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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

The Syrian Public Opinion versus Frames in News Media

A Thesis Submitted to the

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts

By **Menna-t-Allah Hussein Abd El Rahman Kamal**

Under the supervision of **Dr. Amani Ismail**

June 2017

ABSTRACT

The study aims at analyzing frames used by the media to report news about the Syrian crisis with the aim of understanding whether the Syrian voice -represented in public opinion data- finds its place in the media. The study conducts content analysis of 276 news stories' frames divided across two periods of time -during 2015 (Obama's administration) and 2017 (Trump's administration). A content analysis methodology is applied to three online newspapers: the American New York Times, the Syrian Syria Times and the Russian Russia Beyond The Headlines. Each of these newspapers represents the governmental stance and policies in relation to the Syrian Crisis. The study attempts to have a deeper understanding of the interplay of powerful elites represented by the governments of the three countries and the Syrian people represented in public opinion polls. The media's ultimate goal is serving public interest; however, and per the literature, the media can be used by elites to achieve wider acceptance of their policies regardless of the public interest (and their opinion in the matter).

*I Dedicate My Work To My Beloved
Mother Hala Fouad, To My Dear
Husband And Family*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	8
Chapter One: Introduction	9
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	12
A Brief about the Syrian Crisis	12
The Arab Region’s Particularity.....	15
Media and the Powerful	19
Media and the People	23
Media and Public Opinion in the USA	26
Media and Public Opinion in Russia	27
US-Russian Relations	29
The Syrian Voice	31
ORB Poll in Syria	33
Problem Statement	36
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework	38
Framing Theory	38
Framing and Power	39
Research Questions	47
Chapter Four: Methodology	49
Sample	50

Data Collection	52
The Coding Tool	54
Reliability	58
Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion	60
General Information	60
News Sources	62
Syrian Crisis News Frames	67
Comparing the 2015 Content Analysis to the ORB Poll Data81
Chapter Six: Conclusion	90
Study Limitations	97
Recommendations for Future Research	97
References	99
Appendices	111
Appendix A: The Coding Tool	111
Appendix B: Relevant ORB Poll Data Sheets	115

List of Figures

Figure 1: NYT News Sources in 2015 versus 2017 64

Figure 2: RBTH News Sources in 2015 versus 2017 65

Figure 3: ST News Sources in 2015 versus 201767

Figure 4: Problem Definition (NYT)69

Figure 5: Problem Definition (RBTH)70

Figure 6: Problem Definition (ST)71

Figure 7: Causes of the Syrian crisis 2015 versus 2017 (NYT)75

Figure 8: Causes of the Syrian crisis 2015 versus 2017 (RBTH)76

Figure 9: Causes of the Syrian crisis 2015 versus 2017 (ST)77

Figure 10: Comparison between total sample of newspapers and poll data84

Figure 11: Comparison between classified newspapers and poll data85

Figure 12: Military versus Diplomatic Solutions (total sample of newspapers)86

Figure 13: Military versus Diplomatic Solutions (Classified sample)87

Figure 14: Military versus Diplomatic Solutions between 2016 poll data and
2017 content analysis data88

Chapter One

Introduction

The opinion of the public is represented in various forms; sometimes represented in the elected head of state, other times in the media or through public opinion polls (Sparrow, 2008). Though the scope of Sparrow's (2008) article was the US, this applies to various other contexts. Not surprisingly, these three entities (the head of state, the media and the people) are not always in alignment; however, they all have their distinct roles at times of adopting certain policies.

In times of national security and foreign affairs policies, the government or head of state becomes the main source of policy decisions (Sparrow, 2008). The US President is the one who represents the public dominating the popular public opinion and opinions represented in the media. Not only does the governmental stance prevail, but also media tend to adopt the governmental stance in such times of crises (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson, & Sullivan, 1994; Godefroidt, Berbers, & d'Haenens, 2016; Hart, 2013; Sparrow, 2008). Moreover, the people gather around their government's decisions under what is called "Rally Around The Flag Effect" in case of international crises (Mueller, 1970).

Thus, it is safe to consider the government or head of state as the main figure representing the country at times of international crises. This also means that media, and more specifically official media, represent the governments' stance as the prevailing opinion of the country and are used to gather their national public opinion around their own purpose (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Mueller, 1970). They are also used as public diplomacy tools directed toward the international public with the purpose of influencing it (Hachten & Scotton, 2012). Despite the dominance of the government's stance, it is unusual for decisions taken by the country to

completely ignore the public opinion of the majority of the people whether on a domestic or a foreign level (Sparrow, 2008). This is where the important role of the public opinion polls comes in to determine people's opinions. The question that arises here is whether the public opinion of victimized people in any crisis is taken into consideration either by international forces or by their own government when adopting policies to resolve the crisis. This study attempts to answer this question.

The Syrian Crisis has been chosen for this study for several reasons. One reason is the involvement of powerful international rivals in the crisis namely the US and Russia, which enables studying the dynamics of the US-Russian relations as shown in the way they frame the crisis through media (Bayulgen, & Arbatli, 2013; Gerber, 2015). Secondly, the existence of comprehensive polling data that describes the public opinion of the Syrian people covering even the areas under the ISIS rule (ORB international, 2015) is another important reason. Although the poll was conducted in both Syria and Iraq; the Iraqi data was less comprehensive in covering the different regions. Moreover, the significance of the Syrian refugee crisis in the international media makes it of primary importance because of the implications of external forces' interference in the country's affairs in order to resolve the situation. Also, the conflict's nature and the ongoing war coverage increase the news worthiness of the story (Dennis, 1992). One more reason is the specificity of the Syrian case where the "Rally Around The Flag Effect" doesn't apply to all Syrians as they rally around different groups and interests in the crisis; and where their collective opinion about the crisis is lost in the fight for power. Research and public opinion polls are the closest to get to the Syrian people as it becomes more important than ever to know how the main victims of this crisis think about it and how the media, either local or international, frame it.

The aim of this paper will be to compare the Syrian public opinion to the news media stories regarding news sources and frames used particularly those regarding policies proposed to resolve the crisis and to see whether the Syrian voice is accounted for when undertaking policies to resolve the crisis. The study will also look into two different intervals of time to test for developments in media coverage of the crisis. One important notion to look at is the change in the American administrations between Obama's administration in 2015 and Trump's in 2017, which, in turn, may result in change of foreign policies toward the Syrian crisis. Another important notion is the change of the Russian degree of interference in the crisis between 2015 and 2017.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

A Brief bout the Syrian Crisis

In the realm of authoritarianism that characterizes the Arab region, people count on the media to get their voices heard (Hafez, 2008). In this sense, Kai Hafez asks in the introduction of his book *Arab Media: Power and Weakness* “Will the media articulate the voices of society and break the political near-monopoly of the state?” (Hafez, 2008, p.1). Three years after, the Arab spring uprisings took place in the Arab countries seeking change. Syria wasn’t an exception. However, its revolution escalated to a civil war between various factions.

The Syrian crisis started when the Syrian people revolted against the Assad’s regime in 2011 as part of the Arab Spring movements that took place in several Arab countries (Rodgers, Gritten, Offer, & Asare, 2015). However, the situation in Syria deteriorated till it became a wide civil war between those supporting Al Assad’s regime and those opposing it. The Islamic State ISIS extremists have further complicated the crisis through controlling large areas in Syria (Northern and Eastern Syria) and Iraq. The rising power of ISIS has led the US to take action launching an air strike coalition to confront ISIS in August 2014.

This wasn’t the first time for the USA to decide to launch a military strike in Syria nor was it the last time. In 2013, President Obama had decided to take a military action against the Assad’s regime after the latter had allegedly used chemical weapons on Syrian people (Kriner, 2014). This resulted in 1400 deceased Syrians. However, the US strike was cancelled after Syria, with the help of Russia, signed the mission held by the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to rid itself from chemical weapons (Rodgers et al.,

2015). Recently, however, Trump's administration has effectively conducted an air strike against the Syrian regime igniting rage from Syrian and Russian authorities (Ackerman, Pilkington, Jacobs & Borger, 2017). This action followed news about the Assad's regime repeated use of chemical weapons in Khan Sheikhun, Idlib. The US air strikes targeted a Syrian airbase at Shayrat.

Former President Obama's administration had followed the policy of air strikes with no on ground involvement in the crisis (Muñoz, 2017). However, in the early days of President Trump's administration, the policy of creating safe zones in Syria, which the former administration rejected, has gained salience. Although this policy is aimed at helping and protecting displaced Syrian civilians; it also increases the involvement of American forces in the conflict. This, however, comes after escalated Russian intervention on Syrian lands, which took place by the end of 2015 (Quinn, 2016). Russia, in answering the Syrian regime's call for help, has deployed military forces to assist the government in its war for power.

This brief on the Syrian crisis leads us to identify three main players in the scene. First, the USA who has, early on, taken the action of forming the anti-ISIS coalition and launching the military air strikes against ISIS; and who is against Al Assad's regime. Second, Russia who is taking the side of Al Assad's regime and deploying forces to assist the regime in its fight against terrorism on Syrian grounds. Third is Syria being the country where the crisis is taking place. The aim of this study is to analyze the media of these three main players and how they depict and take into account the Syrian public opinion in their coverage of the crisis in Syria as well as their bias toward favoring or un-favoring certain conflict solutions and frames.

Framing bias has appeared in reporting on the Syrian crisis since the early days of the uprisings. Hanano (2011/2013) compares between different framing used by two reporters who covered stories from Al Rastan town in Syria. These reporters are Sofia Amara, a French journalist, and Nir Rosen, an Al Jazeera English journalist. Her article shows how two very distinct frames could be used to report the same story. Of course Hanano herself wasn't completely objective in her article taking the side of the opposition. This was shown in her apparent sympathy with Amara's side in reporting on the Syrian crisis and her critical stance towards Rosen. However, several important points could be learned from her analysis. First, the media convey Syrian news in confusing, hard to comprehend frames. This makes it harder for the audience to get hold of the truth especially when biases take the lead in reporting. Second, independent journalists are not granted access into Syria, which helps in obscuring the truth. However, Syrian news stories are in most cases either covered by journalists approved and accompanied by the government or journalists who challenge the imposed position and operate in secret. Hanano's article, as should be pointed out, dates back to the early days of the uprisings in 2011. The situation doesn't seem to get better as Syria's press freedom was stated to be not free as a general status in 2016 (Freedom House, 2017). In addition, it is the only country with a negative aggregate freedom score of -1 based on the Freedom in the world 2017 annual report (Freedom House, 2017). Nonetheless, it points out to the important notion of framing bias, which is what this study intends to investigate.

Having gone through this brief about the Syrian crisis, this takes us back to the question laid forth at the beginning of this brief "Will the media articulate the voices of society and break the political near-monopoly of the state?" (Hafez, 2008, p.1). Although this question to be put in context relates to the Arab world media; there are examples of more balanced media even when

it has to follow a state-determined policy. The American Alhurra TV network, during the Arab uprisings was found to employ more visual political frames than its counterparts; the BBC Arabic and Al Jazeera (Bruce, 2014). However, and despite showing the highest number of political frames; still human interest frames superseded the political frames. To explain this, one could acknowledge the network's alignment with the US policy of showing political frames; but at the same time the network took the side of the people and showed their sides of the story through human interest frames.

The Arab Region's Particularity

When studying media and power in the Arab region, certain particularities should be considered. Jayyusi (2016) has attempted to gather a lot of aspects through research in various countries within the Arab region such as Egypt, Palestine and Tunisia. The content then focuses on certain media and how divides and rooted conflicts affect one another and eventually help shape a public that is very distinct than its Western counterpart. Some of these divides and conflicts help understand the context of the Syrian conflict. For instance the divide between the Sunni Muslims and Shitie Muslims, which is at the heart of the Syrian conflict, though not integral to this study. Moreover, the rooted notion of colonialism that the occupied Palestine has planted in all Arabs is one of extreme influence. Jayyusi (2016) gives the example of Hezbollah's use of this notion in their communications in order to increase support for their cause. In the Syrian context, this might be looked at from a different perspective where Syrian people empathize with Palestinians as they get killed, displaced from their homes and scattered in different countries.

Having discussed the particularity of the region, one important point to discuss is the role of the media in forming public opinion in the region. Ideally, media's ultimate goal is public

interest (Dennis, 1992). One extremely important role of the media is forming public spheres where public opinion can be formed through public deliberation (Habermas, 1974). Public spheres require institutional space where individuals gather to discuss topics of general interest and form public opinion. These spaces are represented in mass media nowadays. One important characteristic of a public sphere is that it exists apart from the government or the ruling elite. This is how the public shares and becomes part of important decisions taken with regards to public issues. Lynch (2003) asserts that Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere exists in the Arab world through satellite channels and the internet. He describes the Arab public sphere as being transnational in nature due to the old ties and common traits between the different Arab societies in the region. Although the public sphere in the Arab region doesn't necessarily result in policy shifts as described by Habermas, it still exists.

However, there is another view that provides a different conceptualization of the public sphere in the Arab region. Hammami (2016) studied the Tunisian revolution, which represented the spark of the Arab spring. He analyzed the public sphere through a mix between Habermas' conceptualization that is based on discussion and deliberation of ideas and that of Arendt's conceptualization that is based on ideas' visibility to the audience. According to this view, in order to study public opinion formation in a non-Western context; new theoretical frameworks should be in place due to the particularities of every society. In the Arab context, however, and regardless of the most applicable public sphere conceptualization; media should be studied for their role as representatives of the public and their work for the common good. This means that media should, in theory, be a space in which members of the public could represent their opinions and discuss public issues. This study will look into the media's fulfillment of this role

apart from focusing on the theoretical aspects of the public sphere concept, which is not the purpose of the study.

There are two schools of thought about the effects of media in the Arab world; powerful effects and limited effects (Lynch, 2008). Although the powerful effects approach of the media in the Arab world is the most popular belief; researchers in the field find the minimal effects approach more dominant. Despite the differences between the West and the Arab world in many aspects of life; they are similar in that their elite would probably blame media's powerful effects whenever things don't go as planned (Love, 2008; Lynch, 2008). This is despite the small role played by media in many cases. In the US, for instance, media are blamed for creating the demand for interventions or initiatives to end some humanity breaches that may be taking place anywhere (Love, 2008). However, when the US intervenes to resolve the situation by whichever policy deemed right at the time; media would critically address the policies used to resolve the situation. This is as if media framed the country to blame it whether it intervened to resolve the situation or not.

Many researchers believe in media's power in the Arab world (Lynch, 2008). However, no matter how powerful the media are; they can't by themselves be the leaders of change in societies (Hafez, 2008). Nonetheless, media have achieved one particular victory in some Arab regions in the pre-Arab uprisings era. This was seen in having more liberal journalism under authoritarian rule with some pretty clear red lines that should not be crossed. Other than these red lines, journalism was taking a more liberal form in some countries like Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Algeria. This was not the case for all countries in the region. Syria along with Tunisia and Libya represent examples of the most controlled media systems in the region. Governments in these countries had tight grips around press freedom. According to Hafez (2008), media in the

Arab world have a weak influence on the powerful elite who are responsible for policy making. However, media's biggest influence is on public opinion of the people.

In a democratic context, there are three approaches that describe the effect of public opinion on foreign policies (Lucas, 2008). The first approach denotes that public opinion affects foreign policies as powerful elites seek to maintain the electorate's happiness with their performance. The second approach contradicts the first by assuming that the powerful elite manipulate public opinion of the people to encourage wide acceptance for their pre-determined policies. The third approach argues that each case is different and accordingly the relationship between the people's opinion and the elite's proposed policies changes. This approach is based on changing contextual factors, which ultimately affect the outcome of whether public opinion will affect foreign policy.

The author builds upon this third approach to apply a model of public opinion and foreign policy on non-democratic authoritarian Arab countries that don't necessarily follow the Western model (Lucas, 2008). Based on this model, public opinion can either affect foreign policy with varying degrees or have no effect whatsoever. There are five factors related to whether public opinion will have an effect on foreign policy. The first factor is the salience of the issue and the duration it stays on top of people's minds. The second factor is whether the policy is contested among powerful elites. In absence of consensus among elites, public opinion can play a more significant role. Public opinion also increases in significance in the presence of the third factor, which is a unified stance among those who oppose a certain policy. The fourth factor is public mobilization against policies, which if occurred may pose as a leverage for those opposing the policy or it can pass without the slightest change in mind of policy makers. The fifth and final factor is represented in institutional regulations and rules that have the authority to govern and

limit any form of mobilization that may take place. These rules pose as a means to overcome any opposing views to foreign policies supported by elites. All these previous factors can either lead to public opinion marginalization or can lead to effective change of disputable policies. The author applies these five factors on Jordanian examples.

In the Syrian crisis example, however, the application of these factors may differ from time to time throughout the crisis. For instance, in the beginning of the crisis the topic might have been very salient. With time, and despite the continuity of the crisis, it may move further down the news agenda. Another example is institutional regulations, which would be very difficult to study in a country torn and divided by lots of fighting factions who have their own rules in their own territories. It can be seen from these examples that although the factors seem so simple; the Syrian situation is not.

Media and the Powerful

There are many cases in history that stand in support of the media's influence on shifting policies and public opinions. This is why media has always been under the control of those who are powerful in societies be it governments, big businesses, intergovernmental organizations or even non-governmental organizations (Love, 2008). This, however, doesn't mean that media don't play a role for themselves to push for favorable change whenever possible. It is the struggle of the media's role of serving the public (Dennis, 1992) versus the many interest-driven entities that seek claim over the media (Love, 2008) that this study seeks to analyze.

Mass media can be very influential if they were used by certain political powers. In Australia, the Northern Territory Emergency Response NTER was adopted as an intervention in lands inhabited by Australian indigenous people in 2007 (McCallum & Waller, 2013). This

followed an incident of child abuse in these lands. The Australian government supported the new policy to impose further constraints on indigenous inhabitants. The study conducted various interviews with people involved in policy-making in Australia. The politics behind this policy and other policies that followed were supported by the Australian administration that was then ruling the country. The interesting fact is the significant role played by the media in setting the scene for the introduction of the policy as well as pushing for it as the best proposed remedy for the crisis at hand. The author points out that at times when there are contestations in viewpoints about a certain policy with a lack of strong public opinion; media can play a very impactful role. This is equivalent to Lucas' (2008) second factor in factors affecting public opinion's impact on foreign policy where public opinion exists. McCallum and Waller's (2013) study, however, took place in local context.

The previous example was on a local level. There are other examples from history on how global media affected policy and public opinion shifts across borders. East German citizens who were exposed to foreign media and watched the Soviet Union loosen its grip on communism in other places, brought down the Berlin wall and eventually communist Germany (Love, 2008). There are two sides of global media influence. The author focuses on spreading democracy as an optimum example of the positive side of global media influence (Love, 2008).

While, on the contrary, the negative side is represented in the media's influence on public opinion to adopt unhealthy policies or to reveal state secrets, which compromises national security. An example of this is the incident of American hostages that were held in Iran in the days of the 1979 revolution. Though the US had initiated negotiation efforts to set free the hostages, media got their hands on the news and NBC was first to broadcast the incident, which hindered the efforts to release the hostages then.

While some view media's influence on foreign policies as a powerful determinant in many cases; be it in the right or the wrong direction; some have a more skeptical view (Love, 2008). This view argues that media are actually influenced by, rather than influence, declared policies or public opinion. Media's influence isn't as strong in all cases. There are many times when media's coverage of human rights breaches didn't provoke any change in foreign policies such as incidents that happened in Rwanda and Bosnia, which didn't have a direct influence on mobilizing the American government.

Media, nonetheless, have an impact on policies through impacting powerful elites who have control over policy making (Love, 2008). This influence, despite not being a determining one, exists. It is an influence that not only exists within any country's borders but also in other countries; hence, the logic behind studying international media and not only the Syrian national media in case of the Syrian crisis. As explained, media's impact is not a guarantee of a shift in policy. However, they could still influence how certain policies are perceived.

