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FACULTEIT SOCIALE WETENSCHAPPEN  
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**What's in a Frame?  
Framing of the Syrian War**

A Comparative Analysis of European, American  
and Russian Newspapers

Promotor: Prof. Dr. L. d'HAENENS  
Assessor: Drs. A. BERBERS  
Verslaggever: Dr. W. RIBBENS

MASTERPROEF  
aangeboden tot het verkrijgen  
van de graad van Master of  
Science in de  
Communicatiewetenschappen  
door  
**Amélie GODEFROIDT**

academiejaar 2013-2014



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*Nihil sine labore* (Horatius)

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## Abstract

The emergence of the revolutionary movements of the ‘Arab Spring’ surprised the world. The often violent reaction of the ruling regimes in the countries caused moral challenges and geopolitical debates for the Western democracies. In the light of these geostrategic reactions, this thesis examined the cross-national coverage of the Syrian war in *De Telegraaf* (the Netherlands), *Le Figaro* (France), *the Daily Telegraph* (the United Kingdom), *the New York Times* (the United States) and *the Moscow Times* (Russia). A quantitative content analysis measured the attention paid to the war and investigated the prevalence of the five generic frames of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the diagnostic and prognostic frames of Benford and Snow (2000) and the nationalisation frame of Van Cauwenberge, Gelders and Joris (2009). We analysed 637 articles published between July and October 2013. Our results showed that the newspapers report about the war according to their geopolitical role as reflected in the number and length of the articles as well as in the frequent use of the nationalisation frame. The study concluded that there are significant differences in framing between the newspapers as well as across periods (i.e., before the gas attack on 21 August vs. after the attack vs. after the agreement on the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapon stockpile on 14 September).

**Key words:** framing, news media, media effects, Syria, ‘Arab Spring’



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## List of abbreviations

The DT	the Daily Telegraph
DT	De Telegraaf
EU	European Union
FSA	Free Syrian Army
LF	Le Figaro
MANCOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Covariance
The MT	the Moscow Times
NCC	National Co-ordination Committee
The NYT	the New York Times
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
SNC	Syrian National Council
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States

# 1. Introduction

*[The press] is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of the darkness into vision (Lippmann, 1922, p. 229).*

## 1.1. Research subject and objectives

A chant about the people wanting to topple the regime echoed across the Arab lands throughout 2011. It skipped borders with ease, carried on different social media, printed in newspapers and magazines, stated on television (Ajami, 2012a, p. 56). Syria's contribution to this 'Arab Spring' began as an uprising, hardened into a revolution, and has finally escalated into a full-fledged civil war with constant conflict between many armed groups (Waterbury, 2013, p. 200).

The purpose of this research is to examine how several journals in Europe (i.e., the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom), the United States, and Russia covered the Syrian revolution. In this way, we can investigate the coverage of countries with sufficient longstanding historical and political ties to Syria to ensure more than passing reportage. It is commonly acknowledged that news editors as well as reporters have operated according to specific procedures and news values to aid them in selecting and presenting stories on a quick, regular basis. As a result, particular perspectives, journalistic themes and story angles have come to dominate the news (Price, Tewksbury & Powers, 1997, p. 481). Thus, news is easily the most

prominent discursive in which communication researchers strive to understand what framing is and how framing works (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010, p. 1).

To paint a picture of the coverage of the Syrian war in quality newspapers, we will conduct a quantitative content analysis based on a battery of literature. After analysing the attention paid to the subject, we will examine the framing with a focus on the differences between the journals and periods. Next to shedding light on generic frames, we will also evaluate what causes and solutions are put forward for the escalation and continuation of the conflict that started as an uprising against Bashar al-Assad three years ago.

## **1.2. Relevance of the study**

D'Angelo and Kuypers (2010, p. 3) argue that 'framing research is a victim of its own success, as academic specialization has led to a fragmented understanding of what framing is and how it works'. This master thesis tries to contribute to and synthesise this extensive body of research in a socially and scientifically relevant way.

### **1.2.1. Social relevance**

One of the key reasons for scholars to have such a tremendous interest in the process of framing is based on the assumption that framing may have crucial consequences for democracy (Patterson,



1993; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Weaver, 1998; Aalberg, de Vreese & Strömbäck, 2012). Because much of what happens in the world is out of our reach, it has to be reported (Lippmann, 1954, pp. 3-32). By bringing information to the public, the news plays a decisive role in the discursive construction of the public opinion and policy. It is, therefore, proposed that media assessments largely contribute to how the public comes to interpret political issues like the Syrian conflict and to the importance that people attach to it (Weaver, 1998, p. 2; d'Haenens, 2005, p. 422). This influence on the judgments of people, including policy makers, could entail crucial changes to international relations and policy decisions. Because journalists are the prime suppliers of information about the Syrian conflict and as the Syrian struggle has prominently been documented the last four years (De Smedt, 2014, p. 3), this influence is more than plausible.

Another social relevance is the fact that the media encouraged the Arab people to stand up for themselves and challenge their poor societal/political circumstances. The media – especially social media – gave the opponents of the Assad-regime a way to express their views, register their solidarity and co-ordinate their actions (The Economist, 17.12.2011). Thanks to the media, this revolutionary sound was followed in many Arab countries leading to a cross-border call for democracy, justice and human rights; thanks to the media, the movement was brought to ears in Western democracies leading to an enhanced interest and vigilance in the Middle East.

Finally, it is important to investigate as much components as possible of the ‘Arab Spring’ (including the media coverage) because this exposes the overall political context of the region. The outcomes are not limited to Arab-Western relationships, but are manifest in many political institutions. The Syrian uprising painfully shows the disruptions within the United Nations Security Council to the world, as China and Russia vetoed the resolutions made by France, the US and UK that all sought a solution to the conflict by disregarding the Assad-regime. In addition to political tensions, the uprisings cause economic troubles since Syria and other Arab countries have major economic strengths, such as the large oil stock and important trade contracts. The question that comes to the fore is to what extent the public is properly informed about these developments.

### **1.2.2. Scientific relevance**

First of all, this research combines one of the most fertile research methodologies in communication sciences (i.e., framing) with the assessment of a recent development in North African politics (i.e., the ‘Arab Spring’). News-content studies about this topic are rare so far. Consequently, this study will be one of the first to scientifically examine the news coverage of the Syrian war.

Second, this study tries to merge different operationalisations of news frames: the generic frames of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the diagnostic and prognostic frames of Bedford and Snow (2000)

and the nationalisation frame of Van Cauwenberg, Gelders and Joris. (2009). The study provides the unique advantage of uniting generic frames with more specific causal and consequential categories. Regarding the generic frames, this thesis has an extra scientific purpose as these frames are often used in an European context (e.g., Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000; Van Cauwenberge et al., 2009). We wonder how applicable those *generic* frames are in an international setting full of conflict.

Finally, a content analysis is the first scientific step to a framing-effects research. These studies look at the influence of the media on attitudes of the public (including policy makers) – a matter of the utmost social importance, as stated in the first paragraph.

### **1.3. Structure of the study**

The next – and second – chapter of this master thesis will shed light on the theoretical and conceptual basis concerning the conflict in Syria and the concept of framing. To start with, a general outline of the Syrian war will be put forward including the causes of and responses on the conflict (which gave rise to the used diagnostic and prognostic news frames). Furthermore, the concepts of agenda-setting, framing and news frames will be deepened (which gave rise to the used generic frames). Secondly, the research objective and questions as well as the accompanying hypotheses will be presented in the third part. The fourth chapter will describe all methodological

considerations: the data source and collection, the operationalisation of the frames and the reliability. The fifth part will explain all analyses and associated results needed. The discussion, in section six, will reiterate the most important findings to answer the research questions and confirm or refute the hypotheses. We will point to some limitations of our research and make some suggestions for future research as well. This study ends with a conclusion.

It is important to note that the study is divided into two main parts: an analysis of the attention paid to the Syrian conflict and an examination of the framing of that conflict. In addition to the general prevalence of news frames, differences between newspapers and periods are scrutinised.

## **2. Theoretical and conceptual foundations**

### **2.1. War in Syria**

2011 was an extraordinarily eventful year in the Middle East and North Africa, as an unprecedented wave of protests – dubbed the ‘Arab Spring’ – shook the foundations of many Arab regimes (Bellin, 2013, p. 35; Eminiue & Dickson, 2013, p. 5). In some countries, long-standing autocratic leaders were forced out of power. In other countries, even despotism succeeded in maintaining their fragile grip by promising their populace political and economic concessions. Finally, a third category of despots – such as Syria’s Bashar Al-Assad – resorted to aggressive and often atrocious suppression in order to survive (Parachami, 2012, p. 35).

The main focus of this study is the coverage in newspapers of the course and causes of the Syrian war and of the political reactions from key players (e.g., the EU by putting economic pressure on the Assad-regime, the US by threatening with and preparing a military intervention and Russia by supporting the Assad-regime). Before we can investigate how this was reported, it is important to start with an event-driven overview of what happened in Syria between January 2011 and August 2013 and how politicians reacted. This information forms the basis of the research questions and hypotheses for this study. Second, the concepts of agenda-setting and framing, as well as different news frames are explained.

### **2.1.1. Course and cause of the conflict**

In late January 2011, President Bashar al-Assad gave a clarifying interview to *the Wall Street Journal*, confidently claiming that the Syrian government was ‘strongly linked to the beliefs of the people’. He stated that Syria would not be affected by the troubles that other countries were undergoing. ‘If you want to talk about Tunisia and Egypt, we are outside of this; at the end we are not Tunisians and we are not Egyptian. We are not a copy of each other’ (Wall Street Journal, 31.01.2011). Compared to other Arab countries, the regime’s foreign policy corresponded more with the public opinion. Moreover, the young President enjoyed the benefit of the doubt and was seen as preferable to alternatives in the regime. Finally, the Syrian civil society was seen as weaker and more fragmented. Yet this authoritarian improvement did not immunise Syria from the ‘Arab Spring’, as Bashar al-Assad prematurely claimed it would (Hinnebusch, 2012, p. 106): a few weeks after his interview, the Syrian people revolted against their President. The events in Tunisia (2010), Egypt (2011), and Libya (2011) – not to mention the protests in Yemen and Bahrain – had tantalised and emboldened the Syrians. A chant about the people wanting the fall of the regime echoed more and more across all the Arab countries (Ajami, 2012b, p. 70).

The hinterland town of Daraa had been first to stir. A few boys, aged 10 to 15, went out and scrawled some anti-regime graffiti on the walls. The boys were arrested and when they finally came home, it was clear they had been abused and tortured (Ajami, 2012b, p. 71).

These arrests and the brutal handling of peaceful demonstrators led to tumultuous manifestations in the streets of Daraa. In addition to this particular trigger, the protest movement demanded ‘the release of many political prisoners, lifting of emergency law, broader political representation, free media, more human rights and the overall overthrow of the Assad regime’. *Grosso modo*, three clusters of reasons were put forward: political reasons (corruption, a lack of political freedom, unfair elections), socio-economic causes (inflation, unemployment, poverty or a lack of prosperity, limited educational opportunities, generation gap) and a lack of human rights (violation of the freedom of speech, opinion, religion, equal rights or human rights in general) (Van Leeuwen, 2011, p. 4; Vervaeke, 2012, p. 1934; Eminue & Dickson, 2013, p. 5).

Despite the nominal enactment of reforms and because of the regime’s repressing response to the first protests, a cycle of violence was set in motion spreading the revolution all over the country. The besieged Daraa had shown the way, the unrest grew, and all Syrian residents were affected by it (The Economist, 09.07.2011; Eminue & Dickson, 2013, p. 5, Napolitano, 2013, p. 75). The situation deteriorated in May and June 2011 when army tanks of President Bashar al-Assad entered the coastal cities of Baniyas and Latakia, the outskirts of the capital Damascus, Homs and Hama, before reaching the province of Dayr az Zawr in July (Balanche, 2011, p. 437). Now the population was targeted as well, leading to numerous injuries, deaths and refugees. The regime followed a script familiar to other

recent protest sites in neighbouring countries: alternating brutality with promises of reform (Ajami, 2012b, pp. 75-76; *The Economist*, 09.07.2011). Because of the large presence of security forces in the capital Damascus and the biggest city Aleppo, the revolution took longer to assert itself there. It was not until the Summer of 2012 that these cities became the twin hot-spots of the revolution (Napolitano, 2013, p.83).

As a result of this development, the emergence of armed rebel groups signalled a new phase in the Syrian rebellion. The situation in Syria began to resemble a civil war more and more, with opposition groups seizing villages and fighting sophisticated battles against government forces (Eminue & Dickson, 2013, p. 6). Initially, there was no unified leadership that could constitute an alternative to the regime, but in October 2011 the shock troops of rebellion merged into an internal leadership: the Syrian National Coalition (SNC). This group – composed of young, unemployed, dispersed and unknown people – has links with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and called for the immediate overthrow of Assad's regime. The FSA – mostly defected soldiers from the regular army – manned their own checkpoints and 'protected' anti-regime protests (Hinnebusch, 2012, p. 105; Starr, 2013, p. ix). However, opposite groups emerged as well. The National Co-ordination Committee (NCC) 'advocated dialogue and argued that overthrowing Assad's regime would lead to further chaos' (Eminue & Dickson, 2013, p. 6).



In the Summer of 2012, rebel forces began to take and hold territory. Over time radical Islamists, including some allied with Al Qaeda and its branch Al-Nusra, came to play a dominant role beating government forces on the battlefield in some towns and imposing their rule there (Ajami, 2012a, p. 56). Consequently, religious hardening is indentified as a cause for the escalation of the conflict.

The Syrian conflict, which began with protests on 26 January 2011 and escalated into a consolidated uprising on 15 March, has become the bloodiest conflict of the 'Arab Spring' (Heydemann, 2013, p. 84). Up to today, regime and opposition are fighting a vicious civil war. As of June 2013, gains by the government forces bolstered its confidence. Nowadays, the Assad government remains the strongest single actor in the conflict, although it has lost a significant amount of territory and faces a stalemate against rebels in important areas of the country, including Aleppo and the suburbs of Damascus. Radical Islamite groups are silently winning territory as well. Nevertheless, the regime has a well-built arsenal, including chemical weapons added to their advanced conventional artillery (Stack, 28.08.2013). The inspectors of the United Nations proved that some 1429 Syrians, including at least 426 children, were killed by toxic chemicals on 21 August 2013 in the suburbs of Damascus. After a careful investigation, the inspectors said that 'the environmental, chemical and medical samples we have collected provide clear and convincing evidence that surface-to-surface rockets containing the nerve agent sarin were used' (UN, 16.09.2013). Sarin

nerve gas is a liquid nerve agent that vaporises into a deadly mist that human skin can quickly absorb. This turning point in the civil war is believed to be the largest chemical weapons attack since the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein gassed the Kurds in 1988. There is ample evidence, though not conclusive, that the regime has used chemical weapons in addition to conventional weapons to regain ground (Sharp & Blanchard, 2013, pp. 1-2).

Currently, the Syrian crisis has been going on unabated, partly due to the UN Security Council's clear disunity and incapability to form a consensus on action needed to stop the situation (Eminue & Dickson, 2012, p. 6). In the meanwhile, the humanitarian situation is worsened and thousands of civilians – including women and children – are being killed. Since the beginning of the uprising, Human Rights NGO's – like Human Rights Watch and United Nations – have repeatedly reported about violent crackdowns on demonstrations and barbaric torture by Syrian security personnel as well as about violent atrocities by rebels. The Syrian conflict seems to be crueller and deadlier than all other Arab rebellions, with more than 100,000 deaths in August 2013, 6.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, 2.169.00 refugees, and over 7 million displaced persons (Ajami, 2012b, p. 82; Usaid, 05.11.2013; Drieskens, Stockmans & White, 24.10.2013).

### **2.1.2. International responses to the Syrian conflict**

The Syrian crisis has provoked different reactions from regional and international actors, including the EU, the US and Russia. In view of a framing analysis, it is vital to think about the political orientation of the country involved. As Wolfsfeld (1997) stated: ‘the political process has a major impact on the press because political power can usually be translated into power over the news media, because the political structure of a society has a major influence on how the news media cover conflicts, because political realities often determine how antagonists use the news media to achieve political goals, and because political decisions have a major influence on who owns the media and how they operate’ (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p. 3). Additionally, ethnocentrism – judging other countries by the extent to which they live up to the own national practices and values – has always been a crucial news value determining the coverage (Gans, 1979, p. 42).

In 1963, Cohen (pp. 13-14) acknowledged that the significance of the press may be more patent in a country like the Soviet Union, where pictures of reality are constructed by cautious choices of a government and ruling party. Similarly, Casula (2013, p. 4) said that ‘the Russian depiction of the Syrian conflict differs significantly from its portrayal in Western media outlets’. The points of view of the Russian and Syrian officials are usually represented and the opposition’s standpoints are often ignored. Therefore, the revolt is mostly illustrated in Russian newspapers as the regime’s struggle with terrorism and in line with Russian policies.

In this study we investigate whether this is actually the case and how other, Western media outlets depict the conflict in Syria. Do media outlets (e.g., newspapers) follow the policy stances (e.g., official foreign policy documents) of their countries with regard to their coverage of an international conflict (e.g., the Syrian uprising)? Therefore, we have to systematically examine the political reactions to the conflict first, before we can take a closer look at the content of news coverage. The international actions, first imposed in the Spring of 2011, are putting increasing pressure on the Syrian regime (Buckley, 2012, pp. 81-104; Seeberg, p. 1). At the same time, it is important to have an alternative for a possible post-Assad regime. The currently most likely scenario seems to be the most worrying one: prolonged chaos and sectarian fighting, leaving a security vacuum and an opportunity for terrorist organisations to harvest the country's weapons of mass destruction (Blockmans, 2012, pp. 3-4). The following paragraphs describe thoroughly the sanctions imposed by (1) the European Union, (2) the United States and (3) Russia.

