

WAR OF WORDS: PERCEPTION OF THE SYRIAN CONFLICT BY RUSSIAN
AND U.S. MEDIA

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WAR OF WORDS: PERCEPTION OF THE SYRIAN CONFLICT BY RUSSIAN
AND U.S. MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

WAR OF WORDS: PERCEPTION OF THE SYRIAN CONFLICT BY RUSSIAN AND U.S. MEDIA

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The objective of this thesis is to analyze the behavior of Russian and U.S. media in covering the Syrian conflict. This study focuses on propaganda model offered by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman and its applicability to the U.S. and Russian newspapers.

The thesis consists of four chapters. In the first chapter, a brief information about propaganda model is provided. Chapter two is dedicated to the the Russian-Syrian and U.S.-Syrian relations. The third chapter is the analysis the analysis of news regarding the Syrian unrest. For comparative studies six major events that took place in Syria will be discussed. The final, fourth chapter includes concluding notes on our topic. Chomsky and Herman claim that the propaganda model can be applied to the Western media. But can it be applied to the Russian media as well? Can we claim that Russian newspapers are not objective while reporting on the Syrian conflict, but are rather propaganda tools and help in creating a particular perspective of a conflict that further becomes accepted as a reality?

Keywords: propaganda model, Russian and U.S. media, Syrian unrest

ÖZ

KELİMELERİN SAVAŞI: RUS VE AMERİKAN MEDYASI TARAFINDAN SURIYE ÇATIŞMASININ ALGILANMASI

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Bu tez; Suriye'deki çatışmaların Rus ve Amerikan medyası tarafından nasıl algılandığını analiz etmektedir. Çalışma; Noam Chomsky ve Edward Herman tarafından ortaya konan propaganda modeli üzerine odaklanarak; modelin Amerikan ve Rus gazetelerindeki uygulanabilirliğini kanıtlamaya çalışmaktadır.

Tezin içeriğinde dört ana bölüm yer almaktadır. Birinci bölümde; propaganda modeli hakkında kısa bilgiler bulunmaktadır. İkinci bölümde; Rusya - Suriye ve Amerika - Suriye arasındaki ilişkiler ele alınmaktadır. Üçüncü bölümde; Suriye'deki çatışmalar hakkındaki haberler analiz etmektedir. Son bölümdeyse; tez konusuna ilişkin sonuç çıkarımları yer almaktadır.

İçerikte; Suriye'de meydana gelen altı büyük olay karşılaştırmalı şekilde yer alacaktır. Chomsky ve Herman'ın iddiası; propaganda modeli batı medyası üzerinde uygulanabilmektedir. Peki aynı iddia Rus medyası için de söylenebilir mi? Suriye'deki çatışmalar hakkında yayımlanan haberlerde; Rus gazetelerinin tarafsız olmadığını ve gazetelerin propaganda malzemesi olarak; belirli bir bakış açısını gerçek bir durum gibi kabullenebilir hale getirmeye yardımcı olduğunu iddia edebilir miyiz? Anahtar kelimeler: propaganda modeli, Rus ve Amerikan medyası, Suriye'deki çatışma

To my beloved husband and parents

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It all started when a Tunisian street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi has set himself on fire on 17 December 2010. Like hundreds of Tunisians, a twenty-six-year old Bouazizi had a university degree but no work. To earn some money the unemployed Bouazizi sold fruits and vegetables without a license. When police stopped him and confiscated his produce he was so desperate that he poured fuel over himself and set himself on fire.

In just a few days the unrest swept across the country. A series of increasingly violent street demonstrations through December 2010 ultimately led to the ouster of longtime President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011. No one had ever imagined that a suicidal attempt would lead firstly to the Tunisia's Revolution, also known as the Jasmine Revolution, and then spark a wave of unrest in the Arab world. Demonstrations and riots took place in almost all Arab countries-Algeria, Jordan, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. Syria was no exception. The uprising took place on 15 March 2011 with public demonstrations as part of the wider Arab Spring and is still going on.

The reason for my choice of this topic lays in the matter of a really interesting case for Middle East specialists. At the same time it is being not adequately explored and there are not many sources devoted to the subject of my inquiry.

The project is dedicated to the Syrian uprising and its coverage in the mass media. It is an endeavor to compare the information provided by American and Russian newspapers. One would ask, why analyze newspapers and not other media, such as TV-channels, blogs and other electronic media? A great deal of research has been made on “new

media”. But relatively little attention has been given to “traditional media”, and that is a pity. The traditional media, in addition to providing first-hand information, offers a comprehensive and in-depth coverage of current affairs, whereas blogs and social media outlets provide little if any original reporting. More visuals, less information-that is the distinctive characteristic of the “new media”.

The thesis not only provides brief information about the uprising in Syria, but also focuses on Russian- Syrian and U.S.-Syrian relations. In particular, the project is dedicated to the analysis of foreign media sources covering the Syrian unrest.

To provide a solid ground for my research, I chose four media outlets that differed in their political orientation. The choice of these media outlets was not only dictated by their political stance on the Syrian question but also because of the availability of the access to their archives online. These are: *Washington Post* and *New York Times* that represent the American perception of the conflict; and *Izvestiya* (News) and *Kommersant* (Businessman) representing the Russian view of the conflict.

The *Washington Post* is a broadsheet newspaper published in Washington D.C. It is described as liberal, though having some overt leanings towards conservatism.

The *New York Times* is an American liberal daily newspaper. The *Izvestiya* daily was founded in 1917 and has been continuously printed since then. In 2005, the media arm of state-controlled energy giant *Gazprom* bought a majority stake of *Izvestiya* and included in the *Gazprom Media* holding. The *Kommersant* founded in 1989 is a nationally distributed liberal daily newspaper published in Russia and mostly devoted to politics and business.

The choice of these media outlets was not only dictated by their political stance on the Syrian question but also because of the availability of the access to their archives online.

For comparative studies, I chose six major events that were presented in the media. Since the Syrian unrest started in 2011 and is still going on, it is necessary to set the

time frame for news to be analyzed. Therefore, we will take a look at the news that appeared in the period of time between March 23, 2011 and February 3, 2013. The first event to be analyzed was the crackdown in Dara'a on March 23, 2011. It is considered to be a day when the peaceful demonstrations turned into a violent clash with the Syrian Army. The second was the speech of Bashar Assad's that took place on June 20, 2011. The third event was the suicide bombings in Damascus on December 23, 2011 and January 6, 2012. The fourth event took place on February 2012, the day when Russia and China vetoed a resolution before the United Nations Security Council. The fifth, not less important event, took place on June 22, 2012 when a Turkish warplane was brought down by Syrian forces. The last one is dedicated to the issue of chemical weapons.

These were not random events that took place in Syria. Contrary to the daily occasions, be it the violence or demonstrations, these six events provide us with more revealing reading in terms of used sources of information and lexicon employed to explain these out of the ordinary events that shook Syria. In addition, the reason for my choice of these events is that each one has different and opposing interpretations, thus exposing the distinctive elements that show the bias.

The goal of this research is not only to show the media bias but also to describe how such biases shape a certain view that becomes accepted as a reality. To do so, I will utilize Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's theory of spreading propaganda and crafting realities. According to this theory, the media "serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them."¹ In short, the authors claim that the news and editorial opinions are mostly not objective but rather strongly influenced by interests of their 'owners'. It is also worth mentioning that Chomsky and Herman claim that the propaganda model can be applied to the mass media while providing examples from the Western media. I will try to prove that the

¹ Herman, Edward S., Chomsky, Noam, *Manufacturing Consent: Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London: Pantheon, 2002), p.xi

model can also be applied to the Russian media. But before proceeding to our main part, let us take a closer look at the propaganda model.

According to Herman and Chomsky's "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media", the media does "serve and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them."² The representatives of these interests have "important agendas and principles that they want to advance, and they are well positioned to shape and constrain media policy."³

In other words, the authors claim that the media is not an independent institution but rather a system-supportive propaganda tool dependent on market forces.⁴ The authors specify five "filters" such as: size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media; the advertising license to do business; sourcing mass-media news; flak; and anticommunism. Let us take a closer look at these "filters".

The first filter compromises size, ownership and profit orientation of the medium. Most media form parts of giant profit-oriented corporations that have common interests with banks, other cooperations and government. Along with the "legal dependency" such as the companies' requirement of government licenses and franchises, there are also political ties of the media and the dependency on the government "for more general policy support."⁵

The second filter, or funding generated through advertising is another important filter since it influences the media prosperity and survival. The advertisers buy and pay for the programs and news. In other words, by subsidizing the media, advertisers choose

² Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: Political Economy of the Mass Media* , p.xi

³ Ibid., p. 13

⁴ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: Political Economy of the Mass Media* , p.xi

⁵ Ibid., p.13

selectively among programs and news to be shown. A large corporation will unlikely sponsor a program or news that collides with their interests.

The third of Herman and Chomsky's filters relates to the sourcing of mass media: "The mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest." ⁶ Since it is impossible to place reporters everywhere, the media cooperations concentrate their resources on the people and locations most likely to "produce" news, including government agencies, emergency services, city halls, police department. Business corporations and trade organizations are also trusted sources of stories considered newsworthy. Thus, we can see a moral "division of labour: officials have and give the facts; reporters merely get them". ⁷ However this division often leads to media being manipulated into "following a special agenda and framework". ⁸ A refusal to follow a particular line may cause offence to the media's source and the disturbance of their relationship.

The fourth filter is "flak" described by Herman and Chomsky as "negative responses to a media statement or program". ⁹ Flak may be direct or indirect. It may take the form of the withdrawal of access to news sources, complaints, threatening or harrasment of journalists for not reporting in accordance with a particular line.

Finally, the media share the same ideological outlook as the government. Originally, the filter was described as anticommunism. Since the threat of Communism has diminished after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fifth filter might be expressed as ideological convergence between the establishment and the media.

⁶ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: Political Economy of the Mass Media* , p.18

⁷ Ibid., p. 19

⁸ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: Political Economy of the Mass Media*, pp.22-23

⁹ Ibid., p. 26

According to the authors, these five filters are used in narrowing the “range of news” thus leading to “systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage based on serviceability to important domestic power interests.”¹⁰ In other words, Chomsky and Herman assert that it is the policy that shapes the media that is represented as a “puppet” that always has a “puppeteer”.¹¹

There is another important element of propaganda model, namely “worthy and unworthy victims” when victims of enemy states are “worthy” and the people treated with severity by the U.S. or U.S. client states are considered “unworthy”. Worthiness refers to the quality and quantity of coverage which news programmes and newspapers give stories depending on whether they reflect well or poorly on the United States. The quality of coverage is displayed in “placement, headlining, word usage, and other modes of mobilizing interest and outrage.”¹² We would expect that the U.S. media will portray the opposition groups as worthy victims and the Russian media, especially that of the pro-government stand, will portray them as unworthy. The coverage of the worthy victims will be detailed and dramatical and will generate reader interest and sympathetic emotion. In contrast, unworthy victims will be reported in a slight detail, with minimal humanization and little context.

To sum up, there is a five-filter system propaganda model, described by Chomsky and Herman. The authors assert that media is integrated into the market system making it dependent on variety of factors, such as major funding sources (advertisers) and the mutual interests and relationships between the media companies and the government thus leading the media to ‘promote’ a certain agenda in accordance with the U.S. interests. As a consequence, creating particular news helps to shape a certain perspective of a conflict that becomes accepted as reality.

¹⁰ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: Political Economy of the Mass Media*, pp. 31-35

¹¹ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: Political Economy of the Mass Media*, p. xvii

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 35-37

As for the organization of this work, it consists of a preface, introduction, main body, conclusion and references.

The introduction is devoted to brief information about the uprising in Syria. Chapter two of my work discusses the relations between Syria and Russia, and the U.S. and Syria. Chapter three is dedicated to the news analysis and comparison of the foreign media - Russian and American. Chapter four is the conclusion part of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

U.S-SYRIAN AND RUSSIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS

In March 2011 Syria faced nationwide demonstrations as part of the wider protest movement known as the Arab Spring. Beginning as minor protests it soon evolved into mass demonstrations sometimes becoming very violent and brutal. Unlike uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt that led to the ouster of both Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and regime changes, Syrian protests turned into a civil war which is still going on.

Another unique feature of this revolution is that it has been able to unite global and regional powers on one goal- that is the survival of Assad's regime.¹³ Iran, Russia and China-all of these countries are trying to prevent foreign intervention in Syria.

On the other hand, we can see countries that do support the regime change in Syria. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar with its influential media outlet *al-Jazeera*, and Turkey are all undermining the regime while supporting the opposition groups, and it is understandable why. They see Syria as a proxy of Iran that should be eliminated, thus isolating Iran with its threat to Sunni dominance in the region.

To sum up, we see two trends in regional and global powers' policies toward Syria-support for the Bashar al-Assad regime and support for opposition groups. But how these opinions are presented in the media?

It is obvious that we will be able to see differences, but the aim of this paper is to show that the published information was not only subjective, but also actively engaged in

¹³ Rashdan Abdelrahman, *Syrians Crushed in a Complex International Game*, March 21, 2012, (online) <http://www.onislam.net/english/politics/asia/456316-syrians-crushed-in-a-complex-international-game.html> , accessed on October 10, 2012

creating a particular perspective of the issue. To do so, I chose two conflicting views presented by the U.S. and Russian media outlets. But let us firstly take a look at the relations of these two countries with Syria before proceeding to the analysis of media coverage.

2.1 U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS

The United States and Syria have long had an uneasy relationship. The two countries established relations after World War II, with U.S. recognizing the independence of Syria and appointing ambassador to Damascus. However, in 1957, U.S.-Syrian relations got tense. Syria accused the U.S. of trying to overthrow the Syrian Ba'ath government, resulting in suspension of diplomatic relations between the countries.¹⁴ Following eruptions of the June 1967 and October 1973 wars, the relationship between the United States and Syria continued to deteriorate. And yet, it was the U.S.-brokered May 1974 Israeli-Syrian Disengagement Agreement that improved the U.S.-Syrian relations. The agreement included implementation of U.N Security Council Resolution 338, which called for an immediate cease-fire and what is more, Israel was to withdraw from the entire land “captured in the October war and the few strips of territory conquered in 1967, including the city of Quneitra.”¹⁵ After Syria’s humiliating defeat to Israel in the 1967 War and the loss of its some territories during the October 1973-it was a certain victory for Syria. Hafez al-Assad’s regime safeguarded its legitimacy and a new period in the U.S.-Syrian relations began. The United States provided two loans, totaling \$58 million to “help Syria expand and modernize its water supply system in Damascus and to increase its agricultural production.”¹⁶ Bilateral relations have further improved by signing a cultural agreement between the countries and U.S. providing economic assistance for Syria in 1978 and 1979, totalling \$150 million.

¹⁴ For further information, see Rabil, Robert G., *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East*, pp.35-45

¹⁵ Ibid., p.59

¹⁶ Rabil, Robert G., *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East*, p. 61

But this U.S.-Syrian rapprochement was greatly undermined by the failure of the Syrian-Israeli peace process, Syrian interference in Lebanon, sponsoring Palestinian militants and supplying *Hezbollah* with arms. Syria's opposition to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 has created a crisis in which U.S. threats and sanctions targeted Damascus.

As we have seen, relations between two countries have been far from ideal, with periods of ups and downs. But there were times when Syria and U.S. did have close relations.

The Cold War completely changed the balance of power in the Middle East. The end of the war and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union brought the multipolar system to an end thus leading to unipolarity. Syria, having lost its main ally and protector, the USSR, had to “bandwagon with the US hegemon”: it joined the 1990 anti-Iraq multinational coalition in the Gulf War.¹⁷ The Taif Accord that ended the civil war in Lebanon has further strengthened mutual relations. In 1991, former President of Syria Hafiz al-Assad made a historic decision to accept the then U.S. President George H.W Bush's invitation to attend the Madrid peace conference and to engage in subsequent bilateral negotiations with Israel. The peace process failed but as Hinnebusch put in, even though it was due to the unwillingness of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to proceed with Israel's commitments to total withdrawal from the Golan Heights and of Clinton to hold him on them, the failure was blamed on Syria.¹⁸ The last Israeli-Syrian negotiations were held in 2000.¹⁹ The two countries could not come to an agreement since Syria still continues to demand that Israel return the 450 square mile Golan Heights territory which the latter occupied during the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967. Israel rejects Syria's demand and insists that any new negotiations should be without preconditions. There were some other attempts to revive peace talks but no positive results were apparent.

¹⁷ Hinnebusch, Raymond, *Defying the hegemon: Syria and the Iraq War*, International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies, Vol 2, No 3, 2008, p.376

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 377

¹⁹ For more information, see Rabinovich, Itamar, *The View from Damascus: State, Political Community and Foreign Relations in Twentieth-Century Syria*, pp. 255-344

After President Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2000 he has pursued some economic reforms and more political freedoms. He has released approximately 600 political prisoners and permitted freer discussion of political issues; however the so-called Damascus Spring was a short-lived movement that ended in 2001 with the arrest of prominent intellectuals and critics of the regime.²⁰ In terms of economic reforms, Assad tried to liberalize some sectors of the Syrian economy by partially privatizing the banking industry, reducing customs duties, increasing foreign investment and pursuing a gradual integration of Syria into the world market.²¹

In order to stabilize the stagnant economy in a short-term period the regime decided to reopen the oil pipeline which links Kirkuk in northern Iraq to Baniyas on the Syrian coast. Syria, which is a small oil producer, received from Iraq around 200,000 barrels a day at preferential prices, enabling it to profit from sales on the international market.²² These deliveries were in violation of U.N sanctions (Section 531 of the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, 2003 (P.L. 108-7)), that bans aid to countries not in compliance with U.N Security Council sanctions against Iraq. As a result, the oil pipeline was shut in 2003 but it did become a bone of contention thus leading to the deterioration of the U.S.- Syrian relations.²³ According to Hinnebusch, however it, was the rise of the so-called “neo-cons” and their “hawkish patrons” (Cheney and Rumsfeld) that had a decisive role in the decline of the U.S.-Syrian relations.

The neo-cons within the new Bush administration advocated a harsh, anti-Syrian rhetoric while proposing the use of U.S. military capability to “change the dynamics of

²⁰ Prados, Alfred B. and Sharp, Jeremy M., *Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States after the Iraq War*, CRS Report for Congress, February 28, 2005, p. 10

²¹ Prados, Alfred B. and Sharp, Jeremy M., *Syria: U.S Relations and Bilateral Issues*, , CRS Report for Congress, September 19, 2007, p.8

²² Hinnebusch, *Defying the hegemon: Syria and the Iraq War*, p.376

²³ Prados and Sharp, *Syria: U.S Relations and Bilateral Issues*, p.25

the Middle East.”²⁴ As a result, a U.S. brokerage of Arab-Israeli peace negotiations stopped being a priority under Bush thus Syria losing its status as a U.S partner in the peace process and instead becoming a threat.

After the terrorist attacks in September 2001 and the following war on terrorism, the world was divided into two sides-friends and foes of America. Subsequently friends were the countries that were in a total agreement with the U.S. on how to deal with terrorism. Others were foes. Syria, which had its own view on the war against terrorism, tried to take a middle ground, supporting the U.S. war on *al-Qaeda* but objecting to Washington’s tendency to associate resistance movements such as *Hezbollah* or *Hamas* with terrorism.²⁵

For example, the Syrian government played a crucial role in the unraveling of an *al-Qaeda* group in Canada that was planning to attack major government institutions in Canada and the United States. But at the same time Syria was still sponsoring *Hezbollah* and *Hamas*.

It was Syria’s opposition to the Iraq war in 2003 and the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 that created a crisis in U.S-Syrian relations. But why did Syria oppose the Iraqi invasion? Let us remember that in 1991 Syria did join the anti-Iraq coalition. Why not in 2003? According to Hinnebusch, the incentives were different. If in 1991 Iraq was the aggressor toward other Arab states including Syria, in 2003 it was seen as a victim of aggression by a foreign power, support for which would be seen as conflicting with Arab nationalist values. Another important factor was that unlike in 1991 when Hafiz al-Assad was promised a free hand in Lebanon and U.S. help in Middle East peace negotiations, in 2003 the neo-cons were offering just a stick, not a carrot. Moreover there were two threats that Syria was facing: alignment with U.S. would lead to loss of its legitimacy and U.S. hostility if it refused to

²⁴ Hinnebusch, *Defying the hegemon: Syria and the Iraq War*, p. 377

²⁵ Prados and Sharp, *Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States after the Iraq War*, p.17

do so. On top of that, the U.S. doctrine of pre-emption coinciding with close alliance with Israel -all of these posed a threat to the Syrian regime's survival unless it agreed to virtually abandon its "Arab nationalist identity and role."²⁶ Taking all these aspects into consideration, Syria chose to oppose the Iraqi invasion thus becoming a foe of America. However instead of militarily targeting Syria, the U.S. chose to economically and diplomatically isolate Syria.

2.1.1 U.S. Sanctions Against Syria

It is worth noting that there was a number of sanctions imposed on Syria before 2003, mostly resulting from Syria's designation as a country supportive of international terrorism in 1979. These include the prohibition of the U.S. foreign assistance to Syria and restrictions on bilateral trade and financial transactions.

But it was not until 2003 that United States imposed an array of comprehensive sanctions against Syria. In December 2003, Bush signed the so-called SALSA (Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act), an act that threatens Syria with diplomatic and economic sanctions unless it ends its sponsorship of terrorist organizations, development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and occupation of neighboring Lebanon.

SALSA outlines a set of mandatory sanctions including the bans on the export of military items and of dual use items (items with both civil and military applications) to be imposed by the President and a set of sanctions of which the President must choose two that are subject to presidential waiver. The optional sanctions are: a ban on all exports (other than food and medicine) to Syria; prohibit US businesses from investing or operating in Syria; restrict the freedom of movement of Syrian diplomats in the United States; ban on Syrian aircraft landing in or overflying the United States; downgrade diplomatic contacts with Syria; and freeze of Syrian assets in the country. The two sanctions President Bush chose were the ban on Syrian aircraft landing in or

²⁶ Hinnebusch, *Defying the hegemon: Syria and the Iraq War*, pp. 380-81

overflying the United States and ban on all exports other than food and medicine. But there are also waivers allowed by SALSA if only it is determined to be in "national security" interest of the United States.²⁷ Thus following exports are permitted: aircraft parts necessary for flight safety; informational materials; telecommunications equipment to promote the free flow of information; products in support of U.N. operations; products in support of activities of the U.S.; and medicines that are not banned because of potential dual use. The following operations are permitted: takeoff/landing of Syrian aircraft to transport Syrian officials on official business to the U.S.; takeoff/landing for non-scheduled stops or due to emergency; and overflights of U.S. territory.