This influence that media exerts upon elites to change certain policies is perceived by some researchers as being more powerful on elites than they are in the opposite case when influence is exerted to manipulate people (Davis, 2003). This contradicts what Hafez (2008) describes about the Arab world. According to Davis (2003), the effect of the media on the public is minimal and hard to separate from other factors that may lead to the same effect. The author argues that this is partly why most policy-making processes take place in private between members of the elite and completely apart from the public who, according to him, don't have a say in it.

Although media's influence extends to cross borders in the era of globalization; it is not without difficulty that media strive to gather verifiable information about foreign non-democratic countries with strong governmental grip such as China (Love, 2008). Media in these countries are restricted by their governments. Foreign media don't have better luck having governments of these countries as their main source of news at most times. Exceptions to this involve risk such as journalists who work in concealment defying the will of the government. An example of this is the case of Amara (Hanano, 2011/2013) who went into Syria to report on the Syrian crisis in secret. Even in democratic countries, journalists who get news from elite sources are pressured by their dependence on these sources to do their job (Davis, 2003). Sources, in this case, hold power over journalists who fear to lose their sources and their guaranteed means to information.

Davis (2003) proposes a rather different point of view in studying media and power. He conducted 98 interviews with senior representatives of organizations, public relations specialists and journalists in Britain. His study proposes another direction of research in order to understand more communications and power. The study directs attention to elite communications with one another as the main path to policy making that mostly occurs away from the public's sight; but also in media. There are many reasons why elite to elite communications is more involved in policy-making than elite to public or public to elite communications that occur through mass media. The first reason is the dependence of media on elite news sources and the marginalization of members of the public. The second reason is that elite use the media as platforms to promote their policies and express agreement or disagreement with one another regarding certain policies. The third reason is that elites are highly influenced by media. The last reason is that elite communications mostly aim at affecting other elites with opposing views. This differs from the wide accepted belief that elite's communications aim mainly at affecting the public opinion in

order to generate wide acceptance for their policies. The author calls for studying the new elite theory paradigm rather than focusing on the public and the media's effects on the public.

Media and the People

In the influence triangle of media, people and the powerful; all focus lies on the media as tools of influence. While media's ultimate goal is serving the public (Dennis, 1992); sometimes it is controlled by the elite and this is substantiated in various literature (McCallum, & Waller, 2013; Lasswell, 1963; Love, 2008).

While media's influence on the powerful elite might not always be as strong as aspired by opposing groups; they have an established influence on the public opinion of the people in the Arab world (Hafez, 2008). This, however, is a two-edged weapon. Media, in this case, can be manipulated by the powerful elite to influence public opinion to be in congruence with pre-determined policies. On the other hand, media could, given that they maintains their independence, push for social change from within the people by involving them in the political discussion of general interest topics.

Practically speaking, media need to have strong relationships with its public in order to guarantee their survival in a world of cluttered media and their influence on their audiences. Dennis' book (1992) deals with the relationship between media and people. People are crucial determinants of media's success. The book discusses the relationship between media and people that appears in many fields. One of the book's chapters is of significant interest to this study and deals with media and people at times of war. The chapter, consistent with literature (Laswell, 1963; Sparrow, 2008), states that media at times of war and conflict work against their values of

objectivity and impartiality. With general public acceptance, the media report war news with a nationalistic tint.

Having established through various literature sources that media are controlled by the ruling elite especially in times of war and conflict (Dennis, 1992; Laswell, 1963; Sparrow, 2008); it can be safely assumed that Russian, American and Syrian media speak on behalf of their governments when dealing with the Syrian crisis. Studying these media outlets, the study seeks to understand how media frame their news when confronted with a situation where they either serve the public, follow the leadership or find a middle ground between both options. This, also, allows us to evaluate policies promoted by the three countries with the aim of solving the crisis in Syria and whether they take into account the Syrian people's voice.

For the sake of this study, the people or the public involved are the Syrians and not the Russians or Americans. Publics are defined based on different issues (Jayyusi, 2016) and for the Syrian crisis issue the public that is most affected and most concerned are the Syrian people.

The media exert a powerful influence on presenting and shaping the public opinion through agenda setting and framing (Sparrow, 2008). Ideally, media thrive to represent the opinions of the people, their problems and frustrations to put these issues on the Presidential agenda. At the same time, the media disseminate to the public news about the President and the country using its own frames, which are more relevant to the people. This balance that the media maintains may lead to serious consequences if the media leaned towards the rulers and presented their voice as the voice of the people. To back this up, Iftikhar, Ullah, Naureen and Ali (2016) have conducted 338 questionnaires in Pakistan to identify discourse patterns in relation to public opinion formation. The study concluded that media play an important role in determining the

quality of public opinion. The more a certain topic gets discussed on TV; the more people would talk about it; and the higher the diversity of opinions disseminated, the better the quality of public opinion formed. This shows the important role that media play in both forming the opinion of the people and in disseminating this opinion to both the people and the rulers. On the other side of what media's role should be like; there is another side where media are seen as manipulative tools used by the elite to control the masses (Hafez, 2008; Laswell, 1963). This raises many questions about the relationship between media and power.

Consistent with the above and more relevant to the Syrian context; Godefroidt et al. (2016) have found that newspapers in the US, Russia, Britain and France (specifically the New York Times, the Moscow Times, the Daily Telegraph and Le Figaro) adopt their government's stances in terms of foreign policies. The study has conducted a quantitative content analysis to analyze the news agenda and the frames used in covering the incident of the chemical attack by the Syrian regime on the Syrian people during August 2013. Other studies that focused on the US context have shown similar results in relation to the media's pro-governmental stance in times of crises (Allen et al., 1994; Hart, 2013; Sparrow, 2008). These will be discussed in more detail in following sections of the literature.

The following sections will focus on media and public opinion in the USA and Russia. The purpose of going through the literature concerning how each of the two countries account for their own people's opinion in matters related to foreign policies is to provide indications on whether they would account for the Syrian people's opinion.

Media and Public Opinion in the USA

The American media has a history of supporting the voice of the government at the expense of the public opinion of the American people when it comes to foreign military decisions (Allen et al. 1994; Hart, 2013; Sparrow, 2008). A critical point in history was the Gulf War in 1991. During the time before the war was declared by the US against Iraq; the media showed and supported pro-war public opinion (Allen et al., 1994). This, according to Allen et al. (1994), was inconsistent with the real situation, which was the existence of a clear split in the American people's public opinion between favoring and rejecting the war decision. The media, however, didn't show the opposing view; shaping a public opinion highly in favor of the war decision.

Also, in the years 2002 and 2003, the American public opinion in pre- Iraq war showed high opposition to the war decision (Hayes & Guardinom, 2011). Hayes and Guardino (2011) attempted to look at the reasons for this high level of disapproval to the war decision despite consensus among American elites on the necessity of the Iraq war. The researchers carried out a content analysis of 1434 news stories during the period from August 2002 till March 2003 aired on the night news shows of the three main American broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC). Moreover, the researchers used data gathered from nine Pew research center surveys during the same period. They concluded that foreign elites (such as the French President Jacques Chirac, UN officials and others) who expressed opposing views to the war decision in the media played a role in shaping the American public opinion. If foreign officials could affect the public opinion of the people; it is only plausible that foreign public opinion can have an effect as well granted that it reaches the intended audience.

More recently, in an Extra!'s (a property of Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting) report entitled "The Illusion of Debate Over Striking Syria"; Peter Hart (2013) concluded that the American national media, regardless of the US public opinion, were supporting military strikes against the Assad regime in the aftermath of using chemical weapons on Syrian people. In his analysis of the media coverage, 164 sources who participated in the media discussions were surveyed and only one of those was a Syrian (Zaidoun Alzoabi) who's from the Assad regime's opposition. Not surprisingly, he was against US military intervention in Syria.

Moreover and to add to the media's hegemony in the US, popular public opinion polls are mostly sponsored by the media and are reported by the media, which induces bias (Sparrow, 2008). While, on the other hand, academic polls don't get reported by the media as they depend on their own polling data.

Keeping in mind the US history in the fight against terror, a Gallup poll conducted in 2015 showed that ISIS and International terrorism come on the top of the critical threats' list to the USA (Swift & Dugan, 2015). Both items have scored 84% on the critical threats to the US scale. This correlates with the increased interest of the US to fight ISIS and any other terrorist group that might rise to power. This shows the importance of terrorism topics in the American public opinion and that they come high on their agenda.

Media and Public Opinion in Russia

On the other hand and according to Gerber (2015), the role of Russia in the Syrian crisis and its support for the Assad's regime has had little effect on the Russian public opinion with 14% pro-weapons sales to Syria and 14% against while the remaining percentage were neither pro nor against the weapons sale. Moreover, a small percentage of the population actually

follows news about Syria. Nonetheless, Putin's framing of the USA as an enemy to Russia influenced the Russian public opinion positively with regards to issues of foreign policy in general as it made them perceive Russia as having a stronger role on the international stage. Gerber, then, related between these two findings and concluded that the more Russians perceive the USA as an enemy, the more they are to support weapons' sales to Al Assad's regime in Syria and vice versa. It should be noted, however, that Gerber's surveys were conducted in 2011 and 2012 election seasons. The situation regarding Syria has evolved and changed drastically recently and also the role of Russia in the Syrian crisis has evolved. This may lead Russians to follow the Syrian news more closely and possibly cause some shift in the Russian public opinion.

Another explanation to the lack of Russian interest in the Syrian matter is the distancing effect. In the fall of 2004, following terrorist attacks in Beslan, terrorism went up in importance for the Russian public opinion to reach 45% (Polikanov, 2006). Polikanov explained that the public opinion after terrorist attacks tends to increase in panic; then goes down again as people adapt to the feeling of a distant threat. This fear effect can hardly be felt about ISIS in Syria for example, since it hasn't affected the lives of the Russians closely. The fact that Syria is not a neighboring country to Russia like Ukraine, for instance, makes it less important to the Russian public. This is completely different from how US people perceive terror threats, even those far from US borders such as ISIS (Swift & Dugan, 2015).

However, and in light of more recent events such as the crash of a Russian passenger plane in a highly probable terror act above Sinai, Egypt ("Russia plane crash", 2015), a shift in the Russian public opinion is more likely. In addition, the direct interference of Russia in the Syrian crisis as seen in the deployment of Russian forces in Syria may also play a role in attracting the Russian public opinion to the Syrian crisis.

US-Russian Relations

The interplay between the media, the public opinion and policy-related decisions in international issues is one of great importance. In order to shed more light on this, Bayulgen and Arbatli (2013) have studied the US- Russian relationship as portrayed in US media and found that cold war frames prevail especially in times of important international events. In their study, they focused on the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia where they content analyzed two American newspapers and used surveys to determine the public opinion. The study concluded that anti-Russia frames have affected the American public's perception of Russia as the aggressor in the war.

The Syrian crisis, rising in the news agenda and occupying the attention of the international public, is a good setting for the interplay between the media, public opinion and policies to be undertaken. The existence of both the US and Russia in the scene is expected to increase the hostile frames against one another. Since the literature shows that both the US and Russia view the other as an enemy (Bayulgen & Arbatli, 2013; Gerber, 2015).

For the sake of this study, however, two different periods of time with potential shifts in the US-Russian relations are to be studied. The first period is during Obama's administration. First, this period witnessed wide interest in the Syrian crisis that the BBC commissioned a public poll conducted in Syria and Iraq by ORB international, which was out on the 9th of September 2015 (Marcus, 2015). The poll was intended to uncover the Syrian and Iraqis' views on what was happening in their countries during this critical time in their history. Second, the Syrian crisis has had a huge impact that went beyond the borders of Syria. The Syrian refugee crisis has impacted many countries with an estimated number of more than 4 million Syrians escaping mainly to

nearby countries and North Africa (UNHCR, 2015). In an attempt to face such a crisis; the UNHCR has put The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-2016 in order to address refugees' problems as well as the most affected neighboring country-hosts of Syrian refugees.

The second period is after the inauguration of President Donald Trump, which may completely change the US -Russian relations. First, there are lots of speculation about potential ties between the new US President's win and Russian meddling into it. The CIA has stated that Russia has assisted the new President in winning the election by hacking his competitor party's emails (Gayle, 2016). Moreover, investigations concerning the President's associates' potential cooperation with Russia were in place (Schmidt, Rosenberg, Goldman, & Apuzzo, 2017). Second, the US President's popularity, according to Gallup, has gone down drastically right after his inauguration with 45% approvals and 45% disapprovals (Saad, 2017). It is worth stating that this is the lowest approval score any President had started his Presidency with and the highest disapproval score as well. On the contrary, President Trump's popularity has went up among the Russian people with more than 70% of Russians thinking that he is a "competent President" according to VTsIOM pollster ("70% of Russians", 2017). Third and more related to the Syrian crisis, President Trump's approach to resolve the crisis appears to be completely different from former President Obama's. President Trump seeks creating safe zones for displaced Syrians inside their own country as an alternative to accepting refugees into the US (Ainsley & Spetalnick, 2017). Though details are not yet clear, more deployed US forces would most probably be needed to make this happen.

The difference between the media's coverage of the Syrian crisis during Obama's administration versus Trump's administration is one that draws academic interest. Looking into these two periods of time will help unveil what policies each administration favors in order to

resolve the Syrian situation and how the media frame the crisis and promote or criticize the policy.

The Syrian Voice

During the early days of the revolution, the Syrian oppositionists turned to new media as their main weapon to get their voices heard (Harkin, 2013). Syrian activists such as Amjad Siofy were very active on the internet and produced many daring footage to transmit to the world what was happening in Syria. However, the new media could only do so much and according to Harkin (2013), these revolutionists didn't work on uniting the different sects in Syria on one goal. This, accordingly, led to the fall of the opposition in the early days. Even after the early days, Syrian activists' role was concentrated on three cultural brokerage aspects (Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013). Through personal interviews with Syrian activists living outside Syria, three aspects were identified. The first aspect was transmitting the Syrian revolutionists' voice to the globe. The second was uniting the messages in both social media and mainstream media. Finally, the third aspect was to cooperate with foreign journalists through translating Syrian voices and making them understandable by foreign publics.

We can conclude from the previous that Syrian people, who didn't find a space for their voices in Syrian national media, turned to the new media for expressing their views and sharing news with others (Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013). This was often done using special applications that would allow them to breach the security apparatus imposed by the Syrian government on internet use (Harkin, 2013). This is in addition to the role played by the Syrian diaspora in cultural brokerage (Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013). While studying social media and other internet-related platforms to identify Syrian opinion about the crisis is a valuable

method, the focus is on online newspapers as representing governmental stances. The study looks at how governments, as the ultimate actors and policy makers, frame the Syrian crisis and whether the Syrian opinion is considered.

The literature shows various examples of neglect to what Syrians have to say with regards to determining the fate of their country (Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013; Harkin, 2013). Neither media nor policy makers take the Syrian public opinion into account as an important contributor to decisions regarding Syria; even years from the early revolution days. For instance, the recent ORB poll shows that 49% of the sampled Syrians opposed the US-led coalition air strikes (ORB international, 2015). Nevertheless, this didn't stop the air strikes. Moreover, information provided by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights SOHR (2015) show that the collateral damage in Syrian civilians caused by the US coalition strikes reached high numbers and included women and children. Such information might partially justify the stance of those opposing to the air strikes. This is not to undermine the collateral damage and the Syrian lives affected by the Russian military intervention (SOHR, 2015). Nonetheless, the media continues to ignore the Syrian public opinion and the Syrian civilians' wellbeing and right to safety as appeared in the American media analysis that showed only one Syrian guest from 164 guests interviewed in media discussions (Hart, 2013).

Some effort, although very little, is in place to know what Syrians really want. In Lebanon, for instance, the Foreign Affairs website (Crostange, 2016) published a study that surveyed 2000 Syrian refugees trying to know what they think about the different players in Syria and to whose side are they loyal. Among the findings of the study is that Syrians don't favor foreign fighters interference in their country. The study also shows that a big number of Syrians are on the rebels' side.

In the realm of the rising Syrian refugee crisis that had a massive international impact; more attention to the people should be in place. Thus, the importance of analyzing the media at such a critical point in the history of Syria emerges. Additionally, the increased foreign interference in the Syrian crisis and their conflicting interests and stances in the situation as appears in the stances of the USA and Russia; as well as the conflicting local parties in Syria. All these make analyzing the different media that represent different parties of the conflict a very rich research area. This is in addition to comparing media frames to actual Syrian public opinion through the ORB poll data (ORB international, 2015).

ORB Poll in Syria

Public opinion polls have gained significance and proliferated in news media to the extent that they could be considered news in themselves (Medvic & Dulio, 2008). The poll data that is used in this study was reported as news in itself by the BBC (Marcus, 2015). This denotes the importance of opinion polls to both ordinary people who are parts of the public opinion and to policy makers.

Despite their importance, media polls aren't always to be taken for granted. Media need to report poll results from various sources instead of only depending on their own research teams or external polling partners in order to verify information from diverse sources (Medvic & Dulio, 2008).

More often media would report poll results without some very important information such as; where and when the poll was conducted, the sample frame and size, the sampling error, data collection method, exact question wording and order and who paid for the research (Medvic

& Dulio, 2008). These are some examples of missing information that are not usually reported along with the poll results in news media.

The ORB poll is a poll that gives us a rare if not otherwise impossible look into the Syrian public opinion from inside the land of conflict. It is worth noting that the poll was conducted in both Syria and Iraq. However, due to the explicit interest of this study in the Syrian situation and the comprehensiveness of the Syrian data when compared to that of Iraq; this research will maintain its focus on the Syrian part of the poll (ORB international, 2015). Among the information that is known about the ORB poll is the exact wording of the questions and their numbers and, thus, questions' order from the data sheets available on the ORB website (ORB international, 2015). Sample size and split across Syrian territories can also be known from the data sheets. In addition, the poll states very clear where and when it was conducted and that it is a research project commissioned by the BBC (Marcus, 2015). The poll according to the ORB's website was conducted in Syria's 14 governorates where the results were re-weighted to the demographic profile (ORB international, 2015). However and since census data in Syria was old, ORB used the demographic profile generated from its own recent research conducted across Syria. ORB interviewed the Syrian sample in the duration between 10th of June till 2nd of July 2015. The data collection method stated is interviewing (ORB international, 2015), which was conducted by a team of 40 interviewers and 14 supervisors (Marcus, 2015).

One missing piece of information that could not be verified by the researcher is the error entailed in the poll's results. However, according to the Washington Post that reported the results of this poll, the margin of error is equal to +/-3% (Raghavan, 2015).

Having gone through information about the poll; looking at its results, as an important addition to this research, comes next. One of the most important findings of this poll is that 70% of Syrians surveyed were against dividing their country and 74% of the Iraqis surveyed felt the same way (ORB international, 2015). This is despite the agitated situation in both countries. Also, poll results show that 81% of the Syrians polled think that the USA is the one behind ISIS, while 85% of polled Iraqis think the same.

Although another poll was conducted in Syria by ORB in 2016, it wasn't used by this study due to two main reasons (ORB international, 2016). Firstly, it didn't contain as much relevant information as the 2015 poll (ORB international, 2015; ORB international, 2016). It had less questions about policies sought to end the crisis or whom to blame for the situation in the country. However, among the important results provided by the 2016 poll is that more people are increasingly adopting the diplomatic solution to the crisis and rejecting the military one. In 2015, 51% of the respondents were pro-diplomatic solution versus 75% in 2016; while 37% were pro-military solution in 2015 versus 25% in 2016. Secondly, the timing of the fieldwork might have been affected by external factors that might have eased the situation a little. According to ORB (ORB international, 2016) and the Guardian online newspaper (Black, 2016); an agreement to cease fire was struck by the US and Russia by the end of February. The survey, on the other hand, was conducted between first of January and mid-February (ORB international, 2016). Talks about ceasing fire agreement between the US and Russia that built up till the agreement itself might have affected the results of the poll. The agreement came as an implementation of the conditions set forth by the UN Security Council in December 2015 to help put an end to the crisis (Abboud, 2016). Conditions included, in addition to ceasing fire, the transition of power from President Al Assad and facilitating access of humanitarian aid to those in need.