#### **2.1.2.1. Political response of the EU**

Generally, the European Union has explicitly and repeatedly condemned the authoritarian regime and the brutal repression in Damascus since the beginning of the Syrian uprising. Moreover, the EU has strongly denounced the violations of human rights and rule of law. The document *Delivering on a new European neighbourhood*

*policy* contains the following clear statement: ‘The EU has called on President Assad to step aside and allow a peaceful and democratic transition’. Consequently, the EU supports all efforts of the UN to find a negotiated solution to the crisis (EU-commission, 2013, pp. 8-9). Moreover, the EU has attempted to politically influence the developments in Syria, and thereby given up on years of negotiation at entering deals with Syria and suspended earlier agreements. Besides the political pressure, the EU is essentially waging an economic war against Assad (Blockmans, 2012, p. 2; Seeberg, 2012, pp. 2-3, EU-commission, 2012, pp. 1-3). In the following paragraphs, we will clarify the European economic, humanitarian and military reactions to the Syrian violence.

Regarding the economic sanctions, the EU suspended bilateral cooperation with the Syrian government (EU-commission, 2013, p. 1). Starting with the *Council Regulation No. 442/2011 of 9 May 2011 concerning restrictive measure in the view of the situation in Syria* the EU has gradually extended its restrictive sanctions in order to increase the pressure on the Assad-regime. These measures ranged from broad restrictions concerning arms trade, military equipment/software and providing grants/loans to specific sanctions targeted at specific persons typically being part of the inner circles around the President. These economic measures lead to the belief that money will be the main reason why the regime cannot last (Seeberg, 2012, pp. 7-9; Blockmans, 2012, p. 2). Since Summer 2013, the EU lifted its embargo on giving arms to the Syrian rebels, which made it

possible for member states to create their own policies to send weapons to militants. Nevertheless, the EU did not take an active role in supplying Syrian rebels with weapons. The lifting of the embargo came with strict conditions and was stated as ‘a clear signal from the EU to the Assad regime that it has to negotiate seriously’ (Peter, 02.08.2013; Thompson, 29.05.2013).

Secondly, the humanitarian disaster has put millions of Syrian families in need of assistance in their native country, in addition to the two million refugees in neighbouring countries. The EU has allocated €843 million for humanitarian aid, such as emergency relief, food assistance, water, sanitation, shelter, logistics, protection and more. When combined with contributions from EU member states, the overall donation of €1.3 billion puts the EU as the leading provider of humanitarian assistance to Syrians. The EU has also urged the Syrian regime to allow humanitarian workers, agencies and organisations unhindered access to those in need (EU-commission, 2013, p. 9; EU-commission, 02.10.2013).

Conversely, there is no unified appetite in the West for a military intervention. France and the UK – until the vote against the intervention at the House of Commons – led the most outspoken action against Al Assad’s regime. Germany, on the contrary, has always pushed for more involvement of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and a cautious approach towards military intervention. The Netherlands, the third country of our interest, are backing Germany in their hesitation over a military response (IEMed, 07.11.2013).

In conclusion, the Syrian regime has been hit mostly by the economic and to a lesser extent by political outcomes of sanctions imposed by the EU. There is no unified, goal-oriented plan concerning military action. In the near term, Europe's economic sanctions are especially significant as one-quarter of Syria's trade is with the EU (Lesch, 2011, p. 425). However, the sanctions hardly have impacted the regime to a degree where the survival of the Syrian system is at stake. Yet it would be erroneous to conclude that the sanctions have not made it difficult for the al-Assad family and the Syrian elite to maintain their dominance. The European rejection of the Assad regime and the limitation of financial resources for the Syrian military have weakened the regime in Damascus *vis-à-vis* the opposition (Seeberg, 2012, pp. 11-14).

#### **2.1.2.2. Political response of the US**

The White House's approach to the Syrian crisis has been top-down, relying on diplomacy to overthrow Assad and create space for a peaceful transition to democracy (Tabler, 2013, p. 91). The US has pressed the UN to condemn the Syrian regime and reach a ceasefire. The Americans believe that a negotiated political settlement is required, but they have prepared military plans – as opposed to the EU. However, President Obama has remained reluctant to endorse military intervention proposals for several reasons, including fear of exacerbating violence, the absence of UN authorisation, and a lack of

domestic political support. Moreover, there is no united antagonist, despite the more intent focus of the US officials on unifying the Syrian opposition (Sharp & Blanchard, 2013, pp.1-13). Finally, on a geostrategic level, an intervention could drag the Arabic region into a conflict (Hasler, 2012 pp. 120).

In the meantime, – in accordance with the EU – Washington has endeavoured to isolate Damascus. It imposed trade and financial sanctions targeting the regime. Given widespread humanitarian suffering, the spill-over of the conflict into neighbouring states and the Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons, President Obama has signalled a pending expansion of US civilian and military assistance to Syrians and the opposition. Washington helped organise a number of divided and exiled political opposition groups into the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. According to the US State Department, the US has also committed to providing \$250 million to the Syrian Coalition and the Supreme Military Council in order to help the transition into a new democratic system. Nonetheless, protesters in certain areas regularly berate the US for doing little for the Syrians in their hour of need (Sharp & Blanchard, 2013, pp. 9-14; Tabler, 2013, p. 92). Besides nonlethal assistance, the US has provided more than \$513 million for humanitarian activities inside Syria and in its neighbouring countries.

A primary concern for the US is Syrian military’s control over large conventional and unconventional weapons stockpiles, including chemical weapons. After doubting whether a limited use of chemical



weapons was used in March, observations in the Summer of 2013 confirmed the use of chemical weapons in Damascus on 21 August. The attack killed 1,429 people, including 426 children (Blake, 2013, p. 249). This very deadly attack signalled that the 'red line' had been crossed for the US administration. They blamed the Syrian government (Sharp & Blanchard, 2013, p. 15). President Obama announced that he was ordering an American military response, positioned US Navy warships in the Mediterranean Sea and asked the US Congress for authorisation to use force. Meanwhile, the US and Russia worked out an agreement on quarantining and destroying Syria's chemical weapon stockpile, making a military intervention temporarily unnecessary (Kalin & Mohammed, 09.09.2013).

### **2.1.2.3. Political response of Russia**

The effects of all the pressure applied by the West were – until September 2013 – undone by Russia and China, who continued to provide cover for the besieged Assad regime (Katz, 2011, p. 5; Tabler, 2013, pp. 90-96). Unlike the West, Moscow is a faithful ally of Damascus. At the global level, President Putin diplomatically supports Bashar al-Assad and bolsters the Syrian state with arms supplies because of strategic and economic implications, and because of challenges to Russia's political structure (Allison, 2013, p. 795; Eminue & Dickson, 2013, p. 11). The Russian position will be more specifically explained in the following paragraphs.

At the outset, Russia is known for its long-standing aversion of Western-led military interventions (Allison, 2013, p. 795). Russia condemned an US intervention in Syria partially because it fears increased influence of the US in the Middle East (Katz, 2011, p. 5; 2013, p. 2). The deterioration of the Russian-US relationship is also based on different political ideas because Russia emphasises state sovereignty and the illegitimacy of externally promoted regime change while the US cites violated human rights as a legitimacy for a regime change (Trenin, 05.02.2012; Hasler, 2012, pp. 117-119; Allison, 2013, p. 795). Whereas the US demands that Assad and his regime must be overthrown as a precondition for negotiations with the opposition, Russia insists that he, or at least his regime, can stay in place. As of this disagreement, international diplomatic mediation has failed until mid-September 2013. Moscow fears that allowing a resolution against Syria would lead to losing its closest ally in the Middle East, along with control over extremism (Katz, 2013, p. 2). Russia's support for Assad has been reinforced by the growing influence of radical Islam on Syrian rebels. Russian officials fear that a chaotic overthrow of Assad will stimulate sectarianism and enlarge the scope for action of Sunni Islamist groups, which can cause a spill-over to the North Caucasus and a loss of Russian ties to the region. Besides the geostrategic concerns, Russia is thought to have major economic interests in Syria, including arms contracts, their last naval base outside the former Soviet Union (i.e., port of Tartus), and plans for nuclear energy cooperation (Allison, 2013, p. 819).

Therefore, President Putin and Prime Minister Medvedev have vetoed the UN Security Council resolutions on Syria. Going further than preventing military action, Russia has opposed any action that would restrict the Syrian regime (Burnett, 2013, p. 34). Moreover, Russia asserts its influence through supplying arms to the regime and a naval presence in support of Assad (Blockmans, 2012, p. 3). This sustained support for the regime has not only had a negative impact on Russian relations with the West, but also with many Middle Eastern states that support the Syrian opposition (Katz, 2013, p. 2).

#### **2.1.2.4. Syria chemical weapons deal**

The relation between Russia, the US and Syria has been changing since September 2013 after the deadly chemical weapons attack of 21 August. Russia proposed a 'Syria chemical weapons deal' to avert a US strike (Kalin & Mohammed, 09.09.2013). Eventually, on 14 September, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reached an agreement in Geneva on quarantining and destroying Syria's chemical arsenal, one of the largest stockpiles in the Middle East.

The agreement calls for the complete destruction (possibly outside Syria) of all Syrian chemical weapons. For this purpose, the regime first had to provide a comprehensive listing of its entire arsenal within a week (London Embassy, 14.09.2013). On 21 September, Syria ostensibly met this first deadline (Escritt, 2013).

The elimination procedure includes the facilities for the development and production of chemical weapons as well. Full removal and destruction of the weapons and equipment must be completed by the first half of 2014. There was discussing between Russia and the US about whether the accord had to be included in a resolution under Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter, which may authorise the use of force and non-military measures if Syria does not comply with the terms of the settlement. They agreed that sanctions could be implied by a secondary vote (US Department of State, 14.09.2013).

Additionally, the Syrians must provide the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the UN, and other supporting personnel with the immediate and unfettered right to inspect all sites. Begin October, OPCW began its preliminary inspections of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal, and the actual destruction began on 6 October (UN, 05.11.2013). On 31 October the OPCW announced that it Syria met the deadline for inspecting and destroying declared equipment and facilities related to chemical weapons production. The chemical weapon facilities are 'inoperable' and 'international efforts to bring a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria continue apace' (UN, 31.10.2013; 05.11.2013). However, as time passed by, further developments took longer to assert and new deadlines were not met (Gladstone, 22.02.2014, p. 46).

The next section explains the concepts of agenda-setting and framing, before the research questions and hypotheses are clarified in the third section.

## 2.2. Agenda-setting

*News is a window on the world. The views through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear (...). the unfolding scene also depends upon where one stands, far or near, craning one's neck to the side, or gazing straight ahead, eyes parallel to the wall in which the window is encased (Tuchman, 1978, p.1).*

For a continually evolving civil war like the inaccessible Syrian conflict, just as for virtually all topics and concerns, citizens deal with a second-hand reality – a reality that is structured by journalists' information about these objects, situations and people (McCombs, 2005b, p. 1). Walter Lippmann – intellectual father of the agenda-setting idea – noted in *Public Opinion* (1954) that 'the world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind; it has to be (...) reported and imagined' (Lippmann, 1954, pp. 3-32). News media, our windows to the vast world beyond direct experience, construct mental pictures of the reality in our heads. Mass media do more than signalling the existence of events and issues, they also focus our attention and manipulate our discernments of what the key topics are. The fact that media influence how high topics are ranked on the public agenda is a somewhat inadvertent by-product of the necessity to focus on a few topics in the news. This phenomenon is called the agenda-setting function of the media (McCombs, 2005b, pp. 1-19).

The agenda-setting role of the news media is concisely outlined by Cohen (1963, p. 16) noting that the press ‘may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*’. The agenda-setting theory states that mass media have little influence on the direction or the intensity of people’s attitudes, but they are extremely powerful in setting the agenda. In other words, the agenda of the mass media becomes – to a considerable degree – the agenda of the public (McCombs, 2005b, p. 2). In this way, the media are the primary sources of national political information and a key step in forming a public opinion (McCombs, 2005a, p. 543).

The landmark Chapel Hill-study of McCombs and Shaw (1972) about the 1968 US Presidential election gave birth to widespread agenda-setting research in political communication (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 10). They suggested an extremely strong correlation between the emphasis placed by the mass media on various issues and the salience attributed to these issues by the audience. This finding has been replicated in hundreds of empirical studies worldwide (e.g., Eaton, 1989; Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990; Weaver, 1996). According to other studies the mass media can play a critical role in setting the political agenda in addition to public agenda. The political agenda is the list of issues to which political actors pay attention (Nuytemans, Soroka & Walgrave, 2008, p. 815).

The accumulated evidence for this media effect on the public and political agenda in diverse geographical and historical settings worldwide includes all news media and dozens of topics. Several longitudinal (e.g., Eyal & Winter, 1981; Austen-Smith, 1987; Eaton, 1989, Nuytemans, Soroka & Walgrave, 2008) and experimental (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Wang, 2000; Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002) studies also document time-order and causal links in finer detail. A complete set of evidence for the agenda-setting effect of mass media requires both the internal validity of experiments and the external validity of content analysis and survey research whose designs assure us that the findings can be generalised to settings in the real world (McCombs, 2005b, p. 18). In other words: the agenda-setting function of the news media is methodologically well supported.

Moreover, agenda-setting has recently been documented for new media, including online newspapers and social media. Hamilton (2004) found that attention on the Web was even more concentrated than in the print media, which is an important condition for agenda-setting. As people on the internet read more about the subjects they are interested in, there will be more agenda-setting concerning those topics. Whether the basic principles of agenda-setting persist or disappear because of the changing media landscape, investigating agenda-setting will remain high on the research agenda for at least a few more decades (McCombs, 2005, p. 543).

### **2.3. Framing**

Both agenda-setting and framing are oriented towards the media agenda as well as the public perception of the latter (d'Haenens, 2005, p. 424). McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (1997) declared that framing can be seen as an extension of the above described concept of agenda-setting (Scheufele, 1999, p. 103). Their so-called 'second-level' agenda-setting is more subtle than traditional agenda-setting: whereas the 'first-level' of agenda-setting is focused on the relative salience of topics, the 'second-level' examines the relative salience of attributes of these issues. That is to say, 'second-level' agenda-setting is not simply concerned with the mere presence of subjects but rather with the portrayal of these subjects. It is based on the assumption that how something is depicted in the news reports can influence the understanding of that issue by the audiences (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11; Weaver, 2007, p. 142).

The concept of framing has been one of the most fertile areas in research in social and cognitive psychology (Kahnemann & Tversky, 1981, Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), linguistics and discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1977), sociology (Bateson, 1972; Goffman, 1974), journalism, communication and media studies (Scheufele, 1999), political communications, political sciences and policy studies (Entman, 1993; Schon & Rein, 1994), and other fields. Therefore, there is a wide variety of definitions, frame types and methods applied in the framing literature (Matthes, 2009, pp. 350-351).



Robert Entman's definition, however, is by far the most widely cited one (McCombs, 2005, p. 546). He argued that framing is '*to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described*' (Entman, 1993, p. 52). In this way, the concept of framing does seem to include a wider range of cognitive processes than 'second-level' agenda-setting does, which only considers the salience of attributes of an object/subject (Weaver, 2007, p. 146).

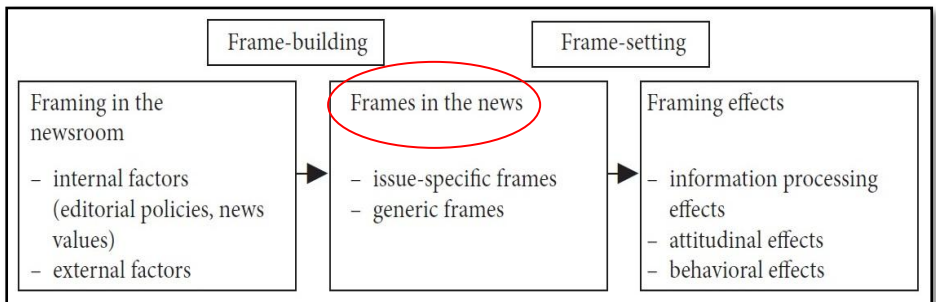
However, apart from its exact operationalisation, the concept of framing consistently describes the power of the media to influence a human perception by making information more visible, meaningful or memorable to audiences. By framing issues in a particular way, the media may shape the public opinion and with it, the public agenda (d'Haenens, 2005, p. 424). The notion of framing thus implies a widespread effect on large portions of the receiving audiences, though it is not likely to have a universal effect on all. Reporters can make information more prominent by selection and omission of features, repetition or association with culturally familiar symbols (Entman, 1993, pp. 52-54; de Vreese, 2005, p. 51).

Framing does expand Cohen's cogent observation: the mass media may not only be successful in telling us *what* to think about, but they may also be successful in telling us *how* to think about it.

### 2.3.1. Frames in the news

News can be framed in a variety of ways and those frames have several locations, including the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture (Entman, 1993, pp. 52-53). These elements are integral components of the framing process that consist of distinct stages: frame-building (i.e., how frames emerge), frame-setting (i.e., interplay between media frames and audience predispositions) and individual or societal level consequences of framing. A clear overview of the frame-process is presented in Figure 1. In this thesis, we are limited to investigate the frames in the news (see red circle, Figure 1), the outcome of the production or frame-building process (de Vreese, 2005, pp. 51-52). It would be interesting for future research to investigate the newspaper editors to get a broader picture of the frame-building stage and a better understanding of why those frames emerged.

**FIGURE 1. An integrated process model of framing (de Vreese, 2005, p. 52).**



Because of the wide variety of theoretical and empirical definitions of news frames, it is hard to find a clear-cut definition (d'Haenens, 2005, p. 424; de Vreese, 2005, p. 52). Gitlin (1980, p. 7) described frames generally as 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion to organise a discourse'. According to Tankard et al. (1991, p. 3), media frames are organising ideas for news content through the use of 'selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration'. McCombs (2005, p. 546) suggested that a media frame is 'a dominant attribute of the object under consideration because it describes the object'. Regardless of what exact definition of frames is used, it is commonly accepted that news frames draw attention to certain aspects of news and downplay others (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 180). In short, a frame co-determined the construction of a given issue by emphasising the salience of different aspects of a topic (d'Haenens, 2005, p. 425; de Vreese, 2005, p. 53).