Along with these sanctions the President also imposed two additional sanctions based on other legislation. These include: a ban on U.S. banks and overseas offices to maintain accounts with the Syrian bank to prevent money laundering as a part of the USA Patriot Act; and freeze of assets and property of individuals who are "determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to be or to have been directing or otherwise significantly contributing to" Syria's sponsorship of terrorist organizations, development of weapons of mass destruction, occupation of Lebanon, or efforts to undermine stability in Iraq; and prohibits U.S. citizens from engaging in financial transactions with them.²⁸

Along with economic sanctions that targeted Syrian government, the U.S tried to diplomatically isolate Syria. In February 2005, in the wake of the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Refik Hariri, the U.S. recalled its Ambassador Margaret Scobey to Washington.²⁹ The assassination was blamed on Syria.

²⁷ Sharp and Prados, Syria: *U.S Relations and Bilateral Issues*, pp.26-27

²⁸ Presidential Documents, Federal Register, , Vol. 69, No. 93, May 13, 2004, 26752, available at <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/13338.pdf> , accessed on November, 3, 2012

²⁹ Daalder Ivo, Gnesotto Nicole, Gordon Philip (ed.), *Crescent of Crisis: U.S.-European Strategy for the Greater Middle East*, p.82

We have briefly discussed U.S.-Syrian relations and U.S. sanctions and mentioned the failure of Syria-Israeli peace talks as well as the Syrian government's opposition to the Operation Iraqi Freedom. But what about other U.S. issues of concern about Syria?

2.1.2 Issues of U.S. Concern

There are several major issues that are of a great concern of America. These include the role of Syria in Lebanon, the Iraq factor, Syrian relations with Iran, arms proliferation in Syria and terrorism.

Let us start with the Syrian involvement in Lebanon.

2.1.2.1 Syrian Involvement in Lebanon

There are three types of relations that we should depict while discussing the role of Syria in Lebanon. These include: political, economic and social ties between the two countries.

Politically Syria has exerted influence in Lebanon for many years. One of the best examples was in 2004 when the Lebanese parliament adopted a Syrian-inspired constitutional amendment extending Lebanon's pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud's six-year term for additional three years.³⁰ Reaction to this amendment was the adoption of U.N. Resolution 1559 calling for "a free and fair electoral process in Lebanon's upcoming presidential election...without foreign interference" and a withdrawal of "all remaining foreign forces" from Lebanon.³¹ It is worth mentioning that there was a significant Syrian military presence in Beirut since the outbreak of civil war in 1975. Following the 1989 Taif Accord which eventually ended the fifteen-year Lebanese civil war, approximately 15,000 Syrian troops remained in Lebanon.

³⁰ Rabinovich, *The View from Damascus: State, Political Community and Foreign Relations in Twentieth-Century Syria*, pp. 346-354

³¹ UN Press Release, SC/8181, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/sc8181.doc.htm>, accessed on November, 3, 2012

Another example is the February 2005 explosion of a car bomb in Beirut killing Lebanese ex-Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. An opponent of the Syrian-inspired amendment, Hariri with ties to Saudi Arabia, resigned in 2004 and subsequently joined an anti-Syrian opposition group. The assassination was blamed on Syria and pro-Syrian Lebanese government. As a result of this incident, the U.S. government recalled the U.S. Ambassador to Syria for urgent consultations thus trying to diplomatically isolate the country.

With the implementation of Resolution 1559, the Syrian forces withdrew from Lebanon thus leading to a decline of military presence in the country but did not put an end to Syria exerting great deal of influence in the neighbor country. There is still a powerful pro-Syrian coalition in the government led by Najib Mikati and not less powerful *Hezbollah*, which was built up by Iran in the 1980s. Syrian support for the Shiite Muslim *Hezbollah* is one of the main issues for U.S. since it continues to launch attacks against Israeli troops in the Lebanese border area. To sum up, although Syria has abandoned its overt control of Lebanon after 2005, it is still exerting covert control using political patronage and behind-the-scenes alliances.

In terms of economical ties we can emphasize three factors such as: labor, trade and financial sectors. In a report, the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) said it was clear that the "Lebanese economy is vital to Syria's own economic health".³² And yet it is true. More than half a million Syrians are estimated to be working in Lebanon thus playing a crucial role in Lebanon's post-civil war reconstruction. Aside from absorbing Syria's excess labor supply, economic opportunities in Lebanon inject the Syrian economy with an important source of earnings; worker remittances from Lebanon to Syria are estimated to be approximately \$1 billion. As well as this, Syria is Lebanon's

³² Hopkins, Rebecca A., *Lebanon and the Uprising in Syria: Issue for Congress*, CRS Report, February 2, 2012, p. 8

only overland trade route and is integral to Lebanon's ability to export. Bilateral trade between the two totals \$560 million.³³

In financial sector Lebanon is also interconnected with Syria. Due to the U.S. sanctions against Syrian banks, Lebanese banks are valuable sources of capital for Syrian businessmen used to evade sanctions.

Societal ties between Lebanon and Syria include strong family ties and a vast Shiite Muslim population in both countries.

2.1.2.2 Iraq and Iran

Another regional issue that affects the U.S.-Syrian relations is Iraq, which is closely tied to Iran's containment. We have already discussed Syrian opposition to the Iraqi invasion in 2003 and its consequences in form of sanctions against Syria. But it was the movement of extremist foreign fighter groups affiliated with *al-Qaeda* in Iraq that caused an outpouring of U.S. grievances.³⁴ The movement of these groups peaked during 2005-2007, and since then there have been significant Syrian efforts to decrease border crossings.

Syrian relations with Iran maintained close since the early years of the Islamic Republic and Syria now serves as Iran's key Arab ally and partner. With the absence of an Iraqi threat since 2003, relations between Syria and Iran have further deepened, sustained by their shared support of resistance movements such as *Hezbollah* and *Hamas*, and their enmity toward Israel. Both Damascus and Tehran have continuously provided *Hezbollah* with material, diplomatic and political support since its establishment. According to the 2012 CRS report, "Syria is an important interlocutor between

³³ Lebanon- Syria Trade Statistics, Economic Unit- 25/7/2012—PBS, available at http://www.economy.gov.lb/public/uploads/files/countries/Syria_Lebanon.pdf, accessed on November, 3, 2012

³⁴ U.S. State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, available at <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2009/140891.htm> and <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2009/140889.htm>, accessed on November 5, 2012

Hezbollah and its main patron, Iran. Iranian weapons transit through Syria to *Hezbollah* caches in Lebanon.”³⁵ The two states also cooperate militarily beyond their support for proxy militias, with Iran supplying arms, ammunition and military technology to Syrian security forces fighting against the rebels in the ongoing Syrian civil war.³⁶

2.1.2.3 Arms Proliferation in Syria

As Sharp and Prados put in, arms proliferation in Syria is another important issue of concern for United States. This include nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, missiles and arms sales from Russia. Whereas nuclear capabilities of Syria are less certain, Syria does possess one of the largest and most advanced chemical warfare capabilities in the Middle East including large missile inventories. Syria is reported to have surface-to-surface missile warheads containing nerve agent Sarin and may be trying to develop a more toxic nerve agent X.³⁷

In terms of arms sales, Russia and Syria have long-standing agreements. It has shipped billions of dollars worth of missiles, combat jets, tanks, artillery and other military gear to Syria over more than four decades.

We will go into more detail on arms deals between two countries later while discussing Russian-Syrian relations. But why Russia's arms sales to Syria is such an important issue of U.S. concern? Let us remember that United States itself is the largest arms dealer in the world. According to CRS report, it is an important issue since Israel contends that Syria may transfer arms to *Hezbollah*. Another concern is that Syrians may deploy supplied missiles to Israel's border thus disrupting the balance of power in the region. In short, the security matter is an important object of concern for the United

³⁵ Hopkins, *Lebanon and the Uprising in Syria: Issue for Congress*, p.1

³⁶ Reuters, *Exclusive: Western report - Iran ships arms, personnel to Syria via Iraq*, September 19, 2012, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/19/us-syria-crisis-iran-iraq-idUSBRE88117B20120919>, accessed on November 5, 2012

³⁷ Sharp and Prados, *Syria: U.S Relations and Bilateral Issues*, pp. 16-18

States.³⁸ But is it really a serious matter of concern? What about the U.S. supplying Saudi Arabia and Qatar (not less authoritarian regimes than Syria) with arms? Let us remember that Saudi Arabia is the world's largest source of funds for Islamists and terrorists, including *al-Qaeda*.³⁹

2.1.2.4 Conclusion

To sum up, there is a long history of ups and downs in U.S.-Syrian relations. If in the 1990s relations between two countries can be described as great, the 2000s marked a rapid deterioration in mutual relations. Close cooperation was replaced by a limited one and an array of sanctions targeting Damascus. But what about the relations between Russia and Syria? Is there any deterioration or do they tend to be close as during the Cold War?

2.2. RUSSIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS

Historically Russia enjoys strong and friendly relationship with Syria dating back to the late 19th century.⁴⁰ During the Cold War, Damascus served as an ally to Moscow in opposition to the Western powers. In addition to Soviet bloc's substantial military supplies, there was extensive economic and political assistance to Syria. For instance, between 1954 and 1955, the Soviet bloc's credits for Syria amounted to \$363 million, and the Soviet bloc's share in Syrian exports increased considerably, from 0.5 per cent to 7.8 per cent. From 1955 to 1958, Syria received about \$294 million from Moscow as assistance.⁴¹ It is also worth mentioning, that in addition to military supplies, Syria also received military advisers and technicians from the Soviet bloc and sent military

³⁸ Sharp and Prados, *Syria: U.S Relations and Bilateral Issues*, pp. 16-18

³⁹ The Telegraph, *Wikileaks: Saudis 'chief funders of al-Qaeda'*, December 5, 2010, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/wikileaks/8182847/Wikileaks-Saudis-chief-funders-of-al-Qaeda.html> , accessed on November 7, 2012

⁴⁰ For further information, see Kreutz, Andrej, "Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?"

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-16

personnel to the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites for training. In the late 1970s, the Soviet Union provided Syria with arms worth about \$3,67 billion, making Syria the “largest noncommunist buyer of Soviet weapons” and the Soviet Union to be Syrian “only dependable global ally”.⁴²

With the end of the Cold War and subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union, Syria lost its main ally-USSR. However it does not mean that the relations between Russia and Syria have deteriorated. On contrary, bilateral relations have boosted with Russia’s support of Assad regime. There are two types of cooperation I would like to highlight: economic and military.

2.2.1. Economic Cooperation

Russia has significant economic relations with Syria. This include: exports, investments in Syria and presence of Russian companies in Syria’s infrastructure, energy and tourism sectors. According to 2011 European Commission report, bilateral trade equals to 957, 8 million euros (3%) with exports totaling 29,4 million euros (0.3 %) and imports 928,3 million euros (4.7%).⁴³

Investment in Syria is another pillar in the economic relationship between two countries. In a post by *Kommersant*, the author claims that the most important sphere of investments is oil and gas exploration and production.⁴⁴ Companies such as *Soyuzneftegaz* and *Tatneft* are currently extracting oil in Syria. *Stroytransgaz* has already built a natural gas pipeline and processing plant and is in the process of building a

⁴² Kreutz, Andrej, “*Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?*”, pp.15-16

⁴³ EU Bilateral Trade and Trade with the World, Trade G.2, available at http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113451.pdf , accessed on November 7, 2012

⁴⁴ *Kommersant* (Russian newspaper), “*Russian Interests in Syria*”, No.22 (4807), February 2, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1868123> , accessed on November 7, 2012

second plant near Rakka. The plant will have annual production capacity of 1.3 billion cubic meters of purified gas.⁴⁵

Russian companies are also involved in other energy projects. For example, in 2010 *Rosatom* announced its plans to build Syria's first nuclear power plant. *Tekhnopromeksport* that has built energy producing facilities in Syria intends to further cooperate with it. Besides there are companies participating in irrigation works in Syria (*Sovintervod* and *Rusgidro*) and manufacturing companies such as *TMK* (steel pipe manufacturer) and *Uralmash* (heavy machine building company). Other companies that have investments in Syria are: *Tupolev*, *Aviastar-SP*, *Traktornie Zavody (Tractor Plant)*, *Sitroniks*, *Russkie Navigatsionnye Tekhnologii (Russian Navigation Technologies)* and *Sinara Group*.⁴⁶

According to CNN, just in 2009 the total amount of Russian business investments in Syria equaled \$19.4 billion.⁴⁷

2.2.2. Military Cooperation

Military cooperation between Syria and Russia can be traced back to the 1950s when the USSR offered to extend significant military and economic assistance in "support of Syria's refusal to join the Baghdad Pact".⁴⁸ Especially after the 1967 War, Soviet military aid to Syria grew considerably and with Hafez al-Assad's rise to power in 1971, political and military ties between two countries were further strengthened. USSR military aid to Syria was not only in terms of arms supply but it also sent Soviet military

⁴⁵ "Stroytransgaz Continues to Build Gas Plant in Syria", [http://www.downstreamtoday.com/\(X\(1\)S\(gla3ha453fhjmq55eo4kvwab\)\)/news/article.aspx?a_id=36054&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1](http://www.downstreamtoday.com/(X(1)S(gla3ha453fhjmq55eo4kvwab))/news/article.aspx?a_id=36054&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1), accessed on November 7, 2012

⁴⁶ Kommersant, "Russian Interests in Syria"

⁴⁷ CNN, "Why Russia protects Syria's Assad", February 3, 2012, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/02/opinion/treisman-russia-syria/index.html>, accessed on November 7, 2012

⁴⁸ Syria - Arms Imports, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/syria/arms-imports.htm>, accessed on November 8, 2012

advisers and technicians as well as trained Syrian military. The Soviet Union's assistance to Syria during the 1973 War is worth mentioning. In October 1973, Egypt and Syria launched an offensive against Israel. Taken by surprise, the Israelis battled back and got the upper hand. Being concerned by the Israelis superiority and a possible defeat of Egypt and Syria, the Soviet General-Secretary Leonid Brezhnev threatened to take "appropriate action unilaterally".⁴⁹ In addition to Soviet's airlift of approximately 4,000 tons of military supplies and its sealift of considerably more to help Syria and Egypt, a Soviet freighter arrived to Alexandria. The presence of nuclear weapons on board was indicated. In response, U.S. President Richard Nixon ordered "a stage 3 worldwide military alert of U.S. forces."⁵⁰ Fortunately, the two superpowers had successfully reached agreement on a cease-fire resolution that led to the end of the October War. Within a year, the Soviets replaced the destroyed weapons and armor.

In the early 1990s Russian-Syrian relations became strained due to Syria's debts for Soviet supplies of armament. However the contacts resumed in 1996 with Syria purchasing a large amount of weaponry. Cancellation of 73 per cent (\$9.8 billion) of total \$13.4 billion Soviet-era Syria's debt in 2005 served as a breaking point in terms of Damascus-Moscow relations. A new era in mutual relations began. Russia became Syria's main arms supplier.

But let us take a closer look at the arms deals between Syria and Russia.

2.2.2.1 Arms Deals

As we have mentioned above, the Russian-Syrian arms deals go back more than a half-century, to the 1950s. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has not put an end to this cooperation, but on contrary, Russian weapons exports to Syria have only increased. Trenin reports in the *New York Times* that from 2000 to 2010 Russia sold around \$1.5

⁴⁹ Quandt, William B., *Soviet Policy in the October 1973 War*, p. 32, available at <http://130.154.3.14/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2006/R1864.pdf> , accessed on November 8, 2012

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 30-33

billion worth weaponry to Syria making Damascus Moscow's seventh-largest client.⁵¹ According to the report on global arms transfers by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), from 2007-2011 Russia provided 78 per cent of all Syrian weaponry, including anti-ship missiles and air defenses - weapons platforms that can be used to deter and combat international intervention.

In 2011 Russia and Syria made the largest arms transfer agreements for 36 Yak-130 fighter/trainer aircrafts totaling \$550 million. Totally until now Russia has supplied Syria with: MIG-29 SMT fighters, 9K9 Pantsyr-S1 air defense systems, 9K40 Buk/SA-17 SAM system (surface-to-air missile), anti-tank missiles, K-300P Bastion-P (coastal defense systems), supersonic Yakhont anti-ship missiles and other armaments.⁵²

Also it has modernized aging fleet of T-72 tanks and provided small arms. In various stages of negotiation are contracts to purchase new Russian weapons, including mobile Iskander-E missiles, modern T-90 tanks, further deliveries of MIG-29 fighter jets, two diesel-electric submarines and other weapons, including helicopters and surface warships. The contracts are worth \$3.5 billion. The military equipment is modern, powerful and very effective.

2.2.2.1 Tartus Base

The Tartus base in Syria is another important factor in the military cooperation between the two countries.⁵³ Being used by the Russian Naval Forces in accordance with the

⁵¹ The New York Times, "Why Russia Supports Assad", February 9, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/opinion/why-russia-supports-assad.html> , accessed on November 8, 2012

⁵² SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, available at <http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>, accessed on November 8, 2012

⁵³ Bagdonas, Azuolas, *Russia's Interests in the Syrian Conflict: Power, Prestige and Profit*, available at <http://ejeps.fatih.edu.tr/docs/articles/159.pdf> , accessed on November 8, 2012

1971 agreement, the facility is not a naval base, as most observers call it, but a naval re-supply and maintenance facility.⁵⁴

After Syria's debt cancellation in 2005, the two countries conducted mutual talks about allowing Russia to develop and enlarge the facility in Tartus port, thus converting it into a permanent Middle East base for Russia's vessels. It is worth mentioning that the facility is the only Russian base in the Mediterranean Sea making Syria a very important strategic partner in the Middle East.

2.3. CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have discussed U.S.-Syrian and Russian-Syrian relations. Whereas U.S.-Syrian relations have historically been far from excellent, often being tense, Russian-Syrian relations on contrary have had a long history of mutual cooperation. But how the relations between the countries are projected in the news coverage? Will the media coverage be heavy influenced by it? It is obvious, that it will, but our aim is to show that the news media outlets of both countries (U.S. and Russia) not only work as propaganda machines but also create a particular perspective of the conflict.

⁵⁴ The New York Times, "*Why Russia Supports Assad*"

CHAPTER 3

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sparked in March 2011 by the arrest of teenagers in the small border town of Deraa, accused of painting revolutionary slogans on public walls, the uprisings reached major cities of Damascus several months later. The Assad government announced some conciliatory measures to halt the unrest. For example, dozens of political prisoners were released and the government was dismissed. In April, the forty-eight-year-old state of emergency was lifted. However the unrest did not come to an end and in June, the President delivered a speech, calling for a “national dialogue” on reform. The speech was dismissed by the opposition as being a total failure. The demonstrations continued.

In November 2011, Arab League voted to suspend Syria, accusing it of failing to implement an Arab peace plan, and imposed economic sanctions. Just a month later, twin suicide bombs outside security buildings in Damascus kill forty-four people, mostly soldiers. It was the first suicide attack since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. The opposition accused the Assad government for staging the bombings to justify its crackdown to the Arab League observers, but the government claimed *al-Qaeda* was behind those attacks. Clashes between army and defectors intensify. On January 6, another large bomb exploded in the al-Midan district of Damascus, killing twenty-six people. As with the December bombings, the government blamed *al-Qaeda*, while the opposition accused the government of staging the attack.

On February 4, Russia and China blocked a UN Security Council draft resolution on Syria, causing heavy international condemnation. In a response to the veto, the Friends of Syria was created. The Friends of Syria is an international diplomatic group of countries and bodies convening periodically on the topic of Syria outside the U.N. Security Council. The first meeting of the group was held the same month in Tunis. In June, NATO condemned Syria’s shooting down of a Turkish F-4 Phantom jet. The

incident further isolated Syria internationally. Just a month later, the General Assembly adopted a resolution deploring the Security Council's failure to act on Syria and calling for a political transition. Fierce fighting spread to Aleppo and Damascus, border crossings with Turkey and Iraq were seized by rebels and thousands fled to neighbouring countries, such as Turkey and Jordan. The next three months saw scores of people killed by clashes between rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA) and pro-regime forces. In December, violence escalated with rising death tolls and displacement, intense fighting continued in Aleppo, reached new levels in Damascus. On January 6, 2013, President Assad pledged to continue fighting terrorist violence, but offered national dialogue, constitutional referendum to end the Syrian crisis; plan roundly rejected, as no indication he would step down.

Unfortunately, not much has changed since January 2013. There is still severe fighting between the opposition groups and security forces. Everyday there are high casualties on both sides.

We have briefly taken a look at the Syrian conflict. Let us now proceed to our analysis of news covering the unrest in Syria.

3.1 DERA A UNREST

The protests in Syria started in January but it was not until March 2011, when the first serious clash between the security forces, policemen and demonstrators took place. March 23, 2011 can be called as the day when a number of people were shot dead in Deraa, thus triggering a violent unrest that spread nationwide over the following months. But what happened on this day? What were the reasons of the protests? What was the role of security forces and the anti-government demonstrators? How these protests were framed by the media?

The Russian pro-government newspaper *Izvestiya* dedicated only one article to clashes in Deraa. In a tiny article titled "Syrians are burning down the party headquarters", the author gives brief information about the protest in Deraa while dedicating only ten lines

to it. Out of these ten lines, three are dedicated to the “victims of the clashes with police” without any detail that might evoke sympathetic emotion. The rest of lines are about the demolition of the monument to the deceased “Syrian leader” Hafez Assad by demonstrators. In contrast, twenty-three lines are given to the offered political reforms and concessions from the Syrian government such as the release of more than “250 prisoners, including Islamists...from jails”.⁵⁵

What were the reasons of the protests erupted in Deraa? Why did the anti-government demonstrators demolish the monument? Why were there so many casualties? Readers of this newspaper will never know.

Overall, we can say that the report does not give any in depth information about the Deraa unrest and the reasons behind it and only briefly mentions the number of “unworthy victims” while focusing more on demolition of the monument and the promises and concessions from the Syrian government. Thus, the March events in Syria are portrayed not as a peaceful protest movement but rather as an act of aggression from protesters’ side leading to clashes with police and casualties.

Unlike *Izvestiya*, liberal *Kommersant* has dedicated two articles to the demonstration on March 23. Entitled “Protest moods come from the side” and “United Arab revolts”, these articles create a certain sympathetic emotion.