Apart from the beneficial and insightful look that this poll gives us about the Syrian people's public opinion; this poll also gathers data that lends itself comparable to frames gathered from the media about the crisis. Entman (1993, 2007), as will be explained later in detail has explained that there are four particular roles that should be achieved by media frames to have intense impact. These are defining the problem, causes of the problem, remedies to the problem and moral stances to the problem. These roles of framing could easily be compared to Syrian public opinion through results of the ORB poll (ORB international, 2015). First, the poll is about the Syrian crisis, which is the problem identified for this study. News stories are selected for the content analysis to correspond to this particular problem. Second, the poll identifies causes of the crisis represented in parties that the Syrian people blame for the deteriorating situation in their home country. Third, the poll provides results related to what Syrian people think of the crisis' remedial strategies or policies supported by the various countries and parties involved in the crisis. The moral stance of the frame used in the media is the only function that can't be compared to public opinion because it relates to the underlying base for a particular way of reporting news. This relates to the news stories themselves and not the public opinion.

Problem Statement

Media's role as public service institutions whose main goal is public benefit (Dennis, 1992) doesn't always reconcile with the fact that media are controlled and pressured by powerful elites in society (McCallum & Waller, 2013; Lasswell, 1963; Love, 2008). Times of crises are particular cases where elites control over media information becomes stronger (Allen et al., 1994; Godefroidt et al., 2016; Hart, 2013; Sparrow, 2008) with general public acceptance due to "Rally Around The Flag Effect" (Mueller, 1970). However, and as explained in detail, Syria is a particular case in itself and as part of the authoritarian Arab regimes (Jayyusi, 2016).

This paper will analyze media content of three main players in the Syrian crisis, which are the USA, Russia and Syria through conducting content analysis of media frames used in three online newspapers that represent each country. Newspapers are the New York Times, the Russia Beyond The Headlines and the Syria Times respectively. The content analysis will be conducted in two different periods of time in relation to the Syrian crisis; 2015 and 2017 in order to study the effect of changing powers in the crisis. The changes that took place are the non-existence versus the existence of Russian troops in the country and the Obama administration versus the Trump administration. In addition to analyzing media frames, the study will compare between these frames and the Syrian public opinion as presented in the ORB poll of 2015 (ORB international, 2015).

The purpose of the study is to shed light on whether the media, as representing their countries' stances, in their coverage of the crisis account for the Syrians' voice and opinion. This can be achieved through revealing media biases, if any, through analyzing the news sources and frames used by each medium and comparing these frames to the Syrians' opinion.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

Media effects' theories are numerous; however, Lynch (2008) emphasizes the importance of studying framing and agenda setting theories to get a grasp of media effects in the Arab countries. This study will use framing theory to determine the frames used in the media and compare them to the Syrian public opinion.

Entman (2007) defines framing as “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation.” In other words framing is about creating associations between concepts to provide a certain understanding of a news topic (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). According to Entman (1993, 2007), framing has to achieve four functions in order to have the intended effect. These four functions are equivalent to agenda setting and attribute agenda setting. He, then, explains that the first framing function of defining the problem is the same as setting the agenda and telling people what is important. The remaining functions of analyzing the causes of the problem, determining moral stances to the problem and proposing solutions are agenda setting attributes. Other researchers have acknowledged these similarities between the two theories to the extent that they question whether these are two distinct theories in the first place (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009).

However, according to Weaver (2007), this equivalency between framing and agenda setting isn't accepted by all scholars where they perceive second level agenda setting as more attributes than reasoning devices of an issue. Moreover, the two theories of framing and agenda

setting are based upon two different knowledge activation techniques (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Framing, on the one hand, depends upon applicability effects, which refer to applying a certain interpretation of a topic through drawing associations between concepts. On the other hand, agenda setting is based upon accessibility effects. When a topic becomes highly salient on the news agenda and people get exposed to it more often; the topic becomes readily accessible on the top of people's minds. Regardless of how similar or different agenda setting and framing are, framing is of a more comprehensive nature and is more concerned of how a particular issue is portrayed and presented.

Framing and Power

Theories of media effects are tools that impact public opinion. The question is who controls these tools. According to Lasswell (1936), the powerful elite control the media in order to control the masses. For instance, Herman and Chomsky (1988) have asserted that the propaganda model used by the US media works for the higher purpose of serving elite interests under the belief of an independent media. Propaganda is one of many tools used by the elite groups to maintain their power and control. Entman (2007) asked the same question of who controls the media and attempted to answer it through studying media bias and determining to whose favor. Shamai, Arnon, and Arnon (1998) found that the change in the stance of the press regarding the Israeli forces in Golan between 1981 and 1995 was followed by a similar change in public opinion, which refers to media effects on the public. Interestingly, the authors note that these changes follow the government's prior change in stance regarding the Golan situation, which refers to the role of the powerful elite.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that media frames' effect on the public is neither a guaranteed power in the hands of media personnel nor can it be expressed as the sole cause of

certain changes in policies. First, when building frames for news interpretations; there are many interfering factors that enter into the equation (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). These are social norms, news organizational pressure, external interest groups' pressure, work routine and journalists' unique way of thinking about the topic. While elites are seen as exerting influence on news frames building; studies in this area have found inconsistent relationships between news frames and the elite. Second, according to Lynch (2008), there are many reasons that may lead to policy change other than media effects. It should be put into consideration that separating media effects from other effects in society that might have caused policy shifts is very difficult.

Entman (2007) also emphasizes the notion of persistent patterns of news slant that bias the news to a particular side's favor. This leads us to question to whose benefit is the news biased in order to understand more how media are used as tools of power. Entman (2007) identifies three types of bias. The first type of biased news doesn't represent reality and provides fake facts. The second type is news bias due to the journalists' own predispositions, views and background. The last type, which is adopted by this research, is news bias that relates to favoring particular party or parties over others when covering news. Under this theorized bias notion is the interplay between the three theories of framing, agenda setting and priming. Unlike Entman's focus on national powerful elites in America, this study focuses on national and international powers with a focus on the framing theory. Framing can be used as a propaganda tool that maintains the elite's interests and keeps media on track to achieve the powerful elite's agendas (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Frames of interest to this study are textual in nature. Visual frames are very important and need more focus, which is not the concern of this study. However, some scholars have taken an interest in analyzing the visual components of TV news. Bruce (2014), for instance, has studied

visual frames used by five major TV networks covering Arab uprising news stories. He conducted content analysis of TV news shots from Alhurra, BBC Arabic, Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera English and Al Arabiya between December 2010 and June 2011. Among the findings of the study is the overall similarity in use of human interest frames between the different types of networks analyzed. While, on the other hand, political frames were more apparently used in Alhurra TV network than they are used in Al Jazeera and the BBC Arabic.

The following part breaks down framing to its four main functions and operationally defines them:

Defining the problem

Media coverage of news stories is systematically biased in selecting the stories to cover in order not to risk a change that won't sell (Love, 2008). In addition, news topics selection could be one of the tools used by media to conform to the norms of following their government's stance and serving their purpose (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Thus, bias of news topics could be for commercial (Love, 2008) or political reasons (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Selecting or defining the problem or news story is the first function of framing (Entman, 1993, 2007). For the sake of this study, this will be determined by the salient issue covered by each news story through the headline. The headlines of the news stories will then be divided into upper level categories of salient topics.

Conflict Remedy

This is the framing function of identifying solutions to the problem (Entman, 1993, 2007). In her analysis of the coverage of the Iraqi war, Boaz (2005) studied how media samples from the US, Canada, France, the UK and Germany framed issues related to the war. She asserted that there are two categories of macro-frames when it comes to international war or

conflict related topics. These are Internationalism/Realism and Militarism/Diplomacy frames. The first category will be discussed later in the morality frames section.

The second category describes promoted remedies to the conflict or war situation (Boaz, 2005). The first type is the militaristic frame, which from its name, encourages military interventions to resolve international conflicts at the expense of more diplomatic solutions. These frames focus on military officials as sources of news or important players in the conflict. The other frame type is the diplomatic frame, which encourages diplomatic talks and negotiations as the means to resolve conflict and would reside to war as the last possible option. It focuses more on UN representatives and international law. Results showed that while the US used more realist and militarist frames in news related to war on Iraq, other media used more internationalist and diplomatic frames in their news. However, during coverage of the Syrian chemical weapons crisis in 2013, Cozma and Kozman (2014) found that frames used in elite American newspapers were primarily diplomatic frames depicting efforts to resolve the crisis. This difference can be explained by what Cozma and Kozman (2014) explained to be the indirect US involvement in this crisis as, unlike Iraq, the US had no military operations in Syria then.

Having noted earlier that framing of international crisis includes visual framing as well; these studies use similar frames that add to the literature. For instance, Greenwoods and Jenkins (2015) have studied the visual frames that were employed in the coverage of the Syrian crisis by analyzing photographs that were used in 11 national US magazines. The photographs were sampled between the 5th of March 2011 and the 31st of December 2012 during the early years of the Syrian crisis. The study found that, inconsistent with Cozma and Kozman's (2014) findings, the conflict framing that focuses more on fighting was more dominant than the peace framing

that focuses on peaceful attempt to resolve the conflict. However, more visual peace frames were found in public affairs magazines than in news magazines.

On the other hand, Godefroidt et al. (2016) have found that both military and diplomacy frames occurred nearly as frequently in news stories as means to resolve the Syrian chemical weapons crisis. Given the variation in the employment of military versus diplomacy remedy frames in the literature, Cozma and Kozman (2014) have explained this by the level of involvement in a given conflict. This means that depending on the situation, governmental policies adopted by each government will change, which will affect news frames.

The study attempts to determine where the media bias lies in the news about Syria; building on Entman's (2007) work on framing bias, Boaz's (2005) and Cozma and Kozman (2014) frames of conflict remedy. The focus will be on four issues related to resolving the Syrian crisis and adopted from the ORB poll questions (ORB international, 2015). These are:

- The US-led international air strike coalition justification frame
- Division of Syria justification frame
- Military Solution/Militaristic frame
- Political Solution/ Diplomatic frame

The framing bias can be identified for all of the previous issues by a simple pro or against any of the issues. Moreover, this study will make use of the literature to determine issue-specific frames that are used to frame international war and conflicts. The justification frames will be used to identify reasons for these biases regarding the US-led international coalition and dividing Syria (Bayulgen & Arbatli, 2013). For instance; if news frame a pro-Syrian division stance in a justifiable manner explaining that it will help in war against terrorism, this will be a pro-Syrian division justification frame. The same goes for anti-Syrian division justification frame, pro- US

air strike coalition justification frame and anti-US air strike justification frame. For the preference of military versus political solutions to resolve the crisis, the Militarism and Diplomacy frames will be used as proposed by Boaz (2005).

It should be noted that both the US and Russia proposed military interventions in Syria to resolve the conflict with some differences. However, based on the data available from the ORB poll, the Russian military intervention can't be included in the analysis due to non-existence of comparable polling data in 2015. However, this option can be added in 2017's content analysis since the Russian intervention via on-ground troops took place by the end of 2015 (Quinn, 2016). Thus for 2017, the justification frame of Russian military interference can be added:

-Russian military interference justification frame.

Although another new policy that may be undertaken by the new US administration is creating safe zones for refugees (Ainsley & Spetalnick, 2017); this policy is more related to the refugee crisis than it is related to the Syrian crisis as a whole. Thus, it will not be included in our study.

Identifying Causes of the Problem

Cozma and Kozman (2014) studied the media frames used in the elite US newspapers coverage of the 2013 Syrian chemical weapons crisis. Through content analysis of the news during the month right after the chemical weapons incident, they identified various types of frames that dominated the news then. Among the scope of frames investigated by the study are conflict frames, economic consequence frames, human-interest frames, morality frames and responsibility frames. Of particular interest to the current study is the responsibility framing, which is related to framing of blamed parties for the crises covered in the news. Godefroidt et al. (2016) have found responsibility frames to be the second most prevalent generic frame in

American, Russian, British and French news about the Al Assad's chemical attack on Syrian civilians in August 2013. The most prevalent frame was the nationalization frame.

Responsibility frames were increasingly existent through blaming certain parties and attempting to resolve the crisis (Cozma & Kozman, 2014). Earlier in 2000, Semetko and Valkenburg analyzed the content of print and electronic media in their coverage of the European leaders' gathering in Amsterdam for the 1997 meeting. The most popularly used media frame was the responsibility frame in both TV and print media. Difference, however, was found between frames used by serious and sensational outlets or topics where sensational media used more human interest frames and serious media used more responsibility and conflict frames.

Moral Stance

This is the moral judgment or stance function of framing (Entman, 1993, 2007). According to Boaz (2005), these are Internationalism/Realism frames that can be found in international conflict news coverage. The internationalist frame allocates more importance on moral stances and abiding by the international law. It resorts to the war option only in cases of human rights or global cooperation breaches. On the other hand, the realist frame views the world as anarchic where countries use power to attain and preserve their interests. It promotes war as a solution to any perceived threat. This is very similar to the militarism/diplomacy frames. Moreover, according to Cozma and Kozman (2014) the moral judgment aspect of framing is often used indirectly, which makes it harder to identify. The aspect of internationalism/realism frames, which is related to leaning toward international law and abiding by morals versus leaning toward war as a one way option to solve any situation can be identified more clearly for this study through militarism/diplomacy frames. Moral frames for this study will follow another logic to be of added value to the study

For the sake of this study, which looks into the Syrian condition and the public opinion of the Syrian people, the human-interest frame will be employed (Cozma & Kozman, 2014). This means that for a news story to be operationally defined as moral it should focus more on the Syrian people, their side of the story and their opinions. On the other hand, if the human-interest frames are not used, this will be operationally defined as having no moral stance. In other words, the moral frame is either existent or non-existent in a news story. In order to support the logic behind this operational definition of moral frames, Cozma and Kozman (2014) found that the more Syrian citizen sources were shown in news articles, the more salient the morality frame appeared in the news. This correlation between morality and Syrian citizens as news sources is of high importance to this study. Thus, for this study both the moral stance and the sources of news will be examined.

Interestingly, most news sources or any people mentioned in news stories are governmental officials headed by Presidents (Love, 2008). Non-governmental sources and ordinary people don't get as much attention. This is a part of media bias, which according to Love (2008) are driven by a desire to cover profitable stories of the powerful people in society and to cover stories that are considered news worthy to journalists. Moreover, and consistent with the previous, news media are also dependent on elite sources (Davis, 2003). For this study, sources will be divided into official and non-official with an additional option when the source is not clearly identified. Official sources are usually policy makers and those- who as news sources- represent others such as the government, organization or political parties.

Moral frames according to the literature are scarce in news stories. Cozma and Kozman (2014) found human-interest frames and morality frames to be scarce. Studies conducted by Godefroidt et al. (2016) and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) have held similar results. This can

be explained by the distance effect of the Syrian crisis to countries like the US or European countries and the inability of foreign journalists to interview Syrians (Godefroidt et al., 2016).

However, this might not be the case for the Syrian journalists.

Research Questions

Based on framing's four main functions as described by Entman (1993, 2007); the study sets the following research questions:

RQ1: How was resolving the Syrian Crisis framed in the Syrian, American and Russian media during 2015 and 2017, and how does such framing compare/contrast with poll data representing the Syrian public opinion on resolving the crisis?

The comparison between the findings of the content analysis and results of the ORB opinion poll in 2015 will be used to see whether and how the media are biased from the Syrian people's stance in the polling data and to whose favor. This builds upon framing as a tool of power that is used to bias the news in a certain side's favor (Entman, 2007). In addition, the research will also compare two intervals of time to look at the changes and developments that took place in people's opinion about the crisis and in how media is in accordance or biased from what people think.

RQ2: How did the media's coverage of the crisis change from 2015 to 2017 in terms of framing bias with its four functions and accounting for the Syrian voice?

Pointing out the media's bias will help in adding to bias research corpus. This also serves in determining who the powerful actors in the Syrian crisis are and how do they approach policies in resolving the crisis. Most importantly, this research will help determine whether such

policies take into account the Syrian public opinion. This will, also, shed some light on the role of the US-Russian adversary in the crisis. This brings us to the last research question.

RQ3: How can comparing the media framing of the Syrian crisis to the Syrian stance (gathered from the poll data) be used to further understand the struggles of power within the crisis?

Chapter Four

Methodology

Since the research seeks to study how media report and frame the Syrian crisis and whether they take account of the Syrian voice; the best method to analyze media is content analysis. Research analyzing content of Arab media is very little (Lynch, 2008). Analyzing the media content of the three countries (Syria, Russia and the USA) will help to quantitatively compare between the framing aspects used in each of these media.

In addressing the topic of content analysis studies in the Arab region, Ayish (2008) surveys more than 100 studies of content analysis that took place in Arab countries. He divides these studies into nine main categories. One of which is media and military conflicts. The author argues that studies in this category lack discussing the politics behind specific framing used by various media in times of conflict. This study, however, seeks to analyze the content of media, specifically frames used to cover Syrian crisis news, that represent key countries with different interests, political backgrounds and policies to resolve the crisis.

This study seeks to address the correlation between the independent variable of the newspaper analyzed and the dependent variable of the kind of frames used. The independent variable will be one of the three newspapers: the New York Times, the Russia Beyond The Headlines and the Syrian Times. Each newspaper from these stands for the political stance of its government in relation to the Syrian crisis. This political orientation will affect the frames used in the news stories and these frames represent the dependent variables of this study.

Sample

In order to capture the different frames disseminated by the three important players in the scene (Syria, Russia and the USA); the researcher selected three newspapers based on some criteria. First, these newspapers should be online and in English in order to insure international reach. Second, they have to be either official or the closest thing to official newspapers so that they would represent the government's stance toward the Syrian crisis. Applying these criteria, the three selected newspapers for the content analysis will be the Syria Times ST, the Russia Beyond The Headlines RBTH and the New York Times NYT.

The Syria Times is an online official English newspaper that represents the Syrian government's stance and is associated to the Syrian ministry of information according the Syria Times website ("About us", 2012). The Russia Beyond The Headlines RBTH is an online news platform that was launched by the Rossiyskaya Gazeta (The Russian Gazette) in 2007 ("Russia Beyond The Headlines", n.d.). Although the RBTH's website doesn't directly say that it's an official news service, the Russian Gazette, which launched the service is a Russian official newspaper ("About the newspaper", n.d.). Finally, the New York Times is the American newspaper chosen for the sample. Since there are no official newspapers in the same sense as the Syrian and Russian newspapers; the researcher selected the New York Times newspaper. It was chosen because it is considered a US elite newspaper to guarantee a closer stance to the government's position (Auerbach & Bloch-Elkon, 2005).

After selecting the newspapers, the researcher selected days to include as a sample from the three newspapers during the specified period of the study. The study employed the systematic random sample technique randomly selecting the starting date for each period and selecting the

sampled news stories accordingly. Newspapers' days will be selected every 6th day to represent stories from the various weeks of the period from the first of July till the end of October 2015. The number 6 was selected to avoid periodicity if every 7th day was employed. On the other hand, the number 3 was selected to cover the second period from 20th January 2017 till end of March 2017. Stories will be analyzed every 3rd day during the second period because it is shorter than the first one and sufficient stories are needed to have a better representative sample.

News stories were selected based on searching with the word "Syria" in the New York Times using the LexisNexis database. All news stories selected had URL links at the bottom to make sure they were online. Only news from the newspaper was added excluding news from the NYT web blog. On the other hand, the Russia Beyond The Headlines and the Syria Times websites were used to find the news stories by going through the history of news stories published on the sampled dates. This way is more thorough than searching with the word Syria. In Syria Times, this process was repeated 3 times because the website searches per news partition and news stories were divided into three partitions; local, regional and world.

