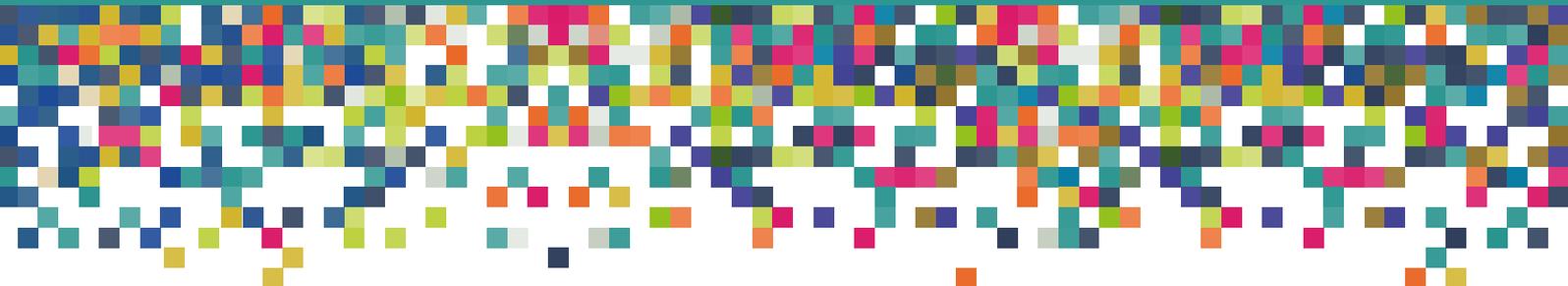




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Manufacturing Consent

**An Investigation of the Press Support
Towards the US Administration Prior to
US-led Airstrikes in Syria.**

Malavika Mysore



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ABSTRACT

The argument that the mainstream media's news coverage of US foreign affairs serves to reflect and legitimise establishment interests is a central feature of the propaganda model proposed by Herman & Chomsky (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). The propaganda model provides an institutional critique of media performance in which it identifies how the integration of the media into capitalist structures has enabled governmental and economic elites to exercise disproportionate control over media output. More specifically, it recognises how news frameworks tend to selectively emphasise and omit information based on whether it is serviceable to the economic and political interests of dominant elites (*ibid*). The objective of this paper is to examine whether the US mainstream media's coverage of Syria in the months leading up to the 2014 US-led airstrikes in Syria exhibits patterns that follow the predictions of Herman & Chomsky's propaganda model. A quantitative content analysis of 150 news articles published by *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* over a two-month period preceding the beginning of airstrikes is conducted. This paper contains four sections. First, I will provide an overview of the Syrian conflict while also discussing the US' economic and strategic interests in the region. Second, I will review the literature and discuss the specific theoretical dimensions that informed this investigation. Third, I will describe the methodological considerations of the content analysis. Fourth, I will present and analyse the results of the investigation. Lastly, I will provide a discussion of the general findings and concluding remarks.

1 THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

In order to understand the United States' role and interests in Syria, it is necessary to first describe the background of the Syrian conflict. From this, we must situate our understanding of the American intervention into Syria in the context of their foreign policy interests and objectives in the Middle East. The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011 and continues until the present day, grew out of large-scale revolt towards the Syrian government and their president, Bashar al-Assad (Al Jazeera, 2018; Blanchard, 2014; Bentley, 2014). Civilians resorted to conducting protests against the government and called for Assad to step down as leader. This quickly escalated into an armed conflict in which Assad's government violently suppressed protesters and anyone who expressed anti-government sentiments (Al Jazeera, 2018; Rodgers, 2016). The war is being fought by several groups, which includes; "The Syrian Armed Forces" and "The Free Syrian Army" (*ibid*). The former represents Assad's side, which consists of military forces of the government whose aim is to suppress and eliminate those who are anti-government. The latter constitutes the opposition, which is composed of various armed rebel groups whose purpose is to dismantle Assad's regime (Blanchard et al., 2014). The Free Syrian Army are not a unified group with an organised command and control structure. Instead, they represent disparate rebel groups some of which are outwardly secular and others who adhere to Sunni Islamist ideologies (*ibid*).

The Syrian conflict has invited a significant amount of intervention from the international community. At present, most major world powers have intervened in this conflict. On the one hand, Assad's forces have received a substantial amount of financial and militaristic support from Iran and Russia - adversaries of the United States (Al Jazeera, 2018; Rodgers, 2016; Blanchard et al., 2014). On the other hand, the United States set out to remove Assad from power by providing funding, training and weapons to select rebel groups with the objective of strengthening the forces that aimed to fight his leadership (*ibid*; Bentley, 2014). However, as the conflict progressed, additional challenges began to surface. Namely, the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a terrorist group that grew out of one of the rebel groups fighting Assad's government. ISIS is a relatively well funded and powerful group who gained

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a substantial amount of recognition in 2014 once they began to take control over large swaths of territory stretching across both Iraq and Syria (Blanchard et al., 2014). This development led to American efforts becoming more focused towards countering ISIS rather than Assad (Bentley, 2014; Lakoff, 2013; Murray, 2013). More specifically, the US intervention was defined by a militaristic confrontation, which involved conducting targeted airstrikes in Syria aimed at territories held by ISIS.

The outcome of this conflict is of interest to the US as it is relevant to their foreign policy goals in the Middle East. The Middle East is situated in an important geopolitical location, which the US has historically, always been keen to have control over. Syria is of regional significance as it is located between Iraq and the crucial areas of Israel-Palestine, Lebanon and Iran (Sadat & Jones, 2009). Given the US has been attempting to expand their presence in these countries for decades, Syria is in a position to either advance or hinder US interests in the Middle East (*ibid*). In light of this consideration, there are several strategic interests at play in relation to US foreign policy with the two main concerns being: (1) The involvement of American adversaries, Iran and Russia, who have provided financial and militaristic support to Assad's government and (2) Islamist militias such as ISIS who have procured a substantial amount of political power and are seeking to replace Assad's government with their own doctrine of Sunni Islamic law. Firstly, if the US were to allow their adversaries such as Iran and Russia to gain control over Syria and expand their presence in the Middle East, this would directly threaten their foreign policy interests (Feltman et al., 2018). Secondly, ISIS' long term goal of replacing the existing leadership with their own rule of Sunni Islamic law conflicts with the US' preferences for Syria's political future (Sadat & Jones, 2009). However, the Obama administration completely ignored the strategic concerns at play and how the political instability in Syria is concerning for the achievement of foreign policy objectives. Instead, engaging in militaristic aggression was defended in relation to defeating ISIS in which conducting airstrikes was framed as a humanitarian and counterterrorism effort that was necessary to ensure regional and national security (Sadat & Jones, 2009; Fahim, 2012; Peralta, 2012). At this point, it is worth questioning the legitimacy of these justifications if the US government was simultaneously providing funding, training and weapons to rebel groups,

which has been responsible for fuelling violence and Islamic extremism in Syria (Milne, 2015). Moreover, it is also necessary to question how bombing and airstrikes were considered the rational and preferred method of providing humanitarian assistance to Syrians. However, utilising this form of rhetoric was more serviceable to US foreign policy interests because humanising their actions by placing emphasis on the necessity of combating terrorism and protecting victims of human rights violations is more efficient in mobilising popular support for American intervention.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Propaganda can be defined as the distortion and manipulation of facts in order to disseminate and promote particular ideas (Jowett, 2012). The news media plays an important role in a democratic society as they are considered to be the “watchdogs” on the exercise of power (Mullen & Klaehn, 2010). They are a crucial component in the process of disseminating information to the public in which they are especially important in reporting on topics related to foreign affairs. Since the American public lacks personal contact with foreign events, they rely on the news media to provide them with the relevant information and interpretations of these events (Krishnaiah et al., 1993). Therefore, news organisations and the manner in which they cover foreign affairs have the ability to shape public opinion. Herman & Chomsky’s analysis of the mainstream media’s coverage of US foreign affairs suggests that it contains a propaganda function as it consciously emphasises and downplays certain information based on whether it legitimises establishment views (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Consequently, uncritically repeating administration talking points enables news organisations to manufacture the consent of the public towards the special interests that dictate state and private activity. Herman & Chomsky’s propaganda model is by far, the most popular and tested model within propaganda studies of the mainstream media’s news coverage relating to US foreign affairs (Klaehn, 2009; Klaehn, 2005; Mullen & Klaehn, 2010). Previous investigations into propaganda studies that have utilised the model have found results that have been consistent with the predictions of the framework (Krishnaiah et al., 1993; Dickson, 1992; Guitierrez- Villalobos et al., 1994; Klaehn, 2002; Good, 2008). Therefore, the present

investigation proceeds with the use of the propaganda model as a reference point to examine whether coverage of Syria in the months leading up to the airstrikes exhibits patterns that provide support for its assertions. This study offers insight into the relevance and usefulness of Herman & Chomsky's model in identifying cases of propaganda campaigns within news coverage relating to US foreign policy. Moreover, the Syrian conflict is an important topic of study as it contributes to the existing body of literature on whether the mainstream media's news coverage of US foreign affairs follows a pattern of parroting administration views.

In this section, I will take stock of the literature regarding propaganda studies and discuss the specific theoretical foundations that informed this investigation. The three main concepts that will be discussed are: (1) Herman & Chomsky's propaganda model, (2) terrorism and the politics of fear and (3) framing theory. First, I will describe the propaganda model and its filters. Second, I will review Altheide's conception of terrorism and the politics of fear while highlighting how this contributes to propaganda studies specifically in relation to US foreign policy in the Middle East. Third, I will describe framing theory and explain its significance in further understanding the specific mechanisms by which fear is leveraged within news frameworks and dissenting views are excluded. These theories are interrelated and lend themselves to explaining the various workings of the media and the manner in which propaganda campaigns are produced. Lastly, I will review the empirical studies conducted on the propaganda model and discuss its contributions to the theoretical framework.