Kommersant, focusing more on “the largest anti-government demonstrations” with police “opening fire on demonstrators gathered near the mosque that led to six people dead” does not describe the reasons of these protests. The next day, demonstrators were chanting “Syria! Freedom!” and “calling for democratic reforms” that led to “use of force by police and security forces and more victims”.⁵⁶ By quoting U.S. State

⁵⁵ *Izvestiya* (Russia), “*Syrians are burning down the party headquarters*”, March 28, 2011, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/372913>, accessed on March 3, 2013

⁵⁶ *Kommersant*, “*Protest moods come from different sides*”, March 24, 2011, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1607082>, accessed on March 3, 2013

Department Spokesperson Mark Toner, *Kommersant* further creates the tone of sympathy towards the demonstrators. “We are deeply concerned by the violence and victims among the peaceful population in Deraa... We are concerned by the Syrian government's use of force, to hinder the ability of its people to freely exercise their rights," said U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner.⁵⁷

The impression conveyed in this report is that the peaceful and non-violent protesters calling for reforms are being brutally repressed by the government, leading to “fifteen-twenty people dead”. However it is interesting that in the second article, the protests “against the President Bashar Assad and his Arab Socialist Resurrection Party (Baath)” spreading to the entire southern part of the country were followed by burning down the headquarters of the Baath Party, the court house, and other buildings “linked to the regime”.⁵⁸ So if the protesters were peaceful why would they burn down the offices and other buildings? And what about the victims?

Despite an overt sympathy and judgmental rhetoric, the liberal *Kommersant* portrays victims of clashes as “unworthy” since only one article mentions the victims, dedicating totally five lines. It would be ridiculous to state otherwise since despite being liberal and independent; the *Kommersant* still reflects the “elite preferences”. Thus, not following the particular line would disrupt relations between the media company and those who ‘create’ news.

But let us take a look at American press. Do *Washington Post* and *New York Times* portray the victims as worthy? How are the protests in Syria framed by the both media outlets?

To understand how the U.S. media portrayed the March events in Syria, we should apply the frame analysis. Aside from showing varieties of biases and opinions, frame

⁵⁷ *Kommersant*, “*Protest moods come from different sides*”

⁵⁸ *Kommersant*, “*United Arab Revolts*”, March 28, 2011, available at <http://kommersant.ru/Doc/1605561>, accessed on March 3, 2013

analysis is useful in understanding how a particular interpretation of event can be accepted as reality. In his book “Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy”, Robert Entman describes frame as the “process of selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality” that “fulfills four functions: “problem definition, causal analysis, moral judgment, and remedy promotion”⁵⁹ According to the author, frames may evoke different emotions, for example empathy or sympathy by using words and images. Use of memorable, emotionally charged words and images and their repetition will create thoughts and feelings among the readers thus leading to emotional association-either positive or negative. Constant repetition of certain words and images will also lead to accepting a particular narrative as absolute reality.

So what happened on March 23?

The *Washington Post* reports describe the unrest in Deraa as follows:

Early Wednesday, security forces stormed a mosque in the city of Daraa.....and opened fire with live ammunition.....the assault on the surrounding neighborhood continued through the day; an *Associated Press* reporter heard automatic weapons fire. At least 15 people were killed, including a prominent local doctor who was trying to provide medical aid. That brings to at least 21 the number of civilians murdered by Mr. Assad’s forces in Daraa since Friday.⁶⁰

The “deadly crackdown”⁶¹ in “which dozens of people were killed, according to the witnesses and activists”⁶² took place after “police detained more than a dozen

⁵⁹ Entman, Robert M., *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 5-26

⁶⁰ Washington Post, “*Opposing Syria’s crackdown*”, March 24, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-03-23/opinions/35261201_1_daraa-hama-security-forces, accessed on March 4, 2013

⁶¹ Washington Post, “*Syria’s Bashar al-Assad faces most serious unrest of his tenure*”, March 24, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-03-24/world/35207340_1_syrian-human-rights-league-syrian-president-bashar-al-assad-security-forces, accessed on March 4, 2013

schoolchildren for spray-painting walls that have rattled the Arab world: “The people want the fall of the regime.”⁶³ Like the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*’ coverage of the unrest in Deraa is also detailed:

police launched a relentless assault Wednesday on a neighborhood sheltering anti-government protesters, fatally shooting at least 15 in an operation that began before dawn...Syrian security forces opened fire on hundreds of young people marching on the southern city of Deraa, a witness said. The protesters were reportedly marching in solidarity with the city, after a six people were killed by the authorities in a deadly raid on...Omari mosque. Bodies fell in the streets, one of the witnesses said.⁶⁴

But what were the reasons of the protests? As we have already mentioned, the *Washington Post* links the 23 March protest in Deraa to the earlier detentions of teenagers and followed demonstrations against it. The *New York Times* also points out that reason, while adding that “Starting last Friday, protests broke out in Deraa...Security forces cracked down with tear gas, water cannons and, ultimately, live rounds...Several people were reported killed, churning the anger that led to the protest at the Omari mosque”.⁶⁵

⁶² Washington Post, “*Syria’s President Assad deploys army*”, March 27, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-03-27/world/35207388_1_deploys-army-deraa-silent-protest, accessed on March 4, 2013

⁶³ Washington Post, “*Syria’s Bashar al-Assad faces most serious unrest of his tenure*”

⁶⁴ New York Times, “*March 23 Updates on War in Libya and Mideast Protests*”, March 23, 2011, available at <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/latest-updates-on-war-in-libya-and-mideast-protests-3/>, accessed on March 4, 2013

⁶⁵ New York Times, “*Thousands in Syria Protest Deaths in Crackdown; Leader Offers Concessions*”, March 25, 2011, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F03E3DB1031F936A15750C0A9679D8B63>, accessed on March 4, 2013

Both newspapers have focused on the Syrian police and security forces, which are accused of indiscriminately shooting and killing “unarmed”⁶⁶ and “peaceful protesters”.⁶⁷ Words such as: “massacre”, “slaughter”, “violence”, “brutal crackdown”, “brutal repression”⁶⁸, “killings”, “murder” are heavily used by both media outlets.⁶⁹ But were there casualties among government forces? If there were, can we still claim the protesters were “unarmed and peaceful”? In a report by *New York Times* dated April 1, 2011 there is a slight notice of a possible attack on security forces: “Eyewitness reports on what happened there last weekend vary: some say security forces opened fire on a peaceful protest; others spoke of snipers on the rooftops shooting civilians and security forces alike...” There is no further information about it. Were there casualties among the security forces or not, no one will ever know. The author stresses though that “what is certain is that people are now dead.”⁷⁰

The *Washington Post* however elaborates on this question more while quoting two sources: Syrian News Agency (SANA) and Nadim Houry, the deputy Middle East director of a New York based Human Rights Watch. “An official source said attacks by armed elements on the families and districts... in the last two days resulted in the martyrdom of 10 security forces and civilians and the killing of two of the armed elements,” SANA news agency said. The source said 200 people, most of whom were from the security forces, were wounded in clashes. Nadim Houry said four police had been killed while trying to separate pro- and anti-government groups, but “were apparently killed by armed thugs close to the brother of the president.” “Resident told

⁶⁶ New York Times, “*In Syria, Tension and Grief After Protests and Government Retaliation*”, March 27, 2011, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F06E0DA1F31F934A15750C0A9679D8B63>, accessed on March 4, 2013

⁶⁷ New York Times, “*The Myth of Syrian Stability*”, April 1, 2011, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/opinion/01Mustafa.html?_r=0, accessed on March 4, 2013

⁶⁸ Washington Post, “*Syria’s Bashar al-Assad faces most serious unrest of his tenure*”

⁶⁹ New York Times, “*Thousands in Syria Protest Deaths in Crackdown; Leader Offers Concessions*”

⁷⁰ New York Times, “*The Myth of Syrian Stability*”

me that the police were killed because they tried to separate them. I can't tell if it is true and we have not confirmed it," Houry said.⁷¹

The both media while slightly mentioning casualties among the government forces does not verify the accuracy and correctness of these statements. And it is understandable. Who are these "snipers on the rooftops shooting civilians and security forces"?⁷² And if the snipers were from the security forces why would they start shooting at police? And maybe the protests were not as peaceful as American press claims? This is what the Russian *Izvestiya* tries to point at. "Opposition groups claim that the security forces opened fire on demonstrators, snipers shot at unarmed people from roofs...However doctors from the state hospital inform that they received around a hundred injured mostly policemen and gendarme".⁷³

Issue of credibility of sources is another interesting point. Both, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* focus on quoting witnesses, protesters, activists and bloggers living outside of Syria. Five reports on events happening in Deraa mention that the information obtained could not be verified because of "severe restrictions on independent reporting in Syria".⁷⁴ Consequently the both media portray these "sources" as legitimate, while being well aware that the information provided by their informers could not be checked and verified.

The more revealing contrast between American and Russian press is how they frame Bashar Assad and his government. While Russian *Izvestiya* reports about the promises of the Syrian government and concessions, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* both discredit the Assad government, calling it: "unaccustomed to concessions" ,

⁷¹ Washington Post, "Syria's President Assad deploys army"

⁷² New York Times, "The Myth of Syrian Stability"

⁷³ Izvestiya, "Syrians are burning down the party headquarters"

⁷⁴ New York Times, "March 24 Updates on Libyan War and Mideast Protests"

“Syria’s repressive leadership”⁷⁵, “just like all the other authoritarian regimes...that fabricate stories and arrest innocent people just to cling on to power”,⁷⁶ “government, which has offered words of compromise at the same time that it has unleashed lethal force”,⁷⁷ “Alawite minority government”, “a government that has no credibility with its population”,⁷⁸ “repressive police state”,⁷⁹ “one of the most repressive governments in the Arab world”, “unapologetically autocratic government”,⁸⁰ “fake republic”, “republic of fear”, “despicable regime”, “bloody regime”, “evil dictatorship”,⁸¹ “one-party government that rules Syria with an iron hand”.⁸²

Both newspapers also point at Syria being a close ally of Iran and Lebanese militant group *Hezbollah*, but it is the *Washington Post* that in its report titled “Ridding Syria of a despot” calls the Assad regime as a “murderous clan...that made Syria the pathway for

⁷⁵ New York Times, “*Thousands in Syria Protest Deaths in Crackdown; Leader Offers Concessions*”

⁷⁶ New York Times, “*Syria Detains Egyptian-American Blogger*”, March 26, 2011, available at <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/26/syria-detains-egyptian-american-blogger/>, accessed on March 5, 2013

⁷⁷ New York Times, “*In Syria, Tension and Grief After Protests and Government Retaliation*”, March 27, 2011, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F06E0DA1F31F934A15750C0A9679D8B63>, accessed on March 5, 2013

⁷⁸ New York Times, “*Syria’s Chaos A Test for U.S.*”, March 27, 2011, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C02EEDA1F31F934A15750C0A9679D8B63>, accessed on March 5, 2013

⁷⁹ New York Times, “*Syria’s Cabinet Resigns; Concessions Expected*”, March 30, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/30/world/middleeast/30syria.html>, accessed on March 5, 2013

⁸⁰ Washington Post, “*Protesters shot as demonstrations expand across Syria*”, March 25, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-03-25/world/35261439_1_sanamein-security-forces-protesters-shot, accessed on March 5, 2013

⁸¹ Washington Post, “*Ridding Syria of a despot*”, March 26, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-03-25/opinions/35208493_1_assad-clan-syrian-regime-lebanese-prime-minister, accessed on March 5, 2013

⁸² Washington Post, “*Syria announces step toward lifting emergency rule*”, March 31, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-03-31/world/35260173_1_emergency-law-emergency-rule-ammar-qurabi, accessed on March 5, 2013

jihadists from around the world to enter Iraq to fight and kill Americans.” Thus the “despicable regime” should be brought down.⁸³

While referring to Bashar al-Assad, the *New York Times* poses a question: “Will he be like his father, Hafez al-Assad, who during three decades in power gave the security forces virtually a free hand to maintain order and sanctioned the brutal repression of a violent Islamist uprising in the early 1980s” or will he see this as an “opportunity to take Syria in a new direction”. Thus the unrest in Syria is seen as a “last chance” at being something “more than simply Hafez al-Assad’s son.”⁸⁴ The reports also point at that Mr. Assad has been an “endless source of frustration”-deepening ties with “Iran and the Islamic militant group *Hezbollah*; undermining the government of Saad Hariri in Lebanon; pursuing nuclear program; and failing to deliver on promises of reform.”⁸⁵ There is also a repetition of sentences stating that Mr. Assad was seen as a “potential agent of change”.⁸⁶ However we can clearly understand from the articles that the choice is made “as is typical for authoritarian leaders”.⁸⁷

In article after article, the *Washington Post* points to brutality of Hafez al-Assad, the president’s father, who “suppressed dissent unapologetically, instilling the fear that is still pervasive here.” Only in one article, “Syria’s Bashar al-Assad faces most serious unrest in his tenure”, dated March 25, 2011, the choice is given to Assad: use the historically brutal practices or implement serious reforms. In other reports, “brutal”,⁸⁸

⁸³ Washington Post, “*Ridding Syria of a despot*”

⁸⁴ New York Times, “*The Syrian President I Know*”, March 30, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/30/opinion/30lesch.html>, accessed on March 5, 2013

⁸⁵ New York Times, “*Syria's Chaos A Test for U.S.*”

⁸⁶ New York Times, “*Syria Blames Armed Gangs for Violence and Vows to Lift a Repressive Law*”, March 28, 2011, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9505EED61F31F93BA15750C0A9679D8B63>, accessed on March 5, 2013

⁸⁷ New York Times, “*The Syrian President I Know*”

⁸⁸ Washington Post, “*Syria’s Bashar al-Assad faces most serious unrest of his tenure*”

“despot”, who “had himself “elected” president”,⁸⁹ “unredeemable thug”,⁹⁰ and an “arrogant dictator”⁹¹ has no other choice than to “slaughter”⁹² protesters since “force is the only way to stay in power”. The frame is obvious: brutal despot Assad, the son of brutal Hafez al-Assad, follows his father’s only solution to stay in power: massacre. Thus responding to the protests by “killing” is the “only way he knows”.⁹³

We have already discussed that by constant repetition of certain sentences a particular association will appear-either positive or negative. So when we read about events in Syria and in particularly when there are words such as “Deraa” or “Bashar Assad”, what comes to our minds? “Deraa unrest” will be associated with negative emotions and words such as: “bloodshed”, “violence”, “massacre”, “unarmed protesters”, “killings”, and “brutal repression”. Syrian president will be associated with words: “despot”, “murderer”, “authoritarian”, “brutal dictator”, “killings”, “lethal force”,⁹⁴ “closest ally of Iran”, “sponsor of *Hezbollah* and *Hamas*” and “thousands of American soldiers killed in Iraq with the help of Assad”.⁹⁵ That is how the propaganda works.

3.1.1 Conclusion

To sum up, all four newspapers: the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, *Izvestiya* and *Kommersant* give a particular narrative of the Deraa unrest. Pro-government

⁸⁹ Washington Post, “*Ridding Syria of a despot*”

⁹⁰ Washington Post, “*Opposing Syria’s crackdown*”

⁹¹ Washington Post, “*Syria’s Assad offers no concessions, blames protests on ‘big conspiracy’*», March 30, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-03-30/world/35260074_1_human-rights-activists-syrian-leader-protest-movement, accessed on March 6, 2013

⁹² Washington Post, “*Syrian ‘engagement’ is kaput, but what will replace it?*”, March 29, 2011, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/post/syrian-engagement-is-kaput-but-what-will-replace-it/2011/03/04/AFkTvquB_blog.html, accessed on March 5, 2013

⁹³ Washington Post, “*Ridding Syria of a despot*”

⁹⁴ New York Times, “*In Syria, Tension and Grief After Protests and Government Retaliation*”

⁹⁵ Washington Post, “*Ridding Syria of a despot*”

Izvestiya newspaper discusses the protest in a brief way, while focusing more on demonstrators “burning down the headquarters” and “torching the statue”.⁹⁶ The newspaper also focuses on concessions and promises made by Assad and clearly omits scenes of violence.

Liberal *Kommersant* in its first report slightly touches upon the violence but does not promote any ‘Deraa’ or ‘Assad frame’ like the U.S. media does. At the same time American press offers remedy to the Syrian “massacre”. Totally five reports stresses the need to: “punish Mr. Assad’s behavior”, “demand an international investigation of the killings in Deraa”, “side strongly with the people of Deraa”,⁹⁷ “prosecute Syria in every available multilateral forum, including the U.N Security Council and the Human Rights Council”, “demand...Syria...to be expelled...from...the Arab League”, “press the Europeans to speak and act against Syria’s regime”, recall “the American ambassador from Syria”, “invoke further sanctions, both economically and otherwise”, and “get rid of Assad”.⁹⁸

It is also noteworthy that all the victims in Syria are portrayed as “worthy” by the U.S. media. There are many videos and pictures showing “violent clashes” between security forces and protesters, especially posted by the *New York Times*.⁹⁹ What is interesting is that the newspaper does not claim these sometimes very disturbing videos to be authentic. Once again, the credibility of sources is questionable. However it does not ‘stop’ the newspaper from posting the videos in its reports.

⁹⁶ *Izvestiya*, “*Syrians are burning down the party headquarters*”

⁹⁷ Washington Post, “*Opposing Syria’s crackdown*”

⁹⁸ Washington Post, “*Ridding Syria of a despot*”

⁹⁹ New York Times, “*Syria’s Chaos A Test for U.S.*”

3.2 BASHAR AL-ASSAD'S SPEECH

The protests had spread nationwide. Bashar al-Assad had to address the growing unrest in a speech he delivered at Damascus University on June 20, 2011. His supporters cheered for the package of reforms while the opposition denounced his speech as “empty promises”.¹⁰⁰

Pro-government *Izvestiya* clearly ignored the news about Bashar al-Assad's speech. In a report titled “By weakening Syria, the West wants to weaken Iran”, nothing is mentioned about the speech delivered by the President. Instead, the article discusses the Syrian unrest as a “well-planned operation by the CIA” as it was in Libya. The statement is further solidified by examples such as: “skilful kindling of the conflict between Alawites who comprise Syria's ruling elite and Sunni, who are a majority of the population.”, “involvement of the Kurdish factor”, “creation of the National Council” as in Libya that “takes the responsibilities to represent the interests of opposition”. Out of thirty-six lines, twelve are dedicated to this statement. The report also quotes Dmitry Medvedev and Rudik Isuzhin, saying: “Iran is the ultimate target of the “CIA project” in the Middle East...Syria is a staunch ally of Iran in the region. Weakening this country means a serious blow to the interests of Iran...Russian government is well aware of it”.¹⁰¹ The remainder of the article talks about the renewed project of UN Resolution on Syria and a possible veto of it, and stresses that the Russian government will veto any resolution but does not refrain from discussing the Syrian issue.

Kommersant has dedicated one article to Assad's speech. Entitled “He actually does not understand, but his time is over”, the report states that Assad does not want and will not carry out any changes. The report further evolves on idea that the promises made by

¹⁰⁰ Washington Post, “Assad blames protests on ‘vandalism,’ ‘saboteurs’”, June 20, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-06-20/world/35233841_1_assad-andrew-tablet-syria-expert, accessed on March 6, 2013

¹⁰¹ *Izvestiya*, “By weakening Syria, the West wants to weaken Iran”, June 20, 2011, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/492395>, accessed on March 6, 2013

Assad are nothing else but a try to gain some time: “They will create a committee...Then the committee will have sessions for so long, as it is needed for the president. At that time the security forces will be catching the so-called saboteurs.” The author stresses that Assad will neither yield power nor enforce any reforms thus the “bloodshed in Syria” will continue.¹⁰²

The report concluded on a note on three problems Assad is facing:

First, he is politically weaker than his deceased father Hafez Assad. Secondly, there is no cold war that had led elder Assad to count on comprehensive cooperation with the Soviet Union. Thirdly, he is dependent on Iran...For Tehran; [Damascus] is a base of support for Hamas, Hezbollah and perhaps, a transfer point for smuggling of materials for its nuclear-missile programme.

As well as this, the author states that by multiplying the number of families who lost their near and dear ones in the unrest, Bashar will not stabilize the situation in the country, but rather make it even worse. Thus, the fall of his regime is imminent: “Bashar Assad will not stay in power for long.”¹⁰³

In *Washington Post*, the first report dealing with Assad speech is entitled “Assad blames protests on ‘vandalism’, ‘saboteurs’”. The report refers to the speech, focusing on different reactions to Assad’s speech. The first description of the speech is that it “failed to mollify the opponents”. Most of Assad’s concessions revolved around bureaucratic change, while he justified what was happening in Syria as having “nothing to do with reform, it has to do with vandalism”. This was presented as a diversion for blame since

¹⁰² Kommersant, “*He actually does not realize, but his time is over*”, June 21, 2011, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1664224>, accessed on March 6, 2013

¹⁰³ Kommersant, “*He actually does not realize, but his time is over*”

Bashar al-Assad “did not acknowledge that his soldiers were involved in shooting hundreds of unarmed protesters.”¹⁰⁴

Out of seventy-six lines, only twelve are dedicated to the promised reforms. The rest of lines discuss reaction of people to the speech. Residents who fled their homes in northern Syria to escape the government’s violent crackdown “reacted with derision.” On the Turkish side of border, crowds of refugees chanted slogans against Assad, calling him a “liar” and demanding his ouster. On the Syrian side, displaced people reached by phone said that they “siphoned electricity from a nearby village to power up a television set in time for his address and that they were dissatisfied by what they heard”. Protesters, refugees and observers largely dismissed his concessions as “empty promises.” Analysts said his speech made clear that the “government felt threatened and was desperate to end the revolt”.

Andrew Tabler, a Syria expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy said that Assad was “clearly concerned”. U.S State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said that Assad “has been making promises to his people for years, for weeks. What’s important now is action, not words...” The Local Coordination Committee (LCC), an organization representing opposition, qualified the speech as “consecration of the crisis of regime” entrenched “behind denial” and a “blatant attempt to “buy time””. A refugee on the Syrian side called the speech “empty words”. A refugee in Turkey said that “No one trusts a word Assad says”. People were disappointed and demonstrators chanting “Oh, Bashar, you liar” and “Freedom” took to the streets in Syria. But what about another point of view on the issue? What about the reaction of Assad’s supporters on the speech? Were all people in Syria “dissatisfied” with the promised reforms? Just once, in the end of the report the author mentions that “inside the auditorium at Damascus

¹⁰⁴ Washington Post, “Assad blames protests on ‘vandalism,’ ‘saboteurs’”

University...such criticism seemed far away. At the close of Assad's speech, the crowd chanted: God, Syria, Bashar, and that's it."¹⁰⁵

The next report by David Ignatius, while discussing "dialogue" as a possible solution to the Syrian unrest briefly mentions Assad's speech and states that "given Assad's disappointing record, it's doubtful that he can or will deliver" the promised reforms.¹⁰⁶ Thus we see a clear denunciation of Bashar al-Assad's speech.

Another report, dated June 25, talks about Mr. Assad being an "illegitimate ruler" and the response of the European Union and Turkey on "regime's murderous violence". In terms of Assad's speech, the author states that the day after Assad delivered a speech "offering vague promises of reform"; security forces "launched a raid" on the Damascus University's dormitories when students refused to be "drafted for pro-regime rallies."¹⁰⁷ This is an interesting twist. The author for the first time mentions that the pro-regime demonstrations might be "staged by the government". There are also constant reminders of the dictatorial nature of Assad's regime throughout the report.