Although general definitions are useful, they leave the explicit operational understanding of the frame concept open. As stated above, Entman (1993) specified what frames generally do: defining problems, making moral judgments, and supporting remedies. His description provided concrete operational guidelines that can be translated into frame indicators. The use of proper frame definitions is, therefore, central to frame validity (i.e., whether scholars really do measure what they intend to measure).

Although frames have been conceptualised at various levels of abstraction (Matthes, 2009, p. 350), a twofold vision can be applied (d’Haenens, 2005, p. 425). Iyengar (1990), on the one hand, focused on episodic and thematic news frames. Episodic news frames apply only to specific episodes, incidents, individuals and concrete events, while thematic frames usually present collective or general evidence (Iyengar, 1994, p. 18). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), on the other hand, made a distinction between issue-specific and generic frames. Where issue-specific frames apply to certain issues, subjects or topics, generic frames typically describe structural aspects and general features of news that can apply across different topics, times and cultural contexts. In a recent meta-analysis of framing researches, Matthes (2009, p. 350-356) concluded that 78 percent of the studies use issue-specific frames, and 22 percent reported generic frames – in total he identified 561 issue-specific vs. 29 generic frames. However, since incomparability is a major limitation of issue-specific frames we believe that the identification of generic frames that are not bound to one subject is more valuable for this study (d’Haenens, 2005, p. 425).

Regardless of the precise conceptualisation, the news frames must first have identifiable conceptual characteristics (i.e., keywords, metaphors, exemplars, catch- and stock phrases, depictions, etc.). Second, the frames should be commonly observed and easily distinguished from other frames. Finally, a frame must have a representational validity (de Vreese, 2005, p. 54). In order to achieve

these three objectives and thus to identify frames properly, one can look at keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, sentences, etc. that reinforce clusters of facts or judgments (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Tankard (2001, p. 101) also suggested a comprehensive list of framing devices for identifying and measuring news frames, including headlines, photos, leads, source and quotes selection, logos ... (de Vreese, 2005, p. 54). Those sets of framing devices are well developed in deductive framing research (e.g., Semetko & Valkenburg, 1999).

This thesis focuses on five clearly distinguished, generic frames with sufficient representational validity (de Vreese, 2005, p. 54) postulated by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000): conflict, human interest, economic consequences, responsibility and morality frames. Literature seems to point to those commonly used generic frames when focusing on media frames adopted in the portrayal of EU affairs. We wonder whether this still holds true in other domains, like in an international context (i.e., the Syrian war). How generic are those *generic* frames? Besides, we add a diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frame to the analysis because these are commonly used frames within the context of social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000, pp. 612-614). Those frames focus on what causes and possible solutions are given for a particular conflict, problem or issue. As the Syrian war started as a popular revolt against the regime, we question how those frames will evolve in the coverage about the ongoing civil war. A set of recurrent frames is explained in the next paragraphs.

### **2.3.1.1. Generic frames**

Although it is conceivable that reporters can depict news in various ways, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) pointed to at least five ways in which news is commonly framed. The first generic frame, i.e., the conflict frame, highlights a conflict between individuals, groups, institutions and/or countries to capture audience interest (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 96). This frame is conceptually intertwined with strategy coverage as it makes winning or losing the central concern. Different scholars found that the conflict frame was the most prevalent frame (e.g., Neuman et al., 1992; Patterson, 1993) or prominent news value (e.g., Galtung & Ruge, 1965), especially in the portrayal of political candidates and campaigns as emphasis is put on the performance and style of a party or an individual (d'Haenens, 2005, p. 425). Due to more recurrent reporting of economic and political news in serious news outlets, this frame is found mainly in these outlets (Van Cauwenberge et al., 2009, p. 43). Because of the emphasis on conflict, the news media have been criticised for adding to public cynicism and mistrust of political leaders (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). In the light of the conflictual nature of the Syrian crisis, we are interested in establishing how visible a conflict frame is in comparison with other common news frames in national quality newspapers.

In search of more public attention, a frame more regularly found in tabloid news is the human interest frame (Van Cauwenberge et al., 2009, p. 43). Specific to this frame is an individual's story or an

emphasis on emotions, what adds to the narrative quality of the news. In that way, a human interest personalises, dramatises and emotionalises the event, issue or problem. In other words, it brings a 'human face' to the news (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Framing the news in terms of emotions is one way to capture and retain the interest of the audiences (de Vreese, Semetko & Valkenburg, 1999, pp.551-552; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p.96).

The economic consequences frame presents an event, problem, concern and/or issue in terms of the economic impact it will have on an individual, group, institution, region or country. The wide impact of an event is seen as an important news value and makes the potential economic consequences of an event (e.g., intervening in the Syrian conflict) clear to the public. Because of this relevance, the economic consequences frames are used quite frequently (de Vreese, Semetko & Valkenburg, 1999, pp. 551-552; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96).

The morality frame puts the event, problem or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions. Because of the professional conduct of objectivity, journalists often make such references to moral frames indirectly, for instance by quoting someone else (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96).

Finally, the responsibility frame attributes responsibility to certain political governmental institutions, groups of individuals for causing (or solving) a problem. It shapes public understanding by

crediting or blaming who is responsible for solving or creating key social problems. Iyengar (1991), for instance, argued that television news encourages people to offer explanations for social problems and to blame certain actors for it. For this reason, it is important to conduct profound research on the use of responsibility frames and its consequences (de Vreese, Semetko & Valkenburg, 1999, pp. 551-552; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96).

### **2.3.1.2. Collective action frames**

Frames function to organise experience and guide action. Collective action frames also simplify and condense aspects of the world, but in ways that are meant to mobilise possible adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilise antagonists. There has been a pronounced proliferation of research on those collective action frames in relation to social movements and their development because they are action-oriented sets of values and meanings that inspire and justify the activities of the organisations. The promotion of appropriate frames is thus viewed as an important condition for successful protest mobilisation. In doing so, framing allows the formation of collective identity and the reinforcement of shared beliefs and values. Framing, therefore, has to be regarded as one of the central dynamics in understanding the character, course and success of a social movement like the Syrian uprising (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 612-614).



Benford and Snow (2000) divided collective action frames into three broad framing tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames. The first two frames have especially proven to be useful in frame identification processes and are also part of much of the recent conceptualisations and definitions of media framing (Vliegenthart, 2012, pp. 938-939).

Consequently, we were curious to what extent journalists use those frames in their coverage of an international, sensitive conflict. The Syrian conflict did not only attract world-wide media attention; that attention went also beyond descriptive coverage. Suggestions were made about causes and responsibilities, possible solutions, and national interests. By adopting those frames, a reporter can ensure that the public is connecting the issue (i.e., the Syrian conflict) to certain causes and solutions to the problem. As those aspects are probably prevalent in the analysed articles, we briefly address the difference between those three collective action frames.

### **Diagnostic frames**

A social movement seeks to alter some problematic situation, so direct action is contingent on the identification of the source(s) of causality. Diagnostic frames refer to ‘a diagnosis of some event or aspect of life as troublesome and in need of change’ (Corrigan-Brown, Snow & Vliegenthart, 2007, p. 3). In other words, diagnostic framing involves the establishment of blame or causality – the root of the problem. A diagnostic frame also includes the ‘attribution of

blame for the problem' (Corrigall-Brown, Snow & Vliegthart, 2007, p. 3). This attribution component of the diagnostic framing focuses on responsibility in order to evoke directed action (Benford & Snow, 2000, pp. 616). In doing so, the diagnostic frame seems to overlap with the responsibility frame of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). As mutually exclusive frames are of utmost importance for the reliability of a frame analysis (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 99), we decided first to exclude personal blames within diagnostic frames. So, where responsibility frames focus on the responsibility of the government, politicians or societal groups and a possible solution, diagnostic frames focus on particular triggers and on external factors (e.g., political and socio-economic causes, lack of human rights, religious prescriptions and other reasons). We wonder whether the different newspapers offer different causes for the Syrian conflict to their readers.

### **Prognostic frames**

Prognostic framing is conceptualised as 'the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem' (Corrigall-Brown, Snow & Vliegthart, 2007, p. 3). That solution includes at least a plan of attack and frame-consistent strategies for carrying it out. In short, it addresses the question of what is to be done. It refers to remedial strategies, tactics or solutions to overcome the problem (Bell & Messer, 2010, p. 855). A prognosis in the Syrian discourse might suggest a military action, governmental change, diplomatic solution,

a call for monetary action, internal reforms and/or the dismantling of the chemical weapons. We wonder whether the different newspapers offer different solutions for the Syrian conflict to their readers.

### **Motivational frames**

Finally, the motivational frame refers to a call to arms or motivation for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action. In the literature, the motivational frame is operationalised as the answer to the question why *we* should be/become involved. Therefore, war approval, for instance, is likely to be based on a convincing construction of collective identity (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617; Corrigan-Brown, Snow & Vliegthart, 2007, p. 3).

Thus in accordance with the literature, we conceptualised the discussion of motivational aspects as identity framing (Eilders & Lüter, 2000, p. 417). This frame focuses more on the own country, the own involvement and rationale, own national politicians or national parties. Research has shown that a link between the problem and the own country is an important news value for journalists (Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005, pp. 234-236). In operationalising the motivational frame in this way, we judge that it resembles the nationalisation frame of Van Cauwenberge et al. (2009). As they studied the tendency to nationalise EU-related news, we are curious if this will still be the case in an overseas conflict with that many parties involved. We wonder whether each national journal reveals a clear presence of a domestic angle when covering the Syrian issue.

### **2.3.2. Computer-assisted text analysis**

Besides the manual framing analysis, it is possible to analyse texts by means of a computer programme. Computer-assisted text analysis ‘uses computer software for making replicable and valid inferences from text to their context’ (Tain & Stewart, 2005, p. 291). Thematic, semantic and network text analysis are the primary applications of computer-assisted text analysis. The main advantages of this analysis compared to manual research are the objectivity and therefore the validity as the research does not need to pre-read the texts and code them in keeping with pre-specified rules. Therefore the analysis is free from conscious and unconscious presuppositions of the researcher. Moreover, since the same algorithms are used by other researchers, the reliability of computer-assisted text analysis can be 100%. Additionally, it can improve the efficiency as an enormous amount of data – sometimes impossible to analyse for humans due to its size – can be handled in shorter timeframes (e.g., a few seconds or even less). In that way, it is possible to work very actualised since once new info appears, the program automatically and immediately analyse that data (Tian & Stewart, 2005, pp. 291-292).

In the 1991, Tankard et al. pointed out the need for an ‘effective method of measuring as framing appears to be emerging as such an important concept in news stories’ (Tankard et al., 1991, p. 12). Computer-assisted text analysis is extremely useful for framing studies as frames are identified by the presence or absence of certain frame devices (e.g., keywords, metaphors, exemplars, catch- and

stock phrases, depictions, images, headlines, leads, quotes ...) (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 2; Entman, 1993, p. 52; Tankard, 2001, p. 101; de Vreese, 2005, p. 54). Counting the frequency of the concepts constituting the frames presents the occurrences and prominence of those themes (i.e., frames) in a text (Tian & Stewart, 2005, pp. 293; Stewart, Gil-Egui, Tian & Pileggi, 2006, p. 738).

Nevertheless, the constraints with using computers for frame analysis should be taken into account as well. The analyses deal with natural language processing, a field related to computer sciences, linguistic and psychology. It has some intrinsic difficulties as the human language is complex and unstructured. Researchers still have no idea about the precise working of the brain and how people process linguistic information. This makes it hard for computer scientist to correctly convert the human processing of news articles into a computer-operated processing (van Atteveldt, 2008, pp. 4-5).

As this master thesis aims to understand how newspapers frame the Syrian crisis, computer-assisted text research is believed to be an ideal complement to our manual framing study given its mentioned benefits. The speciality of computer scientists about algorithms and knowledge of communication scientists about the social world and accompanying theories reinforce each other. Thus, a researcher from the computer science department of the University of Leuven will use computer software to analyse the same articles of *the Daily Telegraph*, *the New York Times* and *the Moscow Times*. This analysis is still being conducted. Results will be published by the end of 2014.



### **3. Research objectives, questions, and hypotheses**

This research sheds light on the nature of the recent news coverage on the Syrian conflict between July and October 2013 in Western European, American, and Russian journals. Based on the literature study and policy documents, broad research questions and specific hypotheses are generated in order to examine a three-fold goal (i.e., a goal about the attention to the conflict, differences in framing between the five newspapers and differences in framing across three identified periods).

#### **3.1. Attention to the Syrian conflict**

Our first interest is to measure the attention paid to the Syrian conflict in Dutch, French, British, American, and Russian high-standing daily papers. Because of the particular political stances taken by the countries towards the conflict, we forecast differences in news coverage among the investigated newspapers. First of all, we expect that the number of articles as well as the length of the articles will vary in accordance to the role of the countries in the international negotiations. As the US shows the highest level of involvement, we hypothesise that more and longer articles are published in *the New York Times*. In contrast, the Netherlands can be considered as the least involved country. We, therefore, expect fewer and shorter articles printed in *De Telegraaf*. Our first research question and hypotheses are as follows:

***RQ1: Which countries attach more importance to the Syrian conflict, measured by the number and length of articles?***

*H1a: The United States attach most importance to the Syrian conflict, measured by the number and length of articles.*

*H1b: The Netherlands attach least importance to the Syrian conflict, measured by the number and length of articles.*

Besides newspapers, we also investigate different periods. In the first investigated period (July – mid-August 2013), the uprising in Syria evolved into a civil war. In all parts of the world, doubts and reluctance characterised the political reactions. During the second period (mid-August – September 2013), following the sarin gas attack on 21 August 2013, there was more goal-oriented action, cooperation and deliberation as an agreement was made concerning the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapon arsenal on 14 September. In this study, the gas attack and following agreement are considered crucial key events. Key events mainly relate to extremely severe accidents and catastrophes (Brosius & Eps, 1995, p. 393). It goes without saying that the sarin nerve gas attack is an exceptionally severe incident as it was – with 1.429 fatalities – the most deadly chemical attack since the ‘Arab Spring’ (Blake, 2013, p. 249). In this thesis, we are also interested whether a non-fatal but still extremely important event like the agreement on the obliteration of Syria’s chemical weapons will cause a change in reporting. Brosius and Eps



(1995, p. 393) outlined that key events lead to ‘an enormous amount of coverage’. There is, therefore, reason to suspect that more and longer articles about the Syrian issue are published shortly after a key event. Moreover, as Russia started to play a moderate role after the chemical attack and a pronounced key role after it succeeded in reaching an agreement, we expect that the increase in articles will be more prevalent in *the Moscow Times* after the agreement. Hence, we formulate subsequent hypotheses about the total number of articles about the Syrian conflict:

***RQ2: Do key events lead to an increase in coverage, measured by the amount and length of articles?***

*H2a: After the first key event (i.e., use of sarin gas), more importance is attached to the Syrian conflict, measured by the number and length of articles.*

*H2b: After the second key event (i.e., agreement on the obliteration of Syria’s chemical weapon stockpiles), more importance is attached to the Syrian conflict, measured by the number and length of articles.*

*H2c: After the second key event (i.e., agreement on the obliteration of Syria’s chemical weapon stockpiles), subsequent events in Syria are most likely to be more covered in Russian newspapers.*

### **3.2. Framing of the Syrian conflict**

The second and main focus of this research is to explore the framing of the Syrian conflict. First and foremost, it is important to take the prevalence of the eight frames<sup>1</sup> into account before looking at frame variations. Based on the news value ethnocentrism (Gans, 1979, p. 42), on the one hand, one might predict that the nationalisation frame will be used the most as Gans assessed that ‘ethnocentrism comes through most explicitly in foreign news, which judges other countries by the extent to which they live up to or imitate [American] practices and values’. Moreover, a link between the issue and the own country is proved to be an important criterion for journalists (Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005, pp. 234-236). On the other hand, different scholars found that the conflict frame was the most prevalent frame (e.g., Neuman et al., 1992; Patterson, 1993) or prominent news value (e.g., Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Thus, the research question and hypothesis about the prevalence of the frames that comes to the fore are:

***RQ3: Which generic, diagnostic and prognostic frames are often used? Are some frames often used together?***

***H3: The nationalisation and conflict frame will be more used than the other frames.***

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<sup>1</sup> Six generic frames (i.e., the conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, responsibility and nationalisation frame), plus the diagnoses and prognoses.