2.1 The Propaganda Model

Herman & Chomsky provide a free market critique of the news media, which argues that the mainstream media's output on certain issues frequently resembles propaganda (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Herman, 2000; Mullen, 2009; Klaehn, 2005; Mullen & Klaehn, 2010). The propaganda model was presented as a means of understanding the structural factors of media behaviour and the role they play in mobilising the support of the public towards dominant social and political relations. The arrangement of the free market and more specifically, the deregulated market has facilitated the centralisation of media capital amongst elite groups such as, powerful government and business entities. This has enabled such groups to exercise control

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over the flow of information to the public (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Mullen & Klaehn, 2010; Klaehn, 2009). They exert their power by directly or indirectly coercing the media to produce a news environment that is friendly towards the interests of governmental and economic elites. The central theme to this argument is that capitalist news media is highly functional and responsive to the needs of government and corporate elites instead of an institution that empowers the public to make informed political decisions. Hence, media output frequently resembles what amounts to as propaganda campaigns. The propaganda model is exclusively used to examine news frameworks across different contexts. However, an area of study in which the model has been especially useful is the US mainstream media's coverage of foreign affairs and more specifically, US-led interventions into other countries (*ibid*). It should be noted that Herman & Chomsky do not assert that the media is a monolith on all issues. In fact, they argue that the media encourages debate, criticism and dissent so long as they ultimately remain within the premises that conform to the elite consensus (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Sparks, 2007). Often times, the form of criticism provided is of a tactical nature, which might choose to question the technicalities of implementing a policy rather than the overall aim of the policy itself (Sparks, 2007). Additionally, they do not contend that the media is always successful in controlling the thoughts of the public. Instead, their arguments are situated within the motivations and intent of particular communicators rather than the precise effects they have on the public (Herman, 2000).

The propaganda model traces the process by which government and corporate entities are able to filter the information that is fit to publish, marginalise dissenting views and communicate their interests to the public. It contends that the "raw material of news" passes through a series of five inter-related filters, which leaves the remaining "cleansed residue" that is suitable to publish: "(1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms, (2) advertising as the primary source of income for news organisations, (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power, (4) "flak" as a means of disciplining the media and (5) "anti-Communism" as a national religion and control mechanism" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p.2). While the fifth filter was originally

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referring to the widespread sentiment of anti-Communism, it has since been revised and broadened to refer to “dominant ideological elements” (Herman, 2000; Klaehn, 2009). These filters continuously interact with and reinforce each other and have multiple effects on media output. Of these five filters, this investigation primarily focuses on the third and fifth filter. Namely, the disproportionate reliance of the media on institutionally affiliated sources and the focus on dominant ideological elements.

The third filter – the news gathering process, comments on the reliance of the media on institutionally affiliated sources such as government entities or businesses. Media companies have gradually integrated into the market system in which they are largely funded by profit-seeking entities. Therefore, this transition has altered the incentive structure for media producers to prioritise objectives such as, audience optimisation and profit maximisation. Additionally, the assimilation of the media into capitalist structures coupled with deregulation has enabled the large extent to which media capital has become concentrated amongst very few owners. Therefore, the structural organisation of the mainstream media operates as such whereby governmental and economic elites can exercise a disproportionate amount of power over media operations (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Herman, 2000; Mullen, 2009). One of the ways in which this manifests itself is by the heavy reliance of the media on official sources. By the economic necessity and reciprocity of interest, the mainstream media are drawn into a mutually dependent relationship with powerful sources of information (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Herman, 2000; Klaehn, 2009; Klaehn, 2005; Sparks, 2007). Journalists allocate their resources where significant news often occurs and where regular press conferences are held. In the context of US politics, the White House, the Pentagon and the State Department are regularly cited sources within the news. Additionally, business corporations are also frequently used as primary sources of information. These sources are valued by journalists as they provide a large volume of material that meets the demands of news organisations for reliable and scheduled flows of information. Similarly, corporate or governmental entities benefit from maintaining a close relationship with journalists as they represent a medium through which they can communicate their messages to the public as well as ensure that dissenting views that threaten their interests are marginalised (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Klaehn, 2009, Klaehn,

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2005; Sparks, 2007). Consequently, non-official or non-business-related sources are rarely, if ever, cited.

The symbiotic relationship between journalists and official sources is an integral feature of the propaganda model as it demonstrates one of the mechanisms by which the powerful can influence the media's agenda and ensure that it falls in line with establishment interests. For example, the news media might feel obligated to report questionable stories provided by their primary sources and/or omit criticisms against them in order to avoid compromising their relationship (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). This requires journalists to operate within a highly constrained analytical space in which they are forced to prioritise their sources at the expense of adhering to decent standards of journalistic practice. The political-economic arrangement of the mass media operates in a manner that privileges the position of governmental and economic elites. By extension, the third filter contends that the bilateral relationship shared between journalists and official sources endows elite decision makers with more power to set the agenda, control the premises of debate and eliminate inconvenient facts from public inspection. This study will focus on the third filter to search for whether there is a disproportionate reliance upon official sources within news coverage on Syria.

The fifth filter is concerned with the "dominant ideological elements" that are leveraged in order to mobilise further support towards the policies of the establishment. While this is a broad concept, we can consider Herman & Chomsky's definition of it: "This ideology helps mobilise the populace against an enemy, and because the concept is fuzzy it can be used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property or support accommodation with Communist states and radicalism" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p.29). Klaehn elaborates on this filter by specifying how it can be understood as a lens through which we can explore how fear is instigated and leveraged within media discourses in order to achieve a particular end (Klaehn, 2009). In specific relation to US foreign policy towards the Middle East, one could argue that a dominant ideological element that has become integrated into the political discourse is the "war on terror" (Falcous & Silk, 2005; Johnson, 2002; Cloud, 2004; Altheide & Grimes, 2016; Sparks, 2007; Mullen, 2009). This concept can be specifically situated within the

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context of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which led to a significant shift in the American political landscape. Johnson argues that the space that was previously reserved for Communists has now been filled by terrorists (Johnson, 2002). More specifically, “freedom-hating” terrorists whose existence and ideologies fundamentally conflict with the US’ “freedom-loving” way of life (Falcous & Silk, 2005; Mullen, 2009). In the aftermath of 9/11, the key development within the American political discourse included public mobilisation by waging a “war on terror”, which was supported with jingoistic rhetoric and the vilification of leaders of Middle Eastern countries who supposedly supported or endorsed terrorism (Snow & Taylor, 2006). The use of such rhetoric conflates anti-terrorism with patriotism in which questioning or criticising the US’ motive of “defeating terrorism” in any capacity is equated with being anti-American (Altheide & Grimes, 2016; Falcous & Silk, 2005; Norris, 2009). Accordingly, justifications of militaristic aggression towards Middle Eastern countries such as with Iraq and Afghanistan involved citing the necessity of defeating terrorism, safeguarding their own national security and bringing stability to the region in which they are intervening (*ibid*). However, the economic and strategic incentives behind their interventions into the Middle East such as, the need to mitigate the political complexities that threaten oil supply to the US, did not find its way into media coverage.

Waging the “war on terror” included US retaliation, the hunt for al-Qaeda leaders and plans to attack countries and “outlaw regimes” that endorsed or harboured terrorists (Altheide & Grimes, 2016; Norris, 2003). These efforts were accompanied by adjusting foreign policy, increasing the military budget and expanding the US’ military presence across the world (*ibid*). Consequently, this shaped social and political matters in which government officials as well as news organisations have routinely applied slogans such as the “war on terror” to justify militaristic aggression towards Middle Eastern countries, which was said to be a necessary means of ensuring safety and stability. Therefore, in terms of the propaganda model, the necessity of defeating terrorism can be considered a dominant ideological element that has been customarily used to legitimise US foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. This study uses the fifth filter as a lens to examine whether news coverage on Syria in the lead up to airstrikes

attempts to leverage dominant ideological elements such as the “war on terror” to justify foreign policy objectives.

2.2 Terrorism and the Politics of Fear

The relevance of placing an emphasis on terrorism within political discourse and its conceptual linkage to the propaganda model can be better understood through Altheide’s interpretation of terrorism and the politics of fear. He contends that the meaning of terrorism has been provided by propaganda because political decision makers and businesses have transformed the issue of terrorism from an act into a world condition (Altheide, 2004; Altheide, 2006; Robin, 2001; Norris, 2003). To elaborate, he describes how terrorism is now perceived as a constant state and “the way things are today”, which has led to the characterisation of society as being dangerous, risky and filled with potential or actual victims. Altheide situates his analysis of terrorism and the discourse of fear in the context of post 9/11 during which fears over terrorist threats against the US were at its highest (Altheide, 2006; Norris, 2003). Consequently, this shaped foreign policy related debates as well as the public’s perceptions of these matters (*ibid*).

The mass media’s coverage of terrorism often serves to decontextualize complex events, which reflect narratives that offer simplistic explanations and demonizes particular groups (Altheide, 2004; Altheide, 2006; Norris, 2003). Tying terrorism to an expansive discourse of fear has enabled decision makers to exploit the public’s distorted assumptions about danger, risk and the eventuality of terrorist attacks to achieve certain policy related goals (*ibid*). To elaborate, an important dimension of leveraging the fear over terrorism in political discourses is to place a substantial amount of focus on human rights violations (Stabile & Kumar, 2005; Cloud, 2004; Hunt, 2002; Manley, 2009; Khan, 2015; Mishra, 2007). The crimes against humanity that occur towards women, children and other innocent civilians are routinely highlighted by both government officials and news organisations in order to direct the public’s attention towards the effects and brutality of terrorism and generate moral repugnance towards their activities. Focusing on human rights violations is not only effective for exploiting the public’s fears over

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terrorism as it creates the impression that they too could be potential victims of it, but it is also an instrument that distracts attention away from the economic and political reasons that are involved in foreign policy decisions. Furthermore, strategically incorporating and co-opting human rights discourses enables decision makers to frame their foreign interventions as humanitarian and benevolent acts that are solely aimed at saving innocent victims and bringing stability to the region (Altheide, 2006; Altheide & Grimes, 2016; Hunt, 2002; Cloud, 2004; Norris, 2003). A shared feature between this theory and the propaganda model is that they both recognise the mutually dependent relationship between the news media and government officials and/or business experts as endowing influential elites with agenda setting power and a way to control what topics, issues and events are to be considered newsworthy. Thus, the collaboration between journalists and agents of power have given decision makers the ability to construct terrorism as the object of fear and to cast all Americans as potential or actual victims of it (*ibid*).