In an article depicting the popular reaction to the speech delivered by Assad, the author, Leila Fidel claims that protests erupted across Syria after "his speech pledging reform and dialogue failed to satisfy government opponents." According to the report, this 'response' by the Syrian opposition was met with "violence", "tear gas and live gunfire" leading to numerous victims, including children. The information about demonstrations and victims was based on activists, LCC and witnesses' statements, with no details how these statements were received or verified. This once again brings us to the issue of credibility of sources. It is interesting how the media portrays their 'informers' as

¹⁰⁵ Washington Post, "Assad blames protests on 'vandalism,' 'saboteurs'"

¹⁰⁶ Washington Post, "Avoiding a summer of blood", June 22, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-06-21/opinions/35266194_1_moammar-gaddafi-libya-syria, accessed on March 6, 2013

¹⁰⁷ Washington Post, "More brutality in Syria and passivity in Washington", June 25, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-06-24/opinions/35233962_1_syrian-refugee-syrian-opposition-security-forces, accessed on March 6, 2013

legitimate sources of information, knowing that it could not be verified or checked. The report concludes on a note that Assad was initially seen as a “young face of reform that could transform Syria from an autocratic nation to modern state” but failed since the promised reforms never materialized, being just a “symbolic and empty rhetoric”.¹⁰⁸

Next piece begins with the statement that Bashar al-Assad regime’s days are numbered and that the speech he delivered on June 20 is a further proof that he “foresees his eventual departure”. It further goes on with calling regime “shaky” with “focus on amassing wealth” and a statement that “this month has brought a revival of anti-American attacks in Iraq.”¹⁰⁹ Let us remember that the *Washington Post* has already posted some pretty harsh accusations of Assad in indirectly killing American soldiers in Iraq by supporting *Hamas* and *Hezbollah*. The report dated July 7, also talks about “steady weakening” of the Assad regime and only briefly mentions Assad’s speech while focusing more on the Hama demonstration and government’s response to it.¹¹⁰ Let us see how the *New York Times* newspaper framed Assad’s speech.

The first report dealing with President Bashar al-Assad’s speech delivered on 20 June is entitled “Assad offers path to change in Syria, but few specifics”. The report starts with the information that the president has offered a national dialogue and that it was greeted with “deep skepticism” and doubt. Further on, the author discusses about the opposition and their fear to “surface” as well as the future prospects in Syria. The report stresses that Assad’s speech was “awaited in the hope that it would offer a crucial insight into the leadership’s willingness to compromise” and a “theoretical path for change”. Also,

¹⁰⁸ Washington Post, “Protest draws largest numbers since start of Syrian uprising, activists say”, June 25, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-06-24/world/35233668_1_syrian-human-rights-activist-syrian-protest-movement-homs, accessed on March 6, 2013

¹⁰⁹ Washington Post, “In Syria, an opening for the West to bring about Assad’s downfall”, June 27, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-06-26/opinions/35234345_1_daraa-security-forces-regime, accessed on March 6, 2013

¹¹⁰ Washington Post, “Syrian crackdown underscores new vulnerability for Assad regime, officials say”, July 7, 2011, available at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-07-06/national/35237000_1_hama-assad-syrian-government, accessed on March 6, 2013

the author mentions that some of the offered changes “have been on table since 2005” thus pointing at that Assad’s promised reforms remained unfulfilled. As a response to the speech, the report quotes activists as chanting “Liar!” and the Local Coordination Committees (LCC) calling Assad’s speech “a bid to gain more time at the expense of Syrian blood and sacrifice”.¹¹¹

The next report entitled “Assad’s image pelted with shoes after speech” begins with statement that Bashar al-Assad’s speech, in which he “promised reform but said that the state had to use force against “saboteurs””, was met with “disappointment and anger by the opposition. The rest of the report is dedicated to video clips, showing “rage” on the streets of Syria. The “rage” was expressed by “beating and throwing...shoes at a poster” of Bashar al-Assad. The author not only mentions that such an expression of “rage” is a “serious insult in the region”, but also states that the activists even created a video game at “Basharshoe.com”, in which players click to pelt shoes at Assad. By focusing on “throwing shoes” the author once again shows that Assad is a total “disappointment” and is an “illegitimate ruler” who is not respected by his own people.¹¹²

In another report dealing with Assad’s speech, the author states that many “dismissed the initiative as a step that came too late and gave too little.” The rest of the report is dedicated to the “orchestrated” pro-Assad rallies. The author quotes opposition figures saying that “people were bused in and state employees forced to attend the pro-government rallies.” To further solidify this statement, there is quotation of the “voices of dissent”. An employee of a private company forced by his manager to attend said he resented that at a time of economic crisis, companies and the government came to a

¹¹¹ New York Times, “*Assad offers path to change in Syria, but few specifics*”, June 20, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/21/world/middleeast/21syria.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed on March 7, 2013

¹¹² New York Times, “*Assad’s image pelted with shoes after speech*”, June 20, 2011, available at <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/06/20/assads-image-pelted-with-shoes-after-speech/>, accessed on March 7, 2013

standstill for a political ploy. “Me and most of my colleagues prefer to keep our mouths shut and participate,” said the man, who gave his name as Ali. “We waste a workday to satisfy the regime.”¹¹³ Once again “an employee of a private company” becomes a legitimate source of news. No information about his identity, role in the conflict, his political affiliation is being given.

Totally five lines were dedicated to the pro-government demonstrators. While quoting slogans such as “We will sacrifice ourselves for you, Bashar!” and “God, Syria and only Bashar”, the author also quotes Najwa Hiddar, as saying “I will stand with the president to end all those destructive elements that are hiding themselves amid peaceful demonstrators..I think all Syrians stand with Assad.” What is interesting is that the author also stresses that Najwa Hiddar, 20 is “Damascus University student”.¹¹⁴ Why this information is important? There was already news about a raid on Damascus University’s dormitories by the security forces when “students refused to be drafted for pro-regime rallies.”¹¹⁵ So by giving this small detail, the author actually once again tries to solidify the statement about the nature of pro-government rallies.

In a report dated June 22, the opposition figures (unnamed of course) are said to have denounced the initiative as “coming too late and not going far enough.” In the conclusion, the author stresses once again that “political opponents and world leaders dismissed the promises”. So once again we can see that the *New York Times* frames Assad’s speech as a total ‘disappointment’ that led to the negative reaction from people. There is absolutely no mention of a possibility of another point of view on the issue. By repeating words such as “denial”, “dismissed”, “too late”, “skepticism”, “bid for time”,

¹¹³ New York Times, “*Thousands Turn Out for Assad*”, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/22/world/middleeast/22syria.html?_r=0, accessed on March 9, 2013

¹¹⁴ Ibid.,

¹¹⁵ Washington Post, “*More brutality in Syria and passivity in Washington*”, June 25, 2011, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/more-brutality-in-syria-and-passivity-in-washington/2011/06/24/AGwHggjH_story.html, accessed on March 9, 2013

the newspaper creates a negative frame thus making the reader associate Assad's speech with negative emotions and something 'unfulfilled'.¹¹⁶

Negative views of Assad's speech were featured in other reports as well. An article entitled "Rejecting offer on dialogue by Syrian President, protesters return to the streets" focuses on demonstrations "denouncing as insincere an overture by... Assad...for dialogue". Except calling the government as one the "region's most repressive" that uses "senseless violence", the report mentions the banner read in Homs "It's a dishonorable dialogue". Further on, the author states that "thousands of Syrians turned out Friday for weekly protests" denouncing the speech by Assad, and that the "prominent opposition figures" have refused the government's call to national dialogue.¹¹⁷ Another report by Anthony Shadid mentions refusal of national dialogue by the Local Coordination Committees. Opinions of opposition activists inside Syria, including Hassan Abdel-Azim, Hajj Yassin Hajj Saleh, and Louay Hussein constitute the bulk of the report. The author also stresses that "Mr. Assad's moves were met with skepticism and anger" thus once again pointing at the negative reaction of people on the speech delivered on June 20.¹¹⁸

In a report entitled "Fighting the Syrian regime from a Chicago office", the author, David Lepeska writes about Yaser Tabbara, the Chicago lawyer, who has "mounted a one-man legal and diplomatic assault against the Syrian regime to highlight the brutality of its response and help depose President Bashar al-Assad." Except discussing how the Syrian lawyer is helping to "depose...Mafia-esque gang", the author focuses on opinion of Mr.Tabbara about the "bloody regime" and Assad's "insulting, conspiracy-minded"

¹¹⁶ New York Times, "Sanctions are similar to war, Syria says", June 22, 2011, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/middleeast/23syria.html?_r=0, accessed on March 9, 2013

¹¹⁷ New York Times, "Rejecting offer of dialogue by Syrian President, protesters return to the streets", June 24, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/25/world/middleeast/25syria.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed on March 9, 2013

¹¹⁸ New York Times, "Syria allows opposition to meet in Damascus", June 27, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/28/world/middleeast/28syria.html>, accessed on March 9, 2013

speech. In the conclusion part, the report mentions the dictatorial nature of the regime and opinions of “some analysts” (unnamed of course) who go about claiming that “Assad regime may be teetering”.¹¹⁹

Next report also focuses only on opinions of the opposition activists, while not giving any room to another point of view on the conflict. Opposition leaders are quoted as calling the national dialogue aimed at a transition to multiparty democracy as “a sham to mask the government’s brutal crackdown on the pro-democracy protests” and “a dialogue between the authority and the authority itself”. The author also claims that “many Syrians dismissed” the national dialogue and are “skeptical of a government that has repeatedly promised reforms and has yet to deliver any.” According to the report, the protesters that took to the streets across Syria in March 2011 were “demanding an end to the government of President...who has shown little or no tolerance for dissent.” This is an obvious discrepancy with the official story since the protesters were not calling for the ouster of Assad in the beginning, but demanded the release of teenagers arrested for painting anti-government graffiti. But let us go back to Assad’s speech.¹²⁰

The last report related to Assad’s speech states that it is too late for concessions by Assad and that activists see the “much-touted national dialogue as an empty exercise.” To further solidify the statement, there is a director of the Center of Research and Documentation in Damascus saying: “I’m very pessimistic.”¹²¹ Thus once again, the reader is faced with idea of a failure of Assad’s speech.

¹¹⁹ New York Times, “*Fighting the Syrian regime from a Chicago office*”, July 2, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/03/us/03cnctabbara.html>, accessed on March 9, 2013

¹²⁰ New York Times, “*Syrian opposition leaders boycott a government dialogue opening*”, July 10, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/11/world/middleeast/11syria.html?gwh=4C2E9EB0B85608732DFCCB282C4F5296>, accessed on March 9, 2013

¹²¹ New York Times, “*Security Forces Open Fire on Syrian Protesters*”, July 15, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/16/world/middleeast/16syria.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed on March 9, 2013

3.2.1 Conclusion

To sum up, only three newspapers have covered Assad's speech delivered on June 20, 2011. The Russian pro-government *Izvestiya* preferred rather to report on the Syrian unrest being a "well-planned operation" by the CIA than on concessions made by Bashar al-Assad. The liberal *Kommersant* has dedicated one article to Assad's speech, while stating that "Assad does not want and will not make any changes" and thus totally discrediting the speech.¹²² The American *Washington Post* qualified Assad's speech as "empty promises", "empty words",¹²³ "empty rhetoric",¹²⁴ a "blatant attempt to "buy time"",¹²⁵ a failure and stressed that the people got disappointed and angry after hearing it. The *New York Times* also points at the failure of Assad's speech, calling it "bid for time",¹²⁶ "insincere", "dishonorable", and "tentative".¹²⁷

Unlike the *Kommersant*, both American media outlets focused on reaction of people on the delivered speech. However while doing so, both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* have quoted only activists and opposition figures, while giving no room for a different point of view.

The belligerents in the Syrian unrest are represented by the both media as falling in one of the two categories of victims and bloody repressors. There is not room for debate who is right and who is not and no mention of a possibility of regime supporters. There is information related to the pro-government rallies after Bashar al-Assad delivered his

¹²² *Kommersant*, "He actually does not realize, but his time is over"

¹²³ *Washington Post*, "Assad blames protests on 'vandalism,' 'saboteurs'"

¹²⁴ *Washington Post*, "Protest draws largest numbers since start of Syrian uprising, activists say",

¹²⁵ *Washington Post*, "Assad blames protests on 'vandalism,' 'saboteurs'"

¹²⁶ *New York Times*, "Assad offers path to change in Syria, but few specifics"

¹²⁷ *New York Times*, "Rejecting offer of dialogue by Syrian President, protesters return to the streets"

speech, however the both media disregarded those rallies as being “orchestrated” by the Assad’s government that “forced” people to participate.¹²⁸

Once again we see that the both American newspapers represent only the voices of “dissent” and anyone who criticize Assad’s regime.¹²⁹ However unlike the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* tried to use more information based on identifiable source. But it does not mean that the *Washington Post* did not include any material that could not be verified or proof-checked. There are numerous quotes of activists, opposition leaders, local residents and analysts whose identities are undisclosed. It is also noteworthy that both newspapers lack the objectivity, while painting the opposition in a favorable light in contrast to Assad’s regime which is repeatedly portrayed as “bloody” and “repressive”. Taking into consideration the above mentioned, it is not difficult to understand which side they had picked in the conflict and which narrative they are promoting.

3.3 BOMBINGS IN DAMASCUS

3.3.1 2011 Damascus Bombings

On December 23, 2011, two seemingly coordinated bombings occurred in Damascus, killing forty-four people. It was the first suicide attack since the uprising began. The Syrian government accused terrorists (*al-Qaeda*) for carrying these attacks while the opposition accused the government for “staging” the explosions. But let us take a look how the Russian and American media has framed these bombings.

Russian *Izvestiya* has dedicated three short reports to the bombings in Damascus. The newspaper did not comment on the event, simply giving unambiguous facts like the locations targeted and the number of victims. The reason why it abstained from commenting was probably that the newspaper used sources such as *France Presse*, the *Jerusalem Post* and the *BBC* which in turn had quoted the Syrian media. Having stated

¹²⁸ New York Times, “*Thousands Turn Out for Assad*”

¹²⁹ New York Times, “*Assad offers path to change in Syria, but few specifics*”

that the “government accused “terrorists” in attacking the security service sites”, *Izvestiya* has restricted itself only to one single narrative of the blasts in Damascus, not once mentioning a possibility of another opinion on the event.¹³⁰

Like *Izvestiya*, liberal *Kommersant* also gave just facts about the bombings, not mentioning the possibility of an opposing view on the event. As a source of information, *Kommersant* used Russian state news agency “*Ria-Novosti*” stating that “al-Qaeda is responsible for the bombings”.¹³¹

The *New York Times* on contrary, tried to portray itself as unbiased while presenting two opposing points of view on the bombings in Damascus. The report entitled “Syria blames al-Qaeda after bombs kill dozens in Damascus” begins with Syrian officials saying that “an initial investigation pointed to a suicide bombing by Al-Qaeda”. To further solidify the statement, the newspaper also quotes Syria’s state news agency (SANA) and Fayssal Mekdad, the deputy foreign minister pointing to the proofs of *al-Qaeda’s* involvement in the suicide attacks. As an opposing point of view, the *New York Times* mentions the statements made by the protest groups that “Mr. Assad’s government might have staged the attack”. Also the newspaper quotes a spokesperson for the Free Syrian Army, residents, antigovernment activists and a protester denying the opposition’s role in the suicide attacks. The report further quotes a twenty-five-year-old antigovernment activist, asking “Why now, and who benefits from these two blasts?” and mentions that the Syrian government usually abstained from showing images of attacks on the country (SANA posted photos taken at the place of suicide attacks). Thus we can see a hint to a real “culprit” for the attacks. While trying to answer “who benefits”, the report also states that the activists fear that the attacks “will play into the

¹³⁰ *Izvestiya*, “*Two explosions hit Damascus*”, December 23, 2011, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/510590>, accessed on March 10, 2013

¹³¹ *Kommersant*, “*Two explosions hit Damascus*”, December 23, 2011, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/news/1844235>, accessed on March 10, 2013

government's justifications for its harsh repression.”¹³² In the conclusion, a protester is being quoted as saying that the only killer is the Assad regime.

Once again the *New York Times* leans toward a narrative proposed by the opposition rather than the government's one. The next report further proves this. Titled “On Syrian state television, bombings are called Qaeda plot directed by U.S.”, the report begins with SANA's statement that the two bombings appeared to be the work of *al-Qaeda*. However this accusation was quickly discredited by the newspaper by mentioning that the opposition activists “immediately suggested” that the Syrian government “had staged the attacks itself to tarnish the protest movement”. As an evidence for the government involvement in the attacks, the newspaper quoted activists as saying that there was a report from eyewitness who “said that the security forces had blocked off a road near the site of one bombing before the explosion.” Suddenly, an eyewitness became a legitimate source of information. As a further evidence of government's plot, a Lebanese opposition leader, Saad Hariri is being quoted as having posted on his Twitter feed that “the blast was engineered by the Syrian regime.”¹³³ Thus a Lebanese opposition activist, whose father, Rafiq Hariri was killed in 2005 becomes a reliable source of information. This is quite interesting since the newspaper only mentions the points of view of opposition, totally excluding any possibility of a different opinion.

Once again, the *New York Times* portrays the conflict as being between two belligerents—the Syrian government as a ‘mindless repressor’ and opposition as ‘victims’. What about opinion of Assad's government supporters? The reader will never know about it.

The statement made by Saad Hariri was mentioned in the report to counter the claims by a retired Lebanese general Amin Hoteit that the “United States government is now

¹³² New York Times, “*Syria blames al-Qaeda after bombs kill dozens in Damascus*”, December 23, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/24/world/middleeast/syria-says-suicide-bombers-attack-in-damascus.html?scp=207&sq=&st=nyt>, accessed on March 10, 2013

¹³³ New York Times, “*On Syrian state television, bombings are called Qaeda plot directed by U.S.*”, December 23, 2011, available at <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/23/on-syrian-state-television-bombings-are-called-qaeda-plot-directed-by-u-s/?ref=middleeast>, accessed on March 10, 2013

“directing Al-Qaeda” to carry out terrorist attacks in Syria.” The general also added that the U.S. had turned to its allies in *al-Qaeda* because a “Zionist-American-European plot to undermine Syria” had failed. To further solidify the idiocy of these statements, the report mentions that the Lebanese political parties supporting Syrian regime claim that “these terrorist acts indicate the failure of the colonial project led by the United States and Israel”.¹³⁴

A following report reads “Assad trades blame with protesters for bombings in Syria” in the subtitle. From the onset of report, the reader is faced with two contradicting opinions on the bombings: the opinion of President Bashar al-Assad, who blames “both” *al-Qaeda* and the antigovernment protest movement for the suicide attacks and does not make any distinction between the two groups; and opinion of the opposition, who “have accused the government of staging the attack”. To show that it was not biased in support of the opposition, the *New York Times* quoted imam, Muhammad al-Bouti as blaming a Syrian opposition figure for the attacks. However what betrays newspaper’s objectivity is the mention of Syrian news agency (SANA) as the initial source of imam’s statements. As well as this, there are constant reminders of the repressive nature of Assad’s regime and statements made by “some analysts” that “government’s eagerness to publicize the bombings, in contrast with its previous practice, indicated that it at least found the attacks useful.”¹³⁵

The newspaper also reported on a statement made by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood denouncing the hacking of their official website and publishing there of a claim of responsibility for the suicide attacks carried out on December 23, 2011. Thus we can clearly see prevalence of a narrative proposed by the opposition in the *New York Times*’ reports. This prevalence is also evident in another report. The article begins with

¹³⁴ New York Times, “*On Syrian state television, bombings are called Qaeda plot directed by U.S.*”

¹³⁵ New York Times, “*Assad trades blame with protesters for bombings in Syria*”, December 24, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/25/world/middleeast/allegations-traded-after-attack-in-syrian-capital.html?scp=208&sq=&st=nyt> , accessed on March 10, 2013

statements that many journalists, intellectuals and ordinary citizens have changed their preferences: from supporting Assad's regime to opposing it. It also stresses that even Assad's regime supporters have issued a "constant stream of criticism" of the regime. The idea of a growing discontent with the regime is further solidified by the statement that Assad's regime has lost its legitimacy. In terms of opinions, the report quotes Robin Yassin-Kassab as saying "Choose the narrative that fits you best," after posting contradictory reports and eyewitness accounts on his Twitter. Yassin-Kassab also added that "This is the confusion into which the criminal and traitorous regime has led us."¹³⁶ By mentioning this, the newspaper once again reveals its overt preference for the opposition.

Like the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* also tried to show a level of objectivity by presenting two opposing arguments—that of the opposition blaming the government and the Syrian government blaming *al-Qaeda* for the attacks. In support of the government claims about *al-Qaeda* involvement in the blasts, the newspaper quoted "some analysts" (unnamed of course) as noting that the suicide attacks bore many of "al-Qaeda hallmarks" and that it was "possible-thought not certain" that the suicide attacks were the "work of the opposition group."¹³⁷ It is interesting that the report mentions that it was uncertain who was behind these attacks in three times.

In support of the opposition's point of view on the bombings, the report quoted Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington and Salman Shaikh, director of the Brookings Doha Center in Qatar. Anthony Cordesman said that it could have been "useful" for the Syrian government to blame *al-Qaeda* for these suicide attacks since it would show that the uprising in Syria was not a domestic

¹³⁶ New York Times, "Syria's defecting bloggers", December 28, 2011, available at <http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/28/syrias-defecting-bloggers/?scp=210&sq=&st=nyt> , accessed on March 10, 2013

¹³⁷ Washington Post, "Attacks on Syrian government buildings seem to strike the heart of state security apparatus", December 23, 2011, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/explosions-rock-damascus-state-media-reports-many-dead/2011/12/23/gIQAHSWFDP_story.html , accessed on March 10, 2013

resistance. Salman Shaikh was reported saying he was “deeply skeptical” of the government’s claims that *al-Qaeda* or an opposition group could have been behind these attacks since “Syria doesn’t really have a record of this”. His evidence for government’s involvement in the attacks was that the media “reported the attack so quickly, with pictures showing the car bombs already cleared away.” To further solidify this opinion, the report quoted the Syrian Revolution General Commission as calling the blasts as a “pathetic move” by the government and a “feeble attempt to plant fear and terror in the hearts of civilians.” The report also mentioned that the government’s claim “drew skepticism” from the opposition groups in Syria as well as Western governments and intelligence agencies. To further discredit to government’s opinion, the report quoted intelligence officials as noting that it would be “difficult for al-Qaeda to carry out such an ambitious operation in the tightly controlled police state” thus pointing to Assad’s “iron fist” regime.¹³⁸

The second report dated December 24, 2011 also featured both opinions. However while dedicating only two lines to contradicting opinions; the report focused more on continued violence in Syria. But let us take a look at suicide bombing that took place on January 6, 2012 in Damascus. How was it covered by the newspapers?

