperation and economic ties. This consolidation in bilateral relations culminated in the 2011 signing of the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation, which vastly improved the state of bilateral trade and investment between the western hemisphere’s two largest economies,⁷⁸ and the 2019 U.S. declaration of Brazil as a Major Non-NATO Ally due to the increase in a shared commitment to security cooperation.⁷⁹

According to Peter Meyer, a Western Hemisphere policy analyst, in his report to Congress, the increased security cooperation between the U.S. and Brazil has coalesced into three separate areas: counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and general defense.⁸⁰ Though Brazil is not a significant producer of drugs, cocaine consumption has increased

⁷⁷ Mónica Hirst and Andrew Hurrell, *The United States and Brazil: A Long Road of Unmet Expectations* (London, U.K.: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), xvii, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=240661>.

⁷⁸ “US-Brazil Trade Facts,” Office of the United States Trade Representative, accessed December 30, 2020, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/americas/brazil>.

⁷⁹ Donald J. Trump, “Designation of the Federative Republic of Brazil as a Major Non-NATO Ally,” Pub. L. No. 2019–21, § Unnumbered Executive Orders, Directives, and Proclamations (2019).

⁸⁰ Peter J Meyer, “Brazil: Background and U.S. Relations” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 11, 2016).

to the point that Brazil has become one of the world's top consumers and a hub for drugs destined for Europe.

An escalation in drug-trafficking and other criminal activity accompanied this increase in consumption, which researchers have primarily attributed to Brazil's rising TCOs.⁸¹ As for counterterrorism, most of the cooperation concentrates on U.S. training to Brazil's security forces to strengthen their capabilities while concurrently sharing intelligence on suspected terrorist activity in Brazil.⁸² The last category, defense, is comprised of the cooperation that stems from the 2010 signing of the U.S.–Brazil Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) that stipulated areas for working together, which included research and development, international peacekeeping, and joint military exercises, amongst others.⁸³

b. U.S. Naval Diplomacy in Brazil

U.S. naval diplomacy in Brazil falls definitively in the amity-seeking category. As evidence, the previously mentioned DCA specifically designated ship visits as a primary security cooperation area between both nations' armed forces.⁸⁴ While it may meet the shared objectives in this military-specific context, actually achieving influence amongst Brazilian lawmakers and the Brazilian public provides a separate challenge. Efforts to achieve soft power in Brazil through naval diplomacy must contend with the historical frustrations that had kept the two nations at arm's length, the most recent of which occurred when reports surfaced in 2015 that the NSA had allegedly been spying on top Brazilian officials.⁸⁵ As a result of the recent setbacks in relations, only 67% of Brazilians view the United States favorably and even less qualify the U.S.–Brazilian relationship as a positive

⁸¹ Meyer, 21.

⁸² Meyer, 22.

⁸³ “Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States of America and Brazil,” 15–626 § Treaties and Other International Acts (2015).

⁸⁴ Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States of America and Brazil.

⁸⁵ “Wikileaks: U.S. ‘routinely Spied’ on Brazil,” *BBC News*, July 4, 2015, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-33398388>.

one (62%).⁸⁶ As seen in the Peruvian case, these statistics are counterintuitive in that they provide a better environment for naval diplomacy, which can be a useful tool in influencing the opinions and views of the Brazilian citizenry.

As mentioned previously, Brazil is similar to the Northern Andean cases because the type of diplomacy sought is amity-seeking; however, Brazil provides a significantly different environment for achieving influence, especially when it comes to messaging. The primary difference that separates Brazil from the rest of the countries within this case study is the relative strength of both the Brazilian economy and its armed forces. Brazil is the world's ninth largest economy⁸⁷ and the western hemisphere's largest military outside of the United States.⁸⁸ Therefore, the priority for U.S. objectives in Brazil are increasing joint coordination to counter shared threats, responding to natural disasters, and aiding in humanitarian relief situations; in other words, Brazil falls entirely within the interoperability category, whereas the North Andean countries include elements of capacity-building. As evidence, the DOD gave less than \$1 million in SSA to Brazil in 2019, a small fraction of what the U.S. gave to Colombia and Peru.⁸⁹ Additionally, the U.S. seeks to increase U.S.–Brazilian interoperability through foreign military sales, in large part because the Brazilian government can afford to purchase U.S. equipment.⁹⁰

Considering the U.S.–Brazil dynamic, the most successful approach to naval diplomacy is likely one of allied and equal partnership and not as a supplement to its SSA policy as seen in the previous cases. The diplomacy should still confer trust in American commitment and strength but more from an equal perspective that respects Brazil's

⁸⁶ Corporación Latinobarómetro, *La Era de Trump: Imagen de Estados Unidos en América Latina*.

⁸⁷ "GDP Data (Current US\$)," The World Bank, accessed January 10, 2021, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?most_recent_value_desc=true&year_high_desc=true.

⁸⁸ James Hackett, ed., "The Military Balance," *International Institute for Strategic Studies* 120, no. 1 (February 13, 2020).

⁸⁹ "Foreign Aid Explorer: Brazil," United States Agency for International Development, accessed January 9, 2021, <https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/BRA>.

⁹⁰ "DSCA: Brazil," Defense Security Cooperation Agency, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.dsca.mil/tags/brazil>; Adriane Elliot, "Foreign Military Sales Secure Brazil, U.S. Partnership," *U.S. Army Security Assistance Command*, November 11, 2015, https://www.theredstonerocket.com/military_scene/article_6e581214-888f-11e5-87ca-035a79c4f8ef.html.

leadership position as the regional hegemon of South America. The likelihood of success is high with this type of messaging that considers Brazil's continued search for international validation, which is illustrated best by its longtime pursuit of a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.⁹¹

c. Analysis on U.S. Actions in Rio de Janeiro, U.S. Press Releases, and Brazilian News Sources

Like the Peruvian case, the port call in Rio de Janeiro included a reception onboard for Brazilian diplomats and dignitaries⁹² and a joint security cooperation exercise between the U.S. Marines and their Brazilian counterparts at Marambaia Island.⁹³ The reception allowed U.S. leadership to shape the port visit's narrative to match the United States' overall policy toward Brazil through face-to-face interactions and an included press conference. Admiral Ponds, the commander of Expeditionary Strike Group 3, took advantage of this opportunity when he told reporters that "these exchanges have relevance, and they have reason; they make us more interoperable and meant to work together if and when the time comes."⁹⁴ The keyword in Ponds' statement is interoperable, which, as previously mentioned, is the focal point of U.S.–Brazilian cooperation. Also included in the reception were static displays of U.S. naval equipment,⁹⁵ an addition that highlights the foreign military sales aspects of U.S.–Brazilian relations.

The Marambaia exercise showcased cooperation and interoperability between U.S. and Brazilian forces as they executed "bi-lateral exchanges on combat marksmanship,

⁹¹ Eugenio V. Garcia and Natalia B. R. Coelho, "A Seat at the Top? A Historical Appraisal of Brazil's Case for the UN Security Council," *SAGE Open* 8, no. 3 (July 1, 2018): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018801098>.

⁹² Christopher J. Moore, "Marines, Sailors Aboard USS America Visit Rio," *I Marine Expeditionary Force Public Affairs*, August 12, 2014, <https://www.imef.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/535421/marines-sailors-aboard-uss-america-visit-rio/>.

⁹³ Donald Holbert, "SPMAGTF-South Conducts Theater Security Cooperation in Brazil," *I Marine Expeditionary Force Public Affairs*, August 12, 2014, <https://www.imef.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/535423/spmagtf-south-conducts-theater-security-cooperation-in-brazil/>.

⁹⁴ Moore, "Marines, Sailors Aboard USS America Visit Rio."

⁹⁵ Moore.

improvised explosive device detection, medical treatment, and combat tracking.”⁹⁶ Critically, the exercise had no capacity-building elements but instead focused on exchanges of information and force integration. This type of event is suited for Brazil because it considers both Brazilian nationalism and Brazil’s desire for recognition as an equal partner in relations with the U.S.

The main message concerning naval diplomacy in the majority of U.S. press releases on the Rio de Janeiro visit was that the purpose of AMERICA’s stop in Brazil was to strengthen the bilateral partnership between the two countries. This signaling is apparent in the *Diálogo* article, which reports that the AMERICA’s visit “represented the brotherly union of two important countries, whose navies’ stabilization actions are important within the regional context.”⁹⁷ The U.S. Embassy’s press release also highlighted the partnership when it explained that the visit “reinforces the importance of military cooperation in the region by promoting and strengthening partnerships and integrated operations between the navies of the two countries.”⁹⁸ Considering the previous analysis on naval diplomacy in Brazil, these publications hit the mark for adequately conveying a message of joint cooperation in the context of interoperability and an equal security partnership.