### **3.2.1. Frame variation between newspapers**

Additionally, framing differences among the journals are scrutinised. The exploratory, ongoing nature of the research subject requires broader research questions so as to paint a complete picture of the framing. Besides, based on the political standpoints and geostrategic roles played by key governmental players, we suspect that European newspapers focus more on economic aspects; that British, French and American newspapers favour military intervention more in comparison with the Russian paper (with the Dutch newspaper in between); and that Russian newspaper concentrate more on the agreement about the obliteration of Syria's chemical weapons. Hence, following research questions and hypotheses are formulated about the differences between the newspapers:

***RQ4: Does the generic, diagnostic and prognostic framing vary significantly across newspapers?***

*H4a: European papers focus more on financial consequences, socio-economic causes and monetary solutions.*

*H4b: French, British, and American papers focus more on military intervention compared to the Russian journal (with the Dutch newspaper occupying an in-between position)*

*H4c: Russian papers focus more on the obliteration of Syria's chemical weapons compared to all other newspapers under study.*

### **3.2.2. Frame variation between periods**

Brosius and Eps (1995, p. 393) elucidated that ‘key events not only lead to an enormous amount of coverage, but also *shape* subsequent news coverage by creating or changing a frame of reference’. A key event may create a new issue that had stayed uncovered so far, or it may add a new dimension to an established issue. In other words, key events can cause a frame shift (Brosius & Eps, 1995, pp. 393-394; Van Gorp, 2007, p. 68; Van Gorp, 2010, p. 99). The chemical incident added a new element to the Syrian issue as it was considered crossing a ‘red line’, which increased questioning and justifying military action. On 14 September, quite unexpectedly, the agreement on quarantining and destroying Syria's chemical arsenal was reached. There is, therefore, reason to suspect that articles will be more heavily framed shortly after the key events; that the military intervention will more often put forward after the gas attack and that the annihilation of the chemical weapons will be proposed more after the agreement. Hence, the research questions and hypotheses about the divergence in frame use influenced by the key events are:

#### **Key event 1: sarin gas attack**

***RQ5: Does the first key event (i.e., use of sarin gas) change the generic, diagnostic and prognostic framing significantly?***

***H5a: After the first key event (use of sarin gas) the prognostic frame ‘military intervention’ will be more used.***

**Key event 2: agreement on obliteration chemical weapons**

***RQ6: Does the second key event (i.e., agreement on the obliteration of Syria's chemical weapon stockpiles) change the generic, diagnostic and prognostic framing significantly?***

***H6a: After the second key event (i.e., agreement on the obliteration of Syria's chemical weapon stockpiles) the prognostic frame 'dismantling chemical weapons' will be used more often.***



#### 4. Methodological considerations

Because of time constraints and other practical considerations, we have chosen for a deductive quantitative content analysis of the coverage of the Syrian conflict in European, American and Russian newspapers from 8 July to 24 October 2013. That is to say, we theoretically derived frames from the literature and operationalised them prior to a quantitative content analysis as opposed to the inductive approach that exercises pre-study to define frames and then employs a codebook. We opted for the five generic frames postulated by Semetko en Valkenburg (2000), namely the conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality and responsibility frame. We chose those frames to investigate how applicable *generic* frames are in a non-European perspective. In addition, we added collective action frames to our analysis to see how compatible generic frames are with these collective action frames. More specifically, we operationalised the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames proposed by Benford and Snow (2000). However, in accordance with other literature (e.g., Eilders & Lüter, 2000) we operationalised the motivational framing as the nationalisation frame of Van Cauwenberge et al. (2009). After choosing those eight frames<sup>2</sup>, we relied on a principal component analysis with varimax rotation to cluster frame devices into scales that are indicative for those eight frames before starting our core analysis (Vliegenthart, 2012, p. 940).

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<sup>2</sup> Conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, responsibility, diagnostic, prognostic and nationalisation frame.

In the following paragraphs, we will first shed light on why and how we collected the used journals and articles. It is of equal importance to assess the rationales behind the period, countries, medium, and newspapers as well as to assess why we chose the specific articles. Secondly, the general operationalisation of the frames is explained, before clarifying how we coded the generic, prognostic, diagnostic and nationalisation frames specifically. The complete codebook can be found in Annex 1 on page p. 135. Lastly, it is important to shortly assess the intercoder reliability in order to enhance the scientific relevance of this master thesis.



#### **4.1. Data source and collection**

As the unit of analysis was a news item, we had to choose (1) a period, (2) countries, (3) a medium, (4) specific newspapers, and (5) articles. Firstly, we focused on three periods that covered the ongoing and evolving uprising (a) before and (b) after the chemical attack on a suburb of Damascus, as well as (b) before and (c) after the agreement on the dismantling of Syria's chemical stockpile.

Secondly, we decided to examine the Netherlands, the UK, France, the US, and Russia, based on several considerations. First, because we wanted to analyse a representative coverage of the EU, we choose a Dutch, French and British newspaper. Although there are internal differences within the EU in terms of importance, these three countries are relatively large and influential. In this way, we have a valuable overview of the news coverage in, at least, Western Europe. In addition, we wished to investigate the coverage of other involved countries outside the EU, with sufficient longstanding historical and political ties to Syria to ensure more than passing reportage. As seen in the theoretical and conceptual foundation about the international responses to the Syrian conflict, Russia and the US are deeply and differently involved in it.

Thirdly, we examined high-standing quality dailies (except for *De Telegraaf*) for the same reasons Brosius and Eps (1995, p. 389) gave in their essay on key events. First and foremost, newspapers are considered as media opinion leaders in political coverage because reporters from other media pay attention to their reporting and use

them for orientation in their own work. Because of their more in-depth and complete coverage, quality newspapers have the ability to lead and affect the political agenda, possibly via the intermediation of TV news (Bartels, 1996, p. 21; Nuytemans, Soroka & Walgrave, 2008, p. 827). Secondly, quality newspapers are thought to offer information on a high journalistic level. Finally, it is acknowledged that the quality journals have somewhat diverse political stances and thus cover a certain range of journalistic perspectives on the Syrian conflict (Brosius & Eps, 1995, p. 398).

Fourthly, we selected one quality paper from each country based on the circulation rates (except for the Russian paper). According to HOI, institute for media auditing, the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* reached a circulation rate of 533,227 at the end of 2013 making it the best selling journal in the Netherlands. The newspaper has a somewhat conservative style, with a political tendency to the right (Berkeljon, 12.09.12). It is worth noting that *De Telegraaf* is somewhat closer to the sensationalist side of a continuum ranging from sensationalist to sober newspapers. However, it is much more elaborated, politically oriented and it contains more financial news than well-known tabloids in other countries (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 97). Therefore and because of the considerable higher circulation rate than any other Dutch journal, we used *De Telegraaf*.

The best selling British quality paper is *the Daily Telegraph*, a centre-right conservative aligned newspaper with a circulation of 550,325 in August 2013 (The Guardian, 06.09.2013). *The Daily*

*Telegraph* is generally accounted as one of Britain's 'big three' quality dailies, alongside *The Times* and *The Guardian*. It takes a somewhat conservative, middle-class approach to comprehensive coverage (Britannica, 2013).

Although *The Wall Street Journal* is the largest newspaper in the US (daily circulation rate of 2,378,827), we did not analyse this paper because of the restrictive focus on business and economic news. Instead, we collected articles from the Pulitzer Prize-winner *the New York Times*. *NYT*'s total (i.e., print and total digital) average daily circulation rose to 1,865,318 by end March 2013, making it the second-largest American paper. Moreover, its website is America's most popular news site with a daily circulation of 1,133,923; making the *NYT* the leading news media of the world (Lulofs, 30.04.2013).

As to Russia, no Russian-language paper could be included because of a constrained language repertoire. Unfortunately, this left us with few English options (i.e., *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, *the Moscow or St. Petersburg Times* and *the Moscow News*). All of them were not available on *LexisNexis*. *The Moscow Times* was the only newspaper that was accessible via the research library *WestLaw International*. *The Moscow Times* is the leading English-language newspaper published in Moscow since 1992, distributed free of charge in locations as well as delivered by subscription to expats, Russian individuals and corporate clients. As the paper is owned by the Sanoma Corporation and managed by a Dutch couple, it is possibly to find a less Russian perspective and fewer differences with

the other papers. However, the newspaper often publishes articles by prominent Russian reporters.

Fifthly, our data derived from a quantitative content analysis of articles in each of the five newspapers. We selected relevant articles by consulting the newspapers' online archives on the easy-to-access database *LexisNexis* or *WestLaw International*. Articles containing the words – or equivalents for each language – uprising, rebellion, revolt, revolution, crisis, rebel, fight, war or civil war and Syria or Syrian were selected. To limit the sample, a random sample of three constructed weeks was selected (each 12 issues). We selected two days of each week during a six-week period with exception of Sundays (i.e., 8 July – 18 August and 17 September – 24 October 2013). In the three weeks between 22 August and 8 September 2013, we selected four days in order to get 12 days as well. A composite sample ensures that each day of the week is equally represented to control for differences due to special issues or day with more news. Three constructed weeks of a 1-year period is considered a sufficient sample to yield reliable estimates (Len-Rios, Rodgers, Thorson & Yoon, 2005, p. 157). This key-word search of 36 randomly selected days yielded 801 articles. After eliminating irrelevant articles, 637 articles were preserved. The sample contained 66 articles published between 8 July and 18 August 2013, 432 between 22 August and 8 September 2013 and 139 between 17 September and 24 October 2013. In order to identify the eight frames, we then systematically used our coding book that is operationalised in the next section.

## **4.2. Operationalisation of the frames**

Essential to a deductive quantitative content analysis is the question: which components in a news story constitute a frame? A frame is a certain pattern in a given text that is composed of several frame devices. A frame cannot directly be measured (i.e., latent variable). So, news frames can be examined and identified by looking at the presence of absence of keywords, metaphors, exemplars, catch- and stock phrases, depictions, (stereotyped) images, moral appeals, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments (i.e., manifest variables) (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 2; de Vreese, 2005, p. 54). In other words, rather than directly coding the whole frame, we have to split up the frame into separate elements (Matthes & Kohring, 2008, p. 263). Those framing devices and other formal features – including the journalistic genre, source, placement and length of the article – formed our codebook, the basis for a quantitative content analysis (Brosius & Eps, 1995, p. 398).

Based on theory, we developed a list of eight sets of questions (n = 36) in order to detect frames and to evaluate the extent to which certain frames appear in stories. To restrict the coders' need to interpret, the material was constructed as simple yes/no questions. After developing the codebook we looked for clusters in the coded devices. To investigate the extent to which the framing questions reflect underlying dimensions, we conducted a principal component analysis with varimax rotation on the 36 framing items (Van Gorp,

2010, p. 99). The component analysis provided us with only six clear-cut news frames: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, responsibility and nationalisation frame. The diagnostic and prognostic frames did not result in two unambiguous frames, since they are composed of too broad, divergent categories. Those categories are still used to conduct a content analysis, in which we examine what reasons and solutions the different newspapers put forward for the conflict in Syria.

We now specifically address the 36 specific yes/no questions that we developed – based on theory – to detect the five generic frames of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the nationalisation frame of Van Cauwenberge et al. (2009) and the diagnostic/prognostic categories of Benford and Snow (2000). As the five generic frames and the nationalisation frame were significant frames in contrast to the diagnostic and prognostic frames, we will address them together before clarifying the diagnostic and prognostic categories.

#### **4.2.1. Generic frames**

The analysis of the conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality and responsibility frames is based on the original categories developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). The same items of the study by Van Cauwenberge et al. (2009) are also used to evaluate the nationalisation frame. As all items can be found in Annex 1, we will only assess the deviations and Cronbach alpha's here.

The conflict frame was measured by means of four questions (see Annex 1) on the contentious situation. In the light of our subject, the second question was altered: instead of ‘reproach’ (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), we used ‘fights, riots and confrontation’. The question on whether the story referred to winners or losers only obtained a factor loading of .29 in the analysis of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). However, we obtained a factor loading of .60. The specific topics of the two studies could be an explanation for this difference. European politics or the entrance of the euro has not as many as opponents and fights as a civil war. The multi-item scale reached an acceptable validity ( $\alpha = .62^3$ ).

The human interest frame was analysed through four questions on the extent to which the story was personalized. The last question of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) on whether the story contained visual information was removed as the databases used did not always contain visual information. The multi-item scale reached a good validity ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

Additionally, the economic consequences frame was assessed by using three items on potential financial consequences. This multi-item scale reached a good validity ( $\alpha = .75$ ). The morality frame was investigated through three questions on moral messages and social prescription. This scale reached an acceptable validity ( $\alpha = .61^3$ ).

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that cautiousness is recommended when talking about our results as Cronbach’s Alpha is not always  $>.70$ . However, Nunnally (1978) stated that ‘time and energy can be saved in early staged of research (e.g., a master thesis) by working with instruments that have only modest reliability’. Moreover, an  $\alpha$  between .60 and .70 is not uncommon in framing research (e.g., Lance et al., 2006).

The responsibility frame was investigated via five questions on who is to blame for the problem. The last question on whether the story suggests that the problem requires urgent action only obtained a factor loading of .43 in the analysis of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). However, it obtained a factor loading of .80 in our analysis. The topics of the two researches could once more be an explanation because European politics or the entrance of the euro does not require as urgent actions as a civil war. The multi-item scale reached a good validity ( $\alpha = .69^3$ ).

Finally, the nationalisation frame was analysed by way of two questions on the link between Syria and the involved country. The multi-item scale reached a good validity ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

Each cluster of questions corresponded with one of the six generic news frames, in which the size of the factor loading indicated the extent to which the question supported the frame concerned. The extent to which the manifest items reflected the underlying latent construct (i.e., frame), was investigated on the basis of a principal component analysis with varimax rotation on the 21 items (d' Haenens & de Lange, 2001, p. 853). The factor analysis showed that all items loaded higher than .54 (see Table 1) on six factors (eigenvalues  $< 1$ ), explaining almost 60% of the variance. Hence six multi-item scales were composed for each frame by averaging the scores on the questions that loaded the factor they were defining. The values of each framing scale ranged from .00 (frame totally not prevalent) to 1.00 (frame totally prevalent).



**TABLE 1. Varimax-rotated factor analysis for 21 framing items**

Framing items	Factors					
	C	HI	EC	M	R	N
<b>Conflict frame</b>						
1. Does the story revolve around disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?	<b>.72</b>	-.08	.01	.01	.12	-.00
2. Does the story refer to fights, riots, and confrontation between two or more parties, individuals, groups, countries?	<b>.74</b>	.10	-.06	.09	-.04	-.22
3. Does the story refer to two sides or more than two sides of the problem?	<b>.66</b>	-.04	-.09	-.08	.09	.15
4. Does the story refer to winners and losers?	<b>.60</b>	-.05	-.05	.04	-.10	.09
<b>Human interest frame</b>						
5. Does the story provide a human example or 'human face' on the issue?	-.09	<b>.81</b>	-.02	.06	.03	-.04
6. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings?	-.03	<b>.80</b>	-.04	.05	.11	-.01
7. Does the story emphasise how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?	.08	<b>.77</b>	-.00	.10	-.02	-.03
8. Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?	-.03	<b>.80</b>	.01	.04	-.05	-.01
<b>Economic consequences frame</b>						
9. Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?	-.07	.03	<b>.85</b>	-.03	-.12	-.05
10. Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?	-.09	.02	<b>.76</b>	.02	-.00	.03
11. Is there a reference to economic consequences of (not) pursuing a course of action?	-.02	-.08	<b>.82</b>	-.09	-.07	-.03

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**Morality frame**

12. Does the story contain any moral message?	-.09	-.01	-.02	<b>.75</b>	.19	.17
13. Does the story make reference to morality, God, Allah, and other religious tenets?	.13	.18	-.07	<b>.66</b>	-.15	-.16
14. Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?	-.01	.06	-.01	<b>.81</b>	.07	.01

**Responsibility frame**

15. Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the issue/problem?	-.02	-.03	-.02	.14	<b>.69</b>	.18
16. Does the story suggest some level of the government (including President Assad) is responsible for the issue/problem?	-.01	-.10	-.09	.07	<b>.69</b>	.06
17. Does the story suggest that an individual or group of people in society (including any coalition of the rebels) is responsible for the issue/problem?	.21	.11	-.03	-.01	<b>.54</b>	-.05
18. Does the story suggest that solutions to the issue/problem?	.01	-.07	-.03	-.09	<b>.75</b>	.09
19. Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?	-.10	.16	-.02	.01	<b>.63</b>	-.09

**Nationalisation frame**

20. Does the article mention a connection between Syria and the individual country?	.04	-.03	.02	.05	.06	<b>.87</b>
21. Does the article articulate or quote the ideas of national politicians or persons that are active on a national level?	.03	-.03	-.07	-.02	.08	<b>.86</b>

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#### **4.2.2. Diagnoses and prognoses**

Although the 15 developed questions did not cluster into one big diagnostic and one big prognostic frame, those questions were used to investigate whether the newspapers offer different reasons and solutions for the Syrian conflict. In that way, we kept six questions to measure prevalence of possible diagnoses and nine questions to investigate the prevalence of potential prognoses. Those categories are more meaningful than one big diagnostic or prognostic frame.

Diagnostic frames refer to ‘a diagnosis of some event or aspect of life as troublesome and in need of change’ (Benford & Snow, 2007, p. 3). Hence, the data were examined for instances in which causes for the escalation/continuation of the Syrian conflict were suggested. The categories listed below are based upon our theoretical study of the policies of the countries in addition the categories listed by Benford and Snow (2007, pp. 9-10). The root of the Syrian problem might include a discussion of political, socio-economic and religious factors, a lack of human rights, particular triggers, and/or other causes. This rest category was qualitatively examined once more after pre-coding 18% of the articles in order to see if new categories emerged. As we found out by this pre-coding that, for instance, the chemical weapon attack was often stated as a particular trigger for the escalation of the conflict, we added it to that category. Each of the categories contains specific elements that need to be mentioned explicitly. Based on our theoretical considerations and pre-coding, we developed the following list of possible diagnoses:

- 1) *Political causes*: does the article mentions corruption, a lack of political freedom, and/or unfair elections as a (possible) cause of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
- 2) *Socio-economic causes*: does the article mentions inflation, rising unemployment, poverty or a lack of prosperity, limited educational opportunities and/or generation gap between young and old Syrians as a (possible) cause of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
- 3) *A lack of human rights*: does the article mentions infringement or lack of the freedom of speech, opinion, religion, equal rights or human rights in general, and/or war crimes against civilization or the violation of international law as a (possible) cause of the continuation/ escalation of the Syrian conflict?
- 4) *Religious prescriptions*: does the article mentions extremists or jihadists, disagreement between diverse religious groups, and/or the character or culture of religious groups as a (possible) cause of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
- 5) *Particular triggers*: does the article mentions the brutal arrest of the boys of Daraa, movement through social media, the many (innocent, civilian) victims, and/or a chemical weapons attack as a (possible) cause of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
- 6) *Others*: this is a residual category for unforeseen causal elements

To investigate data for prognostic frames, we looked for themes related to solutions, remedial strategies and steps taken to solve problems believed to be associated with the rebellion (i.e., the action plan). These ameliorative action steps may be hypothetical or already taken. The categories listed below are based upon our theoretical study of the policies of the countries in addition to the categories listed by Benford and Snow (2007, pp.9-10). Again, the rest category was qualitatively examined after coding in order to see if new categories or sub-elements emerged. By pre-coding 18% of the articles, we split the broad military action frame in three subcategories that were often mentioned and added some specific elements in the category ‘diplomacy’. By doing that, we ended up with a comprehensive list of possible prognosis. Each of the categories contains specific elements that need to be mentioned explicitly. Based on recurring elements in literature, our theoretical considerations and our pre-coded dataset, we developed the following list of possible prognoses:

- 1) *Military action*: (a) does the article mentions suppressing the fights with action by their military, and/or a no-fly zone as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict (intervention)? (b) does the article only mentions military assistance as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict (assistance)? (c) does the article mentions that any military action is rejected or will only deteriorate the Syrian conflict (rejection)?