3.3.2 2012 Damascus Bombing

The liberal *Kommersant* did not provide any information about the explosion in Damascus that led to the deaths of at least twenty-five people. *Izvestiya* dedicated one short report to the bombing, while providing the reader with information about location targeted and the number of dead and injured victims. Opinions and points of views were not included in the report.

Aside from providing detailed information about the bombing, the *Washington Post* also portrayed two opposing opinions-that of the government and the opposition. As in the two bombings that took place just two weeks before the third blast, officials blamed

¹³⁸ Washington Post, “Attacks on Syrian government buildings seem to strike the heart of state security apparatus”

terrorists, while the opposition said the authorities themselves “staged” the attack. However there is no information provided to solidify the opinion of the Syrian government about the involvement of terrorists in the blast. Rather, there are several opposition activists being quoted to promote opposition’s narrative. Ausama Monajed, a spokesman for the Syrian National Council opposition group said he believed that the Syrian government was behind the attack since it would help to support the government’s claim that the Syrian unrest was caused by the actions of terrorists and armed gangs. Colonel Malik Kurdi, an assistant commander of the Free Syrian Army denied opposition’s involvement in the bombing saying that the people in the square were opposition activists preparing to demonstrate. Another opposition activist, Khani, was quoted as saying that it would be “virtually impossible” for anyone to bring explosives into the city because of “heavy security and many checkpoints.”¹³⁹ The newspaper overtly shows its preference for one side in the conflict by focusing on opposition sources while the opposing point of view is only presented as an opinion rather than an argument based on facts.

The *New York Times* also tries to portray its objectivity. In a report dealing with the suicide bombing in Midan quarter of Damascus, the newspaper does not accuse the government of “staging” the attack, but quotes activists and American officials as saying that it is uncertain who is behind the bombing. However, what betrays newspaper’s objectivity is that it focuses on opinions of opposition activists while just once mentioning the government’s opinion that the both attacks (December 23 and January 6) “had the fingerprints of Al Qaeda all over them.”¹⁴⁰ This information unfortunately is just an opposing point of view rather than an argument and the author chooses not to develop this opinion any further. Aside from voicing only the opposition’s narrative, the

¹³⁹ Washington Post, “*Blast in Syria kills 25 on eve of Arab League meeting*”, January 6, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/explosion-rocks-syrian-capital/2012/01/06/gIOAuO6VeP_story.html , accessed on March 10, 2013

¹⁴⁰ New York Times, “*Bomb kills dozens in Damascus, stoking suspicions*”, January 6, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/07/world/middleeast/bomb-attack-in-syrian-capital-kills-25.html?scp=5&sq=Syria&st=nyt> , accessed on March 10, 2013

report also focuses on the aftermath of the attack by quoting local residents and activists as talking about security forces and shabiha's "rampage".¹⁴¹ Several people whose names are not mentioned are quoted as saying that the security forces are shooting and arresting young men. Once again, local residents and opposition activists become legitimate sources of information. By focusing on opinions of the opposition, the *New York Times* not only reveals its preference in this conflict but also conducts a sort of propaganda campaign to create support for the opposition.

3.3.3 Conclusion

To sum up, all four newspapers have reported on the bombings in Damascus. Like the pro-government *Izvestiya*, liberal *Kommersant*, did not comment on the events, restricting itself to unambiguous facts like the locations targeted and the number of victims. According to *Kommersant*, the terrorist group *al-Qaeda* was responsible for the attacks. The reason why the newspaper claimed about *al-Qaeda's* involvement is because Russian *Ria "Novosti"* and Syrian state television were the main sources of factual information on the attacks. *Izvestiya* also adopted official point of view of Assad government, not once mentioning the opinion of the opposition on bombings.

The *Washington Post* and *New York Times* tried to maintain their claims to objectivity by always portraying the two opposing opinions. However what betrays their preference for one side of the conflict is the both newspapers' focus on opposition sources while slightly mentioning about the opinion of the government. In terms of sources, the *Washington Post* tried to use identifiable ones, whereas the *New York Times* focused more on opinions of the activists and local residents. Thus we can clearly state that the American newspapers adopted the position of the opposition on who was behind these attacks, while the Russian newspapers used official 'story' proposed by the Syrian government.

¹⁴¹ New York Times, "Bomb kills dozens in Damascus, stoking suspicions"

3.4 RUSSIA-CHINA VETO UN RESOLUTION

These different approaches remained unchanged when dealing with another event, the block of draft UN Security Council resolution on Syria by Russia and China. On February 4, 2012 Russia and China announced their veto to the UN resolution on Syria condemning regime of Bashar al-Assad. Supported by the 13 other Council members, the resolution would have demanded to stop “all violence, irrespective of where it comes from”, while calling the Syrian government to implement, “without delay”, the elements of a plan set out by the Arab League on January 22.¹⁴²

But let us take a look how the newspapers covered Russia and China’s veto of the resolution and the subsequent reaction to it.

As it would be expected, Russian *Izvestiya* clearly wanted to offer its own perspective on the issue. The first report, dealing with the veto, starts with explanation why Russia has taken such measures. The report quotes Vitaly Churkin, the Russian Ambassador to the UN as saying the resolution “did not adequately reflect the reality in Syria and send unbalanced messages to the Syrian sides.”¹⁴³

The second report also defends the veto of UN resolution on Syria by stating that the resolution’s text did not consider changes proposed by Russia “calling the Syrian opposition to distance itself from extremist groups”. Further on, Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation is quoted as saying the provision expecting that “the government of Syria would withdraw from the cities and towns” could mean that the UN is offered to “enter the civil war taking sides in the conflict.”¹⁴⁴ Lavrov also added that the project of Syrian conflict settlement was nearly impossible since the

¹⁴² Security Council, SC/10536, February 4, 2012, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10536.doc.htm>, accessed on April 1, 2013

¹⁴³ *Izvestiya*, “Russia and China blocked UN resolution on Syria”, February 4, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/514280>, accessed on April 1, 2013

¹⁴⁴ *Izvestiya*, “Fradkov will join Lavrov in talks with Assad”, February 5, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/514301>, accessed on April 1, 2013

ouster of the President Bashar al-Assad was the precondition for the start of peace-making process. The Minister said the Syrians themselves must determine their own destiny thus pointing to the necessity of avoidance of outside interference. To further solidify this point, the report also quotes Vladimir Evseev, director of the center for Public Policy Research in Moscow as saying that the double veto on anti-Syrian resolution makes any intervention illegitimate. The expert also added that anti-Syrian resolutions are being dictated by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In other reports, the reasons behind Russia's UN resolution veto are explained as: to prevent "foreign interference";¹⁴⁵ resolution was put for vote in a "hasty way",¹⁴⁶ before Russian delegation visited Damascus; resolution "did not exclude foreign military intervention"; both "Moscow and Beijing express their fears that a "Libyan scenario" could repeat in Syria".¹⁴⁷

Like *Izvestiya*, liberal *Kommersant* also followed Moscow's official line and defended Russia's veto of a UN resolution condemning Assad's regime. Many of the reasons behind the veto of UN resolution are the same as pointed out in *Izvestiya*. However, unlike *Izvestiya*, liberal *Kommersant* explains the reasons behind the veto in a more thorough way. The article entitled "We will wait until New York awakes" starts with reporting on negotiations between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Lavrov asked Clinton not to put the resolution to a vote since it "does not suit Moscow" and still has to be "worked on". In trying to explain what exactly Russia sees as unsuitable, the report quotes Lavrov as pointing out two issues. First, the "document contains very precise demands addressed to the Syrian regime, while, on the contrary, any reference to armed forces operating there lacks clarity, although these armed gangs intimidate local citizens, violate their rights and attack government buildings." Secondly, "ambiguities in the text of resolution" if not

¹⁴⁵ *Izvestiya*, "Fradkov will join Lavrov in talks with Assad"

¹⁴⁶ *Izvestiya*, "Lavrov noticed hysteria around Syrian issue", February 6, 2013, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/514379>, accessed on April 1, 2013

¹⁴⁷ *Izvestiya*, "Lavrov and Fradkov arrived to Damascus to meet with Assad", February 7, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/514506>, accessed on April 2, 2013

eliminated, make it unclear that the “national dialogue should be held without preliminary conditions.”¹⁴⁸

In a report dated February 8, the author mentions that during the negotiations, Sergey Lavrov and Hillary Clinton “agreed that the resolution will be put to a vote” only after Russian officials return from Damascus. However it was still put to a vote despite promises made by Clinton. Another report dated February 13 also stresses on the undelivered “promise” given by Hillary Clinton that according to Lavrov was a total “disrespect”.¹⁴⁹

Next report states that the UN resolution on Syria was vetoed by Russia because it contained only “a demand addressed to the authorities that all military troops should withdraw from cities.” However, Moscow suggested that the same demand should be addressed to the armed opposition. It also adds that the resolution was put to a vote too “hasty” and a “clear disrespect” could be seen “in the refusal to wait for our [Lavrov and Fradkov’s] return from Damascus”.¹⁵⁰

In an opinion piece, entitled “The price paid”, the author, Evgeniy Satanovskiy, the president of the Institute of the Middle East points to the involvement of Riyadh and Doha in intensifying the conflict in Syria and states that if Assad falls, it will lead to radical Islamists rising to power, collapse of a country, and slaughter of *Shia* Muslims and Christians.¹⁵¹ *Izvestiya* also mentions about Saudi Arabia and Qatar’s deep

¹⁴⁸ Kommersant, “*We will wait until New York awakes*”, February 6, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1866717>, accessed on April 2, 2013

¹⁴⁹ Kommersant, “*Friendly push*”, February 8, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1868044>, accessed on April 2, 2013

¹⁵⁰ Kommersant, “*Syrian thriller*”, February 13, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1867274?themeID=1356>, accessed on April 2, 2013

¹⁵¹ Kommersant, “*The price paid*”, February 7, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1860689>, accessed on April 2, 2013

involvement in the Syrian conflict.¹⁵² Moreover, the author claims that Russia tries to lower the intensity of civil war and to take regime to evolutionary path to development.

Another piece quotes Alexei Arbatov, head of the International Security Centre at the Institute of World Economics and International Affairs as saying that Russia and China “saved” Syria from the resolution that could “open a door to increasing pressure...even to some kind of military actions, as it happened with the Libyan case.”¹⁵³ Report entitled “Syrian thriller” talks about Russian officials trip to Damascus and UN resolution as a “culmination of the stand-off” between Russia-China and the West, that “wants to topple Assad’s regime” by any means. The report quotes Russian diplomats as saying that the resolution “created great opportunities for pressure on Assad” since it contained only demands addressing to the regime, but not to the opposition. According to the official, the West and her allies “badly need the UN resolution that can be used as a ground for further moves.”¹⁵⁴

To sum up, both newspapers as it would be expected, defended the veto while reporting that the UN resolution was insufficient, sending “unbalanced messages”¹⁵⁵, was put to a vote in a “hasty” way,¹⁵⁶ “would probably lead to the Libyan scenario”¹⁵⁷ and “provided great opportunities for pressure on Assad”.¹⁵⁸ *Kommersant* however went even further, claiming that the West needs to pass any resolution that would provide “international legitimacy” for its further actions.¹⁵⁹ It is also worth mentioning that the

¹⁵² Izvestiya, “*Fradkov will join Lavrov in talks with Assad*”

¹⁵³ *Kommersant*, “*Lavrov and Fradkov hold very powerful trump cards*”, February 7, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1868053>, accessed on April 2, 2013

¹⁵⁴ *Kommersant*, “*Syrian thriller*”

¹⁵⁵ Izvestiya, “*Russia and China blocked UN resolution on Syria*”

¹⁵⁶ *Kommersant*, “*Syrian thriller*”

¹⁵⁷ Izvestiya, “*Lavrov and Fradkov arrived to Damascus to meet with Assad*”

¹⁵⁸ *Kommersant*, “*Syrian thriller*”

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,

both newspapers, *Izvestiya* and *Kommersant* portray the veto as sort of a “way” to protect Syria from outside interference thus creating an image of Russia as a ‘savior’. The West is portrayed as “eager to topple Assad’s regime by any means”.¹⁶⁰

But let us take a look how the double veto of resolution on Syria, submitted by the Moroccan delegation to the United Nations Security Council was covered by the American press.

The *Washington Post* does not try to explain why Russia and China blocked the UN resolution, restricting itself to a simple statement that “Russia is Syria’s most powerful remaining protector”.¹⁶¹ Just once, in a report dated February 6, the newspaper mentions about what it calls Moscow’s “fears” of a “repeat of what happened in Libya”. However the report does not further evolve on this statement, preferring to talk about Syria being an “important customer” for Russian arms and hosting Russian “naval supply base”.¹⁶²

It is certain that the *Washington Post* has its own opinion on the double veto. This is how the newspaper portrayed the veto: as “quashing efforts to isolate” Assad; a “blow to attempts by the United States and its European partners to rally behind an Arab League plan that would...make way for a democratically elected unity government.”; as a “willingness to sell out the Syrian people and shield a craven tyrant.”; a “blow to diplomatic efforts to end the Syrian crisis”¹⁶³ ; and a “Cold War curtain call”.¹⁶⁴ The

¹⁶⁰ *Kommersant*, “*Syrian thriller*” and *Izvestiya*, “*Sarkozy is getting ready to topple Assad along the lines of the Libyan scenario*”, February 14, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/515280> , accessed on April 2, 2013

¹⁶¹ *Washington Post*, “*Russia, China veto U.N. resolution on Syria*”, February 4, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/russia-china-veto-un-resolution-on-syria/2012/02/04/gIQAxvVhpQ_story.html , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁶² *Washington Post*, “*Russia raps West, sends mission to Syria*”, February 6, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/russia-raps-west-sends-mission-to-syria/2012/02/06/gIQAh36ytQ_story.html , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁶³ *Washington Post*, “*Russia, China veto U.N. resolution on Syria*”

veto was also presented as a matter of choice: to “turn their backs on the Arab world and support tyranny” or support “the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people”.¹⁶⁵ Of course, the choice was made, thus equating Russia and China to countries ‘supporting tyranny’ and obstructing the legal demands of the Syrian people.

The *New York Times* also joined the *Washington Post* in its denunciations of Russia and China’s block of UN Security Council draft resolution on Syria. Reports mostly focus on violence that erupted in Homs and contain heavy moral judgments. Overall, the newspaper scapegoats Russia and China for escalating violence because of Russia being “Syria’s staunch ally” and both countries’ vetoes that “emboldened” Syrian President to use more violence against the opposition.¹⁶⁶ But let us take a closer look at how the *New York Times* frames the veto of UN resolution.

The first report dealing with veto starts with explanation of violence in Homs, that “came after the vote” in Security Council. Further it quotes activists mostly living outside of Syria as condemning Assad’s regime, calling the President a “killer”, “dictator”, and a “bloodthirsty killer”.¹⁶⁷ The second report is more revealing. Published on the first page of the newspaper, the report mentions the statements made by Russia and China in explaining reasons behind the vetoes as “it [resolution] unfairly blamed only the Syrian government for the violence” and “it [resolution] might further complicate the situation.”¹⁶⁸ However, as with the *Washington Post*, the *New York*

¹⁶⁴ Washington Post, “U.S. closes embassy, pulls diplomats from Syria as violence intensifies”, February 6, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-pulls-diplomats-out-of-syria-as-violence-intensifies/2012/02/06/gIQAN1CxtQ_story.html , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁶⁵ Washington Post, “Russia, China veto U.N. resolution on Syria”

¹⁶⁶ New York Times, “Russia and China block U.N. action on crisis in Syria”, February 4, 2012, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/world/middleeast/syria-homs-death-toll-said-to-rise.html?scp=305&sq=&st=nyt&_r=0 , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁶⁷ New York Times, “Violence in Syria prompts protests at embassies”, February 4, 2012, available at <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/04/violence-in-syria-prompts-protests-at-embassies/?scp=304&sq=&st=nyt> , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁶⁸ New York Times, “Russia and China block U.N. action on crisis in Syria”

Times' report does not further evolve on the statements, restricting itself to the explanation of a "real massacre" in Homs and idiotic claims that the "veto is...sure to embolden the government of ...Assad". To further solidify this statement, the report quotes Peter Harling, an expert on Syria at the International Crisis Group as saying that the veto "is a license to do more of the same and worse".¹⁶⁹ There are other statements made by officials, all condemning Russia and China's measure.

As with the previous events, the newspaper restricts the contents of its reports to the official narrative of the United States, just slightly mentioning other opinions on the issue. Next reports talk of vetoes as: "crucial in bolstering" the Syrian government's confidence; "failure...to stem the violence"; "collapse of diplomatic efforts to mediate Syria's uprising"¹⁷⁰ and "appeared to end...any concerted diplomatic efforts".¹⁷¹

In editorial entitled "Killing in Syria", the author goes even further, stating that China and Russia now "have the blood of Syria's valiant people on their hands". The author also calls both countries' statements that the resolution if adopted "would expand the conflict" as "nonsense". According to the author, the real explanation is that the both countries are "authoritarian" and "fear any popular movement and...are determined to deny the West another perceived victory." The report further talks about the results of votes in the Security Council thus pointing to the "increasing" isolation of the President.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ New York Times, "*Russia and China block U.N. action on crisis in Syria*"

¹⁷⁰ New York Times, "*Syrian unrest after a failure of diplomacy*", February 5, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/06/world/middleeast/syria-steps-up-crackdown-after-failed-un-motion.html?ref=middleeast> , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁷¹ New York Times, "*U.S. embassy in Syria closes as violence flares*", February 6, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/world/middleeast/violence-in-syria-continues-after-diplomacy-fails.html?scp=308&sq=&st=nyt> , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁷² New York Times, "*Killing in Syria*", February 6, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/opinion/killing-in-syria.html?ref=middleeast> , accessed on April 3, 2013

Other reports also strongly denunciate Russian and Chinese vetoes of the resolution. In a letter to the editor, published on February 6, 2012, Russia and China are being accused of considering Assad's ways of treating his political opponents as "acceptable".¹⁷³ Next report states that the violence has escalated just after the vote on Security Council resolution, thus once again pointing that by vetoing; both countries had given "green light" to the Syrian President. Such accusations are also present in other reports.¹⁷⁴

In an op-ed entitled "Why Beijing votes with Moscow", the author, Minxin Pei tries to discredit both countries' vetoes by stating that Russia is "Mr. Assad's strongest foreign backer" and China has strong "diplomatic relations" with Moscow. The article promotes a view that Russians vetoed Syria resolution because of their "economic and security interests" in Syria and China joined Russian veto because of its fear to "jeopardize" relations by voting for the resolution. While it might be partly true, another statement is worth mentioning as well. The author claims that the other explanation of Chinese veto is Chinese Communist Party's "ideological hostility to democratic transition." Another ridiculous explanation proposed by the author is that both countries fear that the ouster of Bashar al-Assad "would inspire the pro-democracy opposition" in Moscow and Beijing. Thus, once again, the newspaper creates an image of two "authoritarian governments" trying to obstruct world's efforts to halt the violence in Syria.¹⁷⁵

Despite an overt adherence to a certain narrative, the *New York Times* still tried to show a certain level of objectivity. In a co-ed dated February 9, the author, Dmitri Trenin claims that most analysts' statements about the reasons behind Russia's veto are much

¹⁷³ New York Times, "*The crisis in Syria*", February 6, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/opinion/the-crisis-in-syria.html?scp=309&sq=&st=nyt>, accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁷⁴ New York Times, "*Stung by criticism, Russia sends envoys to Syria to defuse crisis*", February 7, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/08/world/middleeast/syria-renews-bombardments-after-us-embassy-closes.html?scp=315&sq=&st=nyt>, accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁷⁵ New York Times, "*Why Beijing votes with Moscow*", February 7, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/08/opinion/why-beijing-votes-with-moscow.html?ref=opinion&r=0>, accessed on April 3, 2013

exaggerated. According to the author, Syria is certainly important to Russia, but to understand true reasons of Russia's veto, "one has to take a broader look." The author points to the Libyan experience, democratization leading directly to Islamicization and Russia's firm belief that "attempts to interfere in other countries' civil wars can only make things worse". But even then, this attempt to show its objectivity falls short. Just in the next report, the author, David M. Herszenhorn, points to Russian "longstanding arms sales" to Syria as the reason behind Moscow's support for Damascus.¹⁷⁶

Other reports dealing with Russia-China block of UN resolution describe it as "massacre-enabling";¹⁷⁷ a veto that "sanctified" bloodbath in Syria;¹⁷⁸ a veto that "provided the political cover for a more severe crackdown on rebel forces" and claim that attacks on opposition activists intensified after the vetoes.¹⁷⁹ Such statements once again prove that Russia and China are being scapegoated for increased violence in Homs. There is no mention that attacks in Homs might be provoked by the armed opposition groups. Neither there is a mention that there are not only two belligerents in the conflict: a bloodthirsty Syrian president and peaceful opposition, but also heavily armed gangs, killing both civilians and soldiers. The newspaper follows only one narrative: brutal Assad is given a "green light" by two authoritarian countries, Russia and China that obstruct the Western and Arab plan to end the violence in Syria.

But what about reaction on the double veto? How do all four newspapers cover it?

¹⁷⁶ New York Times, "Why Russia supports Assad", February 9, 2012, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/opinion/why-russia-supports-assad.html?ref=middleeast&_r=0 , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁷⁷ New York Times, "How to halt the butchery in Syria", February 23, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/24/opinion/how-to-halt-the-butchery-in-syria.html?ref=middleeast> , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁷⁸ New York Times, "In rare, blunt speech, Saudi King criticizes Syria vetoes", February 10, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/11/world/middleeast/in-rare-blunt-speech-saudi-king-criticizes-syria-vetoes.html?scp=322&sq=&st=nyt> , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁷⁹ New York Times, "For Syria, reliant on Russia for weapons and food, old bonds run deep", February 18, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/world/middleeast/for-russia-and-syria-bonds-are-old-and-deep.html?scp=337&sq=&st=nyt> , accessed on April 3, 2013

3.4.1 International Reaction to the Double Veto

As we have mentioned above, both American newspapers, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* have denounced the veto. However there is a difference in covering the reaction on the UN resolution block. The *Washington Post*, instead of focusing on the double veto and the subsequent reaction of the world leaders on it, focuses more on Sergey Lavrov and Mikhail Fradkov's trip to Damascus and information about US and other countries closing their embassies in Damascus.