2.3 Framing Theory

Furthermore, we can supplement our understanding of how issues of terrorism and the discourse of fear manifests in news coverage by considering framing theory. Entman's definition of 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). The idea of framing enables us to understand how news frameworks are able to set the boundaries of debate within which policy related topics are discussed and consequently, how it narrows the available political alternatives (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Framing encompasses techniques of selection and emphasis through which certain concepts, meanings and arguments are advanced in a text. Choosing to make some pieces of information more salient than others enables the content creator to impose either a positive or negative interpretation of certain arguments. A particular frame being employed multiple times in the coverage of an event would lead to the emergence of a pattern in terms of which interpretations of said event are supported and which ones are suppressed (Entman, 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Entman & Rojecki, 1993; Norris, 2009). Journalists are constantly required to

exercise such framing judgements in the process of covering and reporting foreign affairs to the public. Therefore, within the news media, the information journalists choose to emphasise over others can influence the public's perceptions and responses to these affairs. Entman & Rojecki argue that such judgements are often heavily controlled and regulated by elite sources in which news coverage of controversial events tend to receive a one-dimensional analysis, which largely omits any criticisms towards elite interests and views (*ibid*). This concept provides a theoretical contribution to Herman & Chomsky's propaganda model as it elaborates on the specific mechanisms by which the news media covers policy matters in such a way that promotes establishment interests while ensuring to exclude opposing views. Incorporating such framing techniques in coverage relating to US foreign policy would enable the news media to elicit a supportive response from the public towards the administration's goals.

2.4 Empirical Considerations

To demonstrate the usefulness of the propaganda model in examining news coverage relating to foreign affairs, consider a study conducted by Guitierrez-Villalobos et al. (1994), which investigated the press support for US administration policy during the Panama invasion. A quantitative content analysis was conducted on news articles published in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *The Nation*, which tested for whether they reveal patterns consistent with Herman & Chomsky's propaganda framework. More specifically, the researchers were testing for how often these publications presented oppositional critique towards administration policies with regard to the Panama invasion. While *The Nation* is not a mainstream magazine, it was included in the sample for comparative purposes as they are a left-leaning publication and therefore, were expected to provide views that diverged from their mainstream counterparts. The results suggested that the mainstream publications, *Time* and *Newsweek* provided little to no strategic opposition towards administration policy whereas *The Nation* was found to have been very critical of administration policy. The researchers argue that the large volume of oppositional critique offered by *The Nation* casts doubt on the view that the government controls all of the news. However, with specific regards to the mainstream media, the findings provided support for the propaganda model. This study highlights the usefulness of the propaganda model as a tool with which to investigate news frameworks and their coverage of foreign affairs. The

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present investigation follows the lead of previous work by using the propaganda model as a reference point to examine news coverage on Syria. Additionally, it exclusively focuses on examining the presentation of content within mainstream publications rather than comparing and contrasting publications based on their ideological leanings.

To exemplify the additional theoretical considerations laid out in this chapter, consider the example of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Multiple investigations into the mainstream media's news coverage of Iraq in the lead up to the war found that public relations and propaganda efforts were central aspects to framing the war on Iraq (Klaehn, 2005; Snow & Taylor, 2006; Boyd-Barrett, 2010; Altheide & Grimes, 2016; Kellner, 2004; Hiebert, 2003). For example, Boyd-Barrett's review of *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and other mainstream media outlet's news coverage on Iraq found that it carried significant resemblance to the suggestions of the propaganda model (Boyd-Barrett, 2010). This is primarily due to the media's self-censorship, the conscious exclusion of dissent and the parroting of administration views. The Bush administration's framing of the Iraq invasion as a "war on terror" and as a necessary measure to adopt in the interest of national security were integral features of selling the war to the public. In his review of the propaganda efforts of the Iraq war, Hiebert notes "the self-defence story" and the "rescue story" (Hiebert, 2003). Despite evidence pointing to the contrary, the Bush administration made the case of "self-defence" for the Iraq invasion by citing dubious claims about Iraq being in possession of weapons of mass destruction and Saddam Hussein having links with al-Qaeda, the perpetrators of 9/11 (Hiebert, 2003; Altheide & Grimes, 2016; Boyd-Barrett, 2010; Kellner, 2004). Although these claims were false, news organisations were nonetheless complicit in uncritically repeating administration talking points and cherry-picking facts that perpetuated fears that Iraq was planning terrorist attacks against the US. Therefore, it created a clear sense of urgency to launch a pre-emptive strike on Iraq in which militaristic aggression was justified in relation to protecting Americans (Bumiller, 2002).

However, as the conflict progressed and the government could not deny the evidence disproving the claims of Iraq having procured weapons of mass destruction and Saddam

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Hussein having terrorist connections, administration officials and the mainstream media worked together to shift the narrative to a “rescue story”, which framed the US-led invasion as a necessary means of saving the Iraqi people from their government and bringing democracy to the region (Hiebert, 2003). This was achieved by emphasising the human rights violations being committed by Saddam Hussein’s government towards Iraqi civilians. Therefore, by shifting the emphasis towards crimes against humanity, militaristic aggression was justified in relation to protecting Iraqis (*ibid*). Furthermore, a necessary feature that made this propaganda campaign possible was the marginalisation of dissent (Boyd-Barrett, 2010; Altheide & Grimes, 2016; Klaehn, 2005; Arnove, 2003). The administration’s course of action went largely unchallenged by the mainstream media in which their analysis of the Iraq war was confined and restricted to simply repeating the statements of government officials, which was rife with false facts and jingoistic rhetoric. This example provides support for the propaganda model while also highlighting the relevance of framing practices as well as the discursive technique of leveraging fear over terrorism in order to manipulate public opinion enough to achieve foreign policy related objectives.

To further exemplify the emphasis on terrorism and the strategic use of human rights to justify declaring the “war on terror”, consider a study conducted by Stabile & Kumar (2005) that investigated the US news media’s coverage on Afghanistan in the lead up to the US-led war in the region. Similar to the Iraq invasion, the Bush administration justified this war in relation to the “war on terror”. However, an additional feature identified by the study was that the news media’s coverage on Afghanistan largely converged on one issue, which was Afghan women and their human rights. The primary focal point within news frameworks was the human rights violations being committed against Afghan women by the Taliban. On this point, it is important to note that the mainstream media “discovered” the Taliban’s assault on women long after it began. However, it hardly received any attention by the US establishment or the news until the Bush administration decided it was serviceable in selling the Afghanistan war to the public. To add, the US’ economic and strategic interests in the region as well as their historical role in funding, training and providing weapons to Islamic fundamentalist groups in Afghanistan was completely ignored by official statements as well as news coverage

regarding this issue. Instead, US intervention was framed as a humanitarian and counterterrorism effort. Hence, the researchers interpret this as war propaganda that opportunistically used Afghan women and their “human rights” as a way of justifying military aggression and extending US imperial interests in the Middle East.

The cases of the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and subsequently, the mainstream media’s coverage of these events contain patterns that are consistent with the propaganda model. Moreover, they provide support for the overall theoretical framework of this study as they highlight the relevance of the politics of fear as well as framing theory, which have been integral features to the creation of propaganda campaigns. The emphasis placed on issues of terrorism and human rights violations combined with the omission of dissenting views demonstrates the methods through which news frameworks attempt to mobilise popular support towards US foreign policy interests. Since there is a pattern that can be derived from the mainstream media’s coverage of past US-led militaristic interventions, this study follows the lead of previous investigations by attempting to examine whether similar trends can be identified within news coverage preceding airstrikes into Syria. Namely, I will attempt to identify (1) whether institutionally affiliated sources dominated the debate, (2) the amount of focus placed on terrorism and human rights and (3) the extent to which dissenting views were marginalised.

3 METHODOLOGY

This paper sets out to investigate whether news coverage by two mainstream publications, *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* served to provide support for administration policies towards Syria in the months leading up to airstrikes. Based on the literature and theoretical framework, this study tests the following hypotheses:

H1: Official sources will be cited more than non-official sources.

H2: Terrorism and human rights violations will be emphasised, and US strategic interests will be omitted.

H3: Militaristic solutions will be emphasised and supported, and counterarguments will be omitted.

H4: News articles dominated by official sources will be framing the debate as a counterterrorism and humanitarian matter.

H5: News articles dominated by official sources will exclude dissenting views.

This chapter will focus on the methodology of the investigation. First, I will describe the rationale for the methodology chosen. Second, I will describe the sampling procedure and the construction of the coding scheme. Third, I will briefly describe reliability measures adopted and the methods used to analyse the data.

3.1 Rationale for Methodology

A content analysis can be defined as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Krippendorff, 2004a, p.19). According to Hansen, a quantitative content analysis affords us with a method to systematically and comprehensively analyse media content, that is less prone to subjective interpretations and idiosyncrasies (Hansen, 1998). The purpose of a quantitative content analysis is to identify and count the occurrence of specific characteristics within texts and from this, to be able to interpret the meanings they contain and make inferences about their wider social significance (Bauer, 2000; Weber, 1990; Weber, 1985). Krippendorff acknowledges that a quantitative content analysis is particularly valuable for the study of journalistic practices in which some of the earliest uses of content analyses was to identify propaganda within the news (Krippendorff, 2004a). To add, previous research conducted on Herman & Chomsky’s propaganda model has also used the content analysis method (Krishnaiah et al., 1993; Dickson, 1992; Gutterez-Villalobos et al., 1994; Klaehn, 2002; Good, 2008). Since the present investigation aims to test whether the news coverage preceding a particular event exhibits propagandistic traits, it is necessary to analyse a large number of texts from which we can systematically isolate and count the occurrence of the characteristics that comprise the

propaganda model. Therefore, a quantitative content analysis seemed the most appropriate method for such an investigation.