- 2) *Governmental changes*: does the article mentions the dismissal of President Bashar al-Assad or his entire regime and/or the appointment of a new government as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
- 3) *Diplomacy*: does the article mentions open dialogue between two or more major players of the Syrian conflict, an international trial, and/or at least a peace agreement/conference as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
- 4) *Monetary action*: does the article mentions economic cooperation with other countries of the international community to provide monetary support, and/or economic measures against one or more parties involved as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
- 5) *Internal reforms*: does the article mentions internal reforms in terms of political issues, socio-economic issues, religious issues and/or the improvement of human rights as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
- 6) *Dismantling chemical weapons*: does the article mentions internal the destruction of the Syrian stockpile of chemical weapons as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
- 7) *Others*: this is a residual category for unforeseen remedial elements.

### **4.3. Inter- and intracoder reliability**

Although a deductive, quantitative method is used in an attempt to remove subjectivity, it is unavoidable to sacrifice some reliability because of the hidden meaning structure behind frames. In this master thesis, we tried to secure reliability by limiting ourselves to frames that are clearly mutually exclusive and by working with simple yes/no questions. As reliability is a necessary condition for validity (Van Gorp, 2010, pp. 99-100), it is scientifically important to take inter- and intracoder reliability into account (van den Hoonaard, 2008, pp. 446-447). Usually, reliability is based on the idea that individual sets of items should produce results consistent with the overall questionnaire (Fields, 2009, p. 674).

Firstly, a subsample of 64 articles – 10 percent of the material – was coded double to estimate intercoder reliability. We randomly selected articles from the newspapers, which made that 6 articles of *DT*, 17 articles of *the DT*, 16 articles of *LF*, 19 article of *the NYT* and 6 articles of *the MT* were coded by two independent coders. Cohen's kappa – a conservative measure of agreement that takes chance agreement into account – was moderate to excellent for the generic frames with kappa = .85 for the conflict frame, .76 for the human interest frame, 1.00 for the economic consequences frame, .88 for the morality frame and .63 for the responsibility frame. Kappa reached .93 for the diagnostic and .96 for the prognostic frames. Lastly, a kappa of .87 was attained for the nationalisation frame.

Secondly, as we pre-coded 10 percent of our articles and saved it separately before proceeding with the core analysis, we can assess intracoder reliability, providing an extra test by estimating the relative consistency of judgments within one coder over time. More specifically, it checks the amount of inconsistency (i.e., measurement errors) resulting from different factors such as neglect, noise, fatigue, and fluctuation of targets' behaviours that occurs during a period of time (Chen & Krauss, 2004, s.p.). The procedure used – similar to the test-retest reliability – yielded an intracoder reliability of kappa = .80 for the conflict frame, .88 for the human interest frame, .71 for the economic consequences frame, .68 for the morality frame and .89 for the responsibility frame. Kappa reached .71 for the diagnostic and .77 for the prognostic frames. Lastly, a kappa of .88 was attained for the nationalisation frame.



## 5. Results

This section displays all results needed to answer our research questions and validate the hypotheses. Firstly, an overview of the number and length of the articles is presented in order to answer the questions about the attention paid to the Syrian conflict (RQ1 and RQ2). Secondly, the prevalence of the five generic plus the nationalisation frames is given (RQ3), followed by the comparative analyses between the newspapers (RQ4) and across periods (RQ5 and RQ6). Finally, a content analysis is provided to examine what explanations and solutions for the Syrian conflict are offered to the readers in order to answer the questions about the framing of the Syrian conflict in more detail. After investigating the prevalence (RQ3), we wondered whether different newspapers offer different diagnoses and prognoses (RQ4); and whether the periods cause any difference (RQ5 and RQ6).

As stated before, cautiousness is recommended as Cronbach Alpha was not always  $>.70$ . However, Nunnally (1978) stated that ‘time and energy can be saved in early stages of research (e.g., a short-term master thesis) by working with instruments that have only modest reliability’. Moreover, a Cronbach’s Alpha between  $.60$  and  $.70$  is not uncommon in framing research (e.g., Banks et al., 1995, p. 180; Lance et al., 2006, p. 205).

## **5.1. Attention to the Syrian conflict**

### **5.1.1. Number of newspaper articles**

In order to answer the research question and hypotheses about the quantity of articles; Table 2 shows the distribution according to the newspapers (RQ1 with H1a and H1b) and periods (RQ2 with H2a, H2b and H2c). First and foremost, most striking was the substantial number of articles from the American journal (191 articles, 30.0%), the moderate number of articles from the French and British papers (167 and 154 articles, 26.2% and 24.2%) and the small number of articles from the Dutch and Russian newspapers (63 and 62 articles, 9.9% and 9.7%). As expected, based on the governmental responses to the Syrian conflict and on the concept ‘ethnocentrism’ (Gans, 1979, p. 42), this corresponded with the involvement of the countries on the international level. Research question 1 is thus answered and hypotheses 1a and 1b confirmed as far as the number of articles is concerned.

Second, we compared three periods to see whether major events influence coverage. The publication date was coded in our analysis and clustered into three categories: before the gas attack, after the gas attack, and after the agreement. As expected, the Syrian war caught the attention after the chemical weapons attack on 21 August in comparison with the daily reporting before the assault. In absolute numbers, there were 66 articles ( $M = .10$ ,  $SD = .30$ ) published before 21 August and 432 articles ( $M = .68$ ,  $SD = .47$ ) between 22 August

and 10 September. This difference was statistically significant,  $t(636) = -21.56$ ,  $p(\text{two-tailed})^4 < .001$ . Thus hypothesis 2a is confirmed. Interestingly and contrary to hypothesis 2b, the crisis disappeared out of the news after an agreement on destroying Syria's chemical stockpile was reached. Only 139 articles ( $M = .22$ ,  $SD = .41$ ) were published between 17 September and 24 October. This was statistically less than the number of articles published in period 2,  $t(636) = 14.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . Hence, an argument is made for the fact that a diplomatic agreement cannot be considered as a classic key event in this casus. This could be explained by the fact that the agreement temporarily tempered the conflict. Less conflict leads to less coverage as 'conflict will be emphasised, conciliation not' (Galtung & Ruge, 1965, p. 84) and as the following news will contain less news value (Gans, 1979, p. 16).

When the data was qualitatively analysed in more detail as can be seen in Figure 2, it is interesting to note that *the Moscow Times* was the only journal that increased its coverage after the agreement. This is in line with the fact that Russia only became a key player in the conflict since the diplomatic success of President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov in reaching that agreement. Thus hypothesis 2c is confirmed.

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<sup>4</sup> All tests of non-directional research questions/hypotheses are two-tailed.

### 5.1.2. Length of the articles

The attention to the Syrian war is not only measured in the number of articles, but also in the length of articles. In general, the analysed articles had an average length of 697.11 words ( $SD = 432.49$ ). The shortest article consisted of merely thirteen words<sup>5</sup>; the longest of 3658 words. A majority of the articles (55.10%) counted less words than the average of 697 words and about one fifth (21.04%) of the articles contained more than 1000 words.

In order to answer research question 1 and related hypotheses properly, Table 3 represents the means and standard deviations of the length of articles per newspaper. At first glance, a significant effect of the newspapers on the length of the articles was noticed,  $F(4, 632) = 32.80, p < .001$ . The Games-Howell post-hoc test showed that average length of the articles in *De Telegraaf* ( $M = 417.95, SD = 281.16$ ) was significantly shorter (all  $p < .01$ ) and the length of articles in *the New York Times* ( $M = 956.40, SD = 358.75$ ) was significantly longer (all  $p < .001$ ) than all other newspapers. Thus research question 1 is completely answered and hypotheses 1a and 1b are confirmed. Moreover, contrary to hypotheses 2a and 2b there were no significant differences in length between the periods,  $F(2, 634) = 1.02, p = .36$ ; but there was a significant effect of journalistic genre,  $F(5, 630) = 11.00, p < .001$ , with reports ( $M = 1547.43, SD = 25.32$ ) being significantly longer than all other genres with the exclusion of interviews (all  $p < .001$ ).

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<sup>5</sup> Syria threat to oil: escalation of crisis sparks fears of spike in price.

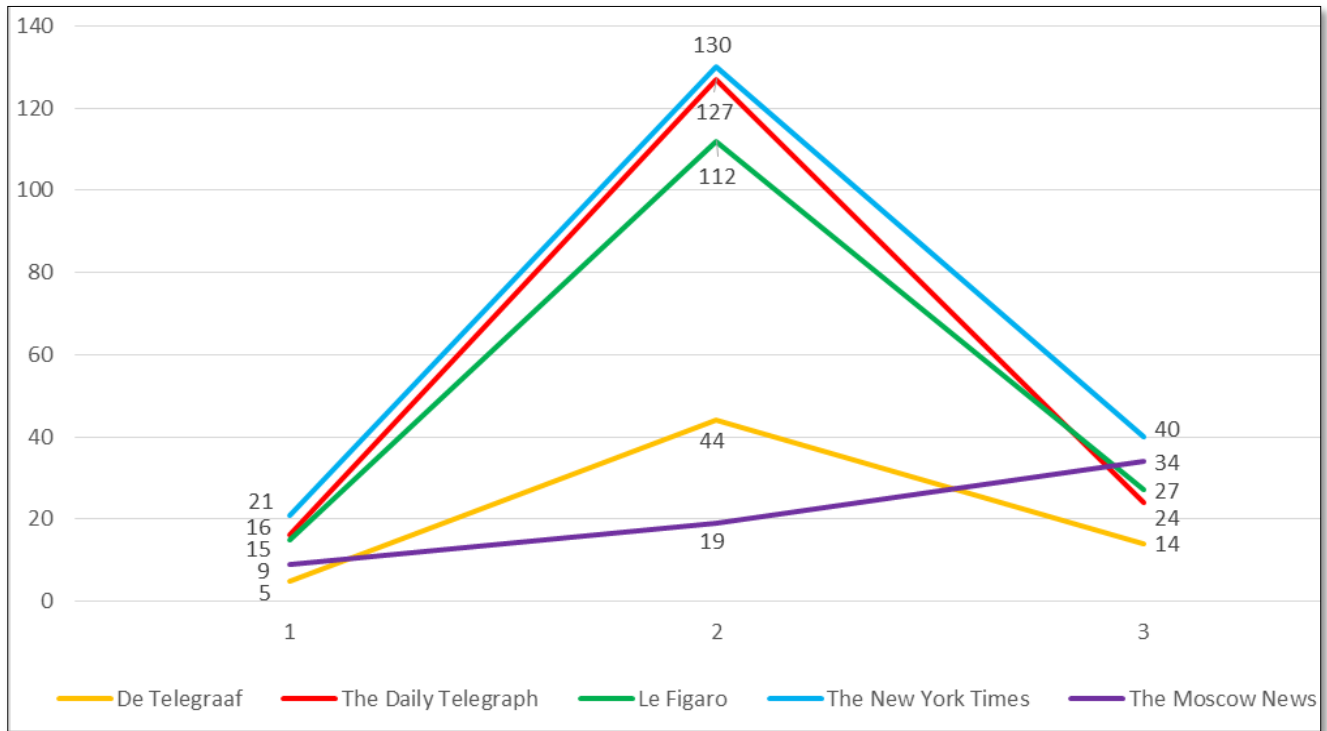
**TABLE 2. Number of articles per period in each newspaper**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Period 1</b>	<b>Period 2</b>	<b>Period 3</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total percentage</b>
De Telegraaf	5	44	14	<b>63</b>	<b>9.9%</b>
The Daily Telegraph	16	127	24	<b>167</b>	<b>26.2%</b>
Le Figaro	15	112	27	<b>154</b>	<b>24.2%</b>
The New York Times	21	130	40	<b>191</b>	<b>30.0%</b>
The Moscow Times	9	19	34	<b>62</b>	<b>9.7%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>637</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Total percentage</b>	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>67.8%</b>	<b>21.8%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

**TABLE 3. Average word length of newspaper articles**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
De Telegraaf	417.95	281.16
The Daily Telegraph	616.96	429.76
Le Figaro	603.10	356.44
The New York Times	956.40	433.23
The Moscow Times	631.42	358.75
<b>Total</b>	<b>697.11</b>	<b>432.49</b>

**FIGURE 2. Number of articles per period in each newspaper.**



## 5.2. Generic framing of the Syrian conflict

The third research question investigated the prevalence of the frames and their combinations, with the expectation that the nationalisation and the conflict frame will be used most frequently. To observe this, a multi-item scale was made for the conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, responsibility and nationalisation frame by averaging the scores on the items that constructed a frame.

At first, we measured the average prevalence of each of those six frames. Our frequency analysis results showed that, overall, the nationalisation frame ( $M = .37$ ,  $SD = .42$ ) was by far the most commonly used frame, followed by the responsibility frame ( $M = .25$ ,  $SD = .29$ ). The conflict frame ( $M = .20$ ,  $SD = .27$ ) was moderately exploited. The morality frame ( $M = .13$ ,  $SD = .25$ ) and human interest frame ( $M = .11$ ,  $SD = .25$ ) were less frequently used, whereas the economic consequences frame ( $M = .06$ ,  $SD = .20$ ) hardly seemed to play a role at all.

Second, we assessed the relationship between the frames with the aim of answer the second part of the third research question. At first glance, you can see in Table 4 that there were significant correlations, although they were not especially strong. The strongest relationship existed between the human interest frame and morality frame ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The more human interest items were found, the more the article contained morality elements. The responsibility frame was related to the nationalisation frame ( $r = .16$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and

to a lesser extent to the morality frame ( $r = .11, p < .01$ ). The more responsibility items were found, the more the article was framed in the light of the own national interests or morality. Moreover, the economic consequences frame was also significantly and negatively related to the responsibility frame ( $r = -.14, p < .001$ ), conflict frame ( $r = -.14, p < .001$ ) and in a lesser extent to the morality frame ( $r = -.09, p < .05$ ). In other words, the more economic consequences items are found, the less attention will be devoted by the journalist to responsibility, conflict and morality items.

In addition, we assessed the relationship between two possible control variables (i.e., journalistic genre and word length) and the frames so as to optimise further analyses. It is possible that opinion pages and reports provide a unique opportunity to study framing as they contain beliefs expressed by the citizenry and journalists. It could be argued that those articles will be more heavily framed, just like longer articles since there is more space available for potential framing (Hoffman & Slater, 2007, p. 58). The simplest way to look at whether two variables are associated is to look at the covariation. These correlations are displayed in Table 5. There were significant relationships, although they were not particularly powerful. The strongest relationship was found between the nationalisation frame and the number of words ( $r = .21, p < .001$ ). The longer the articles, the more likely the nationalisation frame occurred. Additionally, the longer the article, the more the human interest frame ( $r = .15, p < .001$ ) and responsibility frame ( $r = .13, p < .01$ ) were likely to occur.



Furthermore, journalistic genre was significantly related to the economic consequences ( $r = -.10, p < .01$ ), morality ( $r = -.09, p < .05$ ) and human interest frame ( $r = .08, p < .05$ ). As we used nominal categories with seven options, we cannot know conclusively which categories differ on the basis of simple correlations. We, therefore, conducted ANOVAs with those frames as dependent variables. There was a significant effect of the genre on the level of economic consequences frame ( $F(5, 631) = 2.44, p < .05$ ). The Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that news items ( $M = .08, SD = .21$ ) were significantly (all  $p < .001$ ) more framed in terms of economic consequences than other articles, with the exception of external opinions. In contrast to the significant correlation, there was no significant main effect of the journalistic genre on the levels of the morality frame ( $F(5, 631) = 1.95, p = .09$ ) or the human interest frame ( $F(5, 631) = 1.74, p = .12$ ). Since those correlations/ANOVAs were not sufficiently strong, we excluded the variables as covariate in further analyses. Only with respect to the nationality frame<sup>6</sup>, we have controlled for the influence of the length of the article.

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<sup>6</sup> As this was the only correlation above .20 (i.e.,  $r = .22, p < .001$ ).