In the first report by the *Washington Post*, Andrew Tabler, a Middle East expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy is being quoted as saying that he is not sure that the resolution on Syria "could have stopped the killing".¹⁸⁰ Thus, starting from the first report, the newspaper tries to instill an idea that it is too late for a diplomatic resolution.

In comparison to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* quotes only three people, Susan E. Rice, Hillary Clinton and William Hague as condemning the double veto. The newspaper quotes Mr. Hague as saying that Chinese-Russian veto is an "unacceptable situation which demands united international response."¹⁸¹ The *Washington Post* further follows its "it is too late" narrative. Except for calling the UN resolution on Syria as "toothless",¹⁸² the newspaper published an opinion piece, in which an exiled Syrian dissident living in Washington calls for a remedy, while totally discrediting the idea of a diplomatic solution to the Syrian conflict. The author, Ammar Abdulhamid states that the "situation requires some form of intervention" thus proving that the newspaper supports rather an idea of a foreign interference in Syrian conflict than a peaceful settlement of the issue. Our statement is further solidified by author's claims that "it's not too late to prevent catastrophe", the "situation requires some form of intervention"

¹⁸⁰ Washington Post, "Russia, China veto U.N. resolution on Syria"

¹⁸¹ Washington Post, "U.S. closes embassy, pulls diplomats from Syria as violence intensifies"

¹⁸² Washington Post, "Russia, China veto U.N. resolution on Syria"

and that the “Assad killing machine must be stopped.” These statements once again prove that the *Washington Post* follows a certain narrative. It is also important to note that the author in his description of attacks in Homs writes that the “loyalist gangs” have committed “cold-blooded massacre of entire families, including women and babies”. The use of words such as “massacre”, “entire families”, “women” and “babies” works like magic thus creating certain emotions and manufacturing consent among the readers.¹⁸³ This in return helps to promote a certain opinion on the case and a way to its solution. In our case, it is a “toothless” resolution on Syria that would not be a solution to the ongoing massacre by Mr. Assad and a need for foreign interference. Such a “solution” is also promoted by the *Washington Post* in its other reports.

In a report dated February 4, David Schenker, an adviser to the Pentagon on the Middle East during the George W. Bush administration is being quoted as saying that the White House should be “mobilizing a “coalition of the willing”” to help Syria’s activists with “weapons and training.” In another report, the newspaper quotes Michael Singh, senior director for Middle East affairs at the National Security Council in the George W. Bush administration as saying that “doing nothing...could make the inevitable conflict longer, bloodier and more dangerous”, thus pointing to the need for an interference.¹⁸⁴

Taken above-mentioned into account, the *Washington Post* by totally discrediting the UN resolution as a possible solution to the ongoing conflict tries to promote another remedy, i.e. foreign interference. In doing so, the newspaper frames the conflict as impossible to be solved diplomatically, Assad’s regime as a killing machine, slaughtering “entire families”, including women and babies, thus leaving only one way-intervention.

¹⁸³ Washington Post, “*As Syria violence continues, world leaders do little*”, February 7, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/as-syria-violence-continues-world-leaders-do-little/2012/02/06/gIQA9mIvuQ_story.html , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁸⁴ Washington Post, ” *Russia, China veto U.N. resolution on Syria*”

The *New York Times* on contrary, focused more on the double veto and subsequent reaction to it. Almost in every report the newspaper quotes politicians, analysts and diplomats all strongly condemning the veto: “great disappointment”,¹⁸⁵ “travesty”,¹⁸⁶ to block the resolution is to “bear responsibility for the horrors that are occurring on the ground” in Syria¹⁸⁷, a “betrayal of the Syrian people”¹⁸⁸, “disgusted”¹⁸⁹, a “scandal”, “we are not only disappointed but appalled”¹⁹⁰ and “frustration”¹⁹¹.

The newspaper also published an article devoted to the speech made by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. In his short speech, the king castigated double veto, calling it “absolutely regrettable”¹⁹². Along with reporting a strong condemnation of the Russia-China block of the UN resolution on Syria, the newspaper also focuses on violence in Homs. The *New York Times* not only explains the horrors of attacks in the Syrian city, but also quotes local residents and opposition activists as a proof of a “real massacre” happening there.

¹⁸⁵ New York Times, “*Russia and China block U.N. action on crisis in Syria*”

¹⁸⁶ New York Times, “*Solution on Syria remains elusive for White House*”, February 5, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/06/world/middleeast/obama-administration-continues-push-for-change-in-syria.html?scp=306&sq=&st=nyt> , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁸⁷ New York Times, “*Russia and China block U.N. action on crisis in Syria*”

¹⁸⁸ New York Times, “*U.S. embassy in Syria closes as violence flares*”

¹⁸⁹ New York Times, “*Russia rejects criticism of its U.N. veto on Syria*”, February 6, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/world/europe/russia-rejects-criticism-of-its-un-veto-on-syria.html?ref=middleeast> , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁹⁰ New York Times, “*Merkel and Sarkozy share anger over Syria stalemate and urgency over Greece*”, February 6, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/world/europe/merkel-and-sarkozy-address-syria-greece-and-french-election.html?scp=310&sq=&st=nyt> , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁹¹ New York Times, “*U.N. official rebukes Syria over violence*”, February 13, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/14/world/middleeast/syrian-forces-continue-attack-on-homs.html?scp=325&sq=&st=nyt> , accessed on April 3, 2013

¹⁹² New York Times, “*In rare, blunt speech, Saudi King criticizes Syria vetoes*”

To create even more horrifying images of attacks, a resident of Khaldiya is being quoted as saying that he saw “bodies of women and children lying on roads, beheaded”¹⁹³. Once again, a local resident becomes a legitimate source of information. But what is more important is that as in the case of the *Washington Post*, giving such information helps in manufacturing consent among the readers. In our case, this “consent” is about the failure of the diplomatic efforts to end the brutality of Assad regime, thus leaving only one possible solution- foreign interference.

Such a solution is also promoted in a report dated February 7, with a resident being quoted as saying that he sees no other choice since negotiation is “useless with such a regime”. “He [Assad] came to power by force and won’t leave it in any other way” he said, thus pointing to the need of intervention.¹⁹⁴

As we have already mentioned above, both Russian newspapers, *Izvestiya* and *Kommersant* defended the double veto, reporting that the UN resolution was insufficient and was sending ‘unbalanced messages’. But what about the international reaction to the veto? How did both newspapers cover it?

Alike the *New York Times*, the pro-government *Izvestiya* focused on Russia-China block of the UN resolution and subsequent reaction to it. Almost in every report, the newspaper states that the veto by China and Russia drew “sharp criticism” from the West.¹⁹⁵ However it is more a simple statement of facts and does not include any moralistic arguments or judgments as it was in the *New York Times*. *Izvestiya* also quoted a number of politicians and diplomats as denouncing the double veto. However these statements are being discredited by the Russian newspaper by quoting Sergey

¹⁹³ New York Times, “Russia and China block U.N. action on crisis in Syria”

¹⁹⁴ New York Times, “U.S. embassy in Syria closes as violence flares”

¹⁹⁵ Izvestiya, “Lavrov: Assad is ready for a dialogue and committed to ending violence”, February 7, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/514564> , accessed on April 3, 2013

Lavrov as saying “he who gets angry is rarely right,”¹⁹⁶ and Gennady Gatilov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia as writing on Twitter that “undiplomatic reaction of Westerners... confirms the correctness of our line,”¹⁹⁷

Liberal *Kommersant* has also quoted numerous politicians as condemning the double veto. However as in the case of the pro-government *Izvestiya*, the liberal newspaper has simply listed the statements made by the world leaders, leaving no room for opinions and points of views. The newspaper focused more on explaining the reasons behind the veto of the UN resolution and defending the Russian stance on the Syrian conflict.

3.4.2 Conclusion

Taken above mentioned into account, we are able to see differences in covering the issue. Whereas the American *New York Times* and *Washington Post* focused more on denouncing the veto, both Russian newspapers, as it would be expected, have defended it, while discrediting the resolution as incomplete and the international reaction to the veto as “undiplomatic” and “irrelevant”.¹⁹⁸

It is also important to note that there is a difference in coverage of the block of UN resolution on Syria by the two U.S newspapers as well. Whereas the *New York Times* denounces the double veto, accusing Russia and China of emboldening and giving ‘green light’ to the Syrian government to continue its crackdown on protesters, the *Washington Post* while also criticizing the veto, focuses more on discrediting the resolution on Syria as being ‘toothless’ thus promoting only one solution-foreign intervention.

¹⁹⁶ *Izvestiya*, “Lavrov noticed hysteria around Syrian issue”

¹⁹⁷ *Izvestiya*, “Lavrov and Fradkov arrived to Damascus to meet with Assad”

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*,

3.5 DOWNING OF A TURKISH F-4 JET

On June 22, 2012, the Syrian Armed Forces has shot down a Turkish F-4 reconnaissance jet. The incident has greatly escalated already tense relations between two countries. But let us take a look how this news was covered by American and Russian media. Did all four newspapers cover the issue the same way or were there differences? Did Russian newspapers try to defend the Syrian side or did they remain neutral? What about American newspapers? Did the newspapers remain neutral in the conflict or become the propaganda tools?

The Russian pro-government *Izvestiya* tried to remain neutral, always juxtaposing the two opposing views on the incident: the Turkish government claimed that the warplane was shot down by the Syrian forces in the international airspace while the Syrian side claimed that the Turkish F-4 reconnaissance jet has violated Syrian airspace.

The newspaper has dedicated totally sixteen reports to the downing of a Turkish military jet, restricting the content of their reports to the simple unambiguous facts like what happened and where. There is no room for debate and there are no questions asked who is right and who is not in the conflict. No questions as to what the Turkish F-4 warplane was up to when the Syrians shot it down. The reason why the newspaper did not comment on the issue, leaving room to the facts is because *BBC*, the *Telegraph*, *Reuters* and *Assosiated Press* were the main sources of information on the incident. Only once, in a report dated June 25, the newspaper included opinion of a specialist on the issue. *Izvestiya* quoted Boris Dolgov, an expert at the Institute of Oriental Studies as saying that the “story with the plane looks like an ideal pretext for the military invasion”. The expert also added that Turkish jets carry out flights close to the Syrian borders in order to “detect neighbor’s air defense facilities” as well as to test how far “Damascus can go in confrontation with a possible external threat.” The report also stresses that the fact of

Turkish jet loss, sunk in the Syrian waters proves that “NATO has military plans for Syria.”¹⁹⁹ Such a report actually reveals the newspaper’s preference in the conflict.

The *New York Times*, while also having its preferences, published some very fair and balanced reports on the incident. The newspaper portrayed the two contradicting versions, making sure that they provide legitimate information by publishing stories that emanate from identifiable sources representing both sides of the conflict. However even then, under a cloak of objectivity, there are still hints to a certain preference. The newspaper, while presenting two opposing arguments, focused more on Turkish opinion on the incident, by quoting numerous Turkish officials as saying that the F-4 Phantom did not violate Syrian airspace and even if it did, the Syrian response was “unacceptable.”²⁰⁰

For example, in a report dated June 24, 2012, only three lines were dedicated to a statement made by Jihad Makdissi, the Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman. In comparison, totally twenty-three lines were devoted to the statements made by Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish Foreign Minister. Except for giving more space to the Turkish version of an incident, the newspaper also constantly uses adjective “unarmed” when referring to the Turkish reconnaissance jet thus pointing that the jet could not be a threat

¹⁹⁹ Izvestiya, “*Downing of a jet by Syria might provoke a war*”, June 25, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/528447> , accessed on April 3, 2013

²⁰⁰ New York Times, “*Turkey vows action after downing of jet by Syria*”, June 23, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/24/world/middleeast/turkey-promises-retaliation-in-response-to-downing-of-military-jet-by-syria.html?scp=12&sq=Syria&st=nyt> , accessed on April 3, 2013

to the Syrian government.²⁰¹ It is quite important since American-made F-4 Phantom can carry heavy bomb payloads.²⁰²

It is important to note that starting from the first report, the *New York Times* mentions that Turkey supports Syrian rebels “trying to overthrow the government”. Turkey, a neighbor and former close ally of Syria, along with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, supplies “dissident groups” and the Free Syrian Army with arms and money. Turkey also hosts Syrian refugees and provides leaders of anti-Assad militia, living in a fortified camp near the Syrian border, a protection.²⁰³ Thus we are able to see two belligerents of the conflict: Turkey that supports anti-Assad rebels and Syria that tries to suppress the rebels. By constant repetition of these sentences, the *New York Times* tries to link the incident to tense relations between the two countries, making it impossible to look at as an accident, thus totally discrediting the Syrian version of the conflict.

To further denounce the Syrian action, the newspaper quotes politicians and diplomats around the world as criticizing Syria. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton says that the United States “condemns this brazen and unacceptable act in the strongest possible terms”.²⁰⁴ NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen calls the Syrian actions “unacceptable.” The newspaper also quotes NATO allies as calling the incident “another example of the Syrian authorities’ disregard for international norms, peace and security,

²⁰¹ New York Times, “*Backed by NATO, Turkey steps up warning to Syria*”, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/27/world/middleeast/turkey-seeks-nato-backing-in-syria-dispute.html?ref=middleeast>, accessed on April 3, 2013; and New York Times, “*Downed Turkish plane and dead pilots found with aid of Titanic explorer*”, July 4, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/05/world/middleeast/pilots-of-turkish-plane-downed-by-syria-are-found.html?scp=95&sq=Syria&st=nyt>, accessed on April 3, 2013

²⁰² Foreign Policy in Focus, “*Turkish F-4 Activated Syrian Radar to Scope Out Blind Spots*”, June 27, 2012, available at http://www.fpif.org/blog/turkish_f-4_activated_syrian_radar_to_scope_out_blind_spots, accessed on May 10, 2013

²⁰³ New York Times, “*Turkey vows action after downing of jet by Syria*”

²⁰⁴ New York Times, “*Turkey to consult NATO over downing of jet by Syria*”, June 24, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/25/world/middleeast/turkey-to-consult-nato-over-downing-of-jet-by-syria.html?scp=14&sq=Syria&st=nyt>, accessed on May 10, 2013

and human life.”²⁰⁵ In a report dated June 26, which was deleted from the newspaper’s website, but could be found on Reuters’ website, Mr. Rasmussen is being quoted as saying that “NATO allies have expressed strong condemnation of this completely unacceptable act.”²⁰⁶

The *New York Times* clearly wanted to show a level of objectivity by presenting two opposing versions. However it is not difficult to notice that they had picked a side in the dispute and were trying to promote its narrative.

Liberal *Kommersant* has dedicated totally seven reports to the case, including two opinion pieces. The first report dealing with the downing of a Turkish jet, presents two conflicting accounts of what occurred. Turkey insisted that F-4 Phantom was downed “without any warning” and that the jet was on a training flight to test “nation’s radar system”. Syria insisted that the Turkish jet was downed in “one kilometre away from the Syrian coast in accordance with procedure for airspace violation”.²⁰⁷

The second report, dated June 25, 2012 is more revealing. The subtitle reads: “There is a pretext for military intervention to Syria.” From the onset of the report, the reader is faced with an idea that the downing of a Turkish jet is just a pretext for interference in Syria. Except for giving a detailed information about the incident, the report also focuses on both contradicting versions: that is of the Turkish side claiming that the plane was testing “nation’s radar system” and was shot down in the “international waters” and the Syrian side claiming that the plane might have been testing radar system, but “not the Turkey’s, rather Syria’s one”. As a proof, the author quoted Syrian side as claiming that the jet was shot down while it was just “one kilometre away from the Syrian coast,

²⁰⁵ New York Times, “*Backed by NATO, Turkey steps up warning to Syria*”

²⁰⁶ The article was deleted from the New York Times’ website, but could be found on <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/26/us-syria-crisis-nato-rasmussen-idUSBRE85P0D820120626> , accessed on May 10, 2013

²⁰⁷ Kommersant, “*Turkish authorities accused Syria for violating the international law*”, June 24, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1966315?fp=> , accessed on May 10, 2013

flying at low altitude and at high speed.”²⁰⁸ To solidify the statement about intended air violation, the author, Alexander Reutov, mentions that Syria’s air defense systems pose perhaps the sole threat to the armed opposition in case of an external support. Thus the information about Syria’s air defense systems can be a vital interest for a potential enemy.

This “spying” hypothesis is also evident in other reports. However, unlike *Kommersant*, the *New York Times* discredits it, stating that even if the Turkish jet was spying on Syria, still the Syrian measure was “unacceptable.”²⁰⁹ Let us remember that Syria is facing a bloody civil war and fighting against armed opposition supported from the outside. So when there is an unidentified jet flying very “low into its [Syrian] airspace” and at a high speed, the country can not react to such a brazen violation?²¹⁰

The newspaper does not further evolve on the issue, preferring to focus more on killings in the village of Daret Azzeh and Deir al-Zour and quoting world leaders as all denouncing the Syria’s action. Therefore we can see that the *New York Times* admits that the Turkish jet might have been on a spy mission, however it is not important since Syria’s measure was “brazen and unacceptable”.²¹¹ It proves that the *New York Times* prefers to follow a certain narrative, without commenting on the event and not trying to understand who is right and who is not. The newspaper just once mentions the possibility of a Turkish jet ‘spying’ on Syria, however it discredits this supposition by reporting on violence in Syria and brutality of Assad’s regime.

Alike *Kommersant*, the pro-government *Izvestiya* also mentioned that the Turkish jet might have been on a spy mission, thus arousing doubts on the credibility of Turkish

²⁰⁸ Kommersant, “*NATO accuses Damascus*” , June 25, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1966316> , accessed on May 10, 2013

²⁰⁹ New York Times, “*Backed by NATO, Turkey steps up warning to Syria*”

²¹⁰ New York Times, “*Turkey to consult NATO over downing of jet by Syria*”

²¹¹ Ibid.,

version on the incident. As we have discussed above, *Izvestiya* quoted Boris Dolgov, an expert at the Institute of Oriental Studies saying that Turkish jets carry out flights close to the Syrian borders in order to “detect neighbor’s air defense facilities”.²¹²

Unlike other newspapers, the *Washington Post* does not mention the possibility of Turkish jet being on a spy mission, restricting the contents of their reports to portraying Assad’s regime as a “real threat” to the neighbors. Just once, in a report dated June 22, the author, Liz Sly, quotes Ahmet Davutoglu, the Foreign Minister of Turkey as saying that the jet was not spying on Syria.²¹³ No further information was provided regarding this statement. In a report dated June 26, the *Washington Post* states that the Turkish jet, “which carried photo surveillance equipment” could have been “watching the Syrian port for arms shipments.” However the newspaper does not further evolve on this supposition, focusing more on the statements that the downing of a Turkish jet has “served as a stark warning” against potential enemies.²¹⁴ Thus we can see that the newspaper does not even consider the idea of a Turkish jet being on a spy mission, framing the incident as an intended attack on the jet by Syria.

But let us go back to the *Kommersant* newspaper. The third report dealing with downing of a Turkish jet, also follows the narrative of an intended air violation. Entitled “It looks like an act of provocation, but not by the Syrian side”, the report reads in the subtitle: “Western countries... are much interested in the conflict”. To solidify the statement, the newspaper quotes Leonid Ivashov, the vice-president of the Academy on Geopolitical affairs as saying that the downing of a jet looks more like an act of provocation, stressing that Syria is now much interested in that the internal conflict involving

²¹² *Izvestiya*, “Downing of a jet by Syria might provoke a war”

²¹³ *Washington Post*, “Turkey will consult NATO over shooting down of plane by Syria”, June 22, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/turkey-investigates-whether-syria-shot-down-missing-jet/2012/06/22/gJQAt8SXxV_story.html , accessed on May 10, 2013

²¹⁴ *Washington Post*, “Syrian downing of Turkish jet serves as warning”, June 26, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/syrian-shootdown-of-turkish-jet-serves-as-warning/2012/06/26/gJQAIYNy4V_story.html , accessed on May 10, 2013

“elements of external interference” be solved in a “peaceful way.”²¹⁵ The expert also added that Turkey is interested in overthrowing Assad’s regime.

The next report states that the “The West is preparing the ground for a military intervention”. The newspaper quotes Susan Rice, the U.S Permanent Representative to the United Nations as saying that it is time to “use force” against Assad’s regime. Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs Didier Reynders was also quoted as saying that it is “necessary to consider possibilities of foreign intervention”.²¹⁶ Another report entitled “Turkey warned Syria” focuses on the statement made by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister of Turkey. Mr.Erdogan stated that if Syrian army took any action near the border, Turkey would regard it as a military threat”. Further on, the newspaper reports on the strong international condemnation of Syria’s measure, pointing that NATO “fully supports” Ankara. The report concluded on a note about Turkey’s Prime Minister’s pledge to “offer all possible support to Syrian people until he [Mr. Erdogan] does not put an end to oppression, massacre by this bloody dictator and his clique.”²¹⁷

The next piece also focused on a statement made by Mr.Erdogan, claiming that the current situation is surely to play in hand for the Free Syrian Army. According to the report, the Free Syrian Army is already active in the Turkish-Syrian border area, especially in Idlib. If the Syrian army fulfils the conditions of the Turkish state and stop carrying out operations in border areas, it will help the opposition forces in creating “buffer zones”, free of the Syrian security forces. With time, a “revolutionary government” will be formed there that would be further recognized by other governments, first of all which would be Turkey. To solidify this statement, the *Kommersant* quoted Col.Malik Kurdi, a spokesman for the Free Syrian Army command

²¹⁵ Kommersant, “*It looks like a act of provocation ,but not by the Syrian side*” June 25, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1966636> , accessed on May 10, 2013

²¹⁶ Kommersant, “*The West is preparing the ground for a military intervention*”, June 26, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1967414> , accessed on May 10, 2013

²¹⁷ Kommersant, “*Turkey warned Syria*”, June 26, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1967621?fp=> , accessed on May 10, 2013

as saying that Turkish reaction on the downing of its jet “strengthens” their [opposition’s] position not only in the province of Idlib and the border areas, but in the whole of Syria. The rest of the report talked about raids, carried out by the Syrian opposition groups being inspired by strong support from Turkey. Opposition groups “brazenly” attacked suburbs of Damascus, where elite Republican Guard was stationed.²¹⁸ As well as this, the groups stormed the headquarters of *Al-Ikhbariya* news channel near Damascus causing seven people dead, including three journalists.