The Brazilian publications covering the AMERICA’s visit conveyed the same sentiment of cooperation and strengthening security ties to the Brazilian public. An article published by *Estratégia Global* focused explicitly on the opportunities presented by the visit for the U.S. Marines and their Brazilian counterparts to work together. It noted that the visit “reinforces the partnership between the Marine Corps of the two countries, contributes to increased interoperability, and strengthens ties between the military

⁹⁶ Holbert, “SPMAGTF-South Conducts Theater Security Cooperation in Brazil.”

⁹⁷ “USS America: The Newest Amphibious Assault Ship of the U.S. Navy Visits Brazil,” *Diálogo U.S. Southern Command*, August 28, 2014, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/uss-america-the-newest-amphibious-assault-ship-of-the-us-navy-visits-brazil/>.

⁹⁸ “USS America visita o Rio de Janeiro,” *Embaixada e Consulados dos EUA no Brasil*, August 1, 2014, <https://br.usembassy.gov/pt/uss-america-visita-o-rio-de-janeiro/>.

forces.”⁹⁹ In a similar vein, an article by *Exame* stated that the visit “aims to strengthen the partnership between the Brazilian and U.S. navies in order to improve maritime security and humanitarian aid.”¹⁰⁰ In the context of recent U.S.–Brazil relations, the message contained within these Brazilian publications met U.S. diplomatic objectives because they portrayed the U.S. as a trustworthy ally who respects Brazil and its armed forces as equal partners in ensuring stability in the western hemisphere. Though some of these publications report specifically on material concerning defense, like *Estratégia Global*, others that included coverage of the port call are major Brazilian media outlets with a wide distribution throughout Brazil, like *Exame*¹⁰¹ and *Globo*.¹⁰² This is an important distinction because it indicates that the Brazilian public is receiving the message and not just the defense community.

4. Southern Cone Region—Valparaíso, Chile

The AMERICA moored to berth 4 of the South Pacific Terminal in Valparaíso for a three-day port call.

a. U.S. Relations with Chile

The U.S.–Chile security partnership is reasonably robust and has strengthened over the past three decades since Chile transitioned back to democracy from the bureaucratic authoritarianism of the Pinochet regime that had led the country since the 1973 Allende Coup. The current relationship stems from multiple defense cooperation agreements and

⁹⁹ “Em Exercício Conjunto Com Marines Dos EUA Fuzileiros Navais Empregam Pela Primeira Vez a Aeronave MV-22 Osprey,” *Estratégia Global*, August 22, 2014, <https://estrategiaglobal.blog.br/2014/08/em-exercicio-conjunto-com-marines-dos-eua-fuzileiros-navais-empregam-pela-primeira-vez-a-aeronave-mv-22-osprey.html>.

¹⁰⁰ “Navio Anfíbio Americano de Última Geração Visita Rio de Janeiro,” *Exame*, August 6, 2014, <https://exame.com/tecnologia/navio-anfibio-americano-de-ultima-geracao-visita-rio-de-janeiro/>.

¹⁰¹ Michael B. Salwen and Bruce Garrison, *Latin American Journalism* (Routledge, 2013), 135.

¹⁰² Salwen and Garrison, 10; Carolina Jardim, “Um Brasileiro a Bordo Do USS America,” *O Globo*, June 8, 2014, <https://oglobo.globo.com/mundo/um-brasileiro-bordo-do-uss-america-1-13511059>.

over two decades' worth of annual joint training exercises and operations.¹⁰³ Unlike the other three cases in this study, counternarcotics is not a significant point of cooperation; the partnership is focused more on mission sets that include the sharing of intelligence, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, the U.S. gives almost nothing to Chile in SSA,¹⁰⁵ another point of departure from the other cases in this study. However, military sales are conducted regularly between the two countries.¹⁰⁶

Within the western hemisphere, Chile ranks amongst the top trade partners of the U.S. Trade between the two nations has flourished since the signing of the 2001 U.S.–Chile Free Trade Agreement, eliminating many tariffs and other policy barriers to bilateral trade.¹⁰⁷ In 2019, the U.S. was Chile's second-largest exporter and importer behind China;¹⁰⁸ within the Latin American region, Chile was the fourth largest importer of U.S. goods and the third-largest exporter of goods to the United States.¹⁰⁹ Outside of security and trade, the two nations exchange information and coordinate in environmental protection, science and technology, and education while also working together to advance developmental projects in other countries.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ “Defense Communications Memorandum of Understanding between the United States of America and Chile,” 06–1114 § Treaties and Other International Acts (2006); “Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States of America and Chile,” 05–713 § Treaties and Other International Acts (2005); “Defense Research and Development Agreement between the United States of America and Chile,” 08–408 § Treaties and Other International Acts (2008).

¹⁰⁴ “Adm. Tidd Visits Chile, Discusses Security Cooperation with Leaders,” U.S. *Southern Command Public Affairs*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/1474409/adm-tidd-visits-chile-discusses-security-cooperation-with-leaders/>.

¹⁰⁵ “Foreign Aid Explorer: Chile,” United States Agency for International Development, accessed January 9, 2021, <https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/CHL>.

¹⁰⁶ “DSCA: Chile,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, accessed January 11, 2021, <https://www.dscamilitary.com/tags/chile>.

¹⁰⁷ Peter J Meyer, “Chile: An Overview,” *Congressional Research Service*, In Focus, June 3, 2020, 3.

¹⁰⁸ “Chile Trade Summary,” World Integrated Trade Solution, accessed January 8, 2021, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/CHL/Year/2018/Summary>.

¹⁰⁹ World Integrated Trade Solution, “United States Trade Summary.”

¹¹⁰ “US Relations with Chile” (US Department of State, April 25, 2019), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-chile/>.

b. U.S. Naval Diplomacy in Chile

Along the same lines as Brazil, modern U.S. naval diplomacy conducted in Chile falls wholly within the amity-seeking category. The objective of port visits by U.S. warships in Chilean ports is to build upon security partnerships while at the same time expanding U.S. soft power and influence within the Chilean government and public to maintain the mutually beneficial trade and security relationship. Despite the strong relations shared between the two governments, achieving influence and soft power within Chile is not without its challenges. As of 2017, only 67% of the Chilean public had positive views of the United States; interestingly, a significantly higher percentage (73%) viewed the U.S.–Chilean relationship as a favorable one.¹¹¹ Continued Chilean distrust of the U.S. likely explains this dynamic, which stems from the U.S. support of the 1973 coup and the bureaucratic authoritarian regime that took power, a regime recognizable for its extensive state terror programs and human rights violations.

Considering these opinion demographics, naval diplomacy in Chile would be most effective in targeting the Chilean public's views and opinions. The messaging of AMERICA's visit to Valparaíso should focus on U.S. strength and trustworthiness as both an ally and trade partner. Within Ken Booth's framework, the U.S. objectives in Chile centered on gaining national prestige, an idea that places incredible importance on how our partners view us.¹¹² Essentially, the more prestige the U.S. has in the Chilean public's eyes, the better equipped U.S. diplomats are to ensure negotiations on bilateral commitments and policies are mutually beneficial to both states. As a foreign policy tool, the AMERICA is exceptionally well equipped to achieve this prestige as a powerful warship and symbol of American strength and commitment to the Chilean partnership.

Much like the relationship with Brazil, the basis of U.S.–Chilean security cooperation is interoperability, not capacity-building. Chilean military power is relatively robust for the region, and its armed forces are more suited for integration with the U.S. in

¹¹¹ Corporación Latinobarómetro, *La Era de Trump: Imagen de Estados Unidos en América Latina*.

¹¹² Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, chap. 1.

operations like disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. Also, as observed in Brazil, foreign military sales substitute for SSA within the U.S.–Chile relationship.¹¹³

c. Analysis on U.S. Actions in Valparaíso, U.S. Press Releases, and Chilean News Sources

The AMERICA’s crew executed two diplomatic events during their time in-port Valparaíso. The first was a reception onboard for ranking officials in the Chilean Navy and local dignitaries. As witnessed in the previous two cases, events like these are incredible opportunities for establishing the interpersonal relationships vital to a successful public diplomacy campaign. Cultural exchange was a consistent theme of the messaging surrounding both the visit and the reception.¹¹⁴ This cultural element’s inclusion is noteworthy because a nation’s way of life and its attractiveness to others are key components of soft-power influence.¹¹⁵

The other diplomatic event was a community relations event (COMREL) in which U.S. and Chilean sailors worked together to restore the local Arturo Prat Children’s Home.¹¹⁶ Community relations projects like this one in Valparaíso are excellent opportunities to influence the local population through face-to-face public diplomacy while simultaneously boosting U.S. prestige, as the event displayed U.S. goodwill toward the Chilean public.