**TABLE 4. Correlations between the six frames**

	<b>Conflict</b>	<b>Human Interest</b>	<b>Econom. conseq.</b>	<b>Morality</b>	<b>Respons.</b>	<b>Nation.</b>
<b>Conflict</b>	1	-.015	-.141 <sup>a</sup>	-.021	.071	.050
<b>Human Interest</b>	-.015	1	-.030	.177 <sup>a</sup>	.021	-.062
<b>Econom. Conseq.</b>	-.141 <sup>a</sup>	-.030	1	-.085 <sup>b</sup>	-.140a	-.068
<b>Morality</b>	.021	.177 <sup>a</sup>	-.085 <sup>b</sup>	1	.111 <sup>a</sup>	.060
<b>Respons.</b>	.071	.021	-.140 <sup>a</sup>	.111 <sup>a</sup>	1	.162 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Nation.</b>	.044	-.073	-.057	.046	.156 <sup>a</sup>	1

<sup>a</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

<sup>b</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**TABLE 5. Correlations between control variables and frames**

	<b>Conflict</b>	<b>Human Interest</b>	<b>Econom. conseq.</b>	<b>Morality</b>	<b>Respons.</b>	<b>Nation.</b>
<b>Word length</b>	.042	.145 <sup>a</sup>	.027	.056	.126 <sup>a</sup>	.214 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Genre</b>	-.050	.083 <sup>b</sup>	-.104 <sup>a</sup>	.091 <sup>b</sup>	.011	.014

<sup>a</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

<sup>b</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### 5.2.1. Frame variation between newspapers

The fourth research question examined whether there was variation in the framing among the different print media. Hence, we conducted a MANOVA with type of news frames (conflict vs. human interest vs. economic consequences vs. morality vs. responsibility vs. nationalisation) as within-story factor and the five newspapers as a between-story factor. A significant MANOVA was followed up with separate ANOVAs on each of the dependent variables. A preliminary remark should be made as the homogeneity assumption has sometimes been violated. As a general rule in this situation, we can presume that Hotellings  $T^2$  statistic is robust. Moreover, because the interpretation of the significant MANOVAs rested on the interpretation of significant univariate effects, the adjusted post-hoc tests<sup>7</sup> were used.

Using Hotelling's trace statistic, there was a significant effect of the newspapers on frame usage,  $T = .12$ ,  $F(24, 2502) = 3.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Separate univariate ANOVAs on the outcome variables revealed a significant effect on the human interest ( $F(4, 632) = 4.41$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ ), morality ( $F(4, 632) = 2.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ ) and nationalisation frame ( $F(4, 632) = 4.07$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ ). This effect on the nationalisation frame maintained after controlling for the length of the article,  $F(4, 631) = 2.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ .

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<sup>7</sup> When the variances were not equal, the Games-Howell procedure was used. Bonferroni was chosen when the variances were equal.

As regards the human interest frame, post-hoc tests revealed that *the Daily Telegraph* ( $M = .17$ ,  $SD = .27$ ) adopted this frame significantly more frequently than *Le Figaro* ( $M = .06$ ,  $SD = .18$ ) or *the Moscow Times* ( $M = .05$ ,  $SD = .16$ ). European journalists ( $M = .15$ ,  $SD = .27$ ) and especially reporters of *the Daily Telegraph* ( $M = .17$ ,  $SD = .27$ ) used the morality frame more often than journalists of *the Moscow Times* ( $M = .06$ ,  $SD = .16$ ). The nationalisation frame was most commonly used by all newspapers, but the Russian ( $M = .48$ ,  $SD = .43$ ) and American ( $M = .41$ ,  $SD = .42$ ) dailies nationalised the Syrian crisis significantly more than the European ones ( $M = .33$ ,  $SD = .42$ ). When looking at the European papers, national interests were most highlighted in *the Daily Telegraph* ( $M = .39$ ,  $SD = .43$ ) and least in *De Telegraaf* ( $M = .23$ ,  $SD = .38$ ) (all  $p < .01$ ).

Although, there was no<sup>8</sup> significant main effect of newspaper on the economic consequences frame,  $F(4, 632) = 2.14$ ,  $p = .074$ , the post-hoc test revealed that *Le Figaro* ( $M = .03$ ,  $SD = .14$ ) used this frame significantly ( $p < .05$ ) less than *the Daily Telegraph* ( $M = .09$ ,  $SD = .24$ ). European newspapers, however, did not focus more on economic consequences as expected in hypotheses 4a. As seen by the low averages, all newspapers barely depicted the Syrian conflict in terms of its economic consequences ( $M = .06$ ,  $SD = .20$ ). There was also little evidence of variation in responsibility and conflict framing, the second and third most used frames by all newspapers.

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<sup>8</sup> Cohen (2008) shows that it is unusual but not impossible to find a non-significant omnibus ANOVA with a significant post-hoc test. Note that the ANOVA was close to being significant.

### **5.2.2. Frame variation between periods**

The fifth and sixth research questions examined whether there was a variation in framing respectively between the period before or after the gas attack and between the period after the gas attack and after the agreement. The MANOVA with type of news frames (conflict vs. human interest vs. economic consequences vs. morality vs. responsibility vs. nationalisation) as within-story factor and the three periods as a between-story factor showed a significant effect of the three periods on frame usage,  $T = .12$ ,  $F(12, 2556) = 6.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ . The significant MANOVAs (i.e., conflict, human interest, responsibility and nationalisation frame) were followed up with two separate independent T-tests on each key event.

#### **5.2.2.1. Key event 1: sarin gas attack**

To answer the fifth research question, the framing before and after the gas attack (key event 1) was compared through a T-test. On average, the conflict and human interest frames were used more before the gas attack (respectively  $M = .37$ ,  $SD = .35$  and  $M = .19$ ,  $SD = .31$ ) than afterwards (respectively  $M = .19$ ,  $SD = .25$  and  $M = .10$ ,  $SD = .23$ ). These differences were significant,  $t(75,95) = 3.95$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $t(76,30) = 2.10$ ,  $p < .05$ . The economic consequences, responsibility and nationalisation frames, however, were reported less before the gas attack (respectively  $M = .02$ ,  $SD = .08$ ;  $M = .18$ ,  $SD = .24$  and  $M = .27$ ,  $SD = .42$ ) in comparison with the period after

the gas attack ( $M = .08$ ,  $SD = .22$ ;  $M = .28$ ,  $SD = .29$  and  $M = .42$ ,  $SD = .43$ ). These differences were significant,  $t(248.75) = -3.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $t(96.69) = -3.23$ ,  $p < .01$  and  $t(496) = -2.56$ ,  $p < .05$ . There was little evidence of differences between the periods as to the morality frame. In conclusion, the use of sarin gas decreased the use of the conflict and human interest frames and increased the use of the economic consequences, responsibility and nationalisation frames.

#### **5.2.2.2. Key event 2: obliteration-agreement**

To answer the sixth research question, the framing before and after the agreement on the destruction of Syria's chemical weapon stockpile (key event 2) was compared through a T-test. On average, the conflict, responsibility and nationalisation frames were used more after the gas attack than after the agreement (respectively  $M = .14$ ,  $SD = .23$ ;  $M = .20$ ,  $SD = .27$  and  $M = .26$ ,  $SD = .37$ ). These differences were found to be statistically significant,  $t(569) = 2.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $t(569) = 3.13$ ,  $p < .01$  and  $t(266.16) = 4.11$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was little evidence neither as to any increase in framing after the agreement, nor for any difference between the periods in the human interest, economic consequences and morality frame. In conclusion, the agreement decreased the use of the conflict, responsibility and nationalisation frames. As there is less framing after the agreement, another argument is made for the fact that the agreement cannot be seen as a classic key event in this casus.

### **5.3. Diagnostic/prognostic framing of the Syrian conflict**

In the following paragraphs, we will analyse what specific causes and solutions are put forward as well as what differences between the newspapers and periods exist with the intention of painting a broader picture of the frame usage in covering the Syrian conflict.

#### **5.3.1. Diagnoses**

Firstly, we measured the average prevalence of each diagnosis to fully answer research question 3 (see Table 6). Journalists quoted a minimum of zero and a maximum of four possible causes for the continuation of the Syrian conflict. The vast majority of the articles (67.3%) did not offer any explanation to their readers for the Syrian conflict. One fourth of the articles mentioned one cause (25.6%), whereas a small 10 percent mentioned two or more causes for the continuation of the Syrian war. On average, .42 ( $M = .42, SD = .69$ ) solutions were mentioned. Frequency analyses showed that, overall, a particular trigger ( $M = .19, SD = .40$ ) was mostly mentioned as a cause of the continuation of the conflict. After a qualitative study of this category, it was clear that the chemical weapon attack was the most frequent cited reason. The specific protests that started the uprising or the importance of social media as catalyst for the conflict were nearly mentioned three years after the protests. Tensions between religious groups or the rise of jihadism and extremism ( $M = .10, SD = .30$ ) were moderately mentioned, followed by a lack of

human rights ( $M = .08$ ,  $SD = .27$ ). Political causes ( $M = .02$ ,  $SD = .12$ ) and other unforeseen diagnoses ( $M = .02$ ,  $SD = .14$ ) were less frequently used, whereas the socio-economic causes ( $M = .01$ ,  $SD = .10$ ) hardly seemed to play a role in the articles at all.

Secondly, we assessed the relationship between possible control variables (i.e., journalistic genre and word length) and diagnostic framing. In contrast to journalistic genre ( $r = .04$ ,  $p = .38$ ), word length does play a sufficient and significant role ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Consequently, we included word length as a covariate in further analyses. So we computed a continue variable of three categories: less than the average of 697 words, between 698 and 1000 words and more than 1001 words. The ANOVA also showed a significant main effect of word length on number of diagnoses,  $F(2, 634) = 16.71$ ,  $p < .001$ . Obviously, the longer the article, the more possible causes for the continuation of the Syrian conflict were cited (all  $p < .05$ ).

### **5.3.1.1. Frame variation between newspapers**

The fourth research question examined whether there was variation in the framing among the print media. Will different newspapers offer other causes to their readers (while controlling for length of the articles)? When looking at the binary category whether or not the newspapers mentioned at least one reason, a significant association within shorter articles was detected,  $\chi^2(4) = 19.64$ ;  $p = .001$ . Proportionally, *De Telegraaf* (41.1%) and *the New York Times*



(37.8%) talked more about one or more reasons why the Syrian people revolted in comparison with the other newspapers (less than 27.3%). At first glance, the medium plays also a significant role in number of causes offered,  $F(4, 632) = 3.50, p < .01$ . Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that *the New York Times* ( $M = .55, SD = .81$ ) offered more causes to their readers compared to *the Daily Telegraph* ( $M = .33, SD = .55$ ). It is clear, however, that this can be partially explained by the longer articles in this paper as the relationship becomes insignificant after controlling for the length of the articles,  $F(4, 631) = 2.07, p = .083$ .

When looking at specific reasons, while controlling for the length of the article, there was a significant association for very long articles ( $> 1000$  words) between the newspapers and whether or not the diagnosis 'political causes' was mentioned,  $\chi^2(4) = 21.16, p = .01$ . *De Telegraaf* gave proportionally more political reasons (66.7%) in longer articles, in comparison with the other newspapers (less than 5.8%). This outcome should be interpreted with caution as only three articles of *De Telegraaf* were very long. With regards to the lack of human rights, we found significant effect of the newspaper for short articles (less than 697 words),  $\chi^2(4) = 14.82, p = .005$ . *The New York Times* mentioned the lack of human rights in Syria (17.8%) proportionally more than the other newspapers (less than 7.1%). There were no significant associations between the newspapers and whether or not one or more socio-economic reasons, religious prescriptions, particular triggers, and other causes were mentioned.

### 5.3.1.2. Frame variation between periods

The fifth and sixth research questions examined whether there was variation in the framing across the three periods. Will a key event also causes a change in diagnostic framing (while controlling for word length of the articles)? When looking at the binary category whether or not the newspapers mentioned one or more reasons, no significant effect of the key events on mentioning at least one diagnosis was found,  $\chi^2(2) = .80, p = .69$ . One-third of all articles listed at least one diagnosis, regardless of the article was published before the gas attack (30.3%), after the gas attack (33.8%), or after the chemical-weapon agreement (30.2%). The period did not play a significant role in the number of causes offered as well,  $F(2, 634) = .35, p = .706$ . This remained unchanged after controlling for the length of the articles,  $F(2, 633) = .18, p = .837$ .

When looking at specific reasons, while controlling for the length of the article, there was a significant association for very long articles (> 1000 words) between the period and whether or not the diagnosis 'socio-economic reasons' was mentioned,  $\chi^2(4) = 9.83; p < .01$ . There were proportionally more socio-economic reasons presented before the gas attack (20.0%), in comparison with after the gas attack (1.1%) or after the agreement (6.5%). This outcome should be interpreted with caution as only 10 articles were very long before the gas attack. With regards to the religious prescriptions, we found significant effect of the period for longer articles (> 697 words),  $\chi^2(2) = 7.60, p < .05$  and for very long articles (> 1000

words),  $\chi^2(2) = 6.70, p < .05$ . Very few religious prescriptions are mentioned after the gas attack (7.4% or 9.7%) compared to before the gas attack (29.4% or 30.0%) or after the agreement (14.8% or 25.8%). As expected, the chemical weapon attack was mentioned more as a specific cause of the continuation of the Syrian conflict in all articles after the attack, but disappeared out of the news again after the agreement. This difference was also significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 21.99, p < .001$ . There were no significant differences between the periods considering political, human rights or other unforeseen causes.

### **5.3.2. Prognoses**

Firstly, we measured the average prevalence of each prognosis to fully answer research question 3 (see Table 7 and 8). Journalists quoted a minimum of zero and a maximum of five possible solutions for the continuation of the Syrian conflict. One-third of the articles (30.9%) remained silent about how to resolve the problem, whereas most of the articles (60.1%) did offer one or more solutions to their readers. One-third mentioned only one possible solution, while a large 10 percent suggested three or more solutions for the escalation of the Syrian war. On average, 1.20 ( $M = 1.20, SD = 1.09$ ) solutions were mentioned. Our frequency analyses showed that, overall, a military intervention ( $M = .38, SD = .49$ ) was seen as the most proper answer to the conflict. At the same time, though, any military action

was frequently rejected ( $M = .25$ ,  $SD = .43$ ) as it will only deteriorate the situation. Diplomacy ( $M = .21$ ,  $SD = .41$ ) was about as often mentioned as a possible solution. Journalists moderately referred to the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons ( $M = .12$ ,  $SD = .33$ ) and governmental changes ( $M = .09$ ,  $SD = .29$ ), followed by military assistance ( $M = .08$ ,  $SD = .28$ ). Other unforeseen solutions ( $M = .03$ ,  $SD = .16$ ) were rarely brought up, whereas monetary actions ( $M = .02$ ,  $SD = .14$ ) and internal reforms ( $M = .02$ ,  $SD = .12$ ) hardly seemed to play a role in the articles at all. As we investigated the prevalence of all frames, research question 3 is fully answered.

Secondly, we assessed the relationship between possible control variables (i.e., journalistic genre and word length) and diagnostic framing. In contrast to journalistic genre ( $r = .06$ ,  $p = .16$ ), word length did play a sufficient and significant role ( $r = .17$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Consequently, we included word length as a covariate in further analyses in the same way as before. The ANOVA also showed a significant main effect of word length on number of prognoses,  $F(2, 634) = 10.53$ ,  $p < .001$ . Obviously, short articles cited less possible solutions to the Syrian conflict ( $p < .001$ ).

### **5.3.2.1. Frame variation between newspapers**

The fourth research question examined whether there was variation in the framing among the print media. Will different newspapers offer other solutions to their readers (while controlling for length of

the articles)? When looking at the binary category whether or not the newspapers mentioned one or more prognoses, it seemed that *the New York Times* mentioned a possible solution less frequently. Although 53.3% of the short articles in *the New York Times* did not mention any solution at all in comparison to 28.3% of *the Daily Telegraph*, 34.6% of *Le Figaro*, 35.7% of *De Telegraaf* and 36.4% of *the Moscow Times*, this difference failed to reach significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 8.86, p = .065$ . Newspaper did not play a significant role on the number of solutions offered,  $F(4, 632) = .68, p = .608$ , even after controlling for the length of the articles,  $F(4, 631) = .57, p = .688$ .

When looking at specific reasons, while controlling for the length of the article, we found a significant effect of the newspaper on the suggestion of destroying the chemical weapons for short ( $\chi^2(4) = 38.63, p < .001$ ) and very long articles ( $\chi^2(4) = 16.64, p = .005$ ). As predicted, *the Moscow Times* (42.4% and 55.6%) mentioned the dismantling of chemical weapons substantially more than *DT* (5.4% and 0%), *LF* (6.7% and 0%), *the DT* (8.0% and 4.2%), and *the NYT* (11.1% and 16.3%). Although *De Telegraaf* mentioned governmental changes more as a possible solution in shorter articles (14.3%) in comparison with the other newspapers (less than 8.9%), this difference just failed to reach significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 8.93, p = .059$ . Contrary to the expectations, European newspapers do not focus more on monetary actions. There were also no significant differences between the newspapers considering diplomatic solutions, internal reforms, and other unforeseen solutions.

Furthermore, we suspected that the British, French and American newspapers will be more in favour of military intervention in comparison with the Russian newspaper, with the Dutch newspaper in between those papers. There is a significant effect of medium on favouring military intervention,  $\chi^2(4) = 15.07, p < .01$ . As expected, the Western articles (more than 36.1%) are mostly in favour of intervening in the Syrian conflict as opposed to *the Moscow Times* (19.4%). Especially, the high percentage of Dutch articles supporting intervention (41.3%) is remarkable. When controlling for length of the articles, the effect lingers for short,  $\chi^2(4) = 19.50, p = .001$ , and medium sized articles,  $\chi^2(4) = 12.24, p < .05$ . Only in short articles does *the New York Times* not support intervention more than *the Moscow Times*. Additionally, we expected that the Russian paper resisted any military intervention more, but that medium-effect failed to reach significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 5.53, p = .237$ . There was also no significant difference between the newspapers considering military assistance. As we found significant differences between the papers concerning the generic, diagnostic and prognostic frames, the fourth research question is answered.

### **5.3.2.2. Frame variation between periods**

The fifth and sixth research questions examined whether there was variation in the framing across the three periods. Will a key event also causes a change in prognostic framing (while controlling for

word length of the articles)? When looking at the binary category whether or not the newspapers mentioned one or more solutions, there was a significant and substantial effect of the key events on mentioning at least one prognosis,  $\chi^2(2) = 53.46, p < .001$ . There is more often a solution mentioned after the gas attack (77.8%) than before (39.4%) the attack or after the agreement (56.1%). The period played a significant role in the number of prognoses offered as well,  $F(2, 634) = 11.82, p < .001$ . Bonferroni post-hoc test revealed that there were significantly ( $p < .001$ ) more solutions cited after the gas attack ( $M = 1.33, SD = .05$ ) than before ( $M = .74, SD = .13$ ). In addition, our presumption that the agreement cannot be regarded as a key event in this casus is fortified as the prognostic framing dropped ( $p < .01$ ) again afterwards ( $M = 1.01, SD = .09$ ). This remained unchanged after controlling for the length of the articles,  $F(2, 633) = 10.57, p < .001$ .