However, quantitative content analysis has been criticised for its various limitations. Namely, for its “quantitative nature, its fragmentation of textual wholes, for its positivist notion of objectivity and for its lack of a theory or meaning” (Hansen, 1998, p.91). Firstly, with regards to quantification, a content analysis is not limited to meaninglessly counting the occurrence of certain characteristics within texts. Instead, it involves counting the occurrence of particular dimensions that have been specified by a theoretical framework (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Secondly, content analysis is criticised for its fragmentation of texts at the coding level as the process of counting the frequency of individual characteristics fails to holistically capture the complex and latent meanings within texts. However, one could argue that while it does require texts to be broken down, they are reassembled at the stage of analysis and interpretation, which enables the researcher to make valid inferences about the underlying meanings they contain (Hansen, 1998). Thirdly, while it can be accepted that content analysis will not be entirely objective in a value-free manner, the subjective choices and interpretations are not arbitrary as they are justified by a theoretical framework, which provides the researcher with the relevant properties to search for within texts (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Moreover, one could argue that absolute objectivity was never a criterion that was specified in definitions of content analyses. In light of the limitations associated with this method, there are alternative, more qualitative methods that are preferred for analysing texts such as, discourse analysis. This method involves a closer reading and inspection of textual matter, which provides the researcher with a process more suited to uncover the latent meanings within texts (Krippendorff, 2004a). However, one could argue that discourse analysis is even more prone to limitations such as the lack of objectivity as well as the inability to work with a large volume of texts. Therefore, this investigation proceeds with the use of a quantitative content analysis while being cautious about the potential difficulties that could arise.

3.2 Sampling Considerations

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This study content analysed *The New York Times'* and *Washington Post's* news coverage of the Syrian conflict in the months leading up to the first round of US-led airstrikes in Syria in September 2014. A total of 150 news articles were chosen for analysis from a two-month period prior to the beginning of airstrikes into Syria. The LexisNexis database was used to retrieve the news articles. The texts analysed for this study ($n=150$) were collected from the two publications from 22nd July - 23rd September 2014. US-led airstrikes began on 23rd September 2014 and therefore, a two-month time period preceding this date was chosen. The New York Times and Washington Post were selected for analysis as they are among the most read newspapers in the US, which has earned them a mainstream status (Miaschi, 2017). The search terms, "Syria" and "airstrike" were entered into the LexisNexis database and the search criteria was narrowed to only display articles printed by the aforementioned publications. This yielded an overall sample of 352 articles. The sample ($n=150$) represents 42% of the overall population.

Krippendorff argues that a content analysis needs to limit their research to a manageable number of texts as the entire universe of texts is too large to realistically analyse (Krippendorff, 2004a). Hence, researchers should rely on a sample that is selected from an overall population. Sampling techniques are comprised of three main elements, which are; its representativeness, the sample size and the unit of sampling or coding (Bauer, 2000). This study used the method of "probability sampling", which is a procedure designed to ensure that all of the sampling units chosen for analysis have an equal chance of being included in the sample (Lacy et al., 2014; Riffe et al., 2014). The technique of "systematic sampling", which is a type of probability sampling was used, which involves choosing every n th unit from an overall sampling frame (ibid). The specific number, n , is obtained by dividing the required sample size ($n=150$) by the overall population size ($n=352$). This would be calculated as: $352/150 = 2.3$. Therefore, every 2nd article was pulled from the overall population until 150 articles were obtained. A random number between 0 and 2 was chosen in order to decide the starting point from which the sample was to be collected. Since the starting point was randomly chosen, this produced a reliable probability sample (Krippendorff, 2004a). The unit of analysis was each news article.

3.3 Construction of the Coding Frame

The variables selected for the coding framework were derived from the literature review. The coding scheme contains three main categories: (1) the reliance upon institutionally affiliated sources, (2) the focus on terrorism and/or human rights violations and (3) the marginalisation of dissent. These categories attempt to extract certain frames within news coverage, which is challenging for a content analysis since a frame is an abstract variable that is difficult to identify and code for. Hence, this study adheres to the recommendations of Matthes & Kohring who suggest that frames should be broken down into smaller elements during the coding process, which can be reassembled during the stage of analysis and interpretation (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). This codebook broke down the frames into constituent variables, which involved directly counting the occurrence of particular elements instead of attempting to extract larger themes and frames.

The first category – the reliance upon institutionally affiliated sources, contained two variables: (1) the number of times an official source was cited and (2) the number of times a non-official source was cited. An official source was defined as a US governmental or business-related source and a non-official source was defined as a non-US-governmental or non-business-related source. For example, the sentence, “American defense officials said the targets included weapons supplies, depots, barracks and buildings the militants use for command and control.” was coded as citing an official source. On the other hand, the sentence, “Hadi al-Bahra, the president of the Syrian opposition coalition, said in an interview that he was requesting that the United States and its partners “act fast.”” was coded as having cited a non-official source.

The second category – terrorism and/or human rights violations, contained three variables: (1) the number of times issues relating to terrorism and/or human rights violations were mentioned, (2) the number of times US strategic interests in Syria were mentioned and (3) the overall supportiveness of the article towards airstrikes. For example, the sentence, “Fighting terrorism, he said, is ‘the collective responsibility of all members of the international community.’” was coded as having mentioned terrorism. In addition, the sentence, “...the

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chairman of a United Nations investigatory panel on human rights said in Geneva that he had run out of words to depict the gravity of the crimes committed inside Syria.” was coded as having mentioned a human rights violation. Strategic interests were defined as having mentioned anything in relation to American economic and/or political interests in Syria. For example, the sentence, “But there is a less-crazy version of this narrative - involving colonialism and oil - that many people accept, especially in Arab countries.” was coded as mentioning a US strategic interest. Lastly, based on the information and interpretations provided by the article, the coder was then required to judge the overall supportiveness of the article towards US airstrikes on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being “completely unsupportive” and 5 being “completely supportive”).

The third and final category – the marginalisation of dissent, contained three variables: (1) the number of times a militaristic solution was mentioned, (2) the number of times counterarguments towards a militaristic solution were mentioned and (3) the overall extent to which the article marginalised dissenting views. For example, the sentence, “We also need a partner on the ground to take advantage of airstrikes and seize back territory.” was coded as mentioning a militaristic solution. In addition, the sentence, “‘Launching airstrikes on another country, by any standard, by any definition is an act of war,[...]’Have we not had enough of imperial presidencies doing what they want in the world?’” was coded as having mentioned a counterargument to a militaristic solution. Lastly, the coder was required to judge the overall extent to which the article excluded dissenting views on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being “not at all marginalised” and 5 being “completely marginalised”).

3.4 Data Analysis

In order to ensure reliability, a second coder was asked to code a randomly selected sample, which formed 10% of the total number of articles analysed. The second coder was required to code for all variables except for the first category, which measured the number of official and non-official sources. This category did not require a second coder as it was fairly objective and not open to interpretation. The second and third categories were included for which the second coder was provided with definitions and a thorough explanation of each category and their

constituent variables. Neither recording unit examples or a description of the overall purpose of the study were provided in order to prevent coding bias. Intercoder reliability was calculated by using the ReCal2 software.¹ Krippendorff's alpha was used to measure the intercoder reliability. The use of Krippendorff's alpha is recommended as it is suitable for any type of variable, accommodates any number of coders and also accounts for agreements that occur by chance (Krippendorff, 2004b, Lombard et al., 2002). Krippendorff recommends that researchers should only rely on alphas that are .80 or above and use alphas that are between .667 and .80 for tentative conclusions (Krippendorff, 2004a). All variables yielded alphas that were higher than .80 (see appendix A). The statistical analysis consisted of three parts. First, t-tests were conducted for variables within each coding category in order to identify the overall differences and trends in the presentation of content. Second, regression analyses were performed in order to identify whether there were trends and associations between variables across different coding categories. Third, further t-tests were conducted in order to compare *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* and search for whether there were differences in the way issues were discussed between these two publications. The following section will present and discuss the results of the study.

4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Overall, the results support the study's hypotheses as well as the overall theoretical framework of this investigation. News articles from both publications were found to have been propagating the administration's policies towards Syria while showing very little opposition towards these views. This section will discuss the five main themes derived from the results: (1) Official sources were cited far more often than non-official sources, (2) there was a dominant thematic emphasis placed on the issues of terrorism, humanitarian crises and the necessity for mitigating these issues (3) militaristic solutions received far more attention and support than

¹ <http://dfreelon.org/utis/recalfront/recal-oir/>

counterarguments, (4) dissenting views were significantly marginalised and (5) the comparison between the two publications demonstrated little divergence in their coverage of Syria.

4.1 Official Sources Dominated the Debate

Table 1: T-tests between variables in each coding category. *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Variable	Mean	Mean Diff.	N
Official Sources	8.01	5.27***	150
Non-official Sources	2.75	(9.43)	
Terrorism and/or human rights violations	6.14	6.01***	150
US strategic interests	0.13	(18.79)	
Militaristic Solution	7.4	6.47***	150
Counterarguments	0.93	(16.05)	

Table 1 provides the results for t-tests conducted within each coding category. A single sample, one-tailed, paired t-test was conducted in order to determine whether the differences between the observations in each category were statistically significant. First, official sources were cited far more frequently than non-official sources. These two variables contained a mean differential of 5.27, which was statistically significant at the 1% level. Thus, this indicates that each article on average contained 5.27 more citations of official sources than non-official sources. This provides support for H1, which predicted that news coverage would be dominated by information provided by US governmental and/or business entities compared with non-official sources. The information provided by each article was mainly obtained from government officials such as members of the Obama administration, members of Congress, the Pentagon, State Department officials and in some cases, businesses. These findings are also consistent with certain aspects of the theoretical framework such as, the third filter of the propaganda model, which states that news frameworks predominantly source their information from institutionally affiliated individuals. This demonstrates one of the ways in which the news agenda is in effect, defined by elite decision makers. The inclusion of non-official sources primarily consisted of statements made by Syrian civilians, the families of

American journalists who were killed by ISIS terrorists, the United Nations and the leaders of other countries.