The visit of AMERICA to Valparaíso provides a unique case when examining the news coverage surrounding the event. Most of the Chilean articles give direct quotes to the U.S. Embassy’s press release concerning the visit. The most consistently quoted piece of the release is one that focused on the close cooperation between the U.S. and Chilean navies, as seen here:

¹¹³ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “DSCA: Chile.”

¹¹⁴ “Nuevo Buque de La Armada de Los EEUU USS America Visita Chile,” *Embajada de Los Estados Unidos En Chile*, July 11, 2014, <https://cl.usembassy.gov/es/brand-new-uss-america-visit-chile-es/>.

¹¹⁵ Nye, Jr., *Soft Power*, 16.

¹¹⁶ “El USS America durante su estadía en Valparaíso,” *Embajada de los Estados Unidos en Chile*, August 28, 2014, <https://cl.usembassy.gov/es/visit-boys-home-arturo-prat-valparaiso-es/>.

This visit by USS America is an example that shows the close relationship and mutual trust that the naval forces of both countries have developed over the years. Chile and the United States have worked as strategic partners jointly and with increasing frequency and effectiveness on a wide range of regional security issues, especially in humanitarian aid and disaster response training programs. In this regard, both Navies have expressed their interest in continuing to expand upon this collaboration.¹¹⁷

Articles from prominent Chilean news sources, including *Bío-Bío Chile*,¹¹⁸ *El Martutino*,¹¹⁹ *Soy Valparaíso*,¹²⁰ and *El Mercurio*,¹²¹ all contained this quote within their coverage of AMERICA's visit. The teamwork exhibited here between the AMERICA and the Embassy in Santiago created an excellent atmosphere for achieving influence through soft power in Chile, as several of Chile's big-name newspaper outlets extended the U.S. message of cooperation and partnership from Valparaíso to the rest of the country.

Also of note is the inclusion of AMERICA's warfighting characteristics in many of these same articles. This addition is noteworthy because it exhibits what Charles Allen calls "the language of force."¹²² Essentially, the language of force is the latent signaling provided simply by the presence of naval power, which, when deployed abroad, is representative of a country's interest in a specific region and the nations within.¹²³ The more powerful the ship, the more latent signaling it produces. For illustration, an aircraft carrier has greater potential for influence than a patrol craft due to the relative naval power they represent. Along these lines, the cutting-edge and powerful AMERICA is an excellent

¹¹⁷ "Nuevo Buque de La Armada de Los EEUU USS America Visita Chile."

¹¹⁸ "Nuevo buque anfibio 'USS America' recalará en agosto en Valparaíso y Punta Arenas," *Bío-Bío Chile*, July 14, 2014. <http://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/2014/07/14/nuevo-buque-anfibio-uss-america-recalara-en-agosto-en-valparaiso-y-punta-arenas.shtml>.

¹¹⁹ "Nuevo buque de guerra de Estados Unidos recalará en Valparaíso," *El Martutino Noticias*, July 14, 2014, <https://www.elmartutino.cl/noticia/listado/nuevo-buque-de-guerra-de-estados-unidos-recalara-en-valparaiso>.

¹²⁰ "Nuevo buque de la Armada de Estados Unidos USS 'America' visitará Valparaíso," *Soy Valparaíso*, July 12, 2014, <https://www.soychile.cl/Valparaiso/Sociedad/2014/07/12/261527/Nuevo-buque-de-la-Armada-de-Estados-Unidos-USS-America-visitara-Valparaiso.aspx>.

¹²¹ "Nuevo buque de la Armada estadounidense llegará a Chile en agosto," *El Mercurio*, July 14, 2014, sec. Internacional, <https://www.emol.com/noticias/internacional/2014/07/14/669833/nuevo-buque-de-la-armada-de-los-eeuu-uss-america-visitara-chile-en-agosto.html>.

¹²² Allen, *The Uses of Navies in Peacetime*, 15.

¹²³ Allen, 15.

diplomatic tool when utilizing the language of force. When combined with U.S. rhetoric and intent of cooperation and partnership, these latent signals provided by naval strength increase the United States' national prestige and, therefore, the ability to achieve influence within Chile.

D. FINDINGS

The port visits of AMERICA's deployment to South America were effective in achieving diplomatic influence. Before summarizing the lesson learned from these visits' actual execution, it is necessary to discuss the several factors inherent to the deployment itself that aided in AMERICA's success. Starting with the deployment's purpose, the AMERICA's primary mission, other than reaching San Diego, was to promote goodwill and strengthen partnerships throughout the region. The exclusion of operational objectives allowed AMERICA's crew to focus specifically on diplomacy. Other than the purpose, the ship is a sizeable aircraft-carrying capital ship that represents significant U.S. military power. This characteristic's advantages are three-fold: it boosts publicity, intensifies latent diplomatic signaling, and offers an excellent venue for hosting receptions and KLE.

While these inherent factors set the deployment up for success, the actual execution of the port visits was optimal for gaining influence. Starting with the events conducted while in-port, the crew's actions and planned affairs exemplified overall U.S. security policy to the relevant host nation. Most of the port calls contained receptions and ship-tours for local decision-makers; these face-to-face interactions present excellent opportunities to achieve influence through public diplomacy. The embarked Marines' security cooperation exercises matched capacity-building or interoperability policies and generally highlighted the primary mission-sets that the two countries prioritize within their security relationship.

U.S. press releases were also beneficial in capturing influence, as they offered platforms for U.S. leaders, like Rear Admiral Ponds, to effectively convey U.S. intentions of strengthening partnerships and cooperation to the population and government of the host nation. Of particular note is the beneficial value of U.S. Embassy support through press release coverage to the port visits and the accompanying events. Every port call in this

study included press releases from the relevant U.S. Embassy, and in specific cases like Chile, these press releases generated significant press in host nation news cycles.

Finally, and most important to this analysis, host nation news articles reflected the same amity-seeking signaling in U.S. publications and offered by U.S. naval leadership. This last point speaks to the AMERICA's actual effectiveness in achieving influence in Colombia, Peru, Brazil, and Chile.

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III. GUNSTON HALL'S 2018 SOUTHERN SEAS DEPLOYMENT

Analysis of the port visits conducted during USS GUNSTON HALL's (LSD 44) 2018 deployment to the Caribbean comprises the second case study of this thesis.

A. DEPLOYMENT BACKGROUND

The deployment's primary aim was to support and participate in three separate SOUTHCOM exercises: Southern Seas 2018 (SS18), Southern Partnership Station 2018 (SPS18), and UNITAS 2018. According to SOUTHCOM press releases, the deployment's port visits presented opportunities for security-focused training and multinational exchanges in addition to diplomatic opportunities outside of the military-related events to promote goodwill and cooperation between the host nations and the United States.¹²⁴

Before analyzing the port visits, a brief review of the supported exercises is necessary to understand the deployment's contextual aspects. SS18 and SPS18 are annual SOUTHCOM exercises that are "focused on subject matter expert exchanges (SMEE) and building partner capacity with partner nation militaries and security forces in the Caribbean, Central, and South America."¹²⁵ Specific to the execution of SS18 was the embarkation of an international staff consisting of naval officers from Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia. This joint team's objective was to improve multinational coordination across several different mission areas, including countertrafficking and humanitarian relief.¹²⁶ UNITAS, Latin for unity, is longest-running joint naval exercise focused on improving coalition maritime surface tactics and interoperability between the western hemisphere's blue-water navies.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Michael Hendricks, "Southern Seas 2018 Deployment Begins," *U.S. Southern Command*, July 9, 2018, <https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/1570696/southern-seas-2018-deployment-begins/>.

¹²⁵ Chelsea Dietlin, "Gunston Hall Completes SOUTHCOM Ops," *USS Gunston Hall (LSD 44) Public Affairs*, September 26, 2018, <http://GM5-LKweb.newscyclecloud.com/news/20180926/gunston-hall-completes-southcom-ops>.

¹²⁶ Hendricks, "Southern Seas 2018 Deployment Begins."

¹²⁷ "UNITAS 2019," U.S. Southern Command, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.southcom.mil/Media/Special-Coverage/UNITAS-2019/>.

The 2018 iteration of UNITAS is the 59th occurrence of the exercise since its inception in 1960.

In determining the influence of port visits, the GUNSTON HALL deployment provides a great contrast to the last chapter's analysis on AMERICA, particularly in the aspects of routineness, geography, and purpose. AMERICA's deployment to South America was characteristically exceptional; the ship's namesake, its reason for deploying (homeport shift), and status as first of its class and a capital ship all contributed to its uniqueness as a case study. In contrast, GUNSTON HALL conducted port visits under conditions that were more routine in nature. The GUNSTON HALL's patrol was a regularly scheduled 4th Fleet deployment and involved three annually recurring exercises that are not unique by any means.