From the resulting news stories, only those that are related to the crisis in Syria were selected including stories happening in Syria or elsewhere. The Syrian crisis is defined as the events, debates, talks, fights and conflicts taking place between different factions and countries that are playing part in the conflict. For example, the Syrian refugee crisis isn't the core of the crisis that is the concern of this study. So if a story discusses refugee flow to other countries with concentration on the other countries not Syria, they are not covered in the analysis. The reason for this is that the frames that are tested and the data needed to be compared to the poll will not be found in these stories. Another important criterion that was applied when selecting the news

stories is that they should not be opinionated in order to test for news frames apart from personal or editorial slant.

News stories tested in 2017 presented certain challenge in the selection process. Many of the news stories from the RBTH and NYT were talking about many topics at once or talking about a more comprehensive topic that mentions the Syrian crisis in some part of the story. In these cases, the news stories were selected as part of the sample in case they sufficiently cover the Syrian crisis to allow for analysis. News stories, based on this premise, should talk about the Syrian crisis in more than a couple of sentences. It has to dedicate an adequate part of the story to the crisis either in one position or in scattered positions along the story so as to be coded.

Having applied the criteria mentioned above, the resulting sample is 131 news stories during the first period of 2015; 74 from Syria Times ST, 31 from Russia Beyond The Headlines RBTH and 26 from News York Times NYT. News stories sample during the second period of 2017 are 145; 113 from ST, 12 from RBTH and 20 from the NYT.

Data Collection

The study will use content analysis of three online newspapers; the Syria Times as a representative of the Syrian government; the New York Times as a representative of the US situation in the Syrian matter and the Russia Beyond The Headlines RBTH as a representative of the Russian stance in the situation. The study is concerned with news only in order to see how the framing of the Syrian crisis is used apart from opinionated pieces. The aim is to exclude any personal opinions in the matter and to grasp the medium's way of coverage and the dominant frames used. Also, this helps isolate the frames that are used in a more general nature from those used in relation to a certain author's background.

The study will analyze two different time intervals; 2015 and 2017. In 2015, the study will focus on the period from the beginning of July till the end of October. The reasons for selecting this period is the fact that the poll was conducted in July (ORB international, 2015) and the results came out to the news in the beginning of September (Marcus, 2015). This will provide a means to look at news at different intervals of time; at the time the data was gathered and at the time the results went public. While in 2017, the content analysis will be conducted in the time period from 20th January 2017 till end of March 2017 in order to cover news frames during the new rule of President Trump and to compare between Obama's administration and Trump's administration. The sample starts on the 20th as it's the day Trump officially came to office.

The following are important points that should be accounted for methodologically. First, given that the focus of this research is textual analysis; photos with their caption and sources were not part of the analysis. Also, videos that might be accompanying news stories were not analyzed. Second, when identifying news sources, if a medium cites a news source, the news source who delivers the information is counted not the medium. There are cases, however, when the media are the main sources of information in the news story. In other words, when there are two sources; one citing the other; the researcher counts the second one who is the main informer. For example, if Reuters cited a military source, the military source is counted not Reuters.

Third, whenever the news stories cite reports or studies as sources, these will be coded under their producers, for example a United Nations report will be coded under international community. However, when reports are mentioned without identifying their producer, they are placed under "Others". Fourth, any media mentioned as sources are not coded as official sources. This builds on the premise that media, even official media, may represent various view points and cite different sources. Fifth, in the RBTH, there were "press digest" news pieces in 2015.

Press Digest is a summary of various news stories or topics covered by different media. Only the parts related to Syria, if found, were analyzed using the sub headline because the press digest's main headline may sometimes be unrelated to the Syrian story at hand. Although the press digest is identified by the RBTH website as "a selection of views from leading Russian media on international events"; they are not opinionated pieces.

The Coding Tool

The coding sheet that was used for this study, as appears in appendix A, consisted of three parts. The first part is the "General Information" part. This part includes basic information about the date of the news story, its number and whether it is from a news agency. The second part includes information about the "news sources" including how many they are, who they are, who they represent and whether they are official. The final part is the "Framing" part, which includes the four functions of framing; the problem definition, the conflict remedy, the causes of the Syrian crisis and the moral stances related to the crisis.

Given that these four functions of framing have been discussed in the theoretical framework, the following part will present operational definitions of each function and how they will be assessed using the coding sheet. Also, operational definitions will be provided for other required information in the coding sheet.

The general information section

This section only requires giving the news story a number for ease of coding; selecting the newspaper from which the story is taken and stating the date of the news story. Then it asks about the news agency, which is defined as follows:

- **News Agency:** This identifies a news agency if the whole news story is taken from it.

This means the news agency is not an in-text source but is either written in the top or the bottom of the news story.

Sources section

- **Number of sources used:** This presents the number of sources used in the news story. Multiple sources of the same type should be counted separately. For example; if the story cites a UN committee and a UNESCO Source. They are both coded as international community but are counted as 2 separate sources. In stories that cover more than one topic including the Syrian crises, all news sources are coded.
- **Who they represent:** This identifies the party that the news source represents. For example Mr. Putin represents the Russian government. There are 16 options for this question.
- **Specific Source identity:** This can be identified as the names of sources whose names appear in the news stories to specify which sources news may be dependent upon for news information.
- **Official sources:** Those who speak on behalf of a group or who are representatives in authoritative posts. This operationalization is based on the dictionary definition and adapted to focus on official representation of the source (Official, 2015).
 - It should be noted here that media sources are always coded as non-official.

Framing section

- **The problem definition:** Is the main problem, news or other issue discussed in the news story (Entman, 1993, 2007). These will be determined through the headlines of the news stories because they are the most salient and indicative statements in any news story. These headlines will then be classified into higher level classifications to determine the most salient news topics or problems.
- **Conflict Remedy Framing:** These are the remedies of the problem discussed in the news story as part of the crisis. These will be put in two categories of frames; justification frames and militarism/diplomacy frames.
 - **Justification frames:** A justification frame will include reasons to justify certain biases regarding the US-led international coalition and dividing Syria (Bayulgen & Arbatli, 2013). The optional answers are as follows; pro- US air strike coalition justification frame, anti-US air strike coalition justification frame, pro-division of Syria justification frame and anti-division of Syria justification frame. In the 2017 period, two more justification frames were added. These are pro-Russian military interference justification frame and anti- Russian military interference justification frame. A news story can have one or more justification frame.
 - **Militarism/Diplomacy Frames:** These will include two optional remedies to the Syrian crisis, which are the military solution frame and the political/diplomatic solution frame (Boaz, 2015). The military solution frame promotes military means to solve crises. The diplomatic frame promotes diplomatic talks and negotiations as the means to end crises. In news stories where both frames are proposed, the

most prevalent frame should be coded. If both frames are equally appearing, both can be coded.

- **Causes of the Syrian Crisis:** These are based on the idea of the responsibility frames identified by Cozma and Kozman (2014). These will be determined on the basis of “whom” not “what” the news story assigns blame to in the salient issues discussed. The focus will be on the “whom” aspect of the causes in order to present comparable data to the poll. However, sometimes a news story may blame a report by the UN, this is a “what” not a “whom” but it should be coded as it refers to the UN. The “Others” option is selected in case other parties that aren’t among these options were blamed for the crisis. Options for this part are based on the poll. However, some options were added for their importance such as the American government and the Russian government and others were added for their increased occurrence such as the “unspecified terrorists and extremists” option and the “Western countries” option. In stories that cover more than one topic including the Syrian crises, only causes that are related to the Syrian crisis are coded including causes that might be common between the Syrian crisis and the other topic in the news story.
- **Moral stances on the crisis:** This is the moral judgment framing presented by the news story (Entman, 1993, 2007). This will be measured based on “the human-interest frame” (the human-interest frame will operationally signify a moral frame that accounts for the Syrian people, their side of the story, their opinions and losses on their side) and “the number of Syrian citizen sources” (Cozma & Kozman, 2014).

Reliability

10.5% of the 276 news stories analyzed during 2015 and 2017 were re-coded by an independent coder to test for inter-coder reliability (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The study used Holsti's formula to calculate the reliability score for the nominal variables in the coding tool. In order to prevent the inter-effect of the various tested items on one another, each item on the coding tool has its own reported reliability score.

The items varied in terms of agreement between the two coders from being easily agreed upon items to being of less agreeable nature. Nonetheless, all items were within the accepted range of reliability scores using Holsti's formula (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Items that showed the highest agreement were the easiest to code. These were the online newspaper (NYK, RBTH or ST); date of the news story; whether the story was taken from a news agency and which agency; names of specific sources mentioned in the news stories, which came under the variable "specific source identity" and the problem definition variable, which depended on coding the headline of the news stories. All these scored 1 on reliability. Another variable that had a score of 1 on reliability measure is the human-interest frame variable. Although these items are not as easy as the previous ones and require more judgmental input from the coder; they were apparently stated in news stories in a way that makes them difficult to miss. Moreover, the two others options in who the sources represent variable and in the causes of the crisis variable were treated as separate variables when calculating reliability. Both scored 1.

The rest of the items had less reliability scores but all within the acceptable range of reliability based on Holsti's equation. These are variables of who the news sources represent based on pre-determined categories of classification (=0.93); whether the sources are official or

non-official (=0.93), justification frames if present (=0.93), militarism/diplomacy frames if present (=0.97) and causes of the Syrian crisis as mentioned in the news stories (=0.97).

The coding tool also contained two ratio variables that couldn't be tested using Holsti's formula for nominal data. Thus, Krippendorff's alpha was calculated for these two variables (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The number of sources variable scored 0.978; while the number of Syrian citizen sources scored 1.

In order to calculate the reliability score for the whole tool, the researcher re-calculated Krippendorff's alpha for the nominal variables as well. The online newspaper variable, date of the news story, the news agency variables, the specific sources identity variable and the problem definition variable all scored 1 on Krippendorff's reliability. Human-interest frames variable as well as number of Syrian citizen sources scored 1 as well. On the other hand, who the sources represent scored 0.977, official versus non-official sources scored 0.923, justification frames scored 0.725, military/diplomatic frames scored 0.948 and causes of the crisis scored 0.962. There were 2 "others" options in the coding tool, one for who the sources represent and one for the causes. Both options scored 1 and were accounted for in calculating the reliability score of the tool. The overall reliability score of the tool is 0.968.

Chapter Five

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the content analysis will be discussed below in three parts based on the coding instrument's sections; general information, sources and frames. These will be discussed below in comparing between 2015 and 2017's results for the three newspapers. The aim of this analysis is to identify media bias, if any, in reporting on the Syrian crisis.

According to Entman's (2007) definition of bias, he asserts that it is the use of media in disseminating systematic persistent messages to the people with the purpose of increasing a certain party's power over the legitimate governmental power. For the sake of this study, however, the Syrian government will be considered equal to its American and Russian counterparts and not as the legitimate governmental power. This is due to two reasons. First, the question of the Syrian government's legitimacy and its incomplete control over the country renders its power effective in some areas and not in others. Second, this study is looking at the interplay between international powers and not national ones fighting for more influence over the government.

General Information

The study conducted content analysis of a total number of 276 news stories covering the Syrian crisis. These were taken from the three newspapers that represent three important powers that play integral parts in the crisis. Newspapers are the American "New York Times", the Russian "Russia Beyond The Headlines" and the Syrian "Syria Times". Most of the news stories originated from ST due to its centrality on the Syrian crisis by its nature. The study analyzed 74 news stories from ST in 2015 and 113 in 2017. Less stories were analyzed for the NYT and

RBTH due to their non-centralization on Syria as much as the local Syrian newspaper. The study analyzed 26 news stories from the NYT in 2015 and 20 in 2017. While it analyzed 31 news stories for RBTH in 2015 and 12 in 2017.

It is noted that the number of stories dealing with the Syrian crisis in both NYT and RBTH has decreased in 2017 in comparison with ST despite changing the sampling method to cover every 3rd day instead of every 6th day to compensate for the shorter period of time in 2017. This is apparent especially in the case of the Russian newspaper. This can be explained by the longer period of time since the beginning of the crisis, which reduces the salience of the topic. However, another reason can be the cautious stance of both the American side and the Russian side, particularly the Russian side, during the unstable period of the beginning of Trump's rule where they still try to figure out how future relations between them will be.

News stories that are taken from news agencies represented 25% of the total stories in 2015 compared to 7.6% in 2017. Most of these stories that depended on news agencies came from RBTH followed by ST. In 2015, RBTH's news stories taken from agencies represented 18% of all stories taken from news agencies (25% of the whole sample) and they were all from Interfax. ST news stories represented 6.9% of the 25% agencies' stories. In 2017, RBTH's news stories originating from news agencies represented 6% from the total of 7.6% news agencies' stories out of the whole sample followed by 1.4% of ST stories. All 2017 stories of RBTH originating from news agencies came from TASS news agency. There were no cases of news agencies' stories in NYT in this study's sample. The above shows the dependence of the Russian newspaper on news agencies where 77% of the RBTH news stories analyzed in 2015 came from Interfax and 75% came from TASS in 2017.

News Sources

The average number of sources per news story in 2015 was 2.9 and the standard deviation is 3.0. In 2017, the average number of sources was 2.7, which is relatively similar to 2015. The standard deviation is 2.5 declaring a 0.5 less diversity in number of sources used in news stories. Most news stories had a mode score of 1 news source in both years showing the general lack of diversity in news sources.

News sources in both years showed high occurrence of Syrian, Russian, American and media sources with different percentages. In 2015, 19.5% of total sources represented the Syrian government, 19.3% represented media sources, 14.5% represented Russian government sources and 12% represented US government sources. In 2017, Syrian government sources maintained the highest occurrence with 20.4%; while Russian governmental sources jumped to the second place with 15.8%. Media sources followed with 14.3% and US governmental sources with 9.3%. It is worth noting that there is an increased dependence of media on other media as sources of news, in addition to the dependence on news agencies especially in the case of RBTH.

Specific source identity variable shows high frequencies of particular sources in 2015 and 2017. Russian sources' names showed highest salience in 2015 with Sergei Lavrov the Russian Foreign Minister in the first place; followed by the Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov. In 2017, however, both Sergei Lavrov the Russian Foreign Minister and Bashar al Jaafari the permanent representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the UN showed the highest occurrence as sources' names in news stories followed by both the US President Donald Trump and Steffan de Mistura the UN special envoy

for Syria. The high salience of Russian officials' names as news sources in 2015 decreased in 2017 partly due to the smaller number of news stories from the RBTH in the 2017's sample.

News sources in New York Times

The NYT uses more news sources than the other newspapers. The average number of sources used by NYT in 2015 is 6.5 with a standard deviation of 4.8; while in 2017, the average is 6 and the standard deviation is 4. These numbers indicate some decline in number of sources used in 2017 when compared to 2015. Adding to this the mode score, which shows the biggest difference, the study found that while the mode score for 2015 was 8, it went down to half the score in 2017 (mode= 4). This means that most news stories of the NYT in 2017 showed 4 sources per story versus 8 sources in most of 2015's news stories.

As to the degree of news sources diversity, NYT also demonstrates the highest diversity among sources. In 2015, out of a total of 168 news sources 25.6% were US governmental sources, followed by 14% experts and 10% Syrian rebels and activists sources, which is a category that emerged from the "Others" option. Russian governmental sources and international community organizations follow with scores of 8% and 7% respectively. In 2017, on the other hand and out of a total of 123 sources, 26% were US governmental sources, 9.8% were international community sources and 7% were Syrian citizen sources. Below is a comparison between NYT news sources in 2015 and 2017 (Figure 1). The most notable difference between 2015 and 2017 is the difference in percentage of experts used between 2015 (14.3%) and 2017 (6.5%).

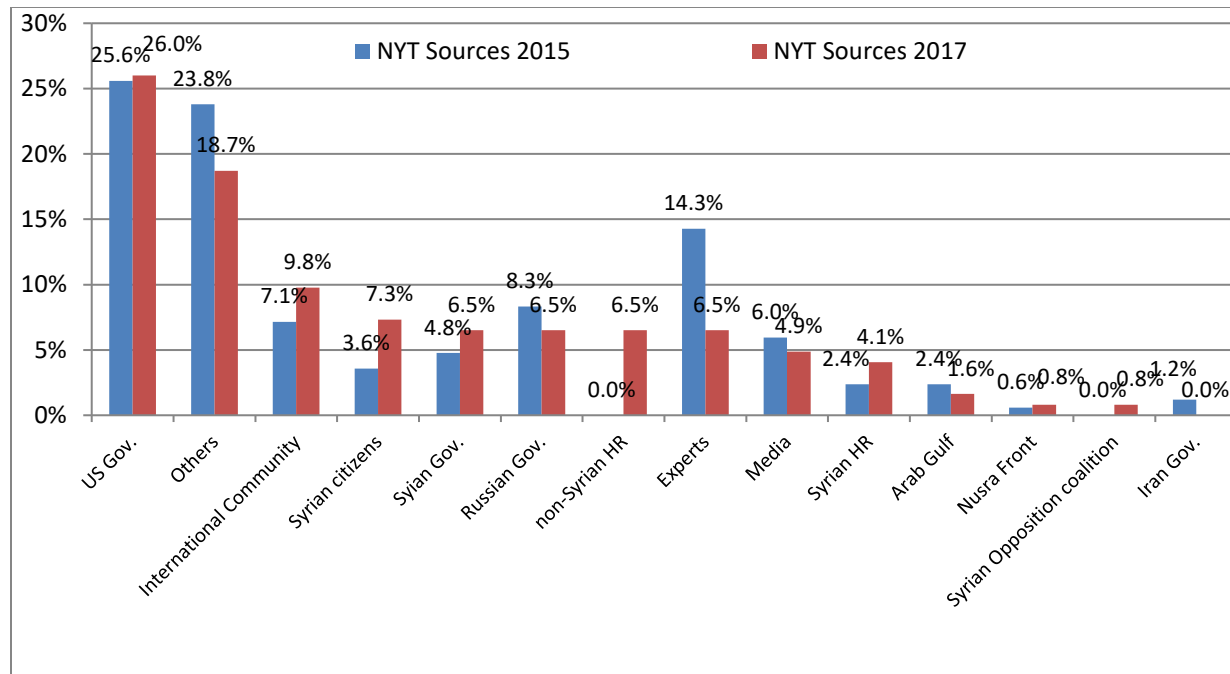


Figure 2: NYT News Sources in 2015 versus 2017

*Hidden sources (Free Syrian Army and ISIS) had a score of zero in both years.

Despite the high number of sources used by the NYT in comparison to the other newspapers and their somewhat diversity; official news sources represent the majority of sources with 67.9% official (versus 31% non-official) news sources in 2015 and 74.8% official news sources (versus 23.6% non-official) in 2017. In cases where it isn't clear whether a certain source is official, it is coded as not applicable or not clear.

News sources in Russia Beyond The Headlines

Most of the RBTH news stories use only one news source per story with a mode score of 1 in both years. Nevertheless and despite the small number of news stories in 2017, they showed more numbers of news sources especially in stories that didn't originate from TASS news agency. The mean score for number of sources used in 2017 is 3.1 versus 1.4 in 2015 and the standard deviation is 2.9 versus 0.8 in 2015.

Low diversity of news sources has characterized the Russian newspaper with an utmost dependence on Russian governmental sources. In 2015, the Russian governmental sources represented 59.1%, which is more than half of the total 44 sources used in all sampled stories. Experts represented 18.2% of the sources followed by an 11.4% representation of media sources. In 2017, sources were more diverse than they were in 2015 with 40.5% dependence on Russian governmental sources out of a total of 37 news sources. In 2017, experts and media sources similarly follow Russian governmental sources as in 2015 with scores of 21.6% and 13.5% respectively. Below is a comparison between RBTH news sources in 2015 versus 2017 (Figure 2).