4.2 Thematic emphasis on terrorism and human rights

Second, issues of terrorism and human rights violations were the dominant frames with which the Syrian conflict was discussed. The number of mentions of terrorism and/or human rights violations compared with US strategic interests contain a mean differential of 6.01, which is statistically significant at the 1% level. This indicates that each article on average, contained 6.01 more mentions of issues relating to ISIS' terrorist activities and/or human rights violations than economic or political interests in Syria. These results provide support for H2, which predicted that news articles will limit the boundaries of debate to focus on issues of terrorism and crimes against humanity while omitting any discussion of the administration's strategic interests in Syria. With reference to the literature review, the thematic emphasis placed on ISIS' terrorist activities and their human rights violations is aligned with the predictions of the fifth filter of the propaganda model as it demonstrates the use of the generic "war on terror" as a dominant ideological element. It could also be argued that these issues were emphasised with the objective of eliciting fears over potential terrorist threats to the US as well as creating a narrative of saving the victims of ISIS. This frame was enhanced by omitting discussions of strategic interests, which consequently, advanced an agenda that appeared to be primarily concerned with saving those targeted by ISIS, protecting American security and bringing political stability to Syria. While it is not entirely surprising that news coverage almost entirely excluded any discussion of strategic foreign policy interests in Syria, it nonetheless underlines how the absence of inconvenient facts creates news discourses that are ideologically inflected, which echoes the predictions of the propaganda model.

Table 2: Association between terrorism and/or human rights violations and official sources.
*, ** and *** denote statistical significance of 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Terrorism and/or human rights violations	Coef.
Official Sources	0.119** (2.20)
Constant	5.183*** (9.68)
<i>N</i>	150
R-Squared	0.0317

Table 3: Association between terrorism and/or human rights violations and non-official sources. *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Terrorism and/or human rights violations	Coef.
Non-official sources	0.483*** (6.24)
Constant	4.811*** (13.60)
<i>N</i>	150
R-Squared	0.208

Furthermore, evaluating the data and identifying the information that is present and absent from news discourses can be linked with source selection (Klaehn, 2009). Table 2 provides the regression results with terrorism and/or human rights violations as the dependent variable and official sources as the explanatory variable. The results indicate a positive association, which is statistically significant at conventional levels. The increased citation of official sources was associated with an increased discussion of terrorism and human rights violations. This provides support for H4, which predicted that news articles dominated by official sources will also be framing the Syrian issue as a counterterrorism and humanitarian matter. Interestingly, the citation of non-official sources was also found to be positively associated with the frequency with which terrorism and/or human rights violations were discussed. The references of non-official sources primarily involved statements that expressed grievances over the brutality of ISIS and the atrocities they are inflicting upon innocent civilians, journalists, etc. The regression results provided by Table 3 demonstrates that increases in the citation of non-official sources was associated with an increase in the frequency with which terrorism and/or human rights violations was discussed. These results are statistically significant at the 1% level. This is relevant to the third filter of the propaganda model, which

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argues that the disproportionate reliance upon official sources serves to narrow the premises of debate. However, these findings indicate that even in the minority of cases that a non-official source was cited, it provided information that conformed to administration talking points instead of offering a diverse range of arguments and perspectives. Consequently, contrary to what one would normally expect, the citation of non-official sources still served to provide viewpoints that mostly converged with the Obama administration's statements regarding Syria.

The general finding that the coverage of Syria contained a significant thematic emphasis on terrorism and human rights is consistent with the third as well as the fifth filter of the propaganda model. Firstly, it demonstrates how the reliance upon official sources was associated with narrowing the premises of debate to revolve around a certain set of issues. Secondly, it converges with idea that news frameworks fixate on dominant ideological elements such as the "war on terror" in order to legitimise militaristic aggression (Hiebert, 2003; Stabile & Kumar, 2005; Altheide & Grimes, 2016; Norris, 2009). One specific trend that was identified within discussions of terrorism and human rights violations was the substantial amount of coverage dedicated to ISIS' assault on civilians, American journalists and religious minorities. This discussion was followed by statements such as:

The tragedy in Syria isn't Obama's fault, but that of Syrians; still, the president has been painfully passive toward what has unfolded: the deaths of nearly 200,000 Syrians, the destabilization of neighbouring countries by three million refugees, the near collapse of Iraq, the beheading of two American journalists, mass atrocities against Yazidi and Christian religious minorities and growing risks of ISIS terrorism against American and European targets. (Kristof, 2014)

This precisely demonstrates the use of atrocities occurring inside Syria to create a sense of urgency to act against ISIS. The discursive tactics identified within these findings resemble those used within the news coverage of Iraq and Afghanistan. The emphasis on the terrorist threat ISIS presents to the US and European countries creates a "self-defence" narrative, which interprets militaristic aggression as a necessary measure to ensure safety (Hiebert, 2003). In

addition, directing the public's attention towards the human rights atrocities caused by ISIS towards Syrian civilians, American journalists and religious minorities also creates a "rescue" narrative, which frames US intervention as a means of saving these victims. These findings also bear resemblance to Altheide's argument, which suggests that elite decision makers rely on exploiting the public's fears of terrorism in order to justify and legitimise their policy related goals (Altheide, 2004; Altheide, 2006; Altheide & Grimes, 2016). Admittedly, the aforementioned quote demonstrates a more explicit use of the atrocities committed inside Syria as a justification for American intervention in which not all discussions of terrorism and human rights were as blatant in framing airstrikes as a humanitarian measure. However, a substantial portion of articles did conform to such patterns of justifying military measures against Syria and thus, is relevant to the analysis as well as the theoretical framework of the study.

4.3 Overall support for militaristic aggression

Third, militaristic solutions received far more attention and support compared to counterarguments towards militaristic aggression in Syria. The t-test results provided in Table 1 demonstrates that the frequency with which militaristic solutions and counterarguments were discussed yielded a mean differential of 6.47, which is statistically significant at the 1% level. This provides support for H3 as it demonstrates that the number of times news articles discussed militaristic solutions far outweighed the frequency with which counterarguments were discussed. Predominantly, the articles which expressed support for militaristic solutions embraced airstrikes as the correct course of action. However, there were other cases in which the article appeared to be providing a counterargument but, was nonetheless propagating a militaristic solution. In such cases, the article expressed an opinion opposing airstrikes due to its apparent leniency in dealing with the potent threat emanating from ISIS in which it argued for a "boots on the ground" operation to accompany airstrikes if they were to adequately deal with the threat. This resembles the form of tactical critique advanced by Sparks, which claimed that the type of criticism often provided questions the implementation of a particular policy rather than the overall aim of the policy itself (Sparks, 2007). Although these were evidently few, the counterarguments offered towards militaristic aggression were cognisant of the

repercussions and consequences of such approaches to innocent civilians, issues of sovereignty, international law and the amount of money it would cost.

Table 4: Regression results with airstrike supportiveness as the dependent variable. *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Airstrike Supportiveness	(1)	(2)
Terrorism and/or human rights violations	0.042** (2.34)	0.037** (2.09)
Official Sources		0.015 (1.22)
Constant	3.043*** (23.51)	2.949*** (19.56)
<i>N</i>	150	150
R-squared	0.036	0.046

Furthermore, Table 4 provides the regression results with airstrike supportiveness as the dependent variable. The first regression was conducted in order to determine whether there was an association between the article's supportiveness towards airstrikes and the number of times terrorism and/or human rights violations were discussed. The results from this test provides a positive association, which is statistically significant at the 5% level. This demonstrates that an increase in the number of times the article discussed Syria in terms of a terrorist threat or a humanitarian crisis was associated with higher levels of supportiveness towards airstrikes. However, in order to test the strength of this association, a multiple regression analysis was also conducted in which official sources was added as a control variable. These results indicate that both terrorism and/or human rights violations as well as official sources were positively correlated with airstrike supportiveness. However, only the former was significant at the 5% level while the latter was not statistically significant. Nonetheless, this provides support for the findings from the first regression, which demonstrates that terrorism and/or human rights violations was positively associated with airstrike supportiveness. Therefore, this is aligned with the predictions of H2 and H3 as it demonstrates that placing a thematic emphasis on counterterrorism and human rights protection was associated with a more positive and supportive interpretation of airstrikes as a solution.

4.4 The marginalisation of dissent

Table 5: Regression results with the marginalisation of dissent as the dependent variable. *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Marginalisation of Dissent	Coef.
Official Sources	0.0403** (2.84)
Constant	3.903*** (27.75)
<i>N</i>	150
R-squared	0.05

Fourth, dissenting views were found to have been significantly marginalised. As aforementioned, the results presented in Table 1 demonstrate a substantial difference in the frequency with which militaristic solutions and counterarguments were discussed. Thus, oppositional critique towards the administration's policy of engaging in airstrikes was significantly scarce. To add, H5 predicted that news articles dominated by official sources would marginalise dissenting views to a greater degree. Table 5 presents the regression results with the marginalisation of dissent as the dependent variable and official sources as the explanatory variable. The results were statistically significant at conventional levels and indicates a positive association between these two variables. The increased citation of official sources was associated with higher levels of marginalising dissent. These findings capture the essence of the propaganda model, which suggests that any views that are overtly critical or questioning towards establishment interests will be excluded. In addition, it also exhibits a pattern that is consistent with the argument that the domination of official sources creates a highly narrow analytical space for journalists who are directly or indirectly coerced to fall in line with establishment views (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Klaehn, 2005; Klaehn, 2009; Mullen & Klaehn, 2010). An essential ingredient in achieving this is to ensure that views that threaten elite interests are silenced.