Conversely, the AMERICA's transit was to conduct a homeport shift, likely the only one of its time in service. The GUNSTON HALL is a Whidbey Island-class dock landing ship, which means it is neither the first of its class nor an aircraft-carrying capital ship like the AMERICA.¹²⁸ The final factor that differentiates the two deployments is geography. The AMERICA's deployment involved visits throughout South America while the GUNSTON HALL's voyage and visits remained in the Caribbean. It is important to note that even though the GUNSTON HALL remained in the Caribbean, the deployment involved several opportunities for engagement with South American partners through the transit's concurrent exercises that included participation from every Latin American region.

B. FRAMEWORK

The GUNSTON HALL's SOUTHCOM deployment began with the ship's departure from its homeport of Norfolk, Virginia, on June 18, 2018, and ended with its return to Norfolk three months later, on September 26.¹²⁹ During the deployment, the ship made port visits to Cuba (Guantanamo Bay), Honduras (Roatán), Trinidad and Tobago (Port of Spain), and Colombia (Cartagena de Indias). Like the previous chapter, Cuba has been excluded

¹²⁸ Pape, *Jane's Fighting Ships 2019–2020*.

¹²⁹ Dietlin, "Gunston Hall Completes SOUTHCOM Ops"; Hendricks, "Southern Seas 2018 Deployment Begins."

from the following analysis as Guantanamo Bay is an overseas U.S. military base. The study follows the same framework used in the previous chapter, which includes an examination of bilateral relations, U.S. naval diplomacy in the host nation, U.S. actions during the visits, and concludes with a cross comparison of U.S. press releases and host nation publications reported on the visits. Since the last chapter included analysis covering the U.S.–Colombian relationship and U.S. naval diplomacy within Colombia, those sections have been replaced by a brief review of what contextual factors differentiated the GUNSTON HALL’s visit from the AMERICA’s.

C. ANALYSIS

1. Roatán, Honduras

On July 21st, 2018, the GUNSTON HALL anchored off the coast of Coxen Hole, Roatán for a four-day port call.

a. *U.S. Relations with Honduras*

Honduras is a longtime trade partner and an essential ally of the U.S. within the Central American region. The current U.S. approach to Honduras consists of a whole-of-government effort that is “focused on strengthening democratic governance, including promoting human rights and the rule of law, enhancing economic prosperity, and improving the long-term security situation.”¹³⁰ Honduras has been struggling with high governmental and finance corruption, violent crime, and economic poverty. These factors have led to general instability in the country, resulting in increased narcotics trafficking activity and large amounts of Honduran citizens fleeing the country in search of safety and better hopes of prosperity.¹³¹ Other than increasing the stability of an important trade partner, major U.S. concerns for Honduras involve limiting the number of trafficked drugs and other illicit goods

¹³⁰ Peter J Meyer, “Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 27, 2020).

¹³¹ Meyer.

in the country and the number of Honduran citizens fleeing an extremely violent situation¹³² to seek asylum or illegal entrance into the U.¹³³

In terms of security cooperation, the two nations have shared strong ties since the 1980s when Honduras supported U.S. military staging and follow-on efforts against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador.¹³⁴ Since these operations, there has been a continuous U.S. troop presence in Honduras since 1983 at Soto Cano Air Base. Known as Joint Task Force-Bravo, the force's goal is to provide advanced staging for counternarcotics and disaster relief operations in the Central American and Caribbean regions.¹³⁵

The central focus area of recent security cooperation efforts has been building Honduran security force capacity to ensure citizen safety and improve counternarcotics.¹³⁶ The prevalence of organized crime and gang activity has rendered the country a dangerous place to live with significant prevalence of violence and one of the world's highest homicide rates.¹³⁷ To aid Honduran security forces in their pursuit of violence limitation, USAID and DoS have implemented several community-based crime prevention programs and others that identify and oust corrupt police officers.¹³⁸ As for counternarcotics, the DOD has given large amounts of aid to Honduran security forces in funding, equipment, and training to limit the flow of illicit goods and drugs through the country.¹³⁹ In 2018, the same year of GUNSTON

¹³² Luis Sundkvist, "Global Study on Homicide 2019" (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, July 2019), <https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet1.pdf>.

¹³³ "US Relations with Honduras" (US Department of State, April 21, 2020), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-honduras-relations/>.

¹³⁴ Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 293–99.

¹³⁵ LaFeber, 309–10; Meyer, "Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations," 21.

¹³⁶ Meyer, "Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations," 21–22.

¹³⁷ Sundkvist, "Global Study on Homicide 2019."

¹³⁸ Meyer, "Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations," 21.

¹³⁹ Meyer, 22.

HALL's visit, the DOD gave over \$10 million in aid to Honduras, which resulted in the arrest and conviction of several high-level drug traffickers.¹⁴⁰

Joint U.S.–Honduran security efforts are not without their criticisms, however, as reports of human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, and corruption on behalf of Honduras' security forces have surfaced since the 2009 coup.¹⁴¹ To make matter worse, especially for public diplomacy, the U.S. often appears complicit to this state violence due to the training and SSA support it provides to those forces.¹⁴² Any diplomatic effort from the U.S. has to contend with this dynamic. Despite this disadvantage to achieving diplomatic influence, 80% of Hondurans view the U.S. favorably as of 2017, and when compared with other Latin American countries, Honduras is tied for the highest in Central America.¹⁴³

b. U.S. Naval Diplomacy in Honduras

Within the 2018 timeframe of GUNSTON HALL's visit to Roatán, naval diplomacy within Honduras was characterized best by Luttwak's concept of latent suasion in the supportive mode.¹⁴⁴ Under this category, supportive-mode port visits are “a continuous reminder to allies and clients of the capabilities that can be brought to their aid” and “a tangible content to any prior commitments that may have been made.”¹⁴⁵ The applicability of this type of suasion to Honduras is apparent when considering how U.S. warships in Honduran ports provide a tangibility of U.S. support to the Honduran government and public in their fight against the destabilizing forces that are debilitating their country. Any analysis on influence in this particular case must consider the geographical disparity between the island of Roatán and mainland Honduras. Although the visit's exposure may be limited for

¹⁴⁰ Meyer, 22.

¹⁴¹ “2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Honduras” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2018), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/honduras/>.

¹⁴² Jeffery R. Webber and Barry Carr, *The New Latin American Left: Cracks in the Empire*, Critical Currents in Latin American Perspective Series (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 366.

¹⁴³ Corporación Latinobarómetro, *La Era de Trump: Imagen de Estados Unidos en América Latina*.

¹⁴⁴ Luttwak, *Political Uses*, 13.

¹⁴⁵ Luttwak, 13.

mainland Hondurans, news coverage of the visit has the ability to extend the influential effects from the island to the rest of the country.

Using the last chapter's analytical tool that categorized U.S. naval diplomacy into capacity-building or interoperability, security cooperation in 2018 Honduras fit entirely within the capacity-building category. As described previously, U.S. objectives in Honduras were to build security force capacity to limit violent crime, drug trafficking, and corruption. Honduras simply does not have the significant military or naval power that would lend to a more interoperative relationship, as seen in other Latin American countries like Brazil or Chile. U.S. actions and signaling concerning port visits to Honduras should note this distinction because, as Joseph Nye points out, matching policy to messaging optimizes the achievement of soft-power effects.¹⁴⁶

c. Analysis on U.S. Actions in Roatán, U.S. Press Releases, and Honduran News Sources

The GUNSTON HALL's visit to Roatán involved three significant events that provided opportunities to gain influence in Honduras. Those events included a KLE between GUNSTON HALL and Honduran Naval leaders, SMEE between members of the crew and armed forces of Honduras,¹⁴⁷ and a COMREL where crewmembers helped a local philanthropy organization to build community housing.¹⁴⁸ The KLE and SMEE events demonstrated the concept of latent suasion in the supportive mode as they exhibited continued U.S. support to prior agreements and the bilateral partnership. These exchange events met both diplomatic and military objectives, though the focus was mainly on the latter. The COMREL, on the other hand, was strictly diplomatic and provided an excellent opportunity to achieve soft power influence through the concept of public diplomacy, which

¹⁴⁶ Nye, Jr., *Soft Power*, 110.

¹⁴⁷ Chelsea Dietlin, "USS Gunston Hall Hosts Distinguished Visitor Day with U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Army in U.S. Southern Command," U.S. *Southern Command*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/1587051/uss-gunston-hall-hosts-distinguished-visitor-day-with-us-marine-corps-and-us-ar/>.