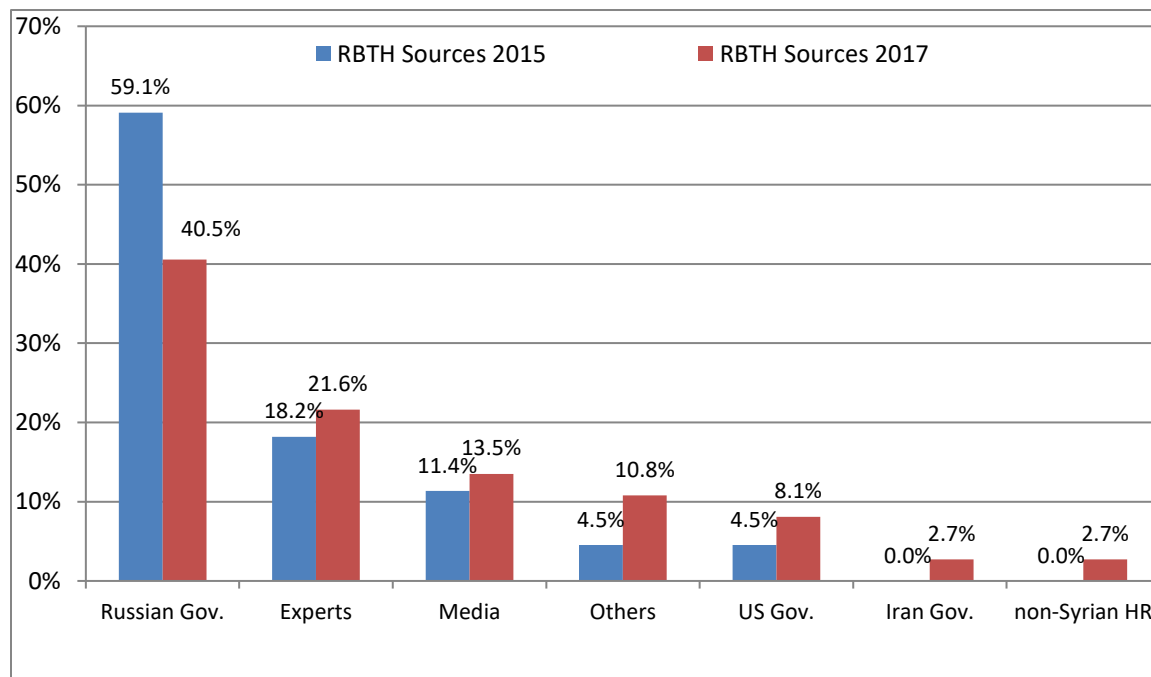


Figure 2: RBTH News Sources in 2015 versus 2017

*Hidden sources (Syrian Gov., International community, Syrian citizens, Free Syrian Army, ISIS, Nusra front, Syrian opposition coalition, Arab Gulf countries and Syrian Human Rights organizations/activists) had a score of zero in both years.

In both years, RBTH news sources were dominated by official sources with more concentration in 2015. RBTH used 68.2% official sources versus 31.8% non-official sources in

2015. While in 2017, it used 59.5% official sources versus 35% non-official sources. Some sources weren't clear if they were official or not.

News sources in Syria Times

The biggest sample of news stories was taken from ST, however, the mean of news sources used was 2.3 in 2015 with a standard deviation of 1.5 from a total of 167 sources. These numbers were very similar to the scores of 2017 where the mean scored 2.1 and the standard deviation scored 1.5 from a total number of sources of 238. Most of the ST news stories had only one news source with a mode score of 1 in both 2015 and 2017. It is worth noting that in 2015, ST's total news sources were 167 from a total of 74 news stories versus NYT's 168 news sources from a total of 26 news stories.

Most of the sources used in ST news stories are Syrian governmental sources and media sources with 39.5% and 34.7% respectively. These are the most used news sources in 2015, followed by 9% Russian governmental sources. However, 2017 witnessed more representation of Russian governmental sources with 16.8% coming in the second place after the Syrian governmental sources (30.7%). Media sources are the third most represented sources in 2017 with 19.3% score.

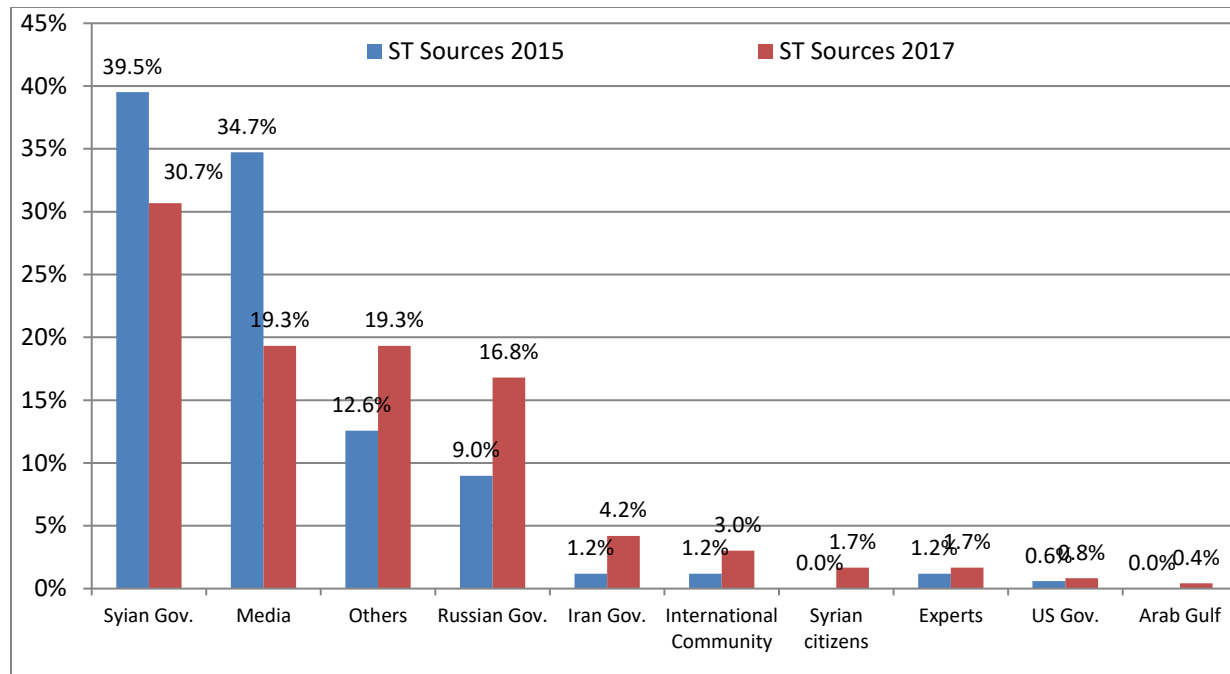


Figure 3: ST News Sources in 2015 versus 2017

*Hidden sources (Free Syrian Army, ISIS, Nusra front, Syrian opposition coalition, Syrian Human Rights organizations/activists, non- Syrian Human Rights organizations/activists) had a score of zero in both years.

The dependence of the ST newspapers was on official news sources same as other newspapers. Official news sources used in 2015 by ST represented 61.1% of all sources versus 38.3% non-official sources. While in 2017, official news sources increased to represent 73.6 % of all sources versus 22.1% non-official news sources. There were sources coded as not applicable or not clear.

Syrian Crisis News Frames

The following section lays down the results of the content analysis of the three online newspapers in terms of how they framed the Syrian crisis in their news stories. This section answers the first research question, which asks *“How was resolving the Syrian Crisis framed in the Syrian, American and Russian media during 2015 and 2017, and how does such framing compare/contrast with poll data representing the Syrian public opinion on resolving the*

crisis?” After discussing the frames that were found in the analyzed media, the researcher provides a comparison between these frames and corresponding public opinion data (ORB International, 2015). Frames are discussed below through their four functions of framing as put by Entman (1993, 2007).

First framing function: problem definition

This is the first function of framing, which indicates the salience of certain news topics and as noted earlier this function is equivalent to setting the agenda for the public (Entman, 2007). In this study, problem definition was measured through news stories headlines. Headlines were assigned to higher level categories. These were in total 7 categories including the “Others” category containing stories that didn’t fit in any of the other 6 categories.

The first category is the military aspect of the conflict, which deals with news headlines about certain military strikes, military achievements such as effective losses among enemy lines or claiming control over certain areas. It can also deal with the use of particular military equipment, military alliances, deals or any other topic that is related to the military. The second category is the diplomatic aspect of the conflict, which encompasses news headlines about certain diplomatic deals, talks or conferences. The third category is humanitarian and cultural effects of the conflict, which encompasses news headlines about effects that the conflict has on human life in Syria and certain cultural monuments or other heritage sites in Syria that may be affected by the conflict. Assigning blame category is the fourth category of news topics, which refers to headlines that assign blame to a certain party in relation to the conflict. The fifth category is terrorist attacks. These are headlines that talk about certain or several terrorist attacks in Syria. The sixth category is a category that emerged only in 2017 that deals with topics about

the US-Russian relations, which may cover other topics besides the Syrian conflict in the realm of discussing relationships between the two powers.

New York Times

The news salient topics in the NYT during the studied period in 2015 and 2017 were classified into 7 categories (Figure 4). The three most prevalent categories of news in 2015 are those dealing with the military aspect of the conflict (23.1%), the humanitarian and cultural effects of the conflict (23.1%) and assigning blame (23.1%). These three major topics were equally represented in news stories' headlines. The diplomatic aspect of the conflict was represented in 19.2% of the total news stories headlines. In 2017, however, more focus was on military news featuring military aspect of the conflict (30%); followed by humanitarian and cultural effects of the conflict (25%) and diplomatic aspect of the conflict (15%). The biggest difference between 2015 and 2017 is the decrease in news topics under the assigning blame category from 23.1% to 10%.

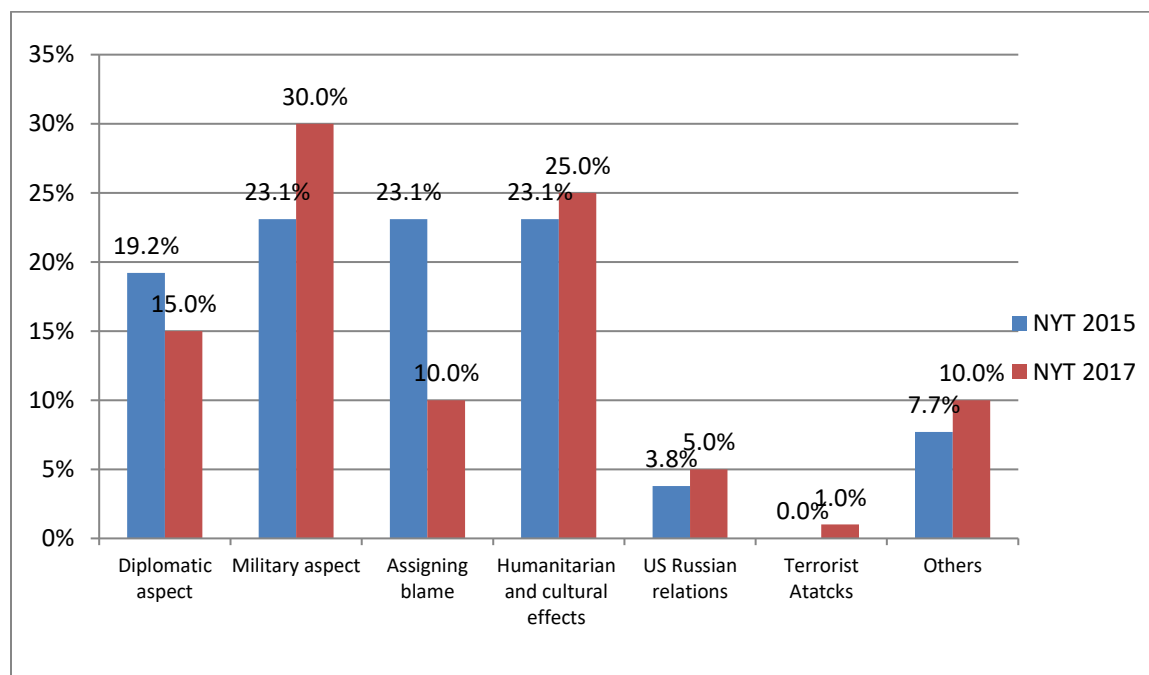


Figure 4: Problem Definition (NYT)

Russia Beyond The Headlines

The same 7 categories shown above were used to categorize the RBTH news headlines. In 2015, salient problems about the military aspect of the conflict represented 45.2% of all news stories followed by 25.8% news stories representing the diplomatic aspect of the conflict. 6.5% of the stories fell under the assigning blame category and 3.2% (one news story) was categorized under humanitarian and cultural effects of the conflict. “Others” category represented 19.4% of the news stories. In 2017, the sample contained only 12 news stories and the highest representation was that of the diplomatic aspect of the conflict category in 33.3% of the stories (4 news stories). Moreover, 2017 witnessed two categories that weren't found in 2015, namely US-Russian relations and terrorist attacks. Figure 5 below shows all categories represented in 2015 and 2017 for RBTH.

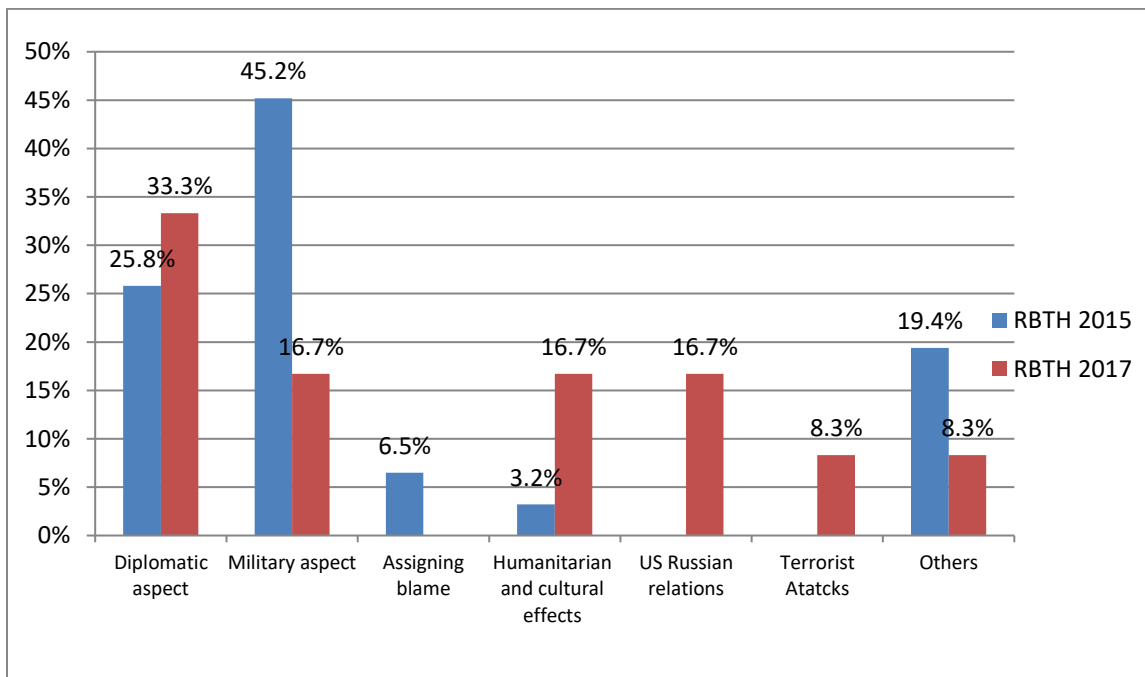


Figure 5: Problem Definition (RBTH)

Syria Times

In 2015, ST news stories were classified under 5 categories (Figure 6). The most prevalent category was the military aspect category, which was represented in 48.6% of the sampled news stories. The second category represented in 20.3% of the sample was terrorist attacks. Diplomatic aspect of the conflict came next with 14.9%, followed by assigning blame category with 13.5%. The “Others” category represented 2.7%. Nonetheless, in 2017 the dependence on the military aspect news topics decreased to 24.8% in favor of more diplomatic aspect news topics (27.4%). Also terrorist attacks category’s representation decreased to 15.9% while assigning blame news stories were almost the same as 2015 (13.3%). Two new categories emerged in 2017, which are humanitarian and cultural effects of the conflict, which appeared in 8% of the sample and the US-Russian relations, which was represented in one news story (0.9%).

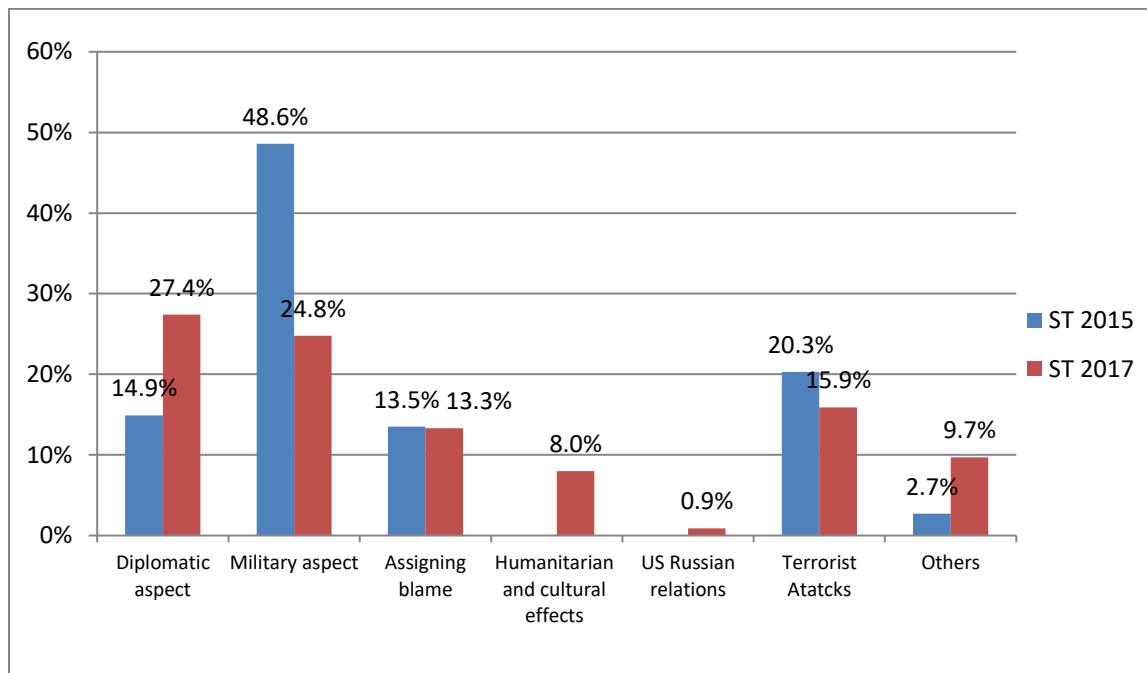


Figure 6: Problem Definition (ST)

Second framing function: conflict remedy

These are divided into two parts, which are justification frames (Bayulgen & Arbatli, 2013) and militarism/diplomacy frames (Boaz, 2005; Cozma & Kozman, 2014). While justification frames of pro/anti- US air strike coalition, pro/anti division of Syria and pro/anti-Russian military interference were found in small percentages throughout the sample; militarism/diplomacy frames were more prevalent.

Pro- US air strike justification frames were found in 3.1% of the 131 news stories in 2015; while anti-US air strike justification frames were found in 6.1% of the sample. In 2017, pro-US air strike justification frames were present in 2.8% of the 145 news stories; while anti-US air strike justification frames were present in 2.1% of the sample. On the other hand, anti-division of Syria justification frames were found in 0.8% of the sample; while anti-division frames weren't found. In 2017, pro-division of Syria justification frames and anti-division frames were scarce with 0.7% each. Moreover, there was an additional justification frame added to the coding tool in 2017, which is pro/anti-Russian military interference frame. Frames that promoted the Russian military interference were present in 4.1% of the sample versus 1.4% for anti-Russian military interference frames.

