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Chronicle / Mike Kavel

Host Jamal Dajani prepares for a report, with help from camera assistant Kyung Lee (left) and editor Chikara Motomura.

## A new accent on the news

San Francisco nonprofit Link TV's 'Latin Pulse' gives viewers alternative perspectives

**By Joe Garofoli**

Chronicle Staff Writer

American network television news programs barely covered President Bush's six-day, five-country March tour of Latin America beyond the usual offering of grip-and-grin photos. A few U.S. reports included a flash of the street protests that shadowed the president, yet most provided little analysis of the region's trade issues and growing anti-American sentiment.

The first few seconds of the show "Latin Pulse" make it clear that a different view of Latin American news is in the offering, starting with its take on the Bush visit. Produced at San Francisco nonprofit Link TV network, "Latin Pulse" viewers saw footage of police in intense confrontation with street protesters and heard analysts and activists describe the United States as a "wounded predator" and

Bush as "a criminal."

Another analysis segment pointed out that while the United States annually gives \$1.7 billion in foreign aid to Latin American countries, Venezuela recently gave \$3 billion to one country - Argentina. Then host Marcos Gutierrez asked its panel of Spanish-speaking experts to explain Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez's influence in the region.

Launched this month, "Latin Pulse" is a 30-minute bilingual program that culls the best from nearly 22 Latin American news networks in 15 countries. Made on a \$400,000 annual budget -- or a fraction of the \$10 million CBS spent to promote Katie Couric as its new anchor -- "Latin Pulse" aims to give Americans a different perspective on how much of the Southern half of the hemisphere sees their government.

Its target market is not only Americans interested in Central and South America, but new immigrants and Latino professionals who want to keep abreast of current events in their home nations. Univision and Telemundo, the two chief Spanish-language cable channels, may cover Latino issues in the U.S. but "Latin Pulse" producers say the popular Spanish-language networks rarely offer more than a snippet of news south of Mexico.

"The U.S. and the American public will never understand Latin America until they understand how Latin America feels about the U.S.," said Dante Betteo, a senior producer of "Latin Pulse" who was a Telemundo producer for a dozen years. "And all of this resentment and all these movements against the U.S. and against free trade -- if we aren't aware of these issues, then we won't understand the region



Motomura gets ready for the Mosaic Intelligence Report at Link TV.

and we won't have a good bilateral relationship.

"And when all hell breaks loose south of the border, the U.S. public is going to be wondering: 'Why? What happened? Those ungrateful people south of the border. We do so much for them, and look what they do to us?' And the (U.S.) media is going to repeat that song," said Betteo, who was born and raised in Chile, but immigrated to Alabama with his family when he was 15.

"Latin Pulse" is produced in the same manner as Link TV's 6-year-old, Peabody Award-winning program, "Mosaic: World News from the Middle East." Instead of relying on U.S. correspondents parachuting into a foreign land when all hell breaks loose, it relies on Latin American reporters to tell the story. News segments will be longer by television standards -- six or seven minutes -- and followed by bilingual discussion from experts in Link TV's studios in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

The show is getting research assistance from the School of Communications at American

University in Washington, D.C., where Spanish-speaking students are helping to monitor some of the Latin American news shows.

The next new episode airs at 6:30 p.m. May 10. It aims to begin weekly airings in July. San Francisco viewers can see Link TV on channel 27 from midnight Friday to midnight Sunday. In the rest of the Bay Area, it is available daily from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. on KRCB. The network can also be seen on Channel 9410 on the Dish Network and Channel 375 on Direct TV satellite service. "Latin Pulse" is distilled down to shorter pieces to be viewed on [www.linktv.org](http://www.linktv.org).

Link TV executives estimate that 5 million people watch at least two hours of Link TV weekly, which offers a diverse buffet of international current affairs and music programming. Despite its size and limited reach, they believe they are offering a vital service to American audiences, especially as mainstream U.S. news outlets continue to cut their overseas operations.

On the three major American

broadcast networks, which each draw at least 7.5 million viewers nightly to news programs, the number of minutes of foreign-based stories declined from 4,032 minutes in 1989 to 2,191 in 2006, according to the State of the News Media 2007 report from the Project for Excellence in Journalism.

Major newspapers, which traditionally maintained foreign bureaus, have been cutting back the past few years because of advertising and circulation declines. The number of newspaper-sponsored foreign bureaus has dropped 30 percent among small- and medium-sized publications since 2000, according to a 2007 study from the Harvard University's Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy.

Instead, many publications are focusing their dwindling resources on more intensive local coverage. As new Philadelphia Inquirer publisher Brian Tierney told the Washington Post, "We don't need a Jerusalem bureau. What we need are more people in the south Jersey bureau South Jersey."

As for Latin American coverage, "The networks cover immigration and drugs, and that's it" in Latin America, said Andrew Tyndall, a media analyst whose Tyndall Report, <http://tyndallreport.com>, tracks network news coverage.

The networks "didn't cover Bush's (Latin America) visit at all," Tyndall said. The reason: "All of their international resources are based in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has been that way since Sept. 11."

The result, say analysts: The networks show up in Latin America to cover a natural disaster, a political coup or to chronicle drug trafficking -- the sort of drop-in reporting that's known in the journalism business



Link TV staffers (from left) Cristina Gazan, Marlene Velasco-Begue and Dante Betteo archive Latin American news footage.

Link TV is available in 28 million satellite TV households in the United States. San Francisco viewers can see Link TV on channel 27 from midnight Friday to midnight Sunday. In the rest of the Bay Area, it is available daily from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. on KCRB. The network can also be seen on Channel 9410 on the DISH Network and Channel 375 on DIRECTV satellite service. “Latin Pulse” reports are distilled down to four-minute pieces to be viewed on [www.linktv.org](http://www.linktv.org).

as “parachuting in.”

“And when you parachute in on a story, you don’t get the nuance of the issue or the subtleties and complexities involved,” said Dante Chinni, a senior research associate at the Project for Excellence in Journalism.

Coverage of the region was more intense in the 1970s and 1980s, when U.S. political interest was higher, said Marlene Velasco-Begue, a “Latin Pulse” producer and a native El Salvadoran who coordinates the show’s relationships with Latin American TV outlets.

“For a moment, Latin America was hot because of the Cold War,” she said. “We were like this little horse between these countries. We were this territory that they had to control. Suddenly, in the 1980s, with the Cold War over, they dropped us.”

ABC is typical of a network’s overseas operations. It has bureaus with correspondents in London, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Hong Kong

and Islamabad. It has bureaus with no correspondents in Mexico City and Havana, its only Latin American outposts. The network maintains stringers in every part of the region.

Betteo of Link TV finds this turn of events baffling. “As a producer, I was blown away after monitoring all these stations after seeing all these news developments, seeing all this happening in Latin America,” he said. “And where’s CBS? Where’s CNN? For Christ’s sake they claim to cover the world. Why can’t I, as an interested American citizen, get this news and this information?”