¹⁴⁸ Chelsea Dietlin, "USS Gunston Hall Conducts Port Visit as Part of Southern Seas 2018 Deployment," U.S. *Navy Public Affairs Support Element East*, July 21, 2018, <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/285426/uss-gunston-hall-conducts-port-visit-part-southern-seas-2018-deployment>.

Joseph Nye argues can bolster a country's attractive image with a foreign public through positive actions and exchanges.¹⁴⁹

Notably, none of the events focused explicitly on capacity-building; this is likely due to the exercises' overarching objectives, which focused on integration in disaster relief type missions. As an expected consequence, neither U.S. nor Honduran coverage of the visit contained any capacity-building elements in their reporting. These omissions incur a significant mismatch between the visit's messaging and the overarching U.S. security policy toward Honduras. The result is a suboptimal diplomatic message that cannot provide tangibility to U.S. SSA policy toward Honduras. Although the signaling may only partially match Honduras-specific diplomatic priorities, the events still met theater objectives for SOUTHCOM. The divergence between the Honduran bilateral agenda and theater-wide goals is expected, as port visits require a prioritization of events due to the limited time associated with the stops.

U.S. press releases that reported on the KLE and SMEE events corresponded to a narrative of latent suasion in the supportive mode,¹⁵⁰ with the coverage including elements of cooperation and integration. In an article by U.S. Navy Public Affairs Element East, Destroyer Squadron 40 Commodore Brian Diebold was quoted with, "our meeting served as a great opportunity for the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps to highlight our current missions with our partners in Central America," and continued with "the Southern Seas deployment provides us opportunities such as this visit to discuss the future of multinational integration with the Honduran Navy."¹⁵¹ Captain Diebold's statements successfully highlighted the cooperative aspects of the GUNSTON HALL's goodwill visit and are on message for achieving influence under the framework of supportive-type latent suasion.

As for Honduran news sources, reports on the visit are quite sparse, and none specifically cover the KLE and SMEE events. One possible explanation for the coverage gap

¹⁴⁹ Nye, Jr., *Soft Power*, 111.

¹⁵⁰ Luttwak, *Political Uses*, 13.

¹⁵¹ Dietlin, "USS Gunston Hall Hosts Distinguished Visitor Day with U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Army in U.S. Southern Command."

is that warship visits to Honduran shores do not generate much press in the country's news cycle. However, this notion is easily discounted by two other U.S. port visits to Honduras in 2018 (USCGC EAGLE and USNS COMFORT) that generated several articles in the Honduran press.¹⁵² A more likely explanation is that the U.S. Embassy did not release an article on the visit's security cooperation aspects.¹⁵³ As observed in the AMERICA study, an embassy press release usually sparks several reports in the host nation press, which generally reflect the same messages of cooperation, support, prestige, and the like. The Embassy released articles for both the EAGLE and COMFORT visits, which likely explains their subsequent inclusion in the Honduran press.¹⁵⁴ Because the Embassy did not provide a press release, the GUNSTON HALL's visit was likely a missed opportunity to achieve influence as the Honduran press did not reflect the diplomatic messages found in the U.S. publications on the visit.

One article in the Roatán press that covered the COMREL demonstrated how events that target public diplomacy could be successful in achieving influence. The article quoted the philanthropy coordinator with, "we are very grateful to the sailors because they have chosen to do their community service with us, and that fills us with great pride because we understand that investing in these projects is investing directly in the development of Roatán."¹⁵⁵ In this article, the public diplomatic message is the U.S. is committed to the development of Roatán. While this signaling was a diplomatic success for achieving

¹⁵² "Buque de EEUU estará Abierto al Público en Roatán," *Diario La Prensa*, June 29, 2018, sec. Honduras, <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1192981-410/buque-escuela-eagle-eeuu-estara-abierto-publico-roatan>; "Presidente Hernández: 'Trabajo del USNS Comfort es una extraordinaria obra para atender dignamente a la gente,'" *Gobierno de la República Honduras*, December 9, 2018, <https://presidencia.gob.hn/index.php/gob/el-presidente/5107-presidente-hernandez-trabajo-del-usns-comfort-es-una-extraordinaria-obra-para-atender-dignamente-a-la-gente>.

¹⁵³ "News & Events," U.S. Embassy in Honduras, accessed February 20, 2021, <https://hn.usembassy.gov/news-events/>.

¹⁵⁴ "Buque Escuela 'Eagle' Llega Por Primera Vez a Honduras," *Embajada de Estados Unidos En Honduras*, June 27, 2018, <https://hn.usembassy.gov/es/buque-escuela-eagle-llega-primera-vez-honduras/>; "El Buque Hospital USNS COMFORT Con Misión 'Promesa Duradera 2018' Llega a Honduras En Diciembre," *Embajada de Estados Unidos En Honduras*, November 27, 2018, <https://hn.usembassy.gov/es/el-buque-hospital-usns-comfort-con-mision-promesa-duradera-2018-llega-a-honduras-en-diciembre/>.

¹⁵⁵ "Más de 20 Voluntarios Estadounidenses Colaboran En Proyecto Habitacional 'Los Sueños,'" *Diario Roatán*, July 25, 2018, sec. Portada, <https://diarioroatan.com/mas-de-20-voluntarios-estadounidenses-colaboran-en-proyecto-habitacional-los-suenos/>.

influence throughout the island of Roatán, it is unlikely that this event and its press had any influential effects on the Honduran mainland. The coverage was limited to one publication, *Diario Roatán*, which is a local newspaper whose readership does not extend much further than the bay islands.¹⁵⁶ This is yet another instance where U.S. Embassy coverage would have aided in extending the message throughout the host nation.

2. Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

The GUNSTON HALL moored to berth 5 of the Container Terminal in Port of Spain on August 8, 2018 for a three-day port call.

a. U.S. Relations with Trinidad and Tobago

The DoS describes U.S.–Trinbagonian relations as cordial,¹⁵⁷ and the U.S. Embassy in Port of Spain lists U.S. interests in the Caribbean country as “increasing investment and trade, enhancing Trinidad and Tobago’s political and social development through crime prevention and youth programs, encouraging its positive regional role in the Caribbean Community and the Organization of American States, and strengthening the government’s capacity to deal with foreign terrorist fighters.”¹⁵⁸ More recent concerns for the U.S. involve the humanitarian crisis in nearby Venezuela and the consolidation of the country’s relations with China. In regards to Venezuela, the U.S. seeks to ensure Trinidad and Tobago can handle the repercussions that stem from the crisis, which has resulted in tens of thousands of asylum seekers entering the country due to its nearby proximity (7 miles coast to coast).¹⁵⁹

As for China, Trinidad and Tobago was the first Caribbean state to sign on to the PRC’s Belt and Road Initiative and in recent years, the Chinese have undertaken numerous infrastructure projects throughout the islands, including the residence of the Trinbagonian

¹⁵⁶ Salwen and Garrison, *Latin American Journalism*, 104.

¹⁵⁷ “US Relations with Trinidad and Tobago” (US Department of State, August 31, 2019), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-trinidad-and-tobago/>.

¹⁵⁸ “US-Trinidad and Tobago Relations,” U.S. Embassy in Trinidad & Tobago, accessed February 6, 2021, <http://tt.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/>.

¹⁵⁹ Mark P Sullivan, “Trinidad and Tobago,” *Congressional Research Service*, In Focus, no. IF10914 (June 26, 2018): 2.

prime minister.¹⁶⁰ In the defense sector, Trinidad and Tobago has bought Chinese-made offshore patrol crafts to supplement its coast guard.¹⁶¹ The U.S. seeks to limit this PRC influence in Trinidad and Tobago, and the region as a whole.¹⁶²

Recent security cooperation efforts between the U.S. and Trinidad and Tobago have emphasized bilateral counterterrorism efforts. In 2016, SOUTHCOM reported that Trinbagonians comprised the majority of ISIS foreign fighters originating from the Caribbean.¹⁶³ In 2017, the U.S. aided Trinidad and Tobago in standing up a new counterterrorism task force by implementing a \$6.3 million program that included counterterrorism-specific training and equipment.¹⁶⁴ In 2018, the year of GUNSTON HALL's visit, the DOD provided over three hundred thousand dollars under the International Military Education and Training Program and 165 thousand dollars for a program that specifically targets the enhancement of Trinbagonian counterterrorism capabilities.¹⁶⁵ Excluding counterterrorism, Trinidad and Tobago receives aid from the DoS's Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) program. CBSI is a program that enhances Trinbagonian security forces in their prosecution of crimes and the country's maritime forces in their ability to provide port security and conduct maritime interception operations.¹⁶⁶

The U.S. shares close trade linkages with Trinidad and Tobago and is currently the Caribbean nation's number one partner in imports and exports.¹⁶⁷ Trinidad and Tobago has been the largest liquified natural gas supplier to the U.S. for several years. As a result, the

¹⁶⁰ R. Evan Ellis, "China's Engagement with Trinidad and Tobago," *Global Americans*, March 26, 2019, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2019/03/chinas-engagement-with-trinidad-and-tobago/>.