Military solution frames were presented in 45% of the 131 news stories in 2015 versus 37.9% from a total of 145 news stories in 2017. On the other hand, diplomatic solution frames were used in 24.4% of the sample in 2015 versus 35.2% in 2017. It is worth noting that in 2017 the line separating news stories that promote a military crisis remedy and those that promote a diplomatic crisis remedy has become blurry since the difference between terrorists and armed opposition became more accepted. This was not the case in 2015 where Russia and Syria didn't

acknowledge the opposition as entities separate from terrorists. This is why in 2017, there are news stories where both the military and the diplomatic solutions were existent and were coded as such. Below is a breakdown of these scores for each online newspaper.

New York Times

The most prevalent justification frame in the NYT during 2015 is pro-US justification frame. It was presented in 11.5% of the 26 news stories. However, anti-US justification frame was present in one news story from the 26 stories (3.8%). Consistent with the US policy of air strike coalition, 15% of the 20 news stories of 2017 showed pro-US air strike coalition frames. 10% of the news stories, however, showed anti-Russian military interference frames.

In 2015, the NYT also promoted a military solution in 38.5% of its news stories and promoted a diplomatic solution in 30.8% of the sample. In 2017, military solution frames increased to 55% of the news stories; while diplomatic solution frames decreased to 25% of the 20 news stories sample. This shift in military and diplomatic solution frames can be explained by the change of the US administration between 2015 and 2017 and, thus, the policies adopted by the US to deal with the Syrian crisis (Muñoz, 2017). Obama's administration was adopting the air strike coalition solution with no direct US troops' involvement; while Trump's safe zones idea proposed increased on ground involvement in Syria. This is consistent with the literature where increased involvement corresponds with more military solution frames and decreased involvement corresponds to more diplomatic solution frames (Boaz, 2005; Cozma & Kozman, 2014).

Russia Beyond The Headlines

RBTH news stories presented very little justification frames in both 2015 and 2017. Out of 2015's 31 news stories only 3 frames were found with a percentage of 3.2% each. These were pro-US air strike coalition, anti-US air strike coalition and anti-division of Syria. In 2017, there were more justification frames especially with the fewer number of news stories (12 news stories). Pro-Russian military interference frames were used in 25% of the stories; followed by pro-US coalition frames (8.3%) and pro-division of Syrian frames (8.3%). Nonetheless, no clear pattern can be established based on this small sample.

Similar to the NYT, militarism/diplomacy frames exist in more news stories compared to justification frames. The military solution frame is consistently the highest promoted solution in the Russian newspaper with 61.3% in 2015 and 50% in 2017; while diplomatic solution frames exist in 22.6% of 2015's news stories versus 16.7% in 2017. Despite Russia's non-involvement militarily in Syria during the period from July till end of October 2015; high military solution frames were used in 2015. This could be in preparation for the military interference that took place afterwards by the end of 2015 (Quinn, 2016).

Syria Times

The ST newspaper used only one justification frame in 2015, which is the anti-US air strike coalition. It appeared in 8% of the total number of news stories (74 stories). In 2017, however, the anti-US air strike coalition justification frames decreased to 2.7% of the total sample (113 stories). ST also promoted the Russian military's operation in Syria as part of the crisis solution in 2.7% of the sample. Moreover, ST used 0.9% anti-division of Syria justification frame.

ST's dependence on military solution frames in 40.5% of its 2015 news stories sample decreased to 33.6% in 2017 in favor of more diplomatic solution frames (38.9% versus 23% in 2015).

Third framing function: conflict causes

The third framing function according to Entman (1993, 2007) is identifying the causes of the problem. Causes of the Syrian crisis will be identified per each newspaper.

New York Times

The NYT's highest identified causes of the Syrian crisis in both 2015 and 2017 are ISIS and the Syrian regime. NYT stories blamed ISIS for the crisis 32.8% out of all other causes mentioned in 2015 and it blamed the Syrian government in 26.6%. These figures decreased in 2017 to 20.8% each in favor of framing unspecified terrorists, which scored 15.1% in 2017 versus 7.8% in 2015. It should be noted that there are other causes for the Syrian crisis framed by the NYT that were coded under "Others" option. The highest score was for El Qaeda terrorist group (presented in 4 causes); followed by Turkey and the Syrian opposition that were presented twice each.

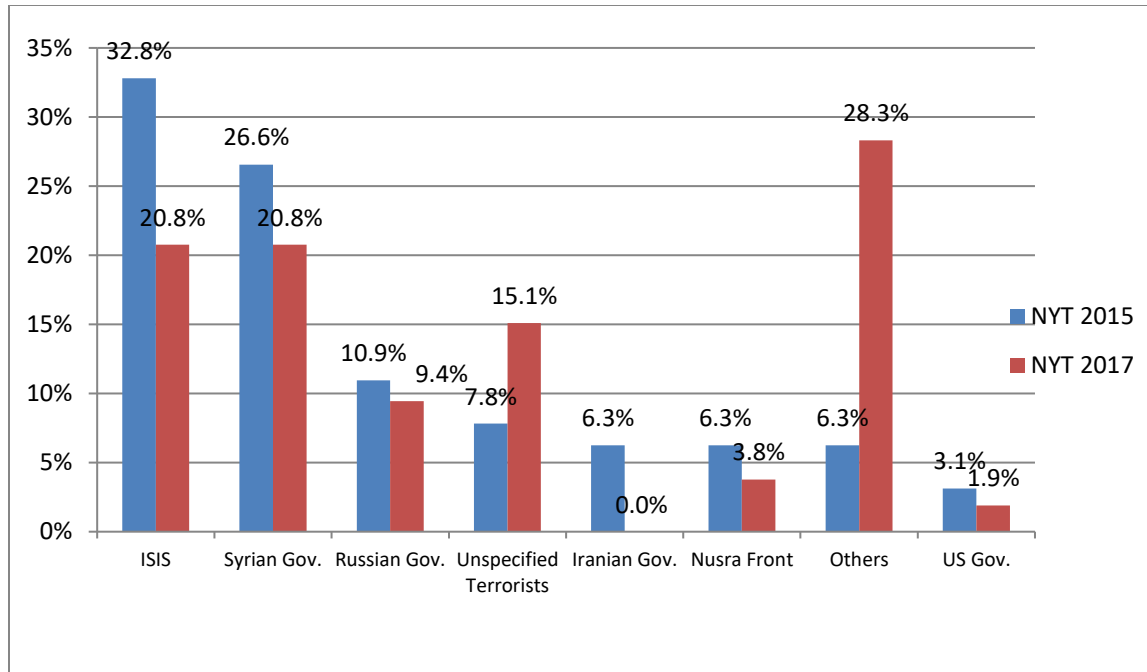


Figure 7: Causes of the Syrian crisis 2015 versus 2017 (NYT)

*Hidden causes (Free Syrian Army, Syrian opposition coalition, Arab Gulf countries and Western countries) had a score of zero in both years.

Russia Beyond The Headlines

RBTH’s main focus in identifying causes of the crisis in both 2015 and 2017 is terrorists particularly ISIS. While ISIS comprised 41.2% of the 34 causes mentioned by RBTH’s news stories in 2015; it comprised 50% from 2017’s causes. However, it should be noted that 2017’s sample contained a total of 8 framed causes only, which means that the 50% is based on 4 frames. Unspecified terrorists and extremists are the second most framed causes of the Syrian crisis in RBTH with 32.4% in 2015 and 25% in 2017.

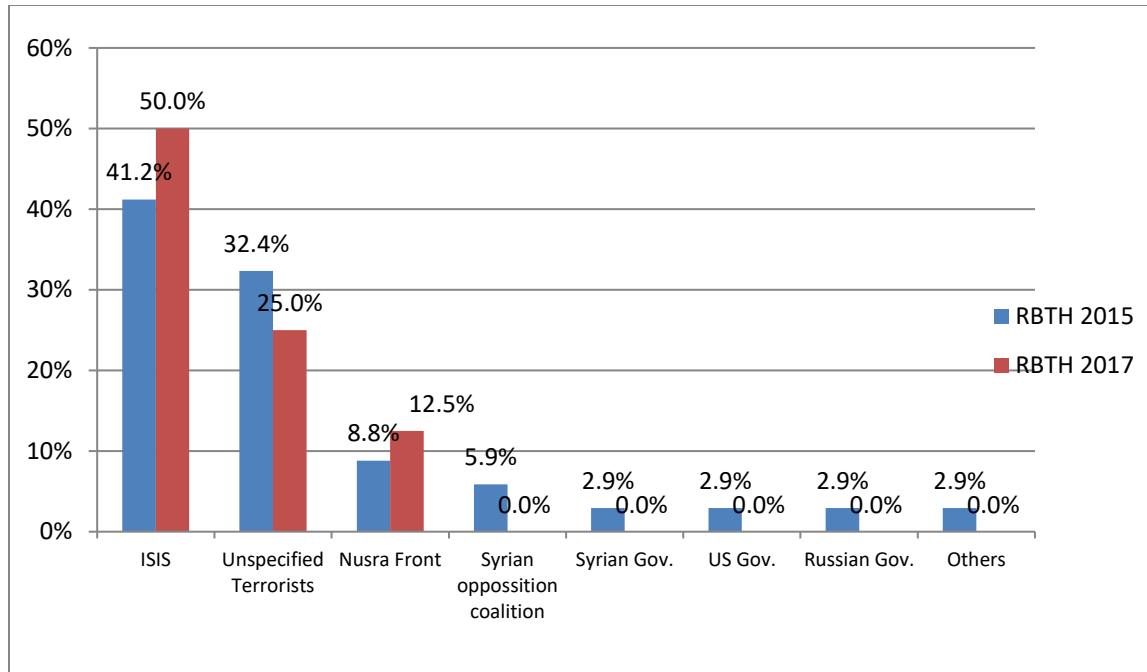


Figure 8: Causes of the Syrian crisis 2015 versus 2017 (RBTH)

*Hidden causes (Free Syrian Army, Arab Gulf countries, the Iranian government and Western countries) had a score of zero in both years.

Syria Times

Similar to the Russian online newspaper, the ST focused on assigning blame to terrorists; either unspecified (21.6%), ISIS (14.9%) or Nusra Front (10.6%) in 2015. However, in 2017, these scores decreased for unspecified terrorists to 20.2% and increased for ISIS to 17.5% and Nusra Front to 12.5%. However, these weren't the only causes framed by the ST news. The "Others" option in both years yielded important results. The most framed causes that surfaced in the others option were put into categories for both years. In 2015, identified terrorist groups category was framed as a cause to the crisis 39.2% out of the total others results (79 causes); followed by Turkey (20.3%) and Israel (16.5%). In 2017, identified terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and Ahrar El Cham were still the most prevalent framed causes in the others option (21.3%); followed by Turkey (13.8%), countries supporting terrorists (11%) and Israel (9.6%).

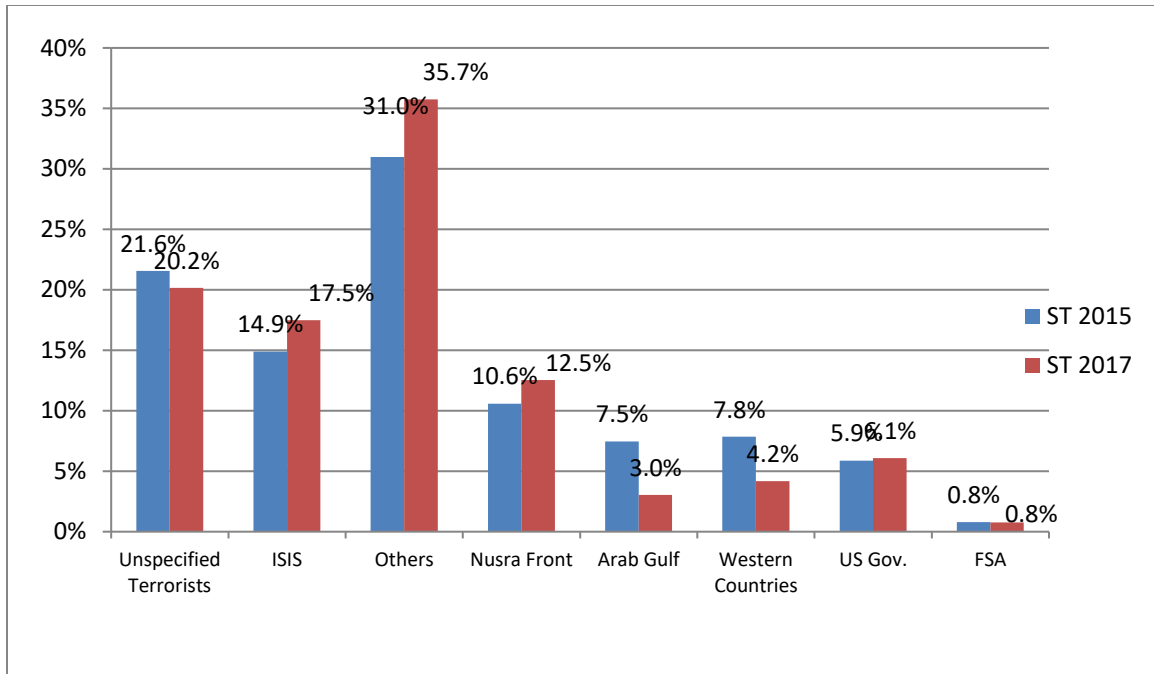


Figure 9: Causes of the Syrian crisis 2015 versus 2017 (ST)

*Hidden causes (the Syrian government, the Russian government, the Iranian government and Syrian opposition coalition) had a score of zero in both years.

Fourth framing function: moral stance

The moral stance toward the crisis is the fourth and last framing function (Entman, 1993, 2007).

This is measured through two points; the presence or absence of a human-interest frame in the news story and the number of Syrian citizen sources in the story (Cozma & Kozman, 2014).

New York Times

The NYT uses the human-interest frames when dealing with Syrian crisis news more than the RBTH and ST. In 2015, it used the human-interest frame in its news 61.5% from the total 26 news stories. Similarly, in 2017, the human-interest frame was present in 70% of the total 20 news stories. In addition and despite its relatively small number of news stories in the sample, it used 15 Syrian citizen sources; 6 in 2015 and 9 in 2017. This is the highest number of human-

interest frames and Syrian citizen sources among all three newspapers. This corresponds with Cozma and Kozman's assertion (2014) that using Syrian citizens as news sources is found more where moral stance framing persists.

Russia Beyond The Headlines

In 2015, only 9.7% of the 31 RBTH news stories used the human-interest frame versus 16.7% in 2017's 12 news stories. RBTH didn't use any Syrian citizens as news sources.

Syria Times

ST used the human-interest frame in 36.5% of its 74 news stories in 2015 and 39.8% of its 113 news stories in 2017. Despite Syria's big number of news stories compared to the NYT and RBTH and despite being a local newspaper that could more easily have access to Syrian citizens; it used only 1 Syrian news source in 2017 and none in 2015.

Based on the above findings of the content analysis, the research answers the second research question: ***“How did the media's coverage of the crisis change from 2015 to 2017 in terms of framing bias with its four functions and accounting for the Syrian voice?”***

Looking at the salient news problems identified in 2015 and 2017 for the three newspapers, it can be seen that the military aspect of the conflict is a common top category presented in news stories. In NYT, RBTH and ST, the military aspect category either is the highest scoring category or the second highest. Also, it is worth noting that the problem definition categories neither differed a lot between 2015 and 2017 nor between the different newspapers. According to Love (2008) this systematic repetition of news topics, that are more or

less similar, is a way to avoid change that may lead to less profitability. Bias, thus, can be detected in the first framing function of problem definition.

As for conflict remedy frames and despite varying percentages and policy shifts, it can be concluded that NYT and RBTH are biased towards the military remedy frames. Even in 2015 before the shift in administrations, the NYT had more military solution frames compared to diplomatic frames. On the other hand, there was a decrease in military frames in ST and RBTH in 2017, and particularly in ST. This can be explained by the 2017 diplomatic effort that was seen in the Astana and Geneva talks to resolve the Syrian crisis with Russia playing an integral role. This explanation is based on the news stories that were analyzed in 2017.

Consistent with the literature, framed causes or responsibility frames related to assigning blame to certain parties were prevalent in the data (Godefroidt et al., 2016; Semetko & Valkenberg, 2000). Bias in the third framing function was apparent for the three newspapers. For the NYT, a biased pattern stood clear in framing the Syrian government and ISIS as the causes of the Syrian crisis. This pattern was systematically persistent in both years regardless of the differences in percentages as they still maintained the top framed causes of the crisis.

RBTH, on the other hand, framed terrorists as the cause of the crisis. Its biggest focus was on ISIS, followed by unspecified terrorists and Nusra Front. Similarly, ST framed terrorists as the main cause of the crisis. The highest score was for unspecified terrorists, followed by ISIS and Nusra Front.

The literature (Cozma & Kozman, 2014; Godefroidt et al., 2016; Semetko & Valkenberg, 2000) has found that moral frames are rare, which was explained by Godefroidt et al. (2016) by the distance effect between those writing the news and those affected by it. While this excludes

ST due to the fact that it's a local newspaper; it applies to RBTH, which uses a very small percentage of human-interest frames. However, NYT stands out due to its increased use of both human-interest frames and Syrian citizens as news sources when compared to RBTH and ST. Thus, where RBTH is biased against the use of human-interest frames and Syrian citizen sources; NYT is biased toward using them even more than the local ST. There was no clear significant difference between moral frames in 2015 and 2017.

As to whether the media accounts for the Syrian voice in their coverage of the crisis, the study analyzed news sources. To sum up the findings of the sources section, the study attempts to locate media biases that characterize the studied online newspapers (Entman, 2007). All three newspapers are biased toward sources of their own governments with varying degrees. NYT is the least dependent on US governmental sources, though they are the highest sources represented in news stories.

Consistent with what Love (2008) stated about the dominance of official sources in the news; all three newspapers depended on official sources. One interesting finding particular of RBTH and ST is their increased use of media as news sources. Moreover, RBTH depends on news agencies for most of its news stories. Analyzing news sources helps identifying where the news bias is coming from. For instance, the dependence of RBTH on TASS news agency in 2017 following its prior dependence on Interfax in 2015 is an important finding that requires further investigation that is out of the scope of this study.

Comparing the 2015 content analysis data to the ORB poll data

The existence of the ORB poll data (ORB international, 2015) from 2015 gives an opportunity for extra analysis. Comparing how the media framed the topic of the Syrian crisis and what the

Syrian public thinks about it will shed more light on whether media accounts for the Syrian people. This section answers the third research question: *“How can comparing the media framing of the Syrian crisis to the Syrian stance (gathered from the poll data) be used to further understand the struggles of power within the crisis?”*

Selected questions from the ORB will be compared to the results of the study. These questions, according to the ORB international (2015), are:

“Q2 Do you support or oppose the international coalition airstrikes in Syria?”

The study sought to answer this question through justification frames of pro versus anti US air strikes. However, only 13 frames were found in the whole sample, which hardly provides comparable data. Nonetheless, 8 of these frames were anti-air strikes (6.1%) versus 4 pro-air strikes (3.1%). NYT used pro-US air strike frames in 11.5% of its news stories versus 8.1% anti-US air strike frames in ST. RBTH was neutral. This indicates that, consistent with the literature (Allen et al., 1994; Godefroidt et al., 2016; Hart, 2013; Sparrow, 2008), news media align with their government’s promoted policies. The poll data, on the other hand, found that 47% of respondents were pro-air strikes versus 50% against air strikes and 3% didn’t know the answer. Nonetheless, data provided from the analysis hardly provides sufficient number of frames for comparison purposes.