4.5 Comparison between *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*

Table 6: T-tests comparing *Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

Variable	Washington Post	NewYork Times	Mean Diff.
Official Sources	8.913	7.445	1.468 (1.52)
Terrorism and/or human rights violations	5.534	6.521	-0.987 (-1.525)
Airstrike Supportiveness	3.379	3.25	0.129 (0.90)
Counterarguments	0.689	1.076	-0.386 (-1.396)

Finally, Table 6 presents the results comparing *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* on key variables from each category. While there was a small degree of difference found between these two publications, they were not found to be statistically significant at conventional levels. Therefore, these results indicate that both publications by and large, behaved similarly in their coverage of the Syrian conflict during the months leading up to airstrikes. Since both of these publications are left-leaning news outlets, it was perhaps to be expected that they will not provide significantly divergent views in their discussion of foreign policy in relation to Syria.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While the findings of this investigation provided statistically significant support for the hypotheses, there were various limitations within the methodology that must be considered. The design of the study was restricted in terms of the relatively small sample size, the narrow time period and its exclusive focus on only two mainstream publications both of which had similar ideological leanings. The small sample size and the narrow time period within which the analysis was conducted prevents the extent with which we can extrapolate the findings of this study to further news coverage relating to Syria in the lead up to airstrikes. Additionally,

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considering Syria has been a strong focus within US foreign policy interests for many decades, future investigations can account for this by examining news coverage over a much longer time period. The exclusive focus on *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, two left-leaning publications, could have impacted the quality of the data by providing a one-dimensional interpretation and discussion of US foreign policy towards Syria. This is especially true as it is perhaps to be expected that left-leaning publications would not be highly critical of an administration that is aligned with a similar political ideology. While it was beyond the scope of this investigation to do so, future studies can account for this limitation by also including mainstream right-leaning publications in the sample so as to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the American news media functions in relation to the propaganda model. This can be achieved by comparing and contrasting whether the presentation of content and journalistic practices within news coverage of foreign affairs differs based on the ideological affiliation of the publication.

Although the data was restricted, the results obtained from the investigation provide valuable insights with regards to the propaganda model and the overall theoretical background outlined in Chapter 2. Herman & Chomsky's propaganda framework argues that the US mainstream media's coverage of foreign affairs serves to reproduce and legitimise the political and economic interests of elite decision makers. It explains the mechanisms by which governmental and economic elites are able to filter the news, narrow the premises of debate and eliminate dissenting views with the objective of engineering popular support for their political and economic interests (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). This study used the propaganda model as a framework to examine whether news coverage on Syria prior to airstrikes conforms to these properties. In addition, the widespread conceptions of terrorism, the politics of fear and framing theory were integral aspects to the theoretical framework that informed the aims and design of this study. By drawing upon the literature, this investigation set out to identify whether news coverage of Syria in the lead up to militaristic aggression (1) disproportionately relied on official sources, (2) placed thematic emphasis on terrorism and human rights while downplaying US strategic interests in Syria and (3) limited or completely excluded any oppositional critique towards administration policy.

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In line with previous investigations conducted on news coverage of US foreign affairs, the major trends that were noticed provide support for the propaganda model. With regards to the third filter of the propaganda model, the results suggested that news frameworks were dominated by US governmental and elite sources. This factor is relevant to news coverage and the evaluation of journalistic practices as privileging sources that are affiliated with the government lays the groundwork for news coverage that narrows the debate to be set within parameters that conform to the interests of power. As laid out in Chapter 2, the American political landscape post 9/11 dealt with a significant shift in which foreign policy matters relating to the Middle East almost exclusively revolved around the “war on terror”. This can be considered as a dominant ideological element that has been routinely used to justify engaging in militaristic confrontations with Middle Eastern countries. More importantly, the American establishment declared their “war on terror” for two main reasons; protecting their own national security and bringing stability to the region in which they are intervening.

The trends observed from the data demonstrated that these frames were heavily used within news coverage of Syria. The issues that were chiefly discussed was ISIS’ terrorist activities and their role in creating a humanitarian crisis inside Syria. These issues were emphasised in order to frame the pre-emptive strike against Syria as a permissible course of action. Additionally, the focus placed on these issues resembles the findings from previous investigations on the news coverage of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. In these cases, it was clear that the mainstream media primarily followed the administration’s line of reasoning, which fixated on the “war on terror”. These factors are relevant to the creation of propaganda campaigns as it provides a highly skewed depiction of US foreign policy objectives, which overlooks the economic and political reasons behind their intervention – reasons that the American establishment arguably prioritises over humanitarianism. Correspondingly, it is notable that the primary topic of discussion within news coverage was about terrorism and human rights instead of how political unrest and the operation of anti-American groups in Syria is concerning for the achievement of US foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. With reference to the propaganda model, the use of dominant ideological elements such as, the “war on terror”

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involves leveraging the public's fears over "freedom-hating" groups of people that threaten the American way of life. Consequently, stressing the topics of combating terrorism is serviceable to the aim of manipulating public opinion enough to support American intervention.

Furthermore, the findings suggested that both publications by and large, propagated militaristic solutions while excluding any dissenting views. The majority of articles were found to have solely been discussing a course of action that involved engaging in military aggression in some capacity. In addition, any arguments about the negative repercussions of doing so were either minimal or completely absent. This captures the essence of the propaganda model, which argues that the central ingredient that makes propaganda campaigns possible is the silencing of dissent. The conscious exclusion of critical views towards engaging in a military operation was instrumental in creating a more favourable and supportive interpretation of the administration's foreign policy towards Syria. Thus, this finding echoes the propaganda model as it demonstrates the primary mechanism by which the mainstream media's coverage of foreign affairs selectively emphasises and omits information based on whether it is serviceable to the economic and political interests of the American establishment. In addition, it bears significant resemblance to the news coverage of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars in which cases the marginalisation of dissent was also a crucial aspect in mobilising popular support for US intervention. This brings the role of news organisations into question as they are, in many ways, the gatekeepers of information and are meant to provide the public with a diverse range of arguments and perspectives in order to enable them to make informed political decisions (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Altheide, 2004, Entman, 1993; Mullen, 2009; Mullen & Klaehn, 2010). However, if the structural factors of the news media function in a manner that involves intentionally silencing opinions that are critical of establishment views, this casts serious doubt over whether the news media is fulfilling their role of adequately educating the public on policy matters.

While the scope of the study was limited to two publications, *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, the analysis provides valuable empirical insights into how these two

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mainstream papers behaved in relation to Herman & Chomsky's propaganda model. In the specific cases of these two papers, this study found support for the propaganda model's assertions. On a final note, in order to expand our understanding of how the mainstream media covers US foreign affairs, further research is required to more comprehensively examine how official sources set the news agenda and ensure that policy debates remain within the constraints of institutional bounds.

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Appendices:

A. Intercoder Reliability

Table 7: Krippendorff's alpha for each variable.

Variable	Alpha
Terrorism and/or human rights violations	0.976
US strategic interests	0.821
Airstrike supportiveness	0.95
Militaristic solution	0.885
Counterarguments	0.898
Marginalisation of dissent	0.91

B. Codebook

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VAR1 Date-Month-Year

VAR2 Publication

1. The New York Times
2. Washington Post

VAR3 Word count

Category 1: Source selection.

VAR4 How many times was a US official/governmental source mentioned in the article?
(Provide the actual number)

VAR5 How many times was a non-governmental/non-official source mentioned in the article?
(Provide the actual number)

Category 2: The emphasis on human rights violations and/or terrorism.

VAR6 How many times did the article mention issues relating to terrorism and/or human rights violations? (Provide the actual number)

VAR7 How many times did the article mention the US strategic interests in the region?
(Provide the actual number)

VAR8 On a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being completely negative and 5 being completely positive), how supportive was the article towards US airstrikes into Syria?

1. Completely unsupportive

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2. Unsupportive
3. Neither supportive or unsupportive (neutral)
4. Supportive
5. Completely supportive

Category 3: The marginalisation of dissent.

VAR9 How many times was a militaristic solution discussed in the article? (Provide the actual number.)

VAR10 How many counter arguments were provided by the article? (Provide the actual number.)

VAR11 On a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being totally disagree and 5 being totally agree), to what extent were dissenting views excluded from the article?

1. Fully included
2. Included
3. Neither included nor excluded (neutral)
4. Excluded
5. Fully excluded

C. Samples

The New York Times

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September 11, 2014 Thursday

Late Edition - Final

Critique From an Obama Fan

BYLINE: By NICHOLAS KRISTOF

SECTION: Section A; Column 0; Editorial Desk; OP-ED COLUMNIST; Pg. 27

LENGTH: 788 words

I'm probably one of the few Americans left with some sympathy for President Obama's foreign policy, and even I have to admit that his **Syria** policy has been a mess.

His "red line" about chemical weapons turned out to be more like a penciled suggestion. His rejection of the proposal by Hillary Rodham Clinton and David Petraeus to arm moderate Syrian factions tragically empowered both the Islamic State in Iraq and **Syria**, or ISIS, and President Bashar al-Assad of **Syria**.

Dismissing ISIS as a "J.V. team," as Obama did in January, was silly -- compounded by the White House's contorted attempts to deny that he had said that. Obama's ambassador to **Syria**, Robert Ford, resigned this year because he found our government's policy impossible to defend.

The tragedy in **Syria** isn't Obama's fault, but that of Syrians; still, the president has been painfully passive toward what has unfolded: the deaths of nearly 200,000 Syrians, the destabilization of neighboring countries by three million refugees, the near collapse of Iraq, the beheading of two American journalists, mass atrocities against Yazidi and Christian religious minorities and growing risks of ISIS terrorism against American and European targets.

And, yes, that's the judgment of an Obama fan.

So it's just as well that the president is trying for a reset -- oops, wrong word -- let's just say "a new strategy" in **Syria**.

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"America will lead a broad coalition to roll back this terrorist threat," Obama declared in his speech Wednesday night. He described it as a "counterterrorism campaign" that would "degrade and ultimately destroy" ISIS.

There's some inconsistency there. Counterterrorism is the right prism through which to approach this, rather than all-out war, but it's unlikely to destroy ISIS any more than it did the Taliban or militancy in Yemen.

Indeed, the president, in his speech, said that his strategy in **Syria** "is one that we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years." That's a plausible comparison, but Obama may be the only person in the world who would cite conflict-torn Yemen and Somalia as triumphs.