¹⁶¹ Ellis.

¹⁶² R. Evan Ellis, "China's Security Challenge to the United States in Latin America and the Caribbean," in *China, the United States, and the Future of Latin America: US-China Relations, Volume III*, ed. David B. H. Denoon, vol. 3 (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1pwtbs3>.

¹⁶³ Sullivan, "Trinidad and Tobago," 2.

¹⁶⁴ Sullivan, 2.

¹⁶⁵ "Foreign Aid Explorer: Trinidad and Tobago," United States Agency for International Development, accessed January 9, 2021, <https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/TTO>.

¹⁶⁶ "Caribbean Basin Security Initiative: Trinidad and Tobago," U.S. Department of State, accessed January 24, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/caribbean-basin-security-initiative-the-bahamas/>.

¹⁶⁷ US Department of State, "US Relations with Trinidad and Tobago."

small Caribbean nation traditionally runs a trade surplus in its partnership with the United States.¹⁶⁸ The mutually beneficial trade relationship stems from the 1984 Caribbean Basin Initiative and the 2001 Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act, policies that have eliminated tariffs and other trade barriers between the U.S. and its Caribbean partners.¹⁶⁹

b. U.S. Naval Diplomacy in Trinidad and Tobago

The Trinbagonian case requires two separate frames of reference when analyzing U.S. naval diplomacy conducted within the country in the 2018 timeframe of GUNSTON HALL’s port visit to Port of Spain. The first, a more zoomed-in examination on Trinidad and Tobago itself, reveals many of the same analytical findings observed in the Honduran case. Like Honduras, Trinidad and Tobago matches Luttwak’s category of latent suasion in the supportive mode for a couple of reasons. The first is that U.S. naval diplomatic visits to Trinbagonian shores signal U.S. support and provide a tangibility and prestige to continued U.S. efforts to improve Trinbagonian counterterrorism capacity. The second reason is the general unlikelihood that any U.S. naval diplomatic actions conducted in the country would seek to compel or coerce Trinidad and Tobago’s government. However, it should be noted that by 2018, the Trinbagonians could have perceived latent signals of U.S. disapproval for their growing ties with the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

Like Honduras, capacity-building, not interoperability, defines the U.S.–Trinbagonian security partnership. This categorization is due to the Trinbagonian military’s limited power and capability, which precludes meaningful integration with the United States’ much larger forces. Further evidence of this distinction resides in the large SSA packages provided to the country by the DOD.¹⁷⁰

The second frame of reference is taken from a wider aperture that includes nearby Venezuela and its ongoing socioeconomic, political, and humanitarian crisis. As Christian Le Mière notes, the same port visit can send distinct signals to multiple recipients, resulting

¹⁶⁸ Sullivan, “Trinidad and Tobago.”

¹⁶⁹ US Department of State, “US Relations with Trinidad and Tobago.”

¹⁷⁰ Sullivan, “Trinidad and Tobago.”

in different influential effects between the host nation and its neighbors.¹⁷¹ The argument here is that the GUNSTON HALL's visit to Port of Spain was supportive to Trinidad and Tobago and, at the same time, coercive to Venezuela. At the time of the visit, the U.S. and Venezuela shared strained relations. Just a year prior, President Trump stated that he had not ruled out using the U.S. military to respond to the ongoing crisis.¹⁷² In May 2018, just months before the visit, the administration had implemented new sanctions against the Nicolás Maduro regime in response to its anti-democratic practices and human rights abuses.¹⁷³ Considering the status of relations, the dynamic between the GUNSTON HALL's visit to Port of Spain and Venezuela matches best with Luttwak's category of active suasion in the compellence mode.¹⁷⁴ Essentially, the GUNSTON HALL's proximity to Venezuelan shores provided a tangible component to the threats and sanctions that comprised U.S. foreign policy toward Venezuela and the Maduro regime, even though the U.S. never listed any Venezuelan objectives for the port visit.

c. Analysis on U.S. Actions in Port of Spain, U.S. Press Releases, and Trinbagonian News Sources

During the three-day visit to Port of Spain, the GUNSTON HALL conducted KLE with top commanders in the Trinbagonian Coast Guard and SMEE between U.S. and Trinbagonian sailors. Both events focused specifically on improving dive and medical operations in support of counternarcotics and disaster relief missions.¹⁷⁵

Like the Honduran case, Trinidad and Tobago's port visit involved a mismatch between U.S. policy and the events conducted while the ship was in-port. As noted previously, counterterrorism is the focal point of U.S.–Trinbagonian security cooperation,

¹⁷¹ Le Mière, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century*, 23.

¹⁷² “Trump Does Not Rule out Military Response to Venezuela Crisis,” *BBC News*, August 12, 2017, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40906290>.

¹⁷³ Clare Ribando Seelke, “Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions,” *Congressional Research Service*, In Focus, no. F10715 (January 22, 2021).

¹⁷⁴ Luttwak, *Political Uses*, 33.

¹⁷⁵ “US Navy Dive, Medical Teams Begin Subject Matter Exchanges in Trinidad and Tobago,” U.S. Embassy in Trinidad & Tobago, August 10, 2018, <https://tt.usembassy.gov/u-s-navy-dive-medical-teams-begin-subject-matter-exchanges-in-trinidad-and-tobago/>.

yet none of the events included counterterror elements. The mismatch is likely the result of counterterrorism's omission as an overarching objective of the SS18 and SPS18 exercises.¹⁷⁶ The exclusion of counterterrorism events was a missed opportunity to match U.S. policy to U.S. actions and likely hampered the achievement of soft-power influence. As observed in Roatán, this is not a necessarily a policy or planning failure; U.S. leaders are required and expected to balance bilateral diplomatic priorities with theater security objectives. Additionally, the actions conducted in-port are still likely to have gained some influence as they matched the U.S. regional security policy of strengthening partnerships and building partner capacity¹⁷⁷ and presented the Trinbagonians with a message of U.S. amity, support, and commitment.

The U.S. governmental press releases on the GUNSTON HALL visit highlighted joint cooperation between the GUNSTON HALL's crew and the Trinbagonian Coast Guard and strengthening the relationship between both nations and their military forces. A press release from the U.S. Embassy in Port of Spain quoted the Chargé d'Affaires, John McIntyre with, "the SMEE is a demonstration of the continued, steadfast partnership between the U.S. and Trinidad and Tobago, which is characterized by trust and respect and based on our shared democratic values."¹⁷⁸ A press release by the SS18 public affairs team quoted the officer in charge of the medical SMEE, Lieutenant David Cruz, with, "the Fleet Health Engagement Team will conduct subject matter expert exchanges with military and civilian organizations to effectively share U.S. naval medicine's best practices and lesson learned."¹⁷⁹ The consistent sentiment across the press releases of cooperation, coordination, and training

¹⁷⁶ Hendricks, "Southern Seas 2018 Deployment Begins."

¹⁷⁷ "SOUTHCOM Lines of Effort," U.S. Southern Command, accessed February 7, 2021, <https://www.southcom.mil/Lines-of-Effort/>.

¹⁷⁸ "U.S. Navy to Conduct Subject Matter Expert Exchanges with T&T Coast Guard," U.S. *Embassy in Trinidad & Tobago*, August 7, 2018, <https://tt.usembassy.gov/u-s-navy-to-conduct-subject-matter-expert-exchanges-with-tt-coast-guard/>.

¹⁷⁹ "US Navy Dive, Medical Teams Begin Subject Matter Exchanges in Trinidad and Tobago," *Southern Partnership Station 2018 Public Affairs*, August 11, 2018, https://www.militarynews.com/news/us-navy-dive-medical-teams-begin-subject-matter-exchanges-in-trinidad-and-tobago/article_b0b6cb34-9de3-11e8-99ae-cb8bd798f1a9.html.

matches the visit's earlier categorization of latent suasion in the supportive mode and as a visit to build partner capacity.

Unlike the previous cases examined within the AMERICA study, only a couple of Trinbagonian news sources reflected the U.S. sentiment of cooperation and coordination. One of those publications was a press release by Trinidad and Tobago's government, which mentioned that the exercises conducted during the visit were "designed to enhance coordination in regional maritime activities and improve the operational readiness and interoperability of participants."¹⁸⁰ Regardless of the small amount of coverage in the Trinbagonian news cycle, articles like these still spread U.S. diplomatic signaling and influence to the rest of the government and population.