When looking at specific solutions there was a significant association between the periods and all military options in short, longer and very long articles. There was a substantial effect of the period on whether or not the prognosis 'military intervention' was mentioned,  $\chi^2(2) = 114.21, p < .001$ . The news favours an intervention more after the gas attack (52.3%), than before attack (7.6%) of after the agreement (8.6%). In contrast, military assistance was suggested more often before the chemical attack (21.2%) then afterwards (8.8%) and it almost disappeared as a recommendation after the agreement (1.4%). This difference was significant,  $\chi^2(2) =$

22.73,  $p < .001$ . Any military action was more often rejected after the gas attack (33.6%) than before (4.5%) or than after the agreement (7.2%). This difference was significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 55.41$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, there was a significant difference in number of governmental solutions offered in long articles,  $\chi^2(2) = 8.30$ ,  $p < .05$ , as more such solutions were suggested before the gas attack (30.0%) than thereafter (less than 6.5%). As expected, dismantling Syria's chemical weapons was recommended more often in the articles after the agreement on such obliteration (40.3%). The news did not mention this before the gas attack (1.5%) or even between the gas attack and the agreement (5.1%). This difference was also substantial and significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 127.94$ ,  $p < .001$ . There were no significant differences between the periods considering diplomatic or monetary solutions, internal reforms or other unforeseen options. As we found significant differences between the periods concerning the generic, diagnostic and prognostic frames, the fifth and sixth research questions are fully answered.

One concluding remark should be made about all above analyses (of the diagnostic and prognostic frames), as not all of cells counted more than five. Most cells did count enough items, but caution should still be recommended when interpreting these results.



**TABLE 6. Diagnostic framing per newspaper and period**

	<b>Diagnoses</b>						<b>Total</b>
	Political ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Socio- economic ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Human rights ( <i>n</i> = 52)	Ethnic/ religious ( <i>n</i> = 62)	Reasons ( <i>n</i> = 123)	Others ( <i>n</i> = 12)	( <i>n</i> = 265)
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.77%</b>	<b>2.26%</b>	<b>19.62%</b>	<b>23.40%</b>	<b>46.41%</b>	<b>4.53%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Newspaper</b>							
De Telegraaf	2	0	5	7	15	3	<b>32</b>
The Daily Telegraph	1	0	11	10	29	4	<b>55</b>
Le Figaro	1	2	12	13	21	3	<b>52</b>
The New York Times	6	4	23	25	46	1	<b>105</b>
The Moscow Times	0	0	1	7	12	1	<b>21</b>
<b>Period</b>							
8 July – 20 Aug.	0	2	3	14	2	3	<b>24</b>
22 Aug. – 10 Sept.	7	2	39	29	104	5	<b>186</b>
17 Sept. – 24 Oct.	3	2	10	19	17	4	<b>55</b>

**TABLE 7. Prognostic framing per newspaper and period**

<b>Prognoses</b>								
	Military action ( <i>n</i> = 455)	Governmental changes ( <i>n</i> = 58)	Diplomacy ( <i>n</i> = 132)	Monetary action ( <i>n</i> = 12)	Internal reforms ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Dismantling ( <i>n</i> = 79)	Others ( <i>n</i> = 17)	Total ( <i>n</i> = 308)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>18.83%</b>	<b>42.86%</b>	<b>3.90%</b>	<b>3.24%</b>	<b>25.65%</b>	<b>5.52%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Newspaper</b>								
De Telegraaf	32	9	9	3	2	3	5	<b>31</b>
The DT	55	11	31	6	4	14	6	<b>72</b>
Le Figaro	52	12	33	0	2	13	4	<b>64</b>
The NYT	105	23	40	1	2	25	2	<b>93</b>
The MT	22	3	19	2	0	24	0	<b>48</b>
<b>Period</b>								
8 July – 20 Aug.	78	9	14	0	1	1	2	<b>27</b>
22 Aug. – 10 Sept.	389	33	86	8	4	22	11	<b>164</b>
17 Sept. – 24 Oct.	138	16	32	4	5	56	4	<b>117</b>

**TABLE 8. Military prognostic framing per newspaper and period**

<b>Prognoses: military solutions</b>				
	Intervention ( <i>n</i> = 243)	Assistance ( <i>n</i> = 54)	Rejection ( <i>n</i> = 158)	<b>Total (<i>n</i> = 455)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>53.41%</b>	<b>11.87%</b>	<b>34.73%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Newspaper</b>				
De Telegraaf	26	3	12	<b>32</b>
The Daily Telegraph	89	14	44	<b>55</b>
Le Figaro	96	15	30	<b>52</b>
The New York Times	122	21	55	<b>105</b>
The Moscow Times	50	1	17	<b>22</b>
<b>Period</b>				
8 July – 20 Aug.	61	14	3	<b>78</b>
22 Aug. – 10 Sept.	206	38	145	<b>389</b>
17 Sept. – 24 Oct.	127	2	9	<b>138</b>

TABLE 9. Overview of the frame variations.

	RQ4: newspapers	RQ5: Period 1 vs. 2	RQ6: Period 2 vs. 3
<b>Generic frames</b>			
Conflict frame	0	↓	↓
Human interest frame	1	↓	0
Economic consequences frame	1 <sup>a</sup>	↑	0
Morality frame	1	0	0
Responsibility frame	0	↑	↓
<b>Diagnostic frames</b>			
Political causes	1	0	0
Socio-economic causes	0	↓ <sup>b</sup>	0
Lack of human rights	1	0	0
Religious prescriptions	0	↓	↑
Concrete reasons	0	↑	↓
<b>Prognostic frames</b>			
Military intervention	1	↑	↓
Military assistance	0	↓	↓
Military rejection	0	↑	↓

Governmental changes	0	↓ <sup>b</sup>	0
Diplomacy	0	0	0
Monetary action	0	0	0
Internal reforms	0	0	0
Dismantling chemical weapons	1	0	↑

**Nationalisation frame**

1	↑	↓
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- 1 Frame variation between newspapers is significant      ↑ Significant increase between periods
  - 1<sup>a</sup> No significant main effect but significant post-hoc test      ↑<sup>b</sup> Significant decrease between periods for long articles
  - 0 Frame variation is non-significant      ↓ Significant decrease between periods



## **6. Discussion**

In this part, the findings are discussed in relation to the hypotheses, research questions and theoretical background.

### **6.1. Answering the research questions and hypotheses about the coverage of the Syrian Conflict**

This study tried to clarify the recent coverage of the Syrian conflict from July to October 2013 in five relevant and prominent journals in their respective markets: *De Telegraaf* (The Netherlands), *Le Figaro* (France), *the Daily Telegraph* (the UK), *the New York Times* (the US) and *the Moscow Times* (Russia). Based on the literature study and policy documents, six exploratory research questions with corresponding hypotheses were formulated. First of all, the attention paid to the conflict was examined. It was expected that the number and the length of the articles would be influenced by the geopolitical role played by the countries involved. Second, the framing was investigated. To paint a complete picture, the relative visibility of diagnostic and prognostic frames was assessed in addition to the five generic frames of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and the nationalisation frame (Van Cauweberge et al., 2009). Next to the prevalence of those eight frames, the differences among the five newspapers were scrutinised. Differences in framing across the three periods were analysed as well.

### 6.1.1. Attention to the Syrian conflict

The attention in the national newspapers paid to the Syrian conflict reflected the geopolitical involvement of the national politicians and thus the concept of ‘ethnocentrism’ (Gans, 1979, p. 42) almost perfectly. On the one hand, the strikingly large number of notably longer articles from *the New York Times* matched the substantial role of President Obama in finding a solution and putting pressure on the Assad regime. The French President Hollande and British Prime Minister Cameron debated actively with the American President about possible actions– until the vote against the British intervention at the House of Commons. Their secondary, still important role was shown in the moderate number of articles in the French and British paper. The Netherlands, on the other hand, were a lesser protagonist, which was perfectly revealed in the small number of considerably shorter articles in *De Telegraaf*. An alternative explanation for the longer articles in *the New York Times* and the shorter ones in *De Telegraaf* could be the fact that *De Telegraaf* was rather closer to the sensationalist side of a continuum ranging from sensationalist to sober newspapers compared to the high-quality *the New York Times*. As to Russia, they did not play a changing role in the beginning of the research period which was indicated in the smaller quantity of articles. But, *the Moscow Times* was the only journal paying more attention to the conflict after the agreement. This coincided with the bigger involvement of Russia after the diplomatic success of President Putin and Minister Lavrov who reached the accord.



In addition to a comparison between the journals, we compared three periods to see whether major events influenced coverage. The sarin gas attack of 21 August 2013 and the following agreement of 14 September on the obliteration of Syria's chemical weapons were considered as key events, leading to three research periods (i.e., before the gas attack vs. after the gas attack vs. after the agreement). The Syrian war only caught the attention after the chemical weapons attack. It is remarkable that the killing of 100,000 or more with conventional weapons elicits little more than a concerned frown, while the death of comparatively few from poison gas triggers an enormous amount of coverage in newspapers and reactions on the geopolitical level. The crisis disappeared out of the news again after the pact to destroy Syria's chemical stockpile had been reached. It is arguable that the agreement tempered the conflict. Less conflict induces less coverage as 'conflict will be emphasised, conciliation not' (Galtung & Ruge, 1965, p. 84) and as subsequent news will contain less news value (Gans, 1979, p. 16).

### **6.1.2. Framing of the Syrian conflict**

The second aim of this research was to assess the framing of the Syrian conflict among different newspapers. To achieve this goal, we developed 36 framing questions to detect eight frames<sup>9</sup>. We studied the prevalence of these frames as well as the frame variation across

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<sup>9</sup> The conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, responsibility, diagnostic, prognostic and nationalisation frame.

five newspapers and three periods. Overall, the most commonly used frame was the nationalisation frame, followed by the responsibility and the conflict frame. The morality and human interest frame were used to a lesser extent, while the economic consequences frame hardly played any role at all. Moreover, the more an article provided a 'human face', the more it contained a moral message as well. In other words, when covering the Syrian conflict journalists mainly related the issue to their own country and to ideas of national politicians and people. They also tended to focus on controversies, fights, confrontations and different sides or on responsibilities.

The fact that the nationalisation frame was the most commonly used frame is in line with our expectations based on the news value ethnocentrism as 'it [ethnocentrism] comes through most explicitly in foreign news, which judges other countries by the extent to which they live up to or imitate [American] practices and values' (Gans, 1979, p. 42). Moreover, a link between the issue and the own country is an important criterion for journalists (Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005, pp. 234-236). This finding adds an interesting perspective and possible addition to the classic categorization of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000).

Considering the five generic frames of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the responsibility frame was most commonly used in this study. This dominance points to the fact that citizens expect their government to provide answers to international security and war-related problems. Hence, the news media can still be considered as

the Fourth Estate playing a crucial role in the management of a representative democracy by holding politicians accountable (Schultz, 1998, p. 15). The conflict frame was regularly used as well. Already half a century ago, Galtung and Ruge (1965) outlined the utility of conflict as a news selection criterion. Other previous studies also found that the conflict frame was the most prevalent frame (e.g., Neuman et al., 1992; Patterson, 1993, Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, de Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001).

By contrast, the economic consequences frame was found in a far lesser degree despite large investments of all authorities concerned, with major consequences for their country. It goes without saying that the destructive civil war has had, and still has, its impact on Syria's national economy as well. The outcome in this study forms a sharp contrast with previous research (e.g., Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, Van Cauwenberge et al., 2009) and challenges the generic character of the economic consequences frame. One may wonder whether this frame is still applicable in an international, disputed and violent context.

Likewise, it is noteworthy that such an emotionally contentious and controversial matter with numerous casualties is not morally questioned more often or framed more in human interest terms. This mediocre occurrence (mainly of the morality frame) is, nevertheless, in line with previous studies (e.g., Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) discussed the framing of European politics, a topic almost incomparable to the Syrian problem.

Notwithstanding, they identified *generic* frames applicable to all themes. Concerns can be raised since our research as well as the landmark study of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) failed to find a high occurrence of the morality frame. An important question is whether the morality frame should be used in future research. The goal of content analysis is to find a pattern of frequently used frames as a first step in media-effects research. But if a frame is barely used, will it still have effects? Several studies already opted to exclude the morality frame (e.g., de Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001; Van Cauwenberge et al., 2009).

In addition to the nationalisation frame and the five generic frames of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), we took a closer look at the diagnostic and prognostic frames. It was clear that papers offered more solutions than causes (or generic frames) to their readers. Almost two-third of the articles referred to one or more possible solutions as opposed to one-fourth that referred to a cause for the contemporary Syrian war. When paying a closer look, the chemical weapon attack was the most often cited cause. The other general diagnoses (i.e., religious hardening, lack of human rights, political and socio-economic causes) were barely mentioned, just like the graffiti-incident and following protests that caused the uprising in 2011. Only in a few cases, references to extremism or violated human rights were made. The main question one should consider is how the public can sketch an accurate picture of the context of the conflict in this way.

When looking at the prognoses, there was substantial debate about military actions. Despite the fact that military intervention was most frequently recommended, it was also highly contested. This painfully exposes the indecisiveness and discrepancies at the geopolitical level. Diplomacy was almost as often advised as a possible solution. Governmental changes were less frequently brought up, while monetary actions and internal reforms hardly seemed to play a role at all. This is at odds with the large economic pressure put on the Assad-regime and could distort the understanding of the people since it is possible that they will underestimate the economic efforts of their country.

It is important to acknowledge that these results may have important implications for public understanding and judgments about the Syrian conflict (Valkenburg, Semetko & de Vreese, 1999). Does the regular use of the nationalisation frame increase the involvement of the civilians? Will people be less favorable to financial assistance to Syria because there is hardly any attention to the price tag and economic needs of the country; and, consequently, do people have no understanding of the economic situation? What is the result of the lack of human interest of morality frames? Will the lack of diagnostic framing cause a lack of knowledge? Will the discussion about military intervention push the public opinion to one side? These questions do not fall within the scope of this master thesis, but their answers will provide vital information for policy makers, a.o..

### 6.1.2.1. Frame variation between newspapers

The next part of our research, the frame variation between the news outlets, led to some interesting findings. Considering the generic frames first, European newspapers were characterised by a greater use of the morality frame than the Russian journal, whereas the Russian newspaper tended to nationalise the conflict more. When looking at the specific papers in more detail, *the Daily Telegraph* displayed some remarkable differences to *Le Figaro*, *De Telegraaf* and *the Moscow Times*. *Le Figaro* and, in a lesser extent, *the Moscow Times* were characterised by a minimal use of the human interest, morality and economic consequences frame, in contrast with *the Daily Telegraph*. Hence, the latter used the most attention drawing elements such as feelings, personal stories, moral questions and economic impact. Apart from that, *De Telegraaf* and *Le Figaro* showed a limited usage of the nationalisation frame, in contrast with *the Daily Telegraph*, *the New York Times* and *the Moscow Times*. This could be partially explained by the limited role of Dutch politicians in solving the Syrian problem.

Our results showed that, although above differences were found, all quality papers followed an identical pattern in the adoption of the news frames more or less. The nationalisation frame was used most by all newspapers (except for *De Telegraaf*), followed by the responsibility, conflict, morality, human interest and economic consequences frame. This could illustrate that the Syrian conflict is portrayed in a fairly equal way.

Second, at least one reason for the Syrian conflict was more often presented to the readers of *De Telegraaf* and *the New York times*. However, as seen before, all journals offered more solutions than causes. As expected, *the Moscow times* paid more attention to the dismantling of the chemical weapon stockpile. This is in keeping with the attempts of President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov to reach an accord in order to avoid a military intervention. Such a military intervention was suggested more in Western newspapers, particularly in European journals.

#### **6.1.2.2. Frame variation between periods**

The last part of our analysis focused on frame variation between the three periods. As to generic framing, most attention was paid to the conflictual character of the issue before the gas attack. After the attack, the attention was shifted from the conflict to responsibility and national interests. The economic consequences only came to the fore after the attack as well. By contrast, the human impact receded even further into the background, which is remarkable in the light of the high death toll of civilians. After the agreement, the focus on personal lives or vignettes remained as small as before. Even less attention was paid to the conflictual character after the accord and the same, lower levels of responsibility and nationalisation framing as before the gas attack were obtained again.

Although one-third of the articles listed at least one cause regardless of the period, there were differences between the periods as to the specific causes. Two curvilinear but opposite tendencies were found. The attention on religious reasons was diverted by the gas attack while the same attack drew attention to the attack itself as a cause for the escalation of the conflict. The presumption that the gas attack could be seen as a key event as opposed to the agreement was strengthened by the increase in prognostic framing after the attack while the number of prognoses dropped again after the accord.

Because the gas attack signalled that the 'red line' had been crossed and the Syrian government was blamed, President Obama – bolstered by France and the UK – announced military action. Other international players (e.g., Russia and China) condemned this intervention partly because they feared an increased influence of the US, a loss of their closest ally in the Middle East and expanding extremism (Katz, 2011, p. 5; 2013, p. 2). This controversy about the proper response to the chemical weapon attack is shown by an increased mention of the diagnosis 'military intervention' as well as of the diagnosis 'military rejection'. The attack diverted attention from military assistance or governmental reforms. Meanwhile, the US and Russia worked out an arrangement on quarantining and destroying Syria's chemical weapon stockpile. It was clear that the papers followed the geopolitical steps, as the suggestion of the annihilation of Syria's chemical weapons as a first step towards negotiations was only mentioned after the agreement was made.