Unfortunately, there are more problems than solutions in international relations, and calls for more aggressive action by some Republican critics could make things worse. Dick Cheney has compiled an almost perfect record of being wrong on foreign affairs, so, on Wednesday, when he called for the United States to be more aggressive and get "back on offense," we should all insist upon caution.

My take is that Obama is right to expand military action against ISIS into **Syria** if it's done prudently with modest goals of containing and degrading a terror group. ISIS is a proper target, having butchered Americans, dismembered Iraq and attempted genocide against minorities like the Yazidis.

A 17-year-old Yazidi girl told the Italian newspaper La Repubblica in a phone call that she was being kept by ISIS as a sex slave along with many others. The newspaper got her cellphone number from her parents, who are in a refugee camp.

"They treat us as if we are their slaves," the newspaper quoted the girl as saying. "The men hit us and threaten us when we try to resist. Often I wish that they would beat me so severely that I would die."

ISIS also could pose a terror threat within the United States. At least 100 and perhaps many more Americans have traveled to **Syria** to join jihadi groups, and some could return to carry out attacks.

So striking ISIS in **Syria** makes sense, but we also have to recognize that **airstrikes** will be of limited benefit and carry real risks as well.

"We're going to war because we've been spooked," notes Joshua Landis, a **Syria** specialist at the University of Oklahoma. "But if we do it wrong, we could ensure that the violence spreads."

One danger is that if our bombs kill innocents, ISIS would use its video-making and social media skills to galvanize the Sunni Islam world, saying the American "infidels" who are slaughtering Sunni children

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must be punished. That's why it's crucial to have Sunni partners, including United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

We also need a partner on the ground to take advantage of **airstrikes** and seize back territory. That means moderate Syrian rebels, but there are many fewer of them now than there were two years ago. The middle has been vanishing.

Bolstering the Syrian opposition is still worth trying, and a senior administration official says that the White House will try to expand support. But there's a danger that more arms will lead not to the destruction of ISIS but to the creation of another Somalia.

So let's move ahead with eyes wide open. We've seen the perils of Obama's inaction, and let's now avoid the perils of excessive action.

URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/11/opinion/nicholas-kristof-critique-from-an-obama-fan.html>

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The New York Times

September 16, 2014 Tuesday

Late Edition - Final

U.S. Policy Offered No Hope to Hostage's Family

Manufacturing Consent

Malavika Mysore

BYLINE: By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI; Reporting for this article was contributed by Glenna Gordon, Eric Schmitt, Michael S. Schmidt and Karam Shoumali. Jack Begg and Sheelagh McNeill contributed research.

SECTION: Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk; Pg. 1

LENGTH: 2653 words

The email appeared in Michael Foley's inbox a year after his brother James disappeared on a reporting trip in northern **Syria**. It made clear that the people holding him wanted one thing above all else: money.

Cautiously hopeful, Michael Foley and his parents, John and Diane, turned over the email to the agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation assigned to their case. The agent provided general guidance but also some stern warnings: The United States would never trade prisoners for hostages, nor would it under any circumstances pay ransom. Moreover, the government told the Foleys that it was a crime for private citizens to pay off terrorists.

More important, in retrospect, was what the F.B.I. did not tell the family: Mr. Foley was being held alongside a dozen Europeans, whose countries have a history of paying ransoms.

Mostly, the government offered sympathy but little active support, the family and their advisers said, leaving them overwhelmed and unsure of what to do.

Guided by its strict no-ransom policy, the United States government's hands-off approach was vastly different from the tack taken by European countries, which quickly negotiated the release of their citizens in exchange for cash.

This greatly frustrated the family of Mr. Foley, 40, a freelance journalist, and the other American hostages, who were desperate for Washington to take stronger action, according to interviews with two dozen people, including members of Mr. Foley's family, witnesses to his time in captivity, his colleagues and a network of consultants who tried to win his release.

"The F.B.I. didn't help us much -- let's face it," Diane Foley said in a telephone interview. "Our government was very clear that no ransom was going to be paid, or should be paid," she said. "It was horrible -- and continues to be horrible. You are between a rock and a hard place."

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For much of the hostages' captivity, the administration appears to have treated the abductions as unfortunate but relatively routine cases of Americans falling into the hands of extremists. Europeans, by contrast, treated the kidnappings as national security crises.

That placed the Foleys in the middle of a global debate about how to deal with terrorist kidnappings, with European countries and the United States taking opposite sides on an agonizing choice about whether to pay ransoms.

In hindsight, the family criticisms echo broader concerns that the administration did not foresee how the Islamic State in Iraq and **Syria** could become a major threat.

There is little indication that the administration anticipated how Mr. Foley and other American hostages could turn into grisly propaganda by ISIS, increasing pressure on the United States to begin what may become another extended military engagement in the Middle East.

A senior law enforcement official said that the F.B.I. agents spoke to the Foleys "each and every day," and that a three-member team was assigned to the family. But they were limited by what they could share, both because much of the information was classified and because they did not want to cause further emotional strain.

"We cannot -- and do not -- want to give the families every single lead because some turn up to be dry holes, and we want to minimize the yo-yo effect," said the official, who requested anonymity because he did not want to be seen as critical of a grieving mother.

Administration officials have defended their response to the hostage crisis, saying that the government mounted a risky raid in July, using American troops to try to free the captives, though the mission was not successful.

After that first email last November, the captors followed up with a demand for 100 million euros (\$130 million) in ransom and the release of unspecified Muslim prisoners. Then, silence.

Eight months later, Ms. Foley would next see her son in a video showing him kneeling in the sand, an executioner's knife at his neck.

The United States and Britain are among the only countries that abide by a zero-concession policy, refusing to accede to terrorists' demands, arguing that doing so encourages more kidnapping. By contrast, European countries have repeatedly paid to free their citizens, despite signing numerous declarations vowing not to, prompting condemnation from former American officials and analysts.

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"What is hard to prove is how many Americans have not been kidnapped as a result of the fact that the enemy knows they will not get a penny from us," said Gen. John R. Allen, who recently retired as the top commander in Afghanistan. "In the aftermath of this horrific event it makes it hard to explain this policy. But the fact that there are Americans in the region who were never taken because they knew there was no advantage to doing so needs to be factored in."

The willingness to pay ransoms for kidnapped victims is a source of debate and mounting tension between the United States and Britain on one side and their European allies on the other. From the families' perspective, there is another dividing line between the two approaches: Many European nations take charge of the situation from the moment their citizens are captured and aggressively begin a negotiation. By contrast, relatives in the United States said they were left to puzzle through the crisis largely on their own.

While the F.B.I. declined to comment on its handling of the hostage crisis, a senior law enforcement official said that the bureau used every tool at its disposal. He conceded, however, that the bureau is bound by American law and cannot engage in a discussion over a potential ransom. "Those are the lanes in the road we are left to work with," the official said.

From the perspective of the families, however, the policy of not bargaining with terrorists is itself controversial. They argue that the death of even one person seems a high price to pay for the broader goal of not encouraging further kidnappings.

A Broad Gulf

Unbeknown to the Foleys, the email they received last November was part of a blitz sent by ISIS over a four-month period to the relatives of the 23 Western hostages they would eventually hold in the same jail, including three other Americans.

There was immediately a gulf between how American and European officials responded.

A crisis cell was activated inside the Foreign Ministries of France, Spain, Switzerland and Italy, staffed around the clock with people working in shifts, said a European counterterrorism official who has worked on numerous hostage cases and was briefed on the negotiations with ISIS.

They waited for the kidnappers to reach out, and when they did, the intelligence services of at least one country took over the email accounts of family members, responding directly to the terrorist group, according to a person with direct knowledge of how the negotiations unfolded.

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As early as February of this year, the Europeans proceeded from requesting proof of life to making a ransom counteroffer, according to a person closely involved in the crisis who said the average sum negotiated per person was around \$2 million.

The Foleys and the other American families were left to answer the emails themselves and kept largely in the dark. They were not introduced to one another and had to find the other families on their own, Ms. Foley said. While high-level officials met with them, they shared little information.

"They were always very cordial," Ms. Foley said. "The problem was we never got any information about what the government was doing -- if anything -- on our behalf. Every bit of information we got was on our own."

The families said they had little evidence that the kidnappings had become a major concern for the Obama administration, though they acknowledge that they were not necessarily aware of all of the government's efforts. While they reached out to the State Department and were repeatedly told "everything was being done," they said they never had any clear indication that this was a policy priority.

Mr. Foley's former employer, the online publication GlobalPost, spent millions of dollars on a security firm it hired to search for clues of the missing journalist, said Philip Balboni, its chief executive.

"As to the F.B.I.'s role," Mr. Balboni said, "we always felt that we had the laboring oar."

Being Told to Stall

Because the Foleys did not initially know how to reach the other families, and because they were not aware of what the Europeans were doing, months elapsed before they realized that their son's captors were releasing his cellmates for cash.

Around May, all four of the American families finally met one another and began holding group conference calls with the administration, Ms. Foley said.

They began comparing the ransom demands and realized that the four Americans were being held by the same people, who were coordinating their response.

In late spring, as more and more Europeans were let go, the Foleys learned that about \$4.5 million had been paid to free one hostage, said Mr. Balboni, who declined to say which government or entity paid.

"The fund-raising didn't start in earnest until relatively late," Mr. Balboni said. "Our goal was \$5 million. It was a kind of extrapolation from what we had learned from the Western hostages that had been released."

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Although American officials initially advised the family that they could be prosecuted for paying a ransom, the bureau later privately told the Foleys that it was unlikely they would face charges and they could pursue their own course of action, independently of what the United States was attempting, a senior American official said. Once the family made it clear they wanted to pay, the bureau instructed them to stall, according to a consultant working on the hostage crisis.

"What the F.B.I. said is that their experience had shown that you want to draw out the process," said the consultant, who requested anonymity because he did not want to be seen as being critical of the United States. "You want to have lots of back and forth. You want further proof of life. You want to ask if you can speak to your son by phone -- anything that elongates the process.