A success in terms of U.S. soft power, one article in local news included coverage of a COMREL event where GUNSTON HALL sailors worked with Trinbagonian partners to refurbish a military cemetery in the Port of Spain district of St. James.¹⁸¹ Under Joseph Nye's theory of public diplomacy, COMRELS, like this cemetery refurbishment, are symbolic events that generate strategic communication meant to enhance host-nation views and opinions toward the United States.¹⁸²

Other pieces, including Shane Superville's in the national newspaper *Newsday*, were more skeptical of U.S. objectives within Trinidad and Tobago. In his article, Superville focused on whether or not the GUNSTON HALL's presence in Trinidad in Tobago was actually directed toward Venezuela and its ongoing crisis and included quotes from the GUNSTON HALL's commanding officer and the U.S. chargé d'affaires denying any such connection to Venezuela and the visit.¹⁸³ The way the article is presented (facts-based, not opinion) and its title, "Not Here for Maduro," have overtones of reassurance to a concerned

¹⁸⁰ "U.S. Navy to Conduct Subject Matter Expert Exchanges with TT Coast Guard," *Trinidad and Tobago Government News*, August 7, 2018, <http://www.news.gov.tt/content/us-navy-conduct-subject-matter-expert-exchanges-tt-coast-guard#.YAXCfsVKj0o>.

¹⁸¹ "Military Cemetery in St. James to Be Refurbished," *103.1 FM News*, August 9, 2018, <https://www.103fm.tt/news/military-cemetery-in-st-james-to-be-refurbished/>.

¹⁸² Nye, Jr., *Soft Power*, 108.

¹⁸³ Shane Superville, "Not Here for Maduro," *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, August 9, 2018, <https://newsday.co.tt/2018/08/09/not-here-for-maduro/>.

public that U.S. intentions are strictly limited toward the islands and not Venezuela. This article is fascinating as it connected the Port of Spain visit and U.S. policy concerns in Venezuela. Superville's piece provides a great contrast to the amity-seeking cases in this thesis in its demonstration of how latent signals of coercion or compulsion can be received and interpreted even if they are not sought or specifically called out as a policy objective.

3. Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

The GUNSTON HALL moored to quay 3 of the Cruise Terminal in Cartagena de Indias on August 27, 2018 for a week-long port visit.

a. *Colombia Review and Contextual Differences from the AMERICA's Visit*

As a review from the last chapter, U.S.–Colombian relations are amongst the strongest in the region, buttressed by years of security cooperation and aid that targeted cocaine production and trafficking in the country.¹⁸⁴ The U.S. views Colombia as a security re-exporter and the partnership as a vehicle to pursue U.S. policy goals throughout Latin America without direct involvement from the U.S. itself.¹⁸⁵ U.S. naval diplomacy in Colombia seeks cooperation and builds Colombian security capacity, especially in counternarcotics and countering TCOs.¹⁸⁶ U.S. port visits' public diplomacy aspects reinforce positive views of U.S. prestige and support within the Colombian government and public, where opinions on the U.S. are amongst the highest in the region.¹⁸⁷

This chapter's introduction covered the overarching differences between the GUNSTON HALL's deployment and the AMERICA's. However, when narrowing the analysis to strictly observe the aspects concerning both ships' visits to Cartagena, one primary difference stands out: each visit's purpose.

Starting with the AMERICA, the goal of the port visit was the visit itself. In other words, the objective of AMERICA's stop in Cartagena was to achieve diplomatic effects,

¹⁸⁴ Hudson, *Colombia: A Country Study*.

¹⁸⁵ Beittel, "Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations," 24.

¹⁸⁶ US Department of State, "US Relations with Colombia."

¹⁸⁷ Corporación Latinobarómetro, *La Era de Trump: Imagen de Estados Unidos en América Latina*.

and the primary vehicle for achieving those effects was the physical presence of the ship. On the other hand, the goal of GUNSTON HALL's visit was not the visit itself, but instead the concurrent naval exercise, UNITAS 2018. Essentially, AMERICA's primary purpose was more geared toward diplomacy, whereas the GUNSTON HALL's focused mainly on security cooperation. This distinction is analytically essential because, as L.W. Martin notes, a difference in context between visits can significantly influence the effects achieved from their execution.¹⁸⁸

b. Analysis on U.S. Actions in Cartagena de Indias, U.S. Press Releases, and Colombian News Sources

U.S. actions while in-port Cartagena revolved around the execution of exercises SPS18 and UNITAS 2018. SPS18 involved a medical SMEE between U.S. and Colombian military medical professionals.¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, the UNITAS exercise included planning events for the at-sea portion of the operation executed in Caribbean waters after the port visit.¹⁹⁰ In the dichotomy of capacity-building versus interoperability, these events focused heavily on the latter. Though the core of U.S.–Colombian security collaboration is building counternarcotics capacity,¹⁹¹ these events still managed to meet U.S. policy toward Colombia and the region. The policy matched because Colombia maintains the military strength necessary to integrate into U.S. operations. Therefore, U.S. naval diplomatic objectives in the country pursue both capacity-building and interoperability, even if the former is the primary focus.

The GUNSTON HALL's port visit was significantly overshadowed in U.S. and Colombian news sources by the visit's concurrent exercises, particularly UNITAS. Most articles only briefly mentioned the stop in Cartagena, while details of the exercises were

¹⁸⁸ Martin, *The Sea in Modern Strategy*, 141.

¹⁸⁹ "US Navy Medical Team Begins Subject Matter Exchanges in Colombia," *Diálogo U.S. Southern Command*, September 14, 2018, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/u-s-navy-medical-team-begins-subject-matter-exchanges-in-colombia/>.

¹⁹⁰ Southern Seas 2018, "UNITAS Has Begun and We Are Coming Together with Our Partner Nations," Facebook, September 1, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/NavySouthernSeas/posts/1333350076834028>.

¹⁹¹ Beittel, "Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations," 27.

featured more prominently.¹⁹² Returning to the AMERICA comparison, the press' focus on the exercises resulted from the non-diplomatic, military purpose of the GUNSTON HALL's visit. While this may be detrimental to the visit's ability to achieve influence, it is important to note that naval exercises, like UNITAS, are subsets of naval diplomacy and, therefore, can also achieve influence. However, the diplomatic influence achieved through naval exercises falls outside the purview of this study.

Like the Honduran case, the U.S. Embassy's lack of a press release also detracted from the influence achieved from GUNSTON HALL's visit to Cartagena.¹⁹³ The U.S. Embassy in Bogotá maintains an archive online of past press releases dating back to 2014. If this collection is comprehensive, then both the GUNSTON HALL's visit and the broader UNITAS exercise managed to go unmentioned. Instead, the three listed releases for the month of September 2018 focused on Venezuela and Tropical Storm Isaac. A press release from the Embassy that highlighted the visit's merits would likely have shifted some publicity from the exercises to diplomatic signaling of the ship's presence.

The lesson-learned for naval diplomacy from the GUNSTON HALL's visit to Cartagena de Indias is that diplomatic messaging and the resulting influence of a port visit can be outweighed and diminished by concurrent events, even those that are a part of the visit.

D. FINDINGS

The GUNSTON HALL's deployment was not very effective at achieving influence throughout the host nations for a couple of reasons. First, the GUNSTON HALL's visits did not bring about a significant amount of publicity in host nation news cycles. The primary reason for this lack of press is the prioritization of theater security priorities over bilateral

¹⁹² "US Navy Medical Team Begins Subject Matter Exchanges in Colombia"; "Exitosa Operación Unitas. Participan 17 Buques de Guerra de Varios Países," *Mundo Noticias*, September 10, 2018, <https://mundonoticias.com.co/exitosa-operacion-unitas-participan-17-buques-de-guerra-de-varios-paises/>; Michael Hendricks, "Colombia Takes the Lead in UNITAS LIX, Hosts Multinational Exercise," U.S. *Southern Command*, September 1, 2018, <https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/1618525/colombia-takes-the-lead-in-unitas-lix-hosts-multinational-exercise/>.

¹⁹³ "News & Events," U.S. Embassy in Colombia, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://co.usembassy.gov/news-events/>.

diplomatic ones. The visits' main objective was not to achieve diplomatic effects but to meet theater-specific goals of strengthening security cooperation and partnership throughout the region. Another major contributor to low publicity was the lack of U.S. Embassy press releases in two of the three visits. Embassy press releases, like the one covering the GUNSTON HALL's visit to Trinidad and Tobago, have been shown to generate follow-on articles in host nation news-cycles that generally reflect the same signaling of cooperation, support, and partnership.