It should be noted, however, that justification frames depend on giving reasons why a particular policy is promoted or discouraged and media rarely discuss these reasons in their news per the data. Justification frames in general were scarce in both 2015 and 2017 data.

“Q3 Thinking about the persons and the groups which are working now in Syria. Generally, do you think that their influence is negative or positive on the matters in Syria?”

The study analyzed the news stories of the US, Russia and Syria in order to determine the parties blamed for the Syrian crisis through responsibility frames (Godefroidt et al., 2016; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) and as one of the framing functions (Entman, 1993, 2007). Under the section “Causes of the Syrian Crisis” in the coding sheet, blamed parties in the Syrian crisis were identified per the newspaper. In order to compare these findings with the ORB poll findings, results of the negative influence parties mentioned in the ORB poll will be compared to the content analysis results of the causes of the crisis section. In other words, parties mentioned as causes of the crisis will be compared to negative influence parties in the ORB poll.

The following figures show the ORB poll data of perceived negative influence of parties mentioned in the poll, which are Bashar El Asad (measured in the content analysis as the Syrian government to mean Bashar El Asad and his regime), the Free Army in Syria, ISIS, Iran/ the Iranian government, the Nusra Front, the Syrian Opposition Coalition and the Arab Gulf countries. In order to provide more accurate comparison between the content analysis and the poll data, the researcher calculated a percentage for the above mentioned 7 causes discarding the other causes that were not part of the poll data. Still the comparison looks at two different units, which are causes framed in news stories and causes mentioned by a human sample of Syrian citizens. However, both indicate stances towards the crisis at hand.

Figure 10 below compares between the total scores of all newspapers and the poll data. The data shows some congruency in terms of the high perception of ISIS and Nusra Front as

negative influence and as main causes of the Syrian crisis as shown in the various media. While high differences appear in case of the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian Opposition Coalition. It should be noted that they were scarcely mentioned in the news stories in this sample.

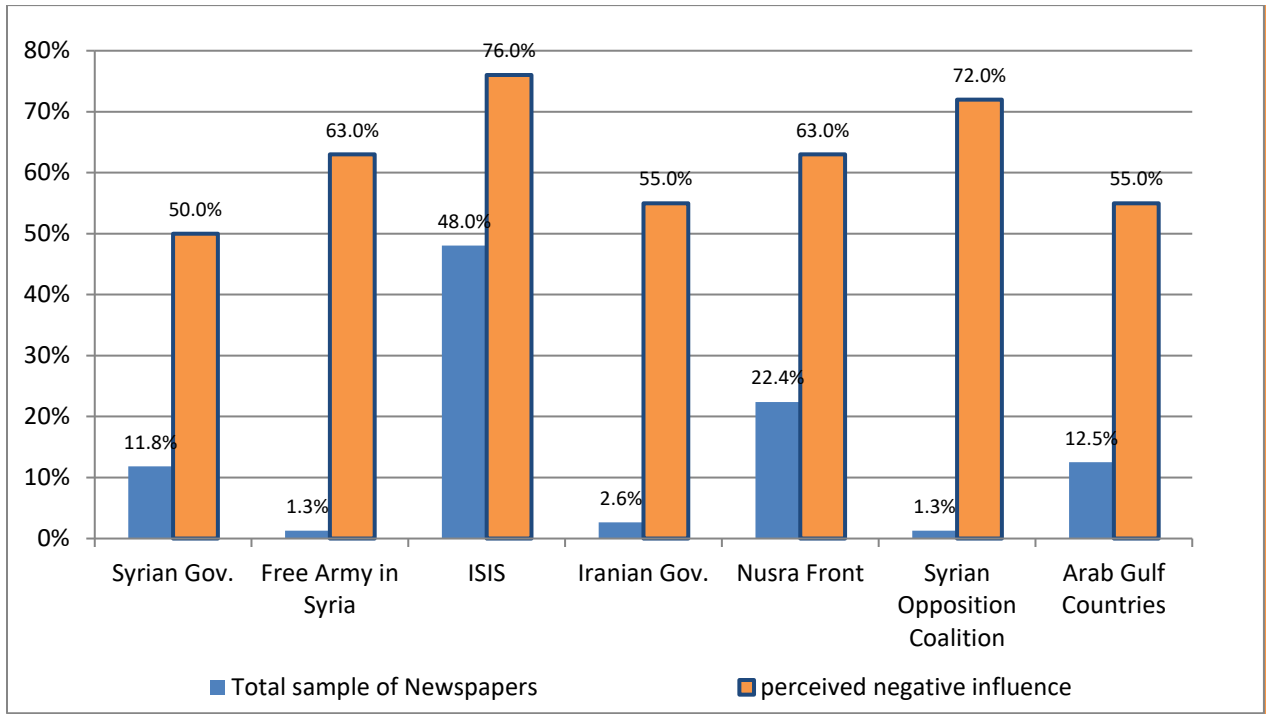


Figure 10: Comparison between total sample of newspapers and poll data

Figure 11 breaks down the total news stories sample into the three newspapers categories. ISIS gained the highest scores for all newspapers and for the poll respondents as apparent in the figure. There were some differences between the three newspapers. The NYT had the highest congruence with the poll data in blaming the Syrian government for the crisis. On the other hand, ST had the closest score to the poll data in blaming the Nusra front as well as the Arab Gulf countries. The highest discrepancies between the media and the Syrian public opinion as presented in the poll appeared for the Syrian Opposition Coalition and the Free Army in Syria. Apparently, Syrian people view them more as a threat than they appear to be in the news. This

can be explained by their scarce mentioning in the news stories gathered in this sample. There was some difference between news and people’s perception about Iran especially when compared to RBTH and ST newspapers.

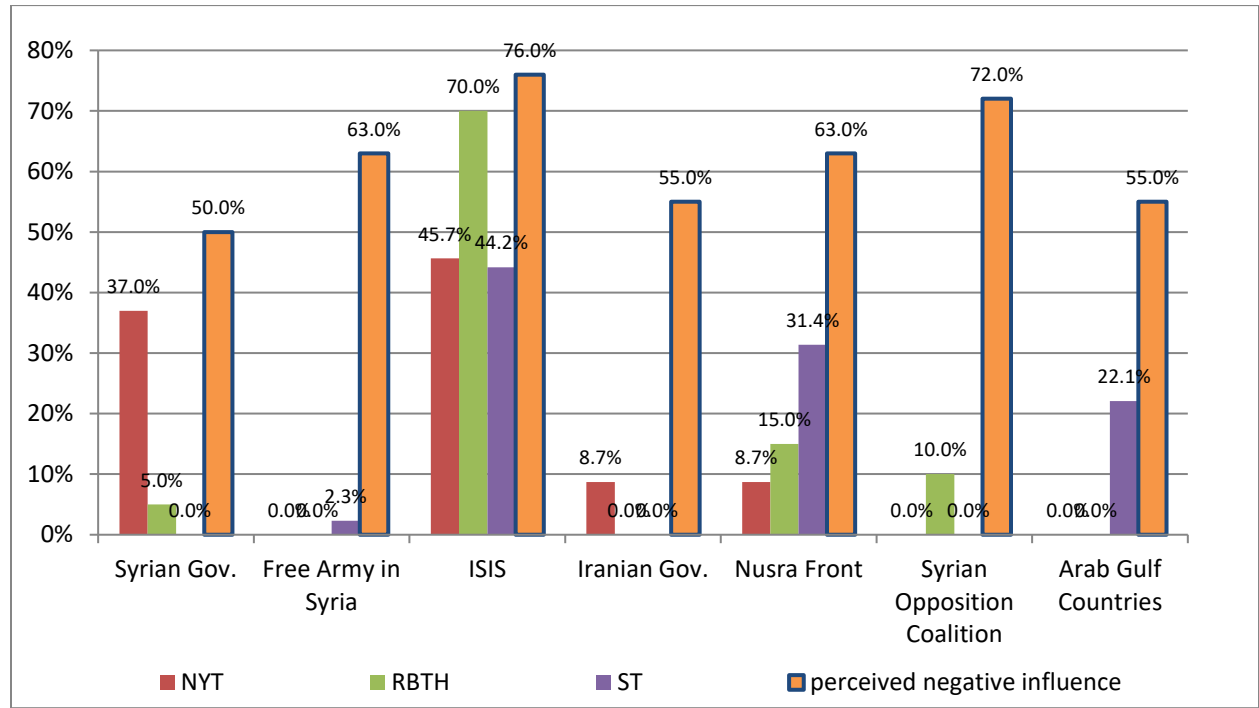


Figure 11: Comparison between classified newspapers and poll data

“Q4 According to your view, which of the following represent the best solution for the crisis which Syria is in today?”

The poll for this question offers two optional answers, which correspond to the content analysis’ remedy frames of militarism versus diplomacy solutions to the crisis. One of the most important findings of this research is the difference between what Syrian people perceive to be the solution to the crisis and what news media run by powerful players in the scene perceive to be the means to resolve the crisis. 51% of Syrian people, based on poll data, choose the diplomatic solution to the crisis versus 37% who choose the military solution. On the contrary, newspapers highly

promote the military solution in 46% of the news stories versus the diplomatic solution in 24% of the stories.

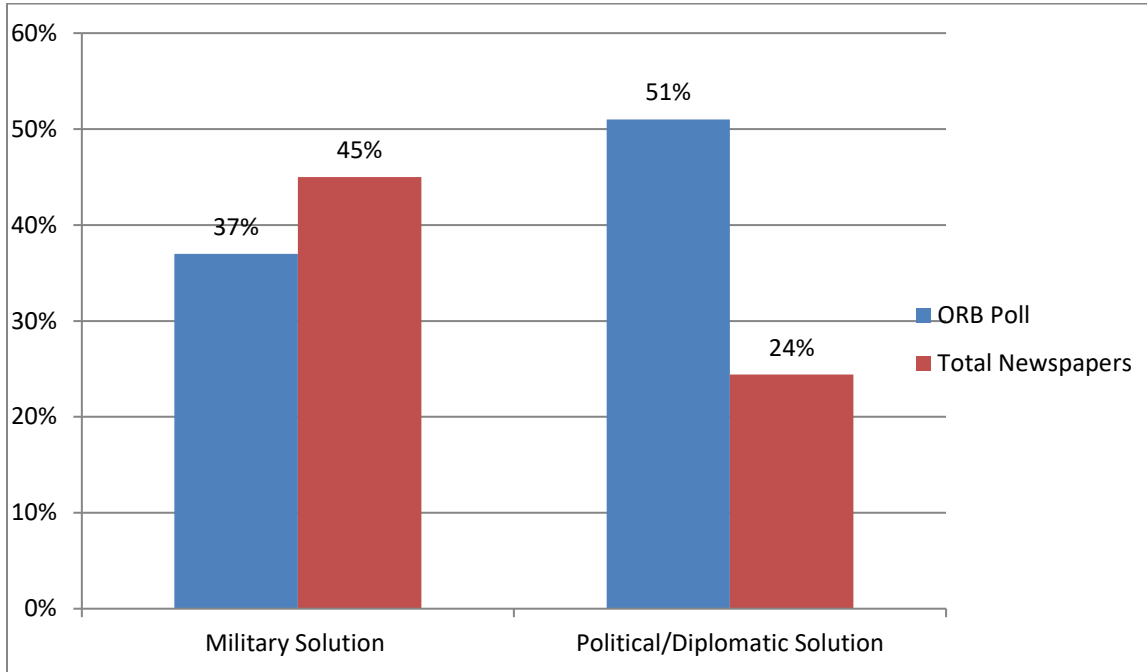


Figure 12: Military versus Diplomatic Solutions (total sample of newspapers)

Figure 13 shows the differences between the poll results and various newspapers. While all three newspapers show different results than the poll's results; the RBTH shows the greatest difference in both solution frames where it promotes military solutions in 61 % of its news stories.

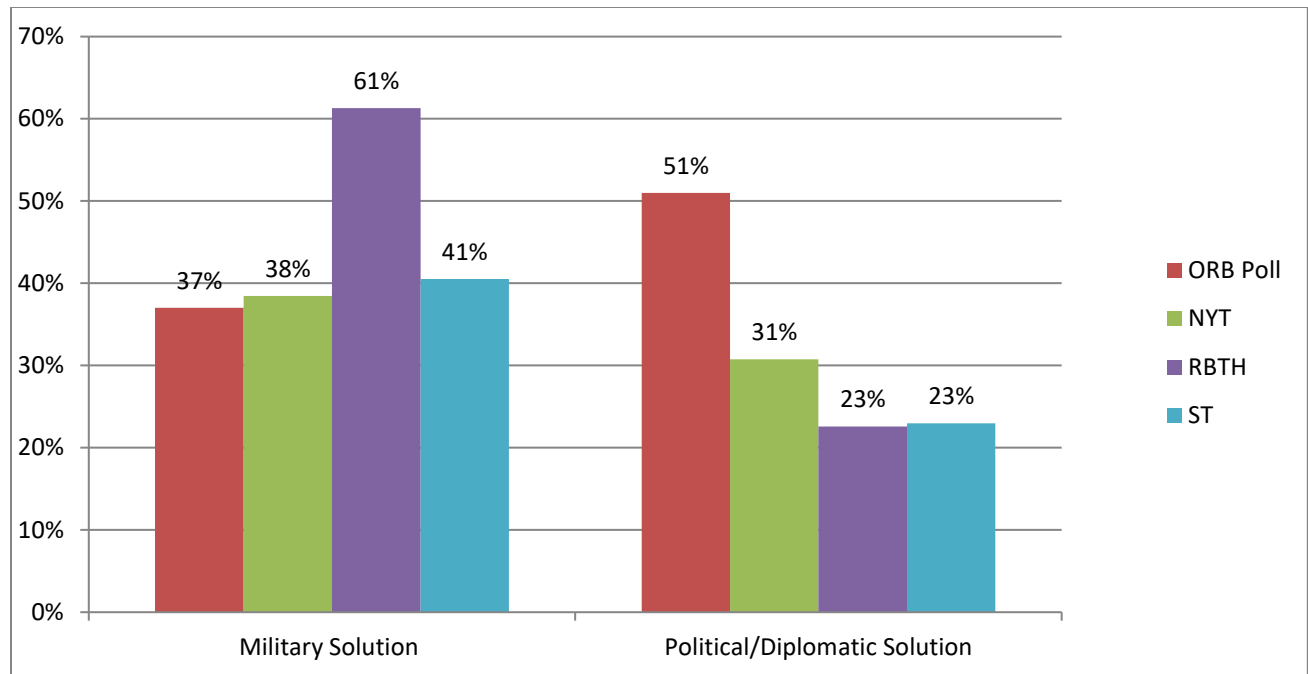


Figure 13: Military versus Diplomatic Solutions (Classified sample)

Taking this important finding a step further (Figure 14), the 2016 ORB poll (ORB International, 2016) found that the Syrian public opinion has shifted towards favoring more diplomatic solutions scoring 75% versus 37% favoring military solution. Comparing this to the scores obtained from the 2017 content analysis, a wider gap could be observed between the Syrian public opinion and the NYT remedy frames, which opted for more military solution frames. On the other hand, both ST and RBTH have decreased their military frames in favor of more diplomatic ones especially the ST, which is the only newspaper that had more diplomatic frames than military ones in 2017.

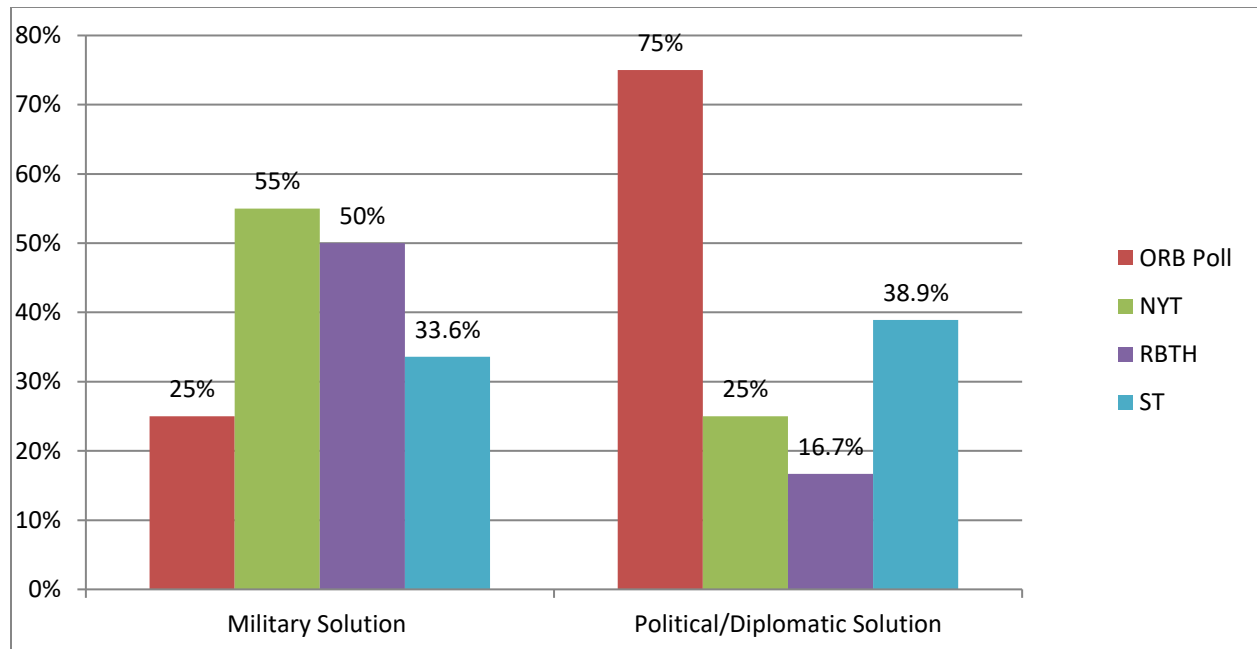


Figure 14: Military versus Diplomatic Solutions between 2016 poll data and 2017 content analysis data

“Q8 Do you support or oppose the division of the country?”

Only one frame was found with regards to the division of the country, which was anti-division of Syria justification frame in all the 131 news stories in 2015. Thus, this question can’t be answered through this study. Based on the 2017 data, the division of Syria justification frame is very scarce since the idea itself is not discussed as part of the news except in rare cases.

It can be concluded from the above comparison based on the 2015 data that there are differences between what people think and what media promotes in relation to the Syrian crisis especially in terms of remedies promoted for the crisis. While people favored the diplomatic solution to the crisis, the media framed the military solution more often. However, in terms of framed causes, there were mixed results. For instance, both media and the public opinion viewed terrorists as a core cause to the crisis, while they differed in terms of the Syrian government except in case of the NYT. The differences between the media frames and the poll data

Public Opinion and News Frames

especially in relation to proposed policies and remedies to the crisis shows the bias of the media towards governments' policies and away from the Syrian opinion.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The study analyzed media content related to the Syrian crisis in three online newspapers that represent three important powers involved in the crisis. These are the American “New York Times”, the Russian “Russia Beyond The Headlines” and the Syrian “Syria Times”. The aim of this content analysis is to identify media bias, if any, in relation to the crisis in order to know how the media are keeping the balance between serving public interest (Dennis, 1992) and abiding by elite or governmental influence (McCallum & Waller, 2013; Lasswell, 1963; Love, 2008). The study breaks its purpose down into three research questions that will be summed up in the following section.

The first research question asks “How was resolving the Syrian Crisis framed in the Syrian, American and Russian media during 2015 and 2017, and how does such framing compare/contrast with poll data representing the Syrian public opinion on resolving the crisis?” Building upon the above mentioned details in the findings section, the researcher summed up the four framing functions (Entman, 1993, 2007) for each online newspaper in order to have an overall idea of how framing was used to report on the Syrian crisis by the three newspapers.