The last report dedicated to the incident begins on a derisive note, claiming that the *Sunday Times*, a British daily stated in its report that Russia may have been involved in Syria's shooting down of a Turkish fighter jet on June 22. As a proof, the British daily quotes a diplomat, unnamed of course, claiming that Syria’s anti-aircraft defences are “using Soviet and Russian-made” weapons. This is an interesting claim. So if Syria uses Soviet and Russian-made weaponry, then Russia can be accused of downing the Turkish jet? What about America then? According to this logic, America should also have been involved in the incident because the downed jet was a US-made Phantom F-4. As another proof of this ridiculous statement, the British newspaper quotes an Israeli Air Force representative as saying that it will not be surprising to discover that “Russian experts, if they didn't push the button, at least were beside the Syrian officers who did it.” The *Kommersant* did not comment on such a statement made by the *Sunday Times*, finding it baseless and ridiculous. The report concluded with a statement made by Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov who said that Russia had their own “objective observation data” and was prepared to present it.²¹⁹

Washington Post also continued on its path of promoting its own narrative, making way for moralistic arguments and judgments. The newspaper dedicated totally seven

²¹⁸ Kommersant, “*Damascus was pointed to a front line*” , June 28, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1968348> , accessed on May 10, 2013

²¹⁹ Kommersant, “*Journalists discovered Russian involvement in Turkish jet's downing*”, July 1, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1971638> , accessed on May 10, 2013

reports, presenting both accounts on the plane incident, with Turkish side claiming that F-4 Phantom was shot in the international waters and Syria claiming that an “unidentified aerial target violated Syrian airspace”, coming at “a very low altitude and at a high speed”. The first report related to the issue provides a reader with a brief information about the incident, while focusing mainly on the “consequences” of Syria’s shooting down a Turkish warplane. The report not only mentions that the relations between the two countries got tense, but also states that the armed conflict may “spill beyond its [Syrian] borders”, thus drawing in its neighbors and perhaps prompting “wider international military intervention.”²²⁰ Thus we can see that from the very first report the newspaper implies a possibility of a future military intervention.

Such an idea can be also traced in earlier reports by the newspaper, proving once again that the *Washington Post* is promoting a certain narrative, in our case it is the need of a military intervention. The rest of the report is dedicated to the “mass killing” in the province of Aleppo, causing dozens of deaths. However there are no moralistic judgments since the report points at that in the video posted on *Youtube* those killed men were identified as “Assad’s shabiha”, pro-government militias “that the opposition blames for much of the violence taking place.”²²¹ This is an interesting twist. There is no accusation, nothing that could trigger any emotion or make a reader feel sorry for the people killed by the opposition forces. Such a small detail creates a sympathy rather towards the opposition forces, than “Assad’s shabiha”.

The next report also portrayed the two contradicting versions on the plane incident, dedicating almost equal space to both accounts. However as in the previous report, the *Washington Post* mentions the soured relations between Syria and Turkey, stressing that the incident “raised regional concerns” that the “armed conflict in Syria risks spilling beyond its borders.” Just two lines later, the newspaper repeats its statement, asserting

²²⁰ Washington Post, “Turkey says it will take ‘steps’ after determining that Syria shot down missing jet”, June 22, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/turkey-investigates-whether-syria-shot-down-missing-jet/2012/06/22/gJQAtSLdvV_story.html, accessed on May 10, 2013

²²¹ Ibid.,

that a conflict with Syria “could rapidly spiral into a regional war”. The report concludes on a statement made by Iraq’s Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, as saying that their main concern is the “spillover of the crisis into neighboring countries,”.²²² This “concern” narrative is also present in another piece published by the *Washington Post*.

The next piece entitled “Turkey calls for emergency NATO meeting over Syria downing of jet”, begins with a statement that downing of a Turkish jet by Syria “potentially opens the door to international military intervention”. Further on, while reporting on the international reaction to the Syrian measure, the newspaper quotes Hillary Clinton as strongly criticizing Syrian government, adding that a U.N effort to address the “spiraling bloodshed” inside Syria through diplomacy is “faltering”. Just a few lines later, the report states that another weekend of bloodshed in Syria “seemed only to underscore the failing of the U.N effort” to diplomatically solve the issue.²²³

It is obvious that the *Washington Post* wanted to discredit possibility of a diplomatic solution to the Syrian conflict. As well as this, the *Washington Post* also tried to portray the plane incident as a possible “threat” not only to Turkey, but to other countries as well. To prove this, the newspaper reports that the “most serious cross-border incident” triggered fears of a “wider regional conflict” and quotes Salman Shaikh, director of the Brookings Doha Center in Qatar as saying that Assad has shown the “very real dangers” of his regime to Syria’s neighbors.²²⁴

It is also important to note that starting from the third report, we are able to notice a clear preference for the Turkish account on plane incident. In comparison to twenty-four lines dedicated to the Turkish version, only three lines were dedicated to reporting the Syrian account. The *Washington Post* clearly ignored the information provided by the Syrian

²²² Washington Post, “Turkey will consult NATO over shooting down of plane by Syria”

²²³ Washington Post, “Turkey calls for emergency NATO meeting over Syria downing of jet”, June 24, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/turkey-calls-for-emergency-nato-meeting-over-syria-downing-of-jet/2012/06/24/gJQAYm2rzV_story.html, accessed on May 11, 2013

²²⁴ Washington Post, “Turkey calls for emergency NATO meeting over Syria downing of jet”

authorities, focusing on the statements made by Selcuk Unal, the Foreign Ministry spokesman that “intercepted Syrian communications suggest that the Syrians knew it was a Turkish plane” and made a “deliberate” decision to shoot at it. To further discredit the Syrian claim that the plane was “unidentified”, the newspaper quoted Ahmet Davutoglu, the Foreign Minister of Turkey, as saying that the plane’s identity could be seen by all. According to the Foreign Minister, the plane was “13 nautical miles off the Syrian coast” when it was hit.²²⁵

The next report also discloses newspaper’s preference. The *Washington Post* quotes Ertugrul Apakan, Turkey’s ambassador to the United Nations as saying that “both Turkish and Syrian radar and radio records testify that our [Turkish] aircraft was shot [in] international airspace.” thus once again putting the credibility of a Syrian account in a doubt. As a Syrian version, the newspaper quotes Syrian Foreign spokesman, Jihad Makdissi, as saying that the Turkish jet was flying low and fast in Syrian airspace when it was downed by “gunners, who didn’t realize it was Turkish.”²²⁶ Such a manipulation of information creates support for a certain side of the conflict, while totally discrediting one of the accounts on the incident.

A following report is entitled “Syrian downing of Turkish jet serves as warning”. From the onset of the report, a reader is faced with an idea that Syria “deliberately” downed the Turkish war plane, thus sending a “stark warning” to other countries. The piece, while presenting only one side of the conflict, the Turkish one, focuses mainly on discussing the Syria’s air defense system. The newspaper claims that whereas the Syria’s air defense system is “relatively sophisticated”, it can still be contended. For example, by employing jammers and “other sophisticated technology” by the U.S. and NATO forces. However, according to the report, creation of a “no-fly zone” for

²²⁵ Washington Post, “*Turkey calls for emergency NATO meeting over Syria downing of jet*”

²²⁶ Washington Post, “*Turkey wants more pressure on Syria, but not confrontation, over plane downing*”, June 26, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/turkey-wants-more-pressure-on-syria-but-not-confrontation-over-plane-downing/2012/06/25/gJQAH6mv2V_story.html , accessed on May 11, 2013

opposition groups and refugees along the Turkish border would totally eliminate the need to contend with it.²²⁷

The next piece starts with reporting on a strong international condemnation of Syria and a statement made by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkish Prime Minister in which he said that the incident showed that Syria had become an open threat to Turkey. This statement is also being repeated by Salman Shaikh, director of the Brookings Doha Center in Qatar, saying that “the Turks clearly think Syria is a threat to regional peace and security.” While reporting on Erdogan’s speech, the newspaper clearly used moralistic tone. For example, when referring to the speech, the *Washington Post* used such sentences as “Erdogan’s sense of betrayal”, “deep sense of betrayal”, “Assad...renewed on promises made to Turkey” thus creating an idea that Bashar al-Assad has personally betrayed the Turkish Prime Minister. Further on, the newspaper states that Mr.Erdogan had “clearly hoped” that “his friendship with Assad” would help end the crisis in Syria, but these hopes were empty, since Assad had not kept his promises.²²⁸ The article also reported on attacks on an elite Republican Guard base in the Damascus suburb of Hameh and on *al-Ikhbariyya* TV station. Both attacks were carried out by Syrian opposition forces. However, as it would be expected, the newspaper did not elaborate on the issue, only briefly mentioning the number of victims. Thus, the victims were portrayed as ‘unworthy’.

Let us remember that according to Chomsky and Herman, ‘worthy’ victims are reported in a detail and dramatical way, whereas ‘unworthy’ victims are reported in a slight detail, with minimal humatization and little context. The *Washington Post* report on victims did not generate any reader interest or sympathetic emotion, making them ‘unworthy’.

²²⁷ Washington Post, “*Syrian downing of Turkish jet serves as warning*”

²²⁸ Washington Post, “*Turkey threatens military retaliation along Syria border, drawing defiance from Assad*”, June 26, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/nato-condemns-downing-of-turkish-jet-by-syria/2012/06/26/gJQAJZqs3V_story.html , accessed on May 11, 2013

Next piece entitled “Ocean explorer Bob Ballard finds bodies of Turkish pilots shot down by Syria” reported on the search mission of the Nautilus exploration ship.²²⁹

3.5.1 Conclusion

To sum up, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Kommersant* and *Izvestiya* have all reported on the downing of a Turkish jet by Syria in a similar way. All four newspapers have tried to show a level of objectivity, featuring the pieces that portrayed both conflicting arguments on the incident. But even then, under a cloak of supposed objectivity, it still does not require a genius to notice that each newspaper has picked a side in the dispute and was promoting its narrative. *Washington Post*, unlike the other newspapers went even further, promoting an idea of a Syrian threat to Turkey and other neighboring countries. As with the previous issues, the newspaper also called for a need of a military intervention, discrediting the possibility of a diplomatic resolution of a conflict.

The pro-government *Izvestiya* newspaper never commented on the event, restricting the content of their reports only to simple unambiguous facts like the reason behind Syria-Turkey dispute and both countries’ arguments. However it does not mean that the newspaper did not try to pick a side in the conflict. The newspaper quoted an expert at the Institute of Oriental Studies as saying that the plane incident looks like an “ideal pretext” for military invasion, adding that NATO already has military plans regarding Syria.²³⁰ Such a statement is quite revealing since it gives an idea of a possible deliberate provocation of Syria.

The liberal *Kommersant* also tried to remain as neutral as possible, showing all aspects of the conflict. However, as with the two other newspapers, *Izvestiya* and *Washington*

²²⁹ Washington Post, “Ocean explorer Bob Ballard finds bodies of Turkish pilots shot down by Syria”, July 4, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/ocean-explorer-bob-ballard-tapped-to-find-downed-turkish-warplane/2012/07/03/gJQArHTpLW_story.html, accessed on May 11, 2013

²³⁰ *Izvestiya*, “Downing of a jet by Syria might provoke a war”

Post, *Kommersant* also could not curb its preference for the narrative of the Syrian government. For example, the newspaper points to the ‘spying mission’ of a Turkish jet in several times, thus arousing some doubts about the credibility of Turkish account on the plane incident. Along with this, the newspaper published a piece entitled “It looks like a provocation, but not from the Syrian side”, in which a vice president of the Academy on Geopolitical Affairs, Leonid Ivashov calls the plane incident a provocation, adding that Syria is more interested in a peaceful resolution of its internal crisis rather than a deliberate escalation of already tense relations with Turkey.

Like *Kommersant*, the *New York Times* also tried to show its level of objectivity by presenting both sides’ arguments. However what betrays it is the newspaper’s focus on Turkish opinion, by quoting numerous Turkish officials as defending their ‘rightness’. The *New York Times* also tries to link the incident to tense relations between the two countries, making it impossible to look as an accident. As a result, a reader is faced with an idea that Syria ‘deliberately’ shot down a Turkish jet, thus totally discrediting the Syrian account on the incident.

It is also worth mentioning that all four newspapers have dedicated different amount of lines to each account, depending on their preference for a certain narrative. For example, Russian newspapers dedicated more lines to the Syrian version of an incident, whereas American newspapers have given more space to the Turkish one.

Taking the above-mentioned into account, we can clearly say that all four newspapers were not objective, taking sides in the conflict and becoming propaganda tools for each of the sides.

3.6 SYRIA’S POSSESSION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

These approaches remained unchanged when dealing with another event: Syria’s possession of chemical weapons. But before we proceed to the analysis of news regarding this issue, it is necessary to remember that the government of Saddam Hussein was also accused by U.S. of possessing weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This

alleged ‘threat’ was further used to justify the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. The weapons were never found.

On July 13, 2012, US officials reported that the Syrian government has started moving chemical weapons out of storage. Later that month, then-Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi, told a news conference that Syria would never use chemical weapons against the Syrian people or civilians under any circumstances, but only in case of “external aggression.”²³¹ The international reaction to this statement was imminent. U.S. President Barack Obama, warned Bashar al-Assad not to make “tragic mistake” of using chemical weapons.²³² In August 2012, Mr. Obama warned Syrian government that the use of chemical weapons was a “red line” and would result in “enormous consequences” if crossed.²³³

But let us take a look how the Russian and American newspapers covered the issue of Syria’s chemical weapons.

The pro-government *Izvestiya*, tried to remain neutral, leaving room to official statements made by world leaders. The newspaper did not comment on the issue. The reason why the Russian newspaper abstained from commenting is probably because *Reuters*, *Associated Press*, *AFP*, *BBC* were the main sources of factual information on the issue. *Izvestiya* has dedicated totally ten articles to Syrian chemical weapons, without any moralistic arguments or judgmental rhetoric.

²³¹ Ria Novosti, “*Damascus: chemical weapons only for foreign aggression*”, July 23, 2012, available at <http://en.rian.ru/world/20120723/174737690.html> , accessed on May 12, 2013

²³² The Telegraph, “*Barack Obama warns Assad not to make 'tragic mistake' of using chemical weapons*”, 23 Jul 2012, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9422196/Barack-Obama-warns-Assad-not-to-make-tragic-mistake-of-using-chemical-weapons.html> , accessed on May 11, 2013

²³³ BBC News, “*Obama warns Syria chemical weapons use may spark US action*”, August 21, 2012, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19319446> , accessed on May 11, 2013

The first two reports talk about concerns in the West and Middle East that the chemical weapons can fall into hands of *al-Qaeda* and the possible ways to neutralize Syrian chemical weapons.²³⁴ Next two reports are dedicated to the statement made by then-Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi about the use of chemical weapons in case of a “foreign aggression” and the international reaction to the statement.²³⁵ In next two articles, *Izvestiya* reports on Syrian rebels saying that the Syrian government is moving its chemical weapons to the border territories and on warning from U.S. President Barack Obama to the Syrian government that a red line for the U.S. is “seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized”.²³⁶

Another report entitled “Chinese accused U.S. of preparing a crusade on Syria” is worth mentioning as well. The official Xinhua News Agency said that U.S. was looking for a pretext to intervene militarily. “Once again, Western powers are digging deep for excuses to intervene militarily,” it said. According to the Chinese news agency, the West will turn Syria into a “testing ground for newest weapons and once again install a favourable regime”.²³⁷ Once again, *Izvestiya* abstained from commenting on these statements, preferring to report on what was stated in the international media. The next piece was also rather a simple narrative of who said what rather than a try to understand what was seriously going on in Syria.

²³⁴ *Izvestiya*, “*White House: Assad maintains control over the chemical weapons*”, July 19, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/530870> ; and *Izvestiya*, “*The West is looking for ways to neutralize the chemical weapons in Syria*”, July 20, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/530920> , accessed on May 11, 2013

²³⁵ *Izvestiya*, “*Syria promises to use chemical weapons in case of an intervention*”, July 23, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/531074> ;and *Izvestiya*, “*U.S. and UK suggested Syria not to think about using chemical weapons*”, July 23, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/531141> , accessed on May 11, 2013

²³⁶ *Izvestiya*, “*Syrian opposition: Assad moves chemical weapons to border*”, July 24, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/531164>; and *Izvestiya*, “*U.S. will launch a war with Syria in case of chemical weapons use*”, August 21, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/533353> , accessed on May 11, 2013

²³⁷ *Izvestiya*, “*Chinese accused U.S. of preparing a crusade on Syria*”, August 22, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/533489> , accessed on May 11, 2013

The newspaper published only one opinion piece in which the author, historian Stanislav Hatuntsev, asserts that the military intervention in Syria is unlikely at this stage of the conflict. According to the author, the West “is not ready to intervene Syria militarily” because of its “massive and organized force” but prefers to put its all efforts to internally break the regime, cause its exhaust and internal destruction.²³⁸ This in turn would make Assad regime incapable of resisting not only internal powers, but external as well.

The last report by *Izvestiya* is entitled “CIA will question defector from Syrian Foreign Ministry about Russia”. The newspaper reports on defected Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi who fled Damascus in early December 2012 and was discovered in the United States. This news has coincided with the appearance of statements made by Syrian opposition that Assad’s regime have started to use chemical weapons. According to the Syrian-American Medical Society the Agent-15 psychotropic chemical weapon, also known as 3-quinuclidinyl benzilate, has been used against the armed opposition forces. And the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports the use of phosgene. To discredit these accusations, the Russian newspaper stated that “this colourless gas is used in the production of dyes in our days”.²³⁹ As a proof, *Izvestiya* quoted Sergey Lopatnikov, professor of physics at the University of Delaware as saying that “technologically advanced Europe refuses to use harmful substances in the production of these dyes, but these components are still used in the Middle East.” To further discredit the opposition forces’ statements about the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government, the newspaper quotes Israeli Vice Prime Minister Moshe Ya'alon as expressing his doubts about the use of chemical weapons by Syrian government. “I am not convinced that what we are seeing in photographs is the result of the use of chemical weapons...The opposition is interested in international

²³⁸ *Izvestiya*, “*If tomorrow Syria?*”, August 31, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/534096>, accessed on May 11, 2013

²³⁹ *Izvestiya*, “*CIA will question defector from Syrian Foreign Ministry about Russia*”, December 26, 2012, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/542318>, accessed on May 11, 2013

intervention." Mr. Ya'alon stated.²⁴⁰ It is also worth mentioning that almost in every report the Russian pro-government newspaper stresses that Assad's government will not under any circumstances use chemical weapons against Syrian people.

The *Washington Post* clearly wanted to offer its own perspective on the the issue of chemical weapons in Syria. Except for portraying the 'brutality' of Assad regime, the newspaper also presented the issue as a 'threat', thus calling for a direct American engagement.

In its depiction of clashes between the security forces and opposition groups, the *Washington Post's* tone was highly judgmental and moralistic. Words and sentences such as "indiscriminate violence",²⁴¹ "bloodshed",²⁴² "violence",²⁴³ "horrific massacre", "slaughter", "some children who had been shot in the head, execution-style", "mass murder", "mounting massacres", "systematically murders"²⁴⁴, "murdering his citizens"²⁴⁵ and "brutal crackdown in Syria"²⁴⁶ were used to increase the horrifying image of Assad's regime.

²⁴⁰ Izvestiya, "CIA will question defector from Syrian Foreign Ministry about Russia"

²⁴¹ Washington Post, "The risks of inaction in Syria", August 6, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/mccain-lieberman-and-graham-the-risks-of-inaction-in-syria/2012/08/05/4a63585c-dd91-11e1-8e43-4a3c4375504a_story.html , accessed on May 12, 2013

²⁴² Washington Post, "What the U.S. should do in Syria", August 8, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/what-the-us-should-do-in-syria/2012/08/07/45e2913c-e023-11e1-8fc5-a7dcf1fc161d_story.html , accessed on May 12, 2013

²⁴³ Washington Post, "Obama's 'red line' warning to Syria on chemical arms draws criticism", August 22, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-red-line-warning-to-syria-on-chemical-arms-draws-criticism/2012/08/21/bcaf39e0-ebd2-11e1-a80b-9f898562d010_story.html , accessed on May 12, 2013

²⁴⁴ Washington Post, "Syria's escalating slaughter", August 28, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/syrias-escalating-slaughter/2012/08/27/c50e09f4-f06e-11e1-892d-bc92fee603a7_story.html , accessed on May 12, 2013

²⁴⁵ Washington Post, "In Syria, Assad crosses the red lines", October 4, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/anne-applebaum-syrias-assad-crosses-the-red-lines/2012/10/03/0b39f34a-0d78-11e2-bb5e-492c0d30bfff_story.html , accessed on May 12, 2013

The newspaper did not try to show the other side of the struggle- the opposition groups heavily infiltrated by *al-Qaeda* and other terrorist groups killing civilians and members of security forces. That was certainly ‘off’ the paper since it would put the ‘peaceful’ purpose of protesters under a question and would probably create a more sympathetic emotion toward the pro-Assad forces than the opposition groups. If the newspaper used ‘*al-Qaeda*’ while depicting the opposition groups, not just ‘rebels’ or ‘fighters’ that would certainly create a negative association with September 11, 2001 event when the terrorists carried out attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. But let us go back to our main issue-the chemical weapons.

As we have already mentioned above, the *Washington Post* clearly wanted to portray the issue in a different way. For example, the newspaper tried to frame Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad as frustrated and desperate. In doing so, the newspaper wrote of Assad as “desperate”,²⁴⁷ “government’s loss of control over territory”²⁴⁸, and “in a new sign of desperation and disregard for its own people” In a report entitled “Syria accused of cluster bomb use in civil war”, the *Washington Post* quoted Steve Goose, an arms expert for the New York-based human rights group, calling the chemical weapons of mass destruction as “a weapon of desperation [for Syria] at this point in time.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Washington Post, “Obama’s ‘red line’ warning to Syria on chemical arms draws criticism”

²⁴⁷ Washington Post, “Worries intensify over Syrian chemical weapons”, September 6, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/worries-intensify-over-syrian-chemical-weapons/2012/09/06/13889aac-f841-11e1-8253-3f495ae70650_story.html , accessed on May 12, 2013

²⁴⁸ Washington Post, “Syria’s nerve agents”, July 19, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/syrias-nerve-agents/2012/07/18/gJQAxLbOuW_story.html, accessed on May 12, 2013

²⁴⁹ Washington Post, “Syria accused of cluster bomb use in civil war”, October 15, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/syria-accused-of-cluster-bomb-use-in-civil-war/2012/10/14/8ad4413c-1642-11e2-a55c-39408f6e6a4b_story.html , accessed on May 13, 2013

Another piece reported that “rebel forces have begun to make significant advances in Syria, raising questions about Assad’s durability and desperation.”²⁵⁰ Other report quoted Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stressing that, “should Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his desperation deploy some of his chemical weapons stockpile against his own people, he will cross “a red line for the United States.””²⁵¹ A report entitled “Worries intensify over Syrian chemical weapons” quoted Andrew Tabler, an expert on Syria as saying that Syrian rebels were concerned about the possibility that “Assad will use the weapons against rebel fighters and civilians as a last resort”.²⁵² Another report dated December 12, 2012 states that al-Assad’s regime is “simply lashing out in desperation”.²⁵³

The *Washington Post* used word ‘desperation’ in six times. Let us remember that a constant repetition of certain words will lead to accepting a particular narrative as absolute reality. In our case, such a repetition would probably lead to a ‘desperate Assad is planning to use deadly chemical weapons against his own people’ frame seem realistic.