Second, the GUNSTON HALL's deployment was not as successful in achieving influence because the events conducted in-port did not match the overarching U.S. security cooperation policy toward the host nation, particularly in the visits to Honduras, and Trinidad and Tobago. As a result, both U.S. and local publications did not include U.S. security cooperation elements to the respective host nation. The resulting diplomatic message directed to the host nation government and the public concerning the port visit is substandard in achieving soft-power influence. For example, the exclusion of counterterror exercises during the Port of Spain visit was a missed opportunity to reaffirm U.S. commitment and aid to Trinidad and Tobago's burgeoning antiterrorism program.

Though not as effective, this analysis does not suggest that the GUNSTON HALL's deployment did not achieve some influential effects. As Charles Allen notes, even just the physical presence of a foreign warship in a host's port creates latent diplomatic signals that can influence the government and population.¹⁹⁴ However, this study into GUNSTON HALL's deployment does suggest that the diplomatic signaling inherent to port visits can be optimized. The optimization is achieved by ensuring the visits' events match U.S. security cooperation policy and enlisting the support of the relevant U.S. Embassy to generate press releases that have outsize effects on the host nation press.

¹⁹⁴ Allen, *The Uses of Navies in Peacetime*, 23.

IV. CONCLUSION

The following conclusion consists of a cross comparison of each case study's findings, recommendations to leaders and planners of the U.S. Navy, scholarly recommendations for follow-on research, and a bottom-line summary.

A. CASE STUDY CROSS COMPARISON AND FINDINGS

Ultimately, the port visits of the AMERICA's deployment to South America were more effective in garnering diplomatic effects in the AoR than those of the GUNSTON HALL's patrol to the Caribbean. Two sets of factors explain the difference: those of the deployments' characteristics and those of the visits' execution.

Starting with the former set, the AMERICA's deployment was inherently superior in two aspects: the type and status of the ship, and the transit's purpose. In regard to the first aspect, the AMERICA is an aircraft-carrying capital ship, the first produced of its class, and represents significant military strength. Also, the AMERICA was the newest ship launched in the U.S. fleet at the time of its voyage. In contrast, the GUNSTON HALL does not carry aircraft, performs a supporting role to capital ships (like the AMERICA), represents significantly less military power, and was over 30 years old when it set out on its 2018 patrol. The implication of these differences is that the AMERICA is better suited for generating publicity and has greater potential for attaining influence through latent signaling.

Transitioning to the deployments' purposes, the AMERICA's homeport shift was advantageous for achieving influence because it was devoid of normal operational commitments. Instead, the AMERICA's crew was able to focus on and devote time to the diplomatic aspects of each port visit. Conversely, the GUNSTON HALL executed its patrol in support of three operational exercises that each had their own specific objectives. The crew's focus and time in-port were split between diplomatic bilateral priorities and the goals of the overarching exercises of SS18, SPS18 and UNITAS 18. The clear implication, therefore, is a deployment dedicated to engagement activities will be more productive in that respect than one that features engagement as additional tasking.

While it is clear that the AMERICA was better equipped and purposed for achieving influence during its deployment, the execution of its port visits was also preferable to that of the GUNSTON HALL's. Three primary aspects of the AMERICA's visits had positive influential effects: in-port events matched and appropriately messaged to the overarching bilateral security policy, planning events that allowed for interaction with host-nation press, and coordinating with the relevant U.S. Embassy for press releases. On the other hand, the GUNSTON HALL visits did not involve the same policy matches, did not include many events that engaged local news affiliates, and only received U.S. Embassy support during one of the visits (Trinidad and Tobago).

It is important to note that even though they were analyzed separately in this section, the visits' execution was either advantaged or hampered by the deployment's characteristics. In this sense, the AMERICA performed well because it was set up for diplomatic success. At the same time, the GUNSTON HALL's execution of its visits was hamstrung by the competing exercise-specific objectives, which consumed in-port time and the crew's focus. This in no way implies the crew of the GUNSTON HALL failed; not all naval deployments have diplomatic aims. However, this study suggests that even those deployments that are not geared toward gaining influence can attain soft power effects as long as there is planning flexibility and capacity to do so. As outlined in the next section, some actions, like coordinating with embassies, do not require significant effort but can optimize a ship's ability to achieve influence during a port call.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Although both case studies yielded meaningful lessons learned, the GUNSTON HALL's port visits were especially significant to future U.S. tactics and policy. The patrol was more representative of the majority of U.S. naval deployments due to its routine nature and its inclusion of operational commitments apart from its diplomatic ones. Even though this study has shown them to be great diplomatic tools, homeport shifts, like the AMERICA's, are relatively sporadic and often do not involve the transiting of AoRs. U.S. naval leaders and planners should incorporate the successful elements of the AMERICA's

port calls into the routine visits of regularly scheduled deployments which involve priorities outside of diplomacy.

Along these lines, planners should ensure, time and resources permitting, that port visits contain events, exercises, and messaging that highlight and exemplify U.S. security policy toward the visited country. Matching these elements to overall policy simultaneously boosts the influence achieved from public diplomacy, while providing tangibility to U.S. commitment and support toward the host-nation.

Other events that are optimal for achieving influence and should be included are those that involve the host-nation media and press. These events allow U.S. leaders to shape the diplomatic messaging and latent signaling provided by the ship's presence and to eliminate any misunderstandings of the public in relation to U.S. intentions and goals for the port call. Another benefit of press engagement is that host-nation news spreads the visit's diplomatic messaging outside the port town or city and to the rest of the host country. This dissemination is critical to increasing the visit's audience and therefore maximizing the influence achieved through public diplomacy. To capitalize on this dynamic, ship captains and other U.S. leaders present or embarked during the port call should seek opportunities to grant audiences with local and national press. One such opportunity is provided by KLEs, which offer excellent settings for press engagement with both U.S. and host-nation leadership. Critical for diplomatic signaling, events like these often highlight bilateral cooperation and amity.

The ship's public affairs officer should coordinate with the relevant U.S. Embassy for each of the deployment's port calls to ensure the visits are covered by an Embassy press release. This study has shown that these releases are able to generate follow-on articles in the host-nation media, thus, increasing the visit's opportunities for garnering influence through interaction with the public.

Finally, naval personnel should recognize and mitigate situations where attaining diplomatic influence through port visits is difficult. These situations occur when theater or exercise objectives hinder the execution of bilateral diplomatic ones or when broader, more significant events, like UNITAS, overshadow the diplomatic aims of the port visit.

Whenever possible, in-port time should be managed to provide ample opportunity for accomplishing both diplomatic and theater/exercise goals. To mitigate being overshadowed, naval leaders and planners should shape their messaging to ensure that the post visit's diplomatic events and objectives are given attention in press releases and by host-nation news.

C. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should apply this thesis' framework to other AoRs to identify whether or not the same lessons-learned and recommendations apply for U.S. naval port visits outside of Latin America. Apart from port calls, further research could extend to identifying influence and effects from other aspects of defense diplomacy, such as multinational exercises, humanitarian/disaster relief operations, and sectors of U.S. security cooperation that involve the other service components.

Outside of security studies, the original framework employed by this thesis provides a new way to analyze and identify influence and, therefore, has significant value to analysts that focus on soft power and the effects of diplomacy. However, primary news publications that include coverage of port visits are fairly sparse. In order to expand the field, future research should include other analytical sources, such as social media posts, interviews of host-nationals and U.S. naval personnel, and opinion surveys. Of particular interest are after-actions reports from the relevant warship, embassy, or combatant command that demonstrate what success and effects U.S. military leaders thought the diplomatic actions had achieved.

D. SUMMARY

This study has shown U.S. naval diplomacy through port calls has been successful at achieving positive effects throughout the visited countries of Latin America. However, the analysis also found the U.S. approach to achieving diplomatic influence has been uneven and shows room for improvement. After analyzing two U.S. naval deployments to the 4th Fleet AoR, the thesis makes three primary recommendations to naval leaders and planners. First, the crew's actions and messaging while in-port should complement overarching bilateral priorities and objectives in order to maximize the diplomatic effects

of the port visit. Second, the ship's leadership and public affairs team should include events, whenever possible, that offer opportunities for interaction and engagement with the host-nation's press. This allows the diplomatic message to spread throughout the visited country, amplifying the effects achieved through public diplomacy. Finally, the ship's public affairs team should seek the support of the relevant U.S. Embassy. Embassy press releases have demonstrated the ability to generate articles in the host-nation's news-cycle that feature key aspects of the port visit; this heightened publicity increases host-nation awareness of the visit, allowing more opportunities to garner influence.

With the return to great power competition, naval diplomacy through port visits will only continue to grow in importance as a critical component of U.S. soft power. Naval leaders and planners should seek to maximize diplomatic effects and influence by optimizing their approach to visiting foreign ports.

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