## **6.2. Limitations of the study**

We faced difficulties in different stages of this study. In the first place while writing the theoretical section about the Syrian conflict: it was sometimes hard to acquire reliable material dealing with the rebellions. Most available sources were, on the one hand, newspaper articles that may well have been biased – that partiality was exactly the subject of this research. The scientific, peer-reviewed papers, on the other hand, were mostly American and seemed to be somewhat influenced by a Western point of view as well. It could be interesting to investigate the possibility of framing in scientific papers. In addition, many sources were to some extent contradictory about the specific situation in Syria. Finally, there is not much published about the war so far, because it is still recent and evolving.

In addition, we were constrained by our language repertoire and by the limited availability of Russian newspapers in English while searching for an appropriate Russian journal. Although we found differences in the expected way (e.g. higher prevalence of the prognosis ‘dismantling chemical weapons’), it is possible that frame-variations will be more prevalent in Russian-language and Russian-owned newspapers or television news. Another problem with the data collection was the fact that the databases did not provide visuals. This limitation is somewhat abated by the finding of Matthes (p. 355) that textual elements are the main constituents and signifiers of frames as 83% of the framing studies neglect visuals. At last, one can ask how representative the chosen journals are for the whole country.

Next to difficulties in the data collection, there are some well-known limitations to the deductive approach that are worthy of careful consideration. Among these, perhaps the most critical is the crucial prerequisite that the frames are known beforehand and that they suit the topic currently under investigation. In other words, this approach demands a clear idea of the frames likely to be encountered and is thus limited to established frames. Therefore, this method is quite inflexible when it comes to the identification of newly emerging frames and one can wonder whether these very broad categories are indeed frames, or rather ‘arguments’ or ‘scripts’. How can we be sure that we do not miss important frames when analysing an evolving issue? Due to the abstract nature of generic frames context-specific details or nuances could get overlooked (Matthes, & Kohring, 2008, pp. 262-263; Vliegenthart, 2012, p. 940). In this casus, we opted to use generic<sup>10</sup> frames in order to see how applicable those *generic* frames really are. Several previous studies analysed the coverage of European affairs (e.g., Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Van Cauwenberge et al., 2009). They obtained average framing scores of .60 (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) or even .87 (Van Cauwenberge et al., 2009). Our two most frequently used frames (i.e., nationalisation and responsibility frame) only obtained a score of respectively .37 and .25 – which is comparable to the scores Semetko and Valkenburg obtained for crime-related news

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<sup>10</sup> The five generic frames of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and the nationalisation frame of Van Cauwenberge et al. (2009).

stories. Thus the question can be raised whether *generic* frames are as *generic* as they suggest if they are mainly applicable to European topics. A second limitation of our deductive approach is that we could not differentiate between frames applied by the journalists and frames that slipped into the articles because they were mentioned by a source – a political interviewee, for instance (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 102) – such as advocacy frames (de Vreese, 2012, p. 367). This limitation entails further investigation.

### **6.3. Suggestions for future research**

Framing is a complex, dynamic communicative process that involves different stages (i.e., frame-building, frame-setting and frame-consequences). As stated before, frames have several locations (e.g., communicator, text, receiver) (de Vreese, 2005, p. 52). This master thesis only investigated the occurrence of some frames in news articles. This leaves many possibilities for future research.

Firstly, no evidence has been systematically collected yet about how factors impact the structural qualities in news in terms of framing (Scheufele, 1999, p. 109). Research could be conducted on the elements that come into play within the editorial office since our approach using generic frames at the level of news articles does not look at the production process of the article. The identification of this frame-building process, on the basis of in-depth interviews with journalists for instance, could provide insight in the realisation,

elaboration and diffusion of media frames (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 612). In that way, the frames we found may be studied as the outcome of the production process including organisational pressure, journalistic routines, elite ... (de Vreese, 2005, p. 52).

Furthermore, this frame-building process contains the constant interaction between media and elite actors (e.g., politicians). This leads to the problem of 'advocacy frames' (de Vreese, 2012, p. 367), that is, frames that were put forward by proponents in a political debate. There is remarkably little evidence of journalistic reframing and questioning of the original frames presented by the interviewees. Similarly, McCombs and Shaw (1972, p. 181) stated that the emphasis put on different campaign issues by the media reflect the emphasis placed by the candidates to a considerable degree. This interplay between advocacy frames and the frames applied by journalists is a crucial area for future framing research. Van Gorp (2010, pp. 102-103) already proposed additional questions in order to distinguish the statements of advocates from the journalistic handling of them. In that way, one gets a more inclusive understanding of the exact role played by journalists *vis-à-vis* advocates in the frame-building process. The fact, for instance, that dismantling Syria's chemical weapons as a first step towards peace was only mentioned in the newspapers after the agreement was reached, points to the possibility that the media just follow and paraphrase politicians.

Moreover, Syria's story proved to be an exceptionally difficult and dangerous one to report on for journalists. Reporters with limited access on the ground heavily relied on online activists for (visual) information. As the Syrian struggle has been one of the most socially mediated conflicts in history, this reliance creates the real risk of the same partial, misleading and motivated narrative in mass media as in social media (Lynch et al., 2014, p. 6). It is not only important to investigate frames provided by interviewees, but also to take social media and their potential as an imperative news source into account.

Secondly, becoming aware of the different frames used in the coverage is necessary to understand what effects these frames can generate. Literature reveals conflicting hypotheses on the possible influence of news frames on audiences' attitudes and perceptions. Although some researchers state that framing does not have any visible effect on the perceptions of the public, we tend to believe that framing does have an influence on the way the public thinks about topics by attributing more or less visibility to a certain aspect; thereby co-determining the public agenda (d'Haenens, 2005, pp. 425-426).

Consequently, on a more cognitive base, a future study can investigate the effects of 'equivalence' framing of Dutch, French, British, American and Russian people concerning the conflict in Syria; that is, assessing the impact of the different presentations on people's attitudes (Vliegthart, 2012, p. 938). It is possible – and plausible – that researchers will find differences or similarities in

attitudes which will correspond with the used frames. In an experiment (e.g., de Vreese, Valkenburg & Semetko, 1999) or longitudinal survey with a defined group one can profoundly investigate the hypothesis that people will talk differently about the same topic when they read differently framed newspapers. Cappella and Jamieson (1997), for instance, argued that the conflict frame does activate public cynicism and mistrust. As the conflict frame is one of the most prevalent frames in the coverage of the Syrian war, it is not unthinkable that people become cynic about this conflict and mistrust any action. Framing research should investigate how people think about the conflict, who is more vulnerable to be influenced and under what conditions. Moreover, scholars should not overlook the fundamental question of how long framing effects last (de Vreese, 2012, p. 370).

## 7. Conclusion

The mass media may not only be successful in telling us *what* to think about, but they may also be successful in telling us *how* to think about it. Framing-effects research suggests that the media influence the importance the public – including policy makers – attach to issues and how they interpret them. Since journalists are the prime suppliers of information about the Syrian issue, this influence is more than plausible and worth investigating.

Before scrutinising possible media-effects on the judgments of people and decisions of policy makers, a content analysis should be made. This thesis is one of the first to contribute to this by examining how prominent journals in the Netherlands (*De Telegraaf*), France (*Le Figaro*), the United Kingdom (*the Daily Telegraph*), the United States (*the New York Times*) and Russia (*the Moscow Times*) covered the Syrian conflict before the gas attack of 21 August, thereafter and after the following agreement on the obliteration of Syria's chemical weapon stockpile. By means of a quantitative content analysis we examined the attention paid to and the framing of the subject with a focus on differences between the newspapers and periods. In addition to shedding light on generic frames (i.e., conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, responsibility and nationalisation frame), we evaluated what causes and solutions were put forward for the conflict that started as a protest against Bashar al-Assad three years ago and has escalated into a civil war.

The frame analysis has yielded some interesting findings.

First, the attention the papers paid to the Syrian issue coincided perfectly with the countries extent of involvement on a geostrategic level. The American newspaper attached the most importance (in terms of the number and length of articles) to the Syrian issue, the Dutch one the least. Attention was also determined by an influential key event, that is the sarin gas attack of 21 August. The non-fatal but essential agreement on the obliteration of Syria's chemical weapons, however, did not cause an increase in reporting and could therefore not be considered as a classic key event in this casus.

Second, when covering the Syrian conflict, journalists mainly related the issue to their own country and to ideas of national politicians and citizens. They tended to focus on disagreement and responsibility as well. Considering the humanitarian crisis and high number of casualties, it is remarkable that the articles did not morally question the war or provide a 'human face' more frequently. While the context of the conflict was barely outlined anymore, diverse solutions were put forward. Although all dailies obeyed this pattern in their coverage, it was clear that *the Daily Telegraph* was the most and *Le Figaro* the least heavily framed journal. Western newspapers proposed a military intervention more often as opposed to the Russian paper, which focused more on the obliteration of Syria's chemical weapons. This was perfectly in line with the political reactions of the national politicians. Contrary to the expectations, however, European papers did not focus more on economic consequences, socio-economic causes or monetary actions.



The sarin gas attack also influenced the coverage substantially as it increased the use of the responsibility, economic consequences and nationalisation frame. The attack shifted the attention from more contextual causes to the sarin gas attack itself and marked a shift in prognostic framing as well. Completely in line with the international debate after the attack, newspapers suggested a military intervention substantially more often while also rejecting it as a solution. The following agreement on the obliteration of Syria's chemical weapons decreased the use of the conflict, responsibility and nationalisation frame but triggered the suggestion of the dismantling.

Which national journal you read or when you read it, obviously changes the picture you are offered of the Syrian war. This picture is almost entirely in keeping with the developments on the geopolitical level. The question that emerges is what important implications for public understanding and judgments of the issue and actors this framing causes. Another question that can be raised is whether the media just follow the geopolitical developments or lead government as well. Although these questions were beyond the scope of this content analysis; it forms, nonetheless, an interesting point of departure for future research.



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## **Annex 1: codebook**

**V1. Article number.** Enter the article number of the article. Use the next consecutive number.

**V2. Date.** Enter the date of the article: dd.mm.yy. Use chronological order.

**V3. Medium (Newspaper).** Enter from which newspaper the story is derived. There are five possibilities: (1) De Telegraaf, (2) the Daily Telegraph, (3) Le Figaro, (4) the New York Times, and (5) the Moscow Times.

**V4. Country Newspaper.** This variable displays the country of the newspapers used. There are five possibilities: (1) The Netherlands, (2) United Kingdom, (3) France, (4) United States, and (5) Russia.

**V5. Title.** Enter the title of the news article

**V6. Page number.** Enter the number of the page the article appeared in the newspaper.

**V7. Number of words.** Enter the number of words the article exists of.

**V8. Journalistic genre.** This variable indicates the journalistic genre to which the article belongs. These categories are based on Van Gorp (2004) and are translated and adapted by the researcher:

1. **News item.** This includes articles from the news genre; a general news story, a short story, cover story, backstory and research article. A general news story here is the most common and has a clear headline, introduction and body copy. A short story (can span multiple columns in the newspaper) is a short message with high information content, without quotes, without introduction and generally not significant. A cover story is an article with the biggest head on the top half of the front page of the newspaper. Background stories and research articles are articles in which journalists delve deeper into the background of the daily events and place them in a wider context, for instance by comparing them to a historical example.

2. **Opinion editor.** This includes articles of the genre opinion editorial, news analysis, and editorial columns. These texts are written by an in-house editor or an unaffiliated that regularly contributes to the newspaper. If it is not clear, it is coded as opinion externally. They often an editorial written by the editor and is usually on page 2 of the newspaper. Google the name of the newspaper and the name of the writer. If you find 2 or more hits, consider the writer internal and enter 2, if you find 2 or less consider the writer external, enter 2. In addition, if you see any indication online (e.g. Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn profile) that the writes regularly contributes to a newspaper, also enter 2.
3. **Opinion external.** These include articles of the genre third party opinions, opinions written by someone unaffiliated with the newspaper's editorial board, and opinions from readers. This refers to on the one hand to opinion pieces written by third parties (e.g., a professor who makes a one-time contribution to the newspaper) and on the other letters that have been submitted by readers of the newspaper. If written by a third party, google the name of the newspaper and the name of the writer. If you find more than 3 hits, consider the writer internal and enter 2, if you find 3 or less consider the writer external, enter 3.
4. **Interview.** These include articles of the interview genre or portrait. An interview is a text in interview form (so question and answer) or in which the majority of the area is occupied by a representation of a conversation, so more than one a text with a couple quotes. When in doubt encode news (1). A portrait is sketch of a certain person, but not necessarily described by the person him- or herself (for example, described by friends or opponents).
5. **Report.** These include articles of the genre reportage and travelogue. A report is a personal news item, where the journalist has been on site and describes what he himself has experienced and seen. A travel story is similar.

6. **Other.** This is a residual category, including articles from all other genres such as cartoons, reviews, etc.
7. **Unknown.** This includes articles with no clear journalistic genre.

**V6. Frames.** In the core of this thesis, the used news frames are investigated: the generic frames of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the collective action frames of Benford and Snow (2000) and the nationalization frame of Gelder, Joris and Vancauwenberghe (2009). Each variable is considered as a dummy-variable (0 of 1).

*Generic frames.* This variable examines whether or not the article contains one or more of the generic frame as proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). Each frame is measured through of a scale, which is composed of a number of questions. The last original question of the human interest scale (e.g. visual information) was omitted since that information was not obtained. The other frames were slightly adopted as proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), with minor modifications by the researcher.

#### **A. Conflict frame**

1. Does the story revolve around disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?
2. Does the story refer to fights, riots, and confrontation between two or more parties, individuals, groups, countries?
3. Does the story refer to two sides or more than two sides of the problem?
4. Does the story refer to winners and losers?

#### **B. Human interest frame**

5. Does the story provide a human example or 'human face' on the issue?
6. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?

7. Does the story emphasise how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?
8. Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?

**C. Economic consequences frame**

9. Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?
10. Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?
11. Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

**D. Morality frame.** This frame tells about how you should live or behave in order to be a good person. Purely the mention of the 'Allah', 'Christian, 'Islam' ... is not enough. There has to be something written about how you must live differently, or about the laws prescribed in the Koran etc, or about how you can be a good citizen, or how you should donate money or provide humanitarian support for the innocent civilians, ...

12. Does the story contain any moral message?
13. Does the story make reference to morality, God, Allah, and other religious tenets?
14. Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?

**E. Responsibility frame**

15. Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the issue/problem?
16. Does the story suggest some level of the government (including President Assad) is responsible for the issue/problem?
17. Does the story suggest that an individual or group of people in society (including any coalition of the rebels) is responsible for the issue/problem?
18. Does the story suggest solutions to the issue/problem?
19. Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?



## *Collective action frames*

**F. Diagnostic frame.** This variable examines whether the article contains a diagnostic frame or not. In other words, whether there is a mention in the text of the causes and reasons of the escalation/continuation of the Syrian conflict. The categories listed below are based upon our theoretical studies of the policies of the countries in addition the categories listed by Benford and Snow (2007, pp. 9-10). It is important that the elements that are offered within one of the six categories are **explicitly mentioned** as a cause. Finally, remember that this frame is about causality and that, for instance, the prescriptive norms about how to behave (in a certain religion) are typed as normative frames.

20. **Political causes:** does the article mentions corruption, a lack of political freedom, and/or unfair elections as a (possible) cause of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
21. **Socio-economic causes:** does the article mentions inflation, rising unemployment, poverty or a lack of prosperity, limited educational opportunities and/or generation gap between young and old Syrians as a (possible) cause of the Syrian conflict?
22. **A lack of human rights:** does the article mentions infringement or lack of the freedom of speech, opinion, religion, equal rights or human rights in general, and/or war crimes against civilization or the violation of international law as a (possible) cause of the continuation/ escalation of the Syrian conflict?
23. **Religious prescriptions:** does the article mentions extremists or jihadists, disagreement between diverse religious groups, and/or the character or culture of religious groups as a (possible) cause of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?

24. **Concrete reasons:** does the article mentions the brutal arrest of the boys of Daraa, movement through social media, the many (innocent, civilian) victims, and/or a chemical weapons attack as a (possible) cause of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
25. **Others:** this is a residual category for unforeseen causal element.

**G. Prognostic frame.** This variable examines whether the article contains a prognostic frame or not. In other words, whether there is a mention in the text of (possible) solutions for the escalation/continuation of the Syrian conflict. These solution may be hypothetical (i.e. what is seen as the best solution) or already taken. The categories listed below are based upon our theoretical study of the policies of the countries and the development of the conflict in addition to the categories listed by Benford and Snow (2007, pp. 9-10). It is important that the elements that are offered within one of the six categories are **explicitly mentioned** as a solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict.

*Military action:*

26. **Military intervention:** does the article mentions suppressing the fights with action by their military, and/or a no-fly zone as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
27. **Military assistance:** does the article only mentions military assistance as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
28. **Rejecting military action:** doest the article mentions that any military action is rejected or will only deteriorate the Syrian conflict?
29. **Governmental changes:** does the article mentions the dismissal of President Bashar al-Assad or his entire regime

- and/or the appointment of a new government as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
30. **Diplomacy:** does the article mentions open dialogue between two or more major players of the Syrian conflict, an international trial, and/or at least a peace agreement/conference as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
  31. **Monetary action:** does the article mentions economic cooperation with other countries of the international community to provide monetary support, and/or economic measures against one or more parties involved as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
  32. **Internal reforms:** does the article mentions internal reforms in terms of political issues, socio-economic issues, religious issues and/or the improvement of human rights as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
  33. **Dismantling chemical weapons:** does the article mentions internal the destruction of the Syrian stockpile of chemical weapons as a (possible) solution of the continuation/escalation of the Syrian conflict?
  34. **Others:** this is a residual category for unforeseen remedial elements.

#### **H. Motivational/nationalisation frame**

35. Does the article mention a connection between Syria and the individual country (i.a. the Netherlands, France, the UK, the US or Russia)?
36. Does the article quote or articulate the ideas of national politicians or persons that are active on a national level?