The lexical choice of news related to the chemical weapons issue is worth mentioning as well. “Terror”, “uncertainty”, “nightmare scenario”, “threat”²⁵⁴, “a real and growing danger”²⁵⁵-were used while referring to the issue. It is also important, that starting from

²⁵⁰ Washington Post, “Obama warns Syria amid rising concern over chemical weapons”, December 3, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/clinton-us-will-act-if-syria-uses-chemical-weapons/2012/12/03/bf1a400e-3d34-11e2-8a5c-473797be602c_story.html , accessed on May 13, 2013

²⁵¹ Washington Post, “Why the red line on Syria’s chemical weapons matters”, December 6, 2012, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/12/06/why-the-red-line-on-syrias-chemical-weapons-matters/> , accessed on May 13, 2013

²⁵² Washington Post, “Worries intensify over Syrian chemical weapons”

²⁵³ Washington Post, “What Syria’s Scud missile launches tell us about the regime’s thinking”, December 12, 2012, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/12/12/what-syrias-scup-missile-launches-tell-us-about-the-regimes-thinking/> , accessed on May 13, 2013

²⁵⁴ Washington Post, “Syria’s nerve agents”

²⁵⁵ Washington Post, “The risks of inaction in Syria”

the first report, the newspaper is asserting that an “international intervention” is required.²⁵⁶ Out of twenty-one reports, seven were openly calling for a military intervention. After portraying all ‘brutalities’ of Assad regime and providing a detailed description of Syria’s “large” chemical weapons arsenal, stressing that Assad is desperate and frustrated, it is clearly impossible not to call for an intervention. Thus we can see how the story line is being constructed by the *Washington Post*. First, the newspaper presents the horrifying image of Syria’s vast arsenal of chemical weapons, when “one drop of sarin can kill an adult”²⁵⁷. Then, the brutalities of Assad regime are described, linking it to the desperation and “bitterness” of the Syrian President²⁵⁸. The media consensus is simple: “desperate Assad” will use chemical weapons against his citizens and the U.S. has a responsibility to come to the rescue of the Syrian people to prevent the occurrence of a disaster²⁵⁹. Does it not seem like a great justification for a military intervention?

The newspaper certainly focuses more on finding remedies, than trying to understand what is going on in Syria. The newspaper’s headlines prove our statement: “The risks of inaction in Syria”, “What the U.S. should do in Syria” and “Syria and chemical weapons: what can the U.S. do now?”

Unlike *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* did not openly call for a military intervention in Syria. Instead, the newspaper focused more on promoting a certain outcome of the conflict—an imminent fall of the Syrian regime. The *New York Times* quoted Maj. Gen. Aviv Kochavi as saying that Assad will not “survive the uprising”²⁶⁰.

²⁵⁶ Washington Post, “Syria’s nerve agents”

²⁵⁷ Ibid.,

²⁵⁸ Washington Post, “In Syria, Assad crosses the red lines”

²⁵⁹ Washington Post, “Worries intensify over Syrian chemical weapons”

²⁶⁰ New York Times, “Israel says Syria pulls troops from Golan to suppress revolt elsewhere”, July 17, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/18/world/middleeast/israel-says-syria-pulls-troops-from-golan-to-suppress-revolt-elsewhere.html> , accessed on May 13, 2013

Other pieces reported on: “growing conviction that the Assad family’s...grip on power in Syria is coming to an end”, “post-Assad Syria”²⁶¹, “Mr.Assad’s fall”, “post-Assad government”, “in the wake of Mr.Assad’s fall”²⁶², “inevitable fall of President”²⁶³,”expected fall of the Assad government”²⁶⁴, “end of the Assad government, which...will happen”, and “when Assad falls-and he will fall”²⁶⁵.

Jay Carney, the White House press secretary was quoted as saying that “Assad is a spent force in terms of history”. Robert Malley of the International Crisis Group was reported as saying that the Syrian government was “falling”²⁶⁶. The newspaper also quoted an activist who leads the Syrian Observatory as saying that the Assad regime “has started to collapse”²⁶⁷. This statement was further solidified by Yoram Schweitzer, a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies saying that Assad’s situation “is getting worse and worse”.²⁶⁸

²⁶¹ New York Times, “*Washington begins to plan for collapse of Syrian government*”, July 18, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/19/world/middleeast/washington-begins-to-plan-for-collapse-of-syrian-government.html?pagewanted=all> , accessed on May 13, 2013

²⁶² New York Times, “*State Department and Pentagon plan for post-Assad Syria*”, August 4, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/05/world/middleeast/state-dept-and-pentagon-planning-for-post-assad-syria.html> , accessed on May 13, 2013

²⁶³ New York Times, “*Britain and France join the U.S. in warning Syria about military action*”, August 23, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/24/world/middleeast/syrian-forces-renew-raids-on-damascus-suburbs.html> , accessed on May 14, 2013

²⁶⁴ New York Times, “*Washington Begins to Plan for Collapse of Syrian Government*”

²⁶⁵ New York Times, “*Stymied at U.N., U.S. refines plan to remove Assad*”, July 21, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/world/middleeast/us-to-focus-on-forcibly-toppling-syrian-government.html?pagewanted=all> , accessed on May 14, 2013

²⁶⁶ New York Times, “*Washington begins to plan for collapse of Syrian Government*”

²⁶⁷ New York Times, “*Syrian rebels land deadly blow to Assad’s inner circle*”, July 18, 2012, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/19/world/middleeast/suicide-attack-reported-in-damascus-as-more-generals-flee.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 , accessed on May 14, 2013

²⁶⁸ New York Times, “*Israel is forced to rethink its regional strategies*”, July 19, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/20/world/middleeast/israel-worries-as-syria-deteriorates.html> , accessed on May 14, 2013

The *New York Times* joined the *Washington Post* in its framing Assad as a frustrated president who would use the weapons of mass destruction in the act of ‘desperation’. “Bashar al-Assad, might use chemical weapons in a last-ditch attack....possibly as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing”²⁶⁹,” “in desperation Mr.Assad would use chemical weapons”, “as a last resort”²⁷⁰, “use the chemical weapons as...last shield”, “if Mr.Assad is backed into a corner, he could use...missiles tipped with chemical weapons”²⁷¹, “Syria’s increasingly desperate president”²⁷²-were used while depicting the Syrian President. In a report entitled “Syria moves its chemical weapons, and U.S. and allies cautiously take note” a senior American diplomat was quoted as saying that “these are desperate times for Assad, and this may simply be another sign of desperation”²⁷³. In another piece, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was reported saying that U.S. concern was that “an increasingly desperate Assad regime might turn to chemical weapons”²⁷⁴.

Alike *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* was also quite judgmental in its depictions of Assad’s ‘brutality’: “Assad’s killing spree”, “his reign of terror”²⁷⁵, “firing

²⁶⁹ New York Times, “*Syria moving parts of chemical arsenal, U.S. says*”, July 13, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/14/world/middleeast/syria-moves-some-chemical-weapons-us-says.html> , accessed on May 14, 2013

²⁷⁰ New York Times, “*Washington begins to plan for collapse of Syrian Government*”

²⁷¹ New York Times, “*Pentagon says 75,000 troops might be needed to seize Syria chemical arms*”, November 15, 2012, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/16/world/middleeast/pentagon-sees-seizing-syria-chemical-arms-as-vast-task.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 , accessed on May 14, 2013

²⁷² New York Times, “*Hints of Syrian chemical push set off global effort to stop it*”, January 7, 2013, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/08/world/middleeast/chemical-weapons-showdown-with-syria-led-to-rare-accord.html?_r=0 , accessed on May 14, 2013

²⁷³ New York Times, “*Syria moves its chemical weapons, and U.S. and allies cautiously take note*”, December 2, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/03/world/middleeast/syria-moves-its-chemical-weapons-and-gets-another-warning.html> , accessed on May 14, 2013

²⁷⁴ New York Times, “*Pressure builds on Syrian opposition coalition; fears of chemical weapons rise*”, December 5, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/06/world/middleeast/clinton-expresses-support-for-new-syrian-opposition-coalition.html> , accessed on May 14, 2013

²⁷⁵ New York Times, “*Assassination in Damascus*”, July 18, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/19/opinion/assassination-in-damascus.html> , accessed on May 15, 2013

indiscriminately”, “violence”²⁷⁶, “heavy violence”²⁷⁷, “most brutal civil conflict”²⁷⁸, “Syrian government’s harsh repression”²⁷⁹, “a new campaign of extrajudicial killings”, “the most serious violence”, “massacre”, and “mass killing”²⁸⁰.

It is also important that both American newspapers tried to portray the issue of chemical weapons as a real threat, despite the Syrian officials assurance that the weapons would not be used against civilians, under any circumstances. To act, to rescue the Syrian people, to prevent the occurrence of a disaster, in other words, all the responsibilities of ‘international community’ - it was certainly more important for both newspapers.

However what differs these two newspapers is their priorities of ‘U.S. concern’. The *Washington Post* states that the U.S. concern is that the weapons can be used by the Syrian regime against the civilians. The *New York Times*, while also portraying such a threat as a great concern, focuses more on the “chemical weapons falling into the wrong hands”.²⁸¹ If the U.S. main concern is that the Syrian chemical weapons do not fall into the hands of terrorist groups such as *al-Qaeda* or *Hezbollah*, why then the U.S. is sending “task force of more than 150 planners and other specialists...to help the armed forces...prepare for the possibility that Syria will lose control of its chemical

²⁷⁶ New York Times, “*Syrian rebels land deadly blow to Assad’s inner circle*”

²⁷⁷ New York Times, “*Border posts fall into the hands of Syrian rebels*”, July 19, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/20/world/middleeast/syria-border-with-iraq.html?pagewanted=all> , accessed on May 15, 2013

²⁷⁸ New York Times, “*Pentagon says 75,000 troops might be needed to seize Syria chemical arms*”

²⁷⁹ New York Times, “*After council’s deadlock, Syria is criticized at U.N.*”, August 3, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/04/world/middleeast/un-general-assembly-criticizes-syria.html> , accessed on May 15, 2013

²⁸⁰ New York Times, “*As fighting rages, Syria and Russia reject U.S. intervention threat*”, August 21, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/22/world/middleeast/syria.html> , accessed on May 15, 2013

²⁸¹ New York Times, “*Israel girds for attacks as Syria falls apart*”, January 27, 2013, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/28/world/middleeast/refugee-crisis-grows-as-violence-flares-across-syria.html> , accessed on May 15, 2013

weapons”?²⁸² According to the *Washington Post* report dated December 17, 2012, the “U.S. government...have hired private contractors to train Syrian rebels how to monitor and secure chemical weapons site”.²⁸³

The U.S. decision to hire contractors to train Syrian ‘freedom’ fighters to handle chemical weapons stockpiles seems quite irresponsible, taking into account how sensitive the U.S. has so far been at making sure only “liberal, secular” rebels receive their nonlethal aid.²⁸⁴ Such a measure proves the correctness of accusations that the Syrian Deputy Prime Minister, Jamil Qadri made that the West is looking for “an excuse to intervene directly in the affairs” of Syria.²⁸⁵ But let us go back to the both newspapers’ narratives.

As we have mentioned above, the *New York Times* focused on portraying Syrian President as losing control and whose fall was imminent. Why was it so important? According to the newspaper, the U.S. chief concern was that the chemical weapons would fall into the ‘wrong hands’. By portraying the regime collapse and a threat that terrorists would possess the dangerous weapons, the newspaper actually tried to justify U.S. contingency plan, sending around 75,000 troops to “secure” the sites²⁸⁶. Such an operation to ‘secure’ the chemical weapons sites would be actually an indirect military intervention in Syria.

The *New York Times* did not care about the statements made by the Syrian government, assuring that it was capable of securing the sites by themselves, without any help. This

²⁸² New York Times, “*Pentagon says 75,000 troops might be needed to seize Syria chemical arms*”

²⁸³ Washington Post, “*U.S. plans for possibility that Assad could lose control of chemical arms cache*”, December 17, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-plans-for-possibility-that-assad-could-lose-control-of-chemical-arms-cache/2012/12/16/f4912be2-4628-11e2-a685-c1fad0d6cd1f_story.html , accessed on May 10, 2013

²⁸⁴ Washington Post, “*In Syria, Assad crosses the red lines*”

²⁸⁵ New York Times, “*As fighting rages, Syria and Russia reject U.S. intervention threat*”

²⁸⁶ New York Times, “*Stymied at U.N., U.S. refines plan to remove Assad*”

information was not important. To ensure that the weapons after an imminent fall of Assad do not fall into the hands of *al-Qaeda*-this was more important to the newspaper.

Unlike the American media, Russian liberal *Kommersant* did not frame Assad regime as crumbling and losing control over Syria. Neither it focused on concerns over the future of chemical weapons, reporting that the chemical weapons arsenal was under control of the Syrian army. Yes, the newspaper did also mention about danger of chemical weapons falling into the hands of terrorist groups, however, it focused more on portraying the issue as a propaganda, a pretext for military intervention. In a report entitled “American army will look after Syrian weapons”, a Middle East expert, Semyon Bagdasarov was quoted as saying that the Western countries can use the issue of chemical weapons to justify an intervention. The expert added that the West can carry out proper “information support” and then station its troops especially on the Turkish territory, where the Syrian opposition center of operations is being located. Another piece reports that “U.S. has found a pretext for war with Syria” and that the “scenario” of chemical weapons falling into the hands of terrorist groups can justify an intervention in Syria.²⁸⁷ In other report, Fyodor Lukyanov, Chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy was quoted as saying that the chemical weapons issue looked as another wave of “propaganda warfare”.²⁸⁸

The newspaper clearly wanted to portray the issue rather as a pretext to launch a foreign military intervention by the West. In article after article, *Kommersant* mentioned that the Syrian government did assure that it would not use chemical weapons against its civilians. Except for quoting Syrian officials, the newspaper also quoted experts and diplomats as dismissing the possibility of chemical weapons use by Assad regime. Sergey Lavrov was quoted as saying that the Syrian authorities were not planning to use

²⁸⁷ *Kommersant*, “American army will look after Syrian weapons”, August, 18, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2004729> , accessed on May 10, 2013

²⁸⁸ *Kommersant*, “Opposition accuses authorities of chemical weapons use”, December 26, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2098385> , accessed on May 11, 2013

the chemical weapons. “Syria is unlikely to use chemical weapons”, said Boris Makarenko of Moscow's Centre for Political Technologies.²⁸⁹ Konstantin Eggert, a commentator for the *Kommersant FM* reported that Assad will not do such a “stupid thing”.²⁹⁰ Syrian government’s statements that it would not use chemical weapons were further solidified by the *Kommersant* newspaper’s source from the Russian Foreign Ministry. It was certainly an information both American newspapers tried to dismiss. *Kommersant* also pointed out that the Syrian government was “capable” of securing the chemical weapons by themselves.²⁹¹ This information was also neglected by the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

3.6.1 Conclusion

Taking above-mentioned into account, we are able to see differences in newspapers’ coverage of chemical weapons issue. Whereas the liberal *Kommersant* tried to portray the issue as a possible pretext for military intervention, both American newspapers framed it as a threat, a danger that needed to be eliminated by American engagement. We can safely say that such an approach allows us to fit it into Entman’s model of framing functions. We notice that the both newspaper define the problem as terrorists possession of chemical weapons and Assad use of chemical weapons; the cause of the issue is that the Assad regime is crumbling and is incapable of securing the sites; finally, such a narrative offers a solution, the U.S. engagement (direct military intervention in case of the *Washington Post*; and enforcement of contingency plans in case of the *New York Times*).

Unlike the other three newspapers, Russian pro-government *Izvestiya* curbed its preference for a certain narrative and tried to remain neutral while covering the issue.

²⁸⁹ *Kommersant*, “Syria is ready to use chemical weapons”, July 23, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1986593> , accessed on May 11, 2013

²⁹⁰ *Kommersant*, “Least of all Obama would like to be compared to George Bush and his operation in Iraq”, August 22, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2006094> , accessed on May 11, 2013

²⁹¹ *Kommersant*, “Syria is being threaten by its own chemical weapons”, August 22, 2012, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2006102> , accessed on May 11, 2013

However what betrays *Izvestiya's* preference is their mention of a U.S. previous 'crusade' against Iraq, when the chemical weapons narrative also served as a 'pretext' for military intervention. The weapons were never found there.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Having analysed six major issues related to the Syrian case, what can we say about media behaviour? Can we clearly state that the media served as a tool to manufacture consent? How did the media coverage shape a certain view that was further accepted as a reality? And can we clearly say that Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model can be applied not only to the Western media but to the Russian media as well?

Based on the examination of the reports in four different media outlets, we can say that there is a certain bias in each newspaper's narrative. The most amazing and telling evidence of the bias is each newspaper's choice of primary sources and sources representing only one point of view on the issue. However we can not blame any newspaper for this, simply because it was the Syrian government that banned the media from Syria from the beginning of the uprising. In its attempt to control the flow of information, the Syrian government actually ended up allowing for misinformation to spread. The foreign media was free to tell stories whatever it preferred simply because there was no alternative account. The result was that the media outlets used information that was difficult to proof check. The media also relied on sources that were Syrian, but present outside of Syria, like the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. It was certainly impossible to verify the information provided by this organization, but still the U.S. media heavily relied on it.

We can group all four newspapers into one category: media that had a particular interest in the Syrian conflict. They all sought to represent only one side of the conflict, giving little or no room for an opposing view. Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* focused on discrediting the Assad regime framing it as brutal, repressive and obstructing the legal rights of Syrian people. Unlike the U.S. media, both Russian newspapers opted for the exact opposite. Rather than discrediting the Assad regime,

both *Izvestiya* and *Kommersant* chose to focus on discrediting the opposition, stressing that it was heavily infiltrated by terrorists and supported from the ‘outside’ of Syria.

The U.S. media used a moralistic tone to describe the Assad regime and his brutalities. Thus, an image of the Syrian crisis was manufactured and certain ‘solutions’ how to end this ‘terror’ were placed at the center of public attention. In each of the cases, be it the Deraa unrest or the chemical weapons, the U.S. newspapers created a dominant frame: a mad dictator Assad brutally repressing peaceful and fighting for freedom opposition. Certain facts such as the clashes between the opposition and security forces were selected as to fit the dominant frame. As it would be expected, information that would question the correctness of the frame was excluded. For instance, both newspapers never or briefly mentioned attacks carried out by the rebels forces. Whereas attacks carried out by the Syrian government were reported in a ‘picturesque’ manner. Even in the case of downing of a Turkish jet, the U.S. media achieved to create a negative image of Assad’s regime. Amid all the statements made by officials regarding the illegality of a Turkish jet violating the Syrian air space, the both newspapers still discredited the Syrian version, claiming that it was “unacceptable”.²⁹²

Like the two American newspapers, *Kommersant* and *Izvestiya* also followed a certain narrative. In all reports, we are able to see how the newspapers constructed the story line. However, unlike the American press, both Russian newspapers were fairly balanced in their reports, rarely using judgmental arguments and moralistic tone. But even then, *Kommersant* and *Izvestiya* can hardly be called as unbiased. The both newspapers mainly used Syrian sources or sources that were sympathetic to the Assad regime. Such an adherence helped to create a certain public opinion, in our case, the support for Assad regime, being the victim of a Western plot.

²⁹² Washington Post, “*Turkey threatens military retaliation along Syria border, drawing defiance from Assad*”; and New York Times, “*Turkey vows action after downing of jet by Syria*”

When considering the Syrian unrest, we notice that manipulation of information was more appalling than in usual news reporting. The media have indeed taken sides in the conflict and become a propaganda tool for each of the sides. Each of the analysed newspapers has created a certain image of the conflict which it tried to present as an absolute reality. Therefore, we can see different ‘truths’. Taking into account that the two Russian newspapers are local and their audience is Russian-speaking, it is not difficult to guess which ‘truth’ becomes accepted as a reality. This means that the narrative that is reaching the broadest audience becomes a popular belief.²⁹³ In our case, it will be the narrative being propagated by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* with its million of readers, not only in America, but in the whole world. Thus, the narrative that is being more widely distributed is the one blaming Assad regime for the all events. It is quite interesting that the accusations made by the both newspapers are neither justified nor factually proven. Furthermore, some information that could question the dominating narrative has been deliberately disregarded by the U.S. mass media. For example, Amnesty International report would certainly discredit the peaceful nature of the opposition groups. According to the report, there are serious abuses of human rights by armed opposition groups (such as summary killings, use of child soldiers militarily, torture and ill-treatment of captives, sectarian threats and attacks and so on)²⁹⁴. Such an information was never mentioned in *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, nor was the issue of armed rebels ever discussed in these two newspapers. This in return, leads to only one conclusion-the both U.S. newspapers served as a propaganda tool.

In terms of Russian news outlets we can also assert that they did adopt a propaganda approach while reporting on events in Syria. As we have mentioned above, both *Kommersant* and *Izvestiya* often included both opinions on the case. However even then we are able to notice a certain preference of the narrative of one of the sides in the

²⁹³ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: Political Economy of the Mass Media*, p. 34

²⁹⁴ Amnesty International Briefing, “Syria: Summary killings and other abuses by armed opposition groups”, March 14, 2013, available at http://www.amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_23085.pdf, accessed on May 12, 2013

conflict. Such a preference reveals an attempt at constructing a story line that is being propagated. Therefore, we can clearly say that Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model can be also applied to the Russian media.

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APPENDICES

A. TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enformatik Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>

YAZARIN

Soyadı : Aktürk
Adı : Marina
Bölümü : Orta Doğu Araştırmaları

TEZİN ADI(İngilizce) :

War of Words: Perception of the Syrian Conflict by Russian and U.S. Media

TEZİN TÜRÜ: Yüksek Lisans Doktora

1. Tezimin tamamı dünya çapında erişime açılsın ve kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla tezimin bir kısmı veya tamamının fotokopisi alınsın.

2. Tezimin tamamı yalnızca Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi kullanıcılarının erişimine açılsın. (Bu seçenikle tezinizin fotokopisi ya da elektronik kopyası Kütüphane aracılığı ile ODTÜ dışına dağıtılmayacaktır.)

3. Tezim bir (1) yıl süreyle erişime kapalı olsun. (Bu seçenikle tezinizin fotokopisi ya da elektronik kopyası Kütüphane aracılığı ile ODTÜ dışına dağıtılmayacaktır.)

Yazarın imzası:

Tarih: 2 Eylül 2013