Syrian crisis’ defined salient problems in the NYT focused on two main categories; the military aspect of the conflict and the humanitarian and cultural effects of the conflict. For the NYT, the conflict remedy frames changed with the change of Obama’s administration where an increase in the military solution frames was observed in 2017 versus 2015 at the expense of diplomatic solution frames. On the other hand, the NYT framed the Syrian government and ISIS as the main causes of the crisis. Also, framing the Syrian crisis in the NYT can be described as

abiding by a moral stance, which can be seen through NYT's high scores of human-interest frames and using Syrian citizens as news sources more than both RBTH and ST. The framing functions of the NYT are consistent with what Bruce (2014) described about the American Alhurra TV that combines between government-led political frames and human-interest frames accounting for the people. Moreover, it should be noted that the US medium, being a more liberal medium compared to its Russian and Syrian counterparts, follows a less obvious way to direct the public's attention where it deems fit (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

The most salient news topics that were coded for RBTH were the military aspect of the conflict news topics and the diplomatic aspect of the conflict news topics. In general, RBTH's military solution frames were much higher than diplomatic ones. Moreover, it focused on blaming ISIS and other terrorists for the crisis in Syria. The Russian RBTH used the least number of human-interest frames and showed the least regard to the Syrian people in its news. Its rivalry with the US may have garnered acceptance of the Russian public for its role in the Syrian crisis (Gerber, 2015). Nonetheless, this acceptance is mainly derived from the Russian people's indifference about the crisis. However, appealing to or accounting for the Syrian people apparently wasn't a concern for the newspaper.

ST's most salient news problems identified in the analysis are the military aspect of the conflict problems, the diplomatic aspect of the conflict problems and terrorist attacks problems. ST's focus on promoting military solution to the crisis in 2015 decreased in 2017 where diplomatic solution frames were more promoted as the crisis remedy. ST, similar to RBTH, focused on framing terrorists as the core reason for the crisis in Syria. Blamed terrorists included ISIS, Nusra Front and unspecified terrorists.

In framing the conflict remedy of the crisis, all three newspapers scored higher on the military solution frames in 2015. Nonetheless, diplomatic frames were also promoted but not as much as the military frames. In 2017, however, the difference between the military and the diplomatic solution frames decreased scoring 37.9% and 35.2% respectively. This can be explained by the fact that international powers started dealing with the crisis on two separate levels; seeking a diplomatic solution with opposition forces and a military solution against terrorists. This was apparent from the news articles that were analyzed for this study. Justification frames were only existent in small number of cases not persistent enough to be considered media bias.

The second half of the first question relates the comparison between the study's 2015 results and the poll results. Summing up the most important results of the comparison, the researcher classifies findings into two parts; causes related and conflict remedy related. As for the causes, consistency was found in case of blaming ISIS and Nusra Front between the poll and the media; while bigger differences between the scores was found for the other causes. On the newspapers level; the NYT had the highest congruency with Syrian public opinion as presented by the poll in terms of perceiving the Syrian government as a cause of the crisis. On the other hand, ST had the closest score to the Syrian opinion data in blaming the Nusra Front and the Arab Gulf countries.

Comparing the results of the poll data and the 2015 media analysis shows a big difference between what media promote as the solution to the Syrian crisis and what Syrian people perceive to be the optimal solution. While most Syrian poll respondents opted for the diplomatic solution to the crisis, the media's focus was on the military solution. These findings show that media,

generally don't account for the voice of the Syrian people when deciding on policies to end the crisis.

The second research question asks "How did the media's coverage of the crisis change from 2015 to 2017 in terms of framing bias with its four functions and accounting for the Syrian voice?" There were several changes that were revealed through the content analysis of the 2015 and 2017 data. Not all of these changes can be firmly related to the change in US administration or the change in Russian foreign policy towards the crisis by sending troops into Syria by end of 2015 (Quinn, 2016). The first notable change was the emergence of some news stories that were categorized in problem definition as US-Russian relations topics. Although they were not many but they were a characteristic of the new phase after President Trump took control. Second, it was noted that RBTH featured less news stories about the Syrian crisis in 2017 where a total of 12 related news stories comprised the sample. This can be described as a phase of weighing the odds and trying to figure out the best way to deal with the new US administration especially with primarily good signs ("70% of Russians", 2017).

Third and fourth changes are both related to conflict remedy changes. A notable change occurred in the NYT's adopted remedy frames where military solution to the crisis increased in 2017. While, on the other hand, ST's military remedy frames decreased in 2017 and diplomatic solution frames became more prevalent. Fifth and last change observed in the data is related to RBTH. As noted earlier RBTH is highly dependent on news agencies for its stories. However, it was mainly Interfax news agency whose name was on news stories in 2015. In 2017, RBTH shifted to TASS news agency. Investigating this deeper is out of the scope of this study.

The third research question asks “How can comparing the media framing of the Syrian crisis to the Syrian stance (gathered from the poll data) be used to further understand the struggles of power within the crisis?” It was found that, consistent with the literature (Allen et al., 1994; Godefroidt et al., 2016; Hart, 2013; Sparrow, 2008), media follow the government’s stances and policies in times of crises at the expense of the people. Media, generally in relation to the Syrian crisis, didn’t account for the voice of the Syrian people. This was largely seen when comparing the Syrian opinion about the crisis (ORB international, 2015) to the media data where media focus on promoting policies sponsored by their governments regardless of what Syrians think.

Looking at the content analysis results in 2015 and 2017, more insights about discarding the Syrian voice can be noted. Apart from the NYT, Syrian citizens were largely discarded as news sources. This is especially alarming in the case of the ST being a local Syrian newspaper. However, authoritarian regimes in the Arab world as explained by Hafez (2008) maintained a strong hold on the media even before the Arab uprisings. This seems to continue regardless of the Syrian people’s dissent and mobilization. Lucas (2008) described this as one of the factors of public opinion’s effect on foreign policy. He also asserted that even in case of public mobilization, there was no guarantee of effective change under authoritarian rule. However and despite the bigger gap observed when comparing the analysis of 2017 and the ORB poll of 2016 (ORB International, 2016), ST shifted to promoting diplomatic solution more often in 2017 unlike the other two newspapers. This can be seen as accounting for the Syrian voice and promoting a conflict remedy of the people’s choice. A closer look at the content of the news stories in the sample would show that this shift was due to two important events that took place in 2017, which are the Astana and Geneva talks that were held in an attempt to bring the

government and the opposition to resolve the situation diplomatically. Although the purpose of the talks is for the good of the country, ST's focus on official governmental sources and neglect of Syrian citizens' opinions shows an opposite stance.

Based on this and on Entman's (2007) news bias in favor of certain influential parties; it can be concluded that the three analyzed online newspapers contained bias. Although this study cannot substantiate that bias patterns found in the content analysis are due to elite or governmental influence; there were important observations that make this assertion more probable. This appeared very clearly in the policy shift that occurred in the US media (NYT) following President Trump's rise to power. Thus, the importance of studying two different periods of time to observe how shifts in power affect foreign policy and media frames. Moreover, bias wasn't only found in news frames, as discussed earlier, but also in news sources. News sources used by the three newspapers were all biased towards official sources with an increased concentration on the newspaper's government's sources.

According to Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model, which relates to the US in particular, it can be noted that the NYT followed the US governmental stance. This can be seen clearer in the rising use of military conflict remedy frames during Trump's administration when compared with Obama's administration. According to the model, the US would focus more on covering news about victims who are considered worthy. In other words, victims that are subjected to atrocities by a non-ally or rival government get higher opportunities of news coverage in US media compared to victims in ally governments. The content analysis of NYT showed that it considered the Syrian regime as a blamed party in the crisis. Adding to this Russia's support of the regime and the rivalry between the US and Russia (Bayulgen & Arbatli, 2013; Gerber, 2015) gives Syrian victims attention in US media. This was shown in the high

occurrence of human-interest frames in NYT compared to the other two newspapers and also in its use of Syrian citizen sources more often. Consistent with the model, however, the NYT uses news about Syrian victims to serve their own purposes promoting the military conflict remedy contrary to what Syrians want, which is a diplomatic solution (ORB International, 2015; ORB International, 2016).

One interesting conclusion is how media sets the scene for certain policies. This happened in case of the US where the rise of military remedy frames in 2017 set the scene for the US military strike that took place in April 2017 (Ackerman, et al., 2017). This happened despite Trump's views on acceptance of Bashar El Assad as a leader of Syria, which are so different from his predecessor who favored the idea of ousting him. On the other hand, RBTH has had high occurrence of military solution frames in 2015 which set the scene for elevated Russian military interference in the conflict later on (Quinn, 2016). In these two cases, the media not only followed the policies of their governments but also promoted acceptance for such policies even before they were officially adopted which is similar to the Australian example (McCallum & Waller, 2013). This, however, can be seen from a different perspective where the governments may be seen as influenced by the media (Love, 2008). However, this perspective could be dismissed for RBTH being an official governmental newspaper and thus is controlled by the Russian government. While the NYT isn't a government-owned newspaper, the literature shows examples of US media's conformity with the government in times of foreign policies or crises (Allen, et al., 1994; Hart, 2013; Sparrow, 2008). In addition and as explained earlier, this shift in the NYT followed Trump's presidency in 2017.

Study Limitations

Among the study's limitations is the fact that during the selected periods for content analysis fewer news stories were found for NYT and RBTH in comparison to ST. Additionally, the study's results cannot be generalized on all media as they were based only on three newspapers, which hardly represent all US, Russian and Syrian media. Moreover, the complication of the Syrian crisis made it difficult for the researcher to study all parties involved such as Turkey and Iran. Nonetheless, they are important players that future research should not ignore. One more limitation is the unavailability of comparable poll results during 2017 to track how the Syrian public opinion evolved since 2015.

Recommendation for Future Research

Some findings emerged from the study suggesting new areas for future research. The finding related to ST and RBTH's bias toward media as sources of news for their stories about the Syrian crisis is a phenomenon that requires further investigation. Another interesting finding is the high dependence of RBTH on news agencies and the shift from Interfax in 2015 to TASS in 2017. Further investigation into Russian news making and reasons why they depend on news agencies is an important suggested research area. In addition, taking this study's topic to deeper detail through qualitative analysis should be valuable. Qualitative analytical content analyses are rare (Ayish, 2008) and represent a good method to tackle the topic.

More academic studies should focus on tracking Syrian public opinion about the crisis in order to be able to compare between two world views; that of the media and that of the people. It is also recommended to study the visuals accompanying news stories about the Syrian crisis (Bruce, 2014). The study used the human-interest frame (Cozma & Kozman, 2014) to represent

the moral stance of newspapers, which was very scarce in the data. For future studies, studying other moral frames might render different results in dealing with the Syrian crisis. Also, studies focusing on frames that the US and Russia use to frame one another is a very important area of study especially in news stories about a complicated topic as the Syrian crisis.

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Appendix A:

The Coding Sheet

General Information

I. News Story:

II. Online newspaper:

1. The Syria Times
2. The New York Times
3. Russia Beyond The Headlines RBTH

III. Date:

IV. News Agency:

Sources

V. Number of Sources used:

VI. Who they represent (*Check all that apply*):

- 1: the Syrian Government (including Bashar and any other representative of the Government)
- 2: the American Government (including Obama and any other representative of the Government)
- 3: the Russian Government (including Putin and any other representative of the Government)
- 4: the international community (including the various UN bodies, the international committee of the red cross)
- 5: the Syrian citizen sources
- 6: the free army in Syria

Public Opinion and News Frames

7: ISIS

8: the Iranian Government

9: Fateh ElSham Front (new name) or Nusra Front (old name)

10: Syrian opposition Coalition

11: Arab Gulf Countries

12: Syrian Human rights activists or representatives of human rights organizations

13: non-Syrian Human rights activists or representatives of human rights organizations

14: media

15: Experts

16: Other

VII. Specific Source Identity:

VIII. Official or non-Official

1: Official

2: Non-Official

3: Not Applicable or Not Clear

Framing will be assessed using its 4 main functions as follows:

IX. The Problem definition:

X. Conflict Remedy Framing:

A. Justification frames:

- 1: pro- US air strike coalition justification frame
- 2: Anti-US air strike coalition justification frame
- 3: Pro-division of Syria justification frame
- 4: Anti-division of Syria justification frame
- 5: Pro- Russian Military interference justification frame
- 6: Anti- Russian Military interference justification frame

B. Militarism/Diplomacy Frames:

- 1: Military Solution frame
- 2: Political/diplomatic Solution frame

XI. Causes of the Syrian Crisis:

- 1: the Syrian Government (including Bashar and any other representative of the Government)
- 2: the American Government (including Obama and any other representative of the Government)
- 3: the Russian Government (including Putin and any other representative of the Government)
- 4: the free army in Syria
- 5: ISIS
- 6: the Iranian Government
- 7: Fateh ElSham Front (new name) or Nusra Front (old name)
- 8: Syrian opposition Coalition
- 9: Arab Gulf Countries
- 10: Western Countries
- 11: Unspecified Terrorists or Extremists
- 12: Others

XII. Moral stances on the crisis:

A. The human-interest Frame

1. Human-interest frame is present
2. Human-interest frame is absent

B. Number of Syrian citizen sources:

Note:

- Fatah ElSham Front is a new name for El Nusra Front that wasn't there in 2015.
- There are two additional options in the justification frames that weren't there in 2015; pro-Russian military interference and anti-Russian military interference.

Appendix B:

Relevant ORB Poll Data Sheets

Page 2


Syria Public Opinion – July 2015

Table 2
Q2 Do support or Oppose the international coalition objectives in Syria?
Base: All respondents

	Gender		Age						Region										Control of the Region										
	Total	Male (a)	18-24 (a)	25-34 (b)	35-44 (c)	45-54 (d)	55-64 (e)	65+ (f)	Daraa (g)	Hama (h)	Homs (i)	Latakia (j)	Tartus (k)	Latakia (l)	Hama (m)	Homs (n)	Daraa (o)	Quneitra (p)	Al-Midya (q)	Al-Raqqa (r)	Al-Ha-rah (s)	Al-Baylun (t)	Al-Baylun (u)	Al-Baylun (v)	Al-Baylun (w)	Al-Baylun (x)	Al-Baylun (y)	Al-Baylun (z)	
Unweighted row	1365	699	438	308	247	192	119	71	117	56	57	90	97	28	199	74	8	89	318	92	54	86	427	171	89				
Total	1365	707	658	269	370	221	126	71	115	56	58	90	96	28	203	73	7	89	317	93	53	86	430	170	91				
Strongly Support	348	200b	148	65	100	73	59	33	18	348	23	16	28	8	50	11	4	15	81k	30	19	21k	197bc	97c	6	48	20c		
Somewhat Support	590	305	228	104	147	94	55	31	30	41	28	31	19	7	42	15	2	25	17	26	37	7	25	29	3	3	52		
Somewhat Oppose	565	289	217	93	137	87	54	31	31	18	18	24	14	7	32	11	1	25	18	19	27	8	18	22	5	3	34		
Strongly Oppose	317	156	141	63	83	72	53	31	15	24	10	13	14	28	6	49	21	20	71	14	24	20	133d	101d	8	10	2		
Don't know	40	19	21	8	12	10	2	5	3	51	1	1	3	-	10	41	-	12	2	-	2	23	12	2	3				
Net support	648	340	306	131e	183e	138	112e	49	35	65e	39	29	51e	15	92	27	5	43	142	60	8	37	368bc	191c	11	79	20c		
Net oppose	477	245	217	99	147	94	55	31	31	18	18	24	14	28	6	49	21	20	71	14	24	20	133d	101d	8	10	2		
	677	345	332	130	176	159	107	72	33	45	18	27	38	55	13	101	43	30	45	14	43	43	55	44	6	87			
	50%	49%	50%	48%	47%	52%	48%	57%	46%	39%	31%	47%	43%	57%	47%	50%	58%	54%	55%	51%	35%	80%	54%	42%	53%	92%	10%		

95 percent at lower case or *

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Syria Public Opinion – July 2015

Table 3
Q3 (summary table) - Thinking about the persons and the groups which are working now in Syria, Generally, do you think that their influence is negative or positive on the matters in Syria - & that influence strongly or somehow

Base: All respondents

	STATEMENTS							
	Bashar al-Assad (a)	Iran (b)	Islamic State (c)	Nusra Front (d)	Syria Opposition Coalition (e)	Syria Opposition Coalition (f)	Azad/Culf counties (g)	Free Syrian Army (h)
Unweighted row	1365	1365	1365	1365	1365	1365	1365	1365
Total	1365	1365	1365	1365	1365	1365	1365	1365
Completely positive influence	397 (29%)	287 (21%)	98 (7%)	220 (16%)	131 (10%)	213 (16%)	213 (16%)	240 (18%)
Somewhat positive influence	281 (21%)	298 (22%)	193 (14%)	262 (19%)	218 (16%)	286 (21%)	286 (21%)	241 (18%)
Somewhat negative influence	266 (19%)	229 (17%)	373 (28%)	294 (22%)	368 (27%)	332 (24%)	274 (20%)	205 (15%)
Completely negative influence	412 (30%)	450 (33%)	600 (44%)	540 (40%)	613 (45%)	424 (31%)	590 (43%)	430 (32%)
Don't know	47 (3%)	26 (2%)	38 (3%)	25 (2%)	35 (3%)	103 (8%)	26 (2%)	26 (2%)
Net positive	641 (47%)	585 (43%)	291 (21%)	482 (35%)	349 (25%)	500 (37%)	483 (35%)	466 (34%)
Net negative	678 (50%)	724 (53%)	1036 (76%)	858 (63%)	981 (72%)	750 (55%)	856 (62%)	636 (47%)

95 percent or lower case or *



Syria Public Opinion – July 2015

Table 15
 Q8 Do you support or oppose the division of the country?
 Base: All respondents

	Gender		Age					Region										Control of the Region																	
	Total	Male	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Damascus	Latakia	Hama	Homs	Sweida	Daraa	Quneitra	Al-Idlib	Al-Raqqa	Al-Ha- mah	Al-Ras- ad-Di- ar	Latakia	Hama	Homs	Sweida	Daraa	Quneitra	Al-Idlib	Al-Raqqa	Al-Ha- mah	Al-Ras- ad-Di- ar	Control of the Region					
	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)	(i)	(j)	(k)	(l)	(m)	(n)	(o)	(p)	(q)	(r)	(s)	(t)	(u)	(v)	(w)	(x)	(y)	(z)	
Unweighted row	1365	699	428	308	247	192	119	71	117	56	57	90	97	28	199	74	8	89	318	92	54	86	678	427	171	89									
Total	1365	707	458	269	370	307	221	126	71	115	58	90	96	28	203	73	7	89	317	93	53	86	674	430	170	91									
Support	365	204	140	66	119	80	46	35	19	30	13	176	24	15	7	54	20	2	286	86	146	17	172	116	33	44	46								
	27%	29%	24%	25%	32%	26%	21%	28%	27%	22%	30%	27%	16%	25%	27%	27%	34%	31%	31%	27%	36%	30%	20%	26%	27%	20%	48%								
Oppose	958	477	481	194	244	222	168	86	47	83	43	38	60	78	19	137	53	5	61	223	58	37	63	481	305	126	44								
	70%	68%	73%	72%	66%	72%	73%	68%	66%	72%	76%	67%	61%	66%	67%	73%	66%	68%	70%	62%	69%	74%	71%	71%	71%	76%	46%								
DK/Ref	42	25	17	9	7	6	9	5	5	2	1	2	5	3	2	10	1	1	7	1	1	5	21	10	8	3									
	3%	4%	3%	4%	2%	2%	4%	4%	7%	1%	2%	3%	6%	3%	8%	6%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	6%	3%	3%	2%	5%	4%								

95 percent or lower case or *



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Note:

- These are only the ORB data sheets of the questions that were used in this study. These are not the whole poll data sheets.