"I asked, 'Why do we want to do that?' What they said is, 'This is how you get the numbers down to a realistic figure,' " the consultant said. "At one point, I said: 'Are you sure? I think we are just making them angry.' "

Cash was not the only thing Mr. Foley's captors wanted. In one of the early emails to the family, they had demanded the release of unspecified Muslim prisoners, Mr. Balboni said. In subsequent messages to the families of the other Americans, the captors proposed a swap for a Pakistani neuroscientist, Aafia Siddiqui, whose incarceration in a Texas prison on charges of trying to kill Americans in Afghanistan has become a rallying cry for jihadists.

Such a swap was off the table, they were told, because of the no-concessions policy.

Yet on May 31, Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl was released by the Taliban after being traded for five Taliban detainees held at Guant-namo Bay, Cuba.

This was a significant shift in how the United States had handled such situations. Dane Egli, who was a hostage rescue adviser for the National Security Council during the Bush administration, said Sergeant Bergdahl's release "introduced a huge inconsistency in our policy."

The families of the ISIS hostages were aghast. They angrily called their advisers and one another, feeling more than ever that they were on their own, said a person who worked alongside several of them.

A Confusing Rationale

The Obama administration argued that the Bergdahl case did not constitute an exception because he was considered a prisoner of war.

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By contrast, the families were advised that Ms. Siddiqui's release was impossible because she had been convicted in an American court, a different situation from that of the Guant-namo detainees, who have never been charged, according to one adviser.

If this rationale was confusing for the families, it was especially hard to explain to their sons' captors.

By the summer, President Obama authorized a rescue operation after a group of French journalists were released. In April and May, one of the released hostages sat down with the F.B.I. in Paris to describe the oil facility on the outskirts of Raqqa, **Syria**, where the 23 foreigners had been held. He pinpointed the location on a Google Earth map, showing a building opposite three silo-like formations.

The unsuccessful rescue attempt took two more months to mount, as the authorities worked to corroborate the information from the former hostage, a senior official said.

Advisers to the families say this delay shows the administration was not carrying out surveillance of the town in **Syria** where the four Americans were held, and had to scramble to position a surveillance aircraft over the area in order to establish a baseline of human activity. (Officials refused to confirm or deny, saying the information is classified.)

Unaware of the July 3 rescue operation, the Foleys were working at full tilt on the only avenue open to them: trying to raise money. It was a humiliating endeavor. To save their son's life, they were essentially passing a hat, asking donors to provide money that would go to a terrorist group deemed so extreme it had been expelled from Al Qaeda.

The family was particularly worried because they had not received a reply from ISIS since December. They were advised by the F.B.I. that the captors' demands were not serious because they had asked for such a high initial figure.

Looking back, Ms. Foley said, she was "appalled" that the United States did not do more, and wondered if the government's approach did not cause their son's captors to single him out for retribution.

"Jim was in the hands of a very hateful, brutal group of people -- only God knows," she said. "But it was clear that they wanted to negotiate. That angered them more than anything -- they would send nasty messages aimed at the government, and the family had to get back to them," she said. "We would read it over, and tweak it and suggest changes, but it was obvious they wanted to engage with the government, and I don't understand how it is that we were not willing to engage at some level. This made them more and more angry."

On Aug. 8, Mr. Obama authorized **airstrikes** on ISIS positions in Iraq.

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On Aug. 12, the Foleys received the last email from their son's abductors. It appeared to be addressed not just to the Foleys, but also to the United States government:

"You were given many chances to negotiate the release of your people via cash transactions as other governments have accepted," said the email, published by GlobalPost. "We have also offered prisoner exchanges to free the Muslims currently in your detention like our sister Dr Afia Sidiqqi however you proved quickly to us that this is NOT what you are interested in," they said. "You and your citizens will pay the price of the bombings."

A week later, a video appeared on YouTube showing the execution of Mr. Foley.

Two weeks after that, a nearly identical video was uploaded showing the death of another American journalist, Steven J. Sotloff. This weekend, a British aid worker, David Cawthorne Haines, was beheaded.

Two other Americans and two British citizens remain in ISIS custody. At least 15 others held with Mr. Foley, all but one of them European, succeeded in getting out in return for cash.

In an effort to make sure the death of Mr. Foley brings about change, his parents are now working to establish an organization that will advise families of other victims, giving them the information early on that they say they were not given.

"It was a very, very frightening place to be," Ms. Foley said. "And other countries do this better," she added. "I would hope that our government and the international community is looking deeply at this issue, and we pray that by doing so, Jim's death will not be in vain."

URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/16/us/for-hostages-family-us-policy-offered-no-hope.html>

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GRAPHIC: PHOTOS: Participants at a memorial service in Iraq last month for James Foley, a freelance journalist held hostage and beheaded by Islamist militants. (PHOTOGRAPH BY MARKO DROBNJAKOVIC/ASSOCIATED PRESS)

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DIANE FOLEY, the mother of James Foley. Family members were frustrated by a no-ransom policy maintained by the American government and by what they saw as a lack of information about American efforts. (PHOTOGRAPH BY DOMINICK REUTER/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE -- GETTY IMAGES)

A photo from the website of Mr. Foley while he was covering the Syrian civil war. (PHOTOGRAPH VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS)

John Foley at a remembrance Mass for his son James. The F.B.I. says it was limited in what it could share with family members. (PHOTOGRAPH BY CHERYL SENTER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES) (A10)

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Suburban Edition

Path clearing in Congress for Obama's Syria plan

BYLINE: Ed O'Keefe;Anne Gearan

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President Obama's plan to train and equip Syrian rebels in the fight against Islamic State militants appeared headed for quick passage on Capitol Hill this week, but congressional leaders have signaled that they will postpone a full debate on the use of military force until after the midterm elections.

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House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) have been working together on a cross-chamber strategy designed to keep their party ranks united and move swiftly toward passage of the measure.

The House is expected to grant Obama the short-term authority as part of an amendment to a larger measure funding federal agencies that is expected to pass after it is debated Tuesday and Wednesday, GOP leadership aides said. Once the House votes, the Senate would take up the issue by next week before adjourning for the elections.

"People are trying to be careful about making a large commitment before we have all the facts, but eventually we need to have a new authorization that's simple and sweeping and empowers the president to use all means necessary to destroy ISIL," said Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), using an alternative acronym for the Islamic State. "Hopefully that can happen in the lame-duck session."

Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill.) said Monday that GOP colleagues who once favored not intervening in foreign conflicts seem to be in retreat. "It's hard for them to argue to do nothing, and they know it," he said.

On the international stage, Obama's effort to build a broad coalition against the militants seemed to pick up momentum in Paris. World powers meeting in the French capital agreed to use "any means necessary" to combat the militant force surging in Iraq and Syria, and diplomats from 26 nations and several international organizations began dividing responsibilities for what Secretary of State John F. Kerry said will be an expanded international military, diplomatic and law enforcement assault on the group.

There was one setback in the coalition-building efforts. Iran on Monday spurned an American request for cooperation in the fight against the Islamic State. U.S. officials, however, said the door remains open to a rare opportunity for Iran - to make common cause with the United States against its principal adversary in the Middle East.

Meanwhile on Monday, U.S. military officials said they conducted two airstrikes in Iraq, including one near Baghdad that they characterized as the start of a new phase of offensive operations against the Islamic State. Prior to the attack near Baghdad, which targeted Islamic State fighters who had been firing on Iraqi security forces, the U.S. military said its rules of engagement were to launch strikes only to prevent humanitarian disasters or protect U.S. personnel and property.

In Washington, Congress returned to work Monday with the Syria question at the top of the agenda, and leading members of both parties signaled a willingness to grant Obama's request for explicit authority to allow U.S. military personnel to train rebels and outfit them with arms, at least in the short term.

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Some disgruntled members of the president's party, however, were insisting on a full war debate before the elections.

"I can't see a reason to not do so, other than political timidity," Rep. Adam B. Schiff (D-Calif.), a senior member of the House Intelligence Committee, said Monday.

"It's very difficult to pinpoint how this issue cuts politically right now," he added. "My sense is that it will have greater resonance in the next election than this one, depending on the nature of the conflict two years from now."

Boehner's decision to quickly introduce legislation underscores his hawkish view and the progress he has made to mollify his unruly conference and keep it moving in the same direction. The relative calm in GOP ranks contrasts with the unrest seen in the party a year ago, when daily battles over legislative strategy led to a government shutdown and badly divided the party. This year, Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), who has long espoused non-interventionist views, has said he would like to "destroy" the Islamic State, and Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.), who led the shutdown fight for conservatives, has avoided issuing any ultimatum.

"I would like to think Rand Paul and Ted Cruz are going through adolescence and beginning to enter adulthood," said Rep. Peter T. King (R-N.Y.). "I think we're back, as Republicans, to realizing that there is real danger in the world and that shutting down the government isn't appropriate when you're dealing with issues of life and death."

Under plans unveiled by House Republicans on Monday night, Congress would grant short-term authorization for the Pentagon to begin operations to counter the rise of the Islamic State terrorist group. The Pentagon would be required to submit planning reports to lawmakers with details on how military officials are recruiting and vetting rebel forces.

Opening the Paris conference, French President François Hollande said the threat from global militancy requires a coordinated international response. France is among the European nations alarmed by the flow of radicalized young men who have traveled from Europe to fight in Syria and who could seek to return home.

The meeting came at the end of Kerry's week-long tour of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey. The trip sought to frame the division of labor for a wider assault on the Islamic State, with the U.S. military and Iraqi forces playing the central roles.

On Sunday, U.S. officials said Arab states have volunteered to launch airstrikes alongside those carried out by the United States. But they stressed that such an expansion was still under discussion and subject

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to review by Iraq. Officials from the region said the volunteers included Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and others whose leaders had been waiting to hear from the administration that it has a viable plan and is prepared to follow through with it.

The United Arab Emirates and Qatar conducted strikes during the 2011 air campaign in Libya. Qatar's role is not entirely clear now, though it is helping train Syrian rebels, as is Jordan.

Saudi Arabia is also expected to participate in expanded training of the rebels fighting both the Islamic State and forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The Saudis have been pressing the United States to accede to Syrian rebels' long-standing requests for surface-to-air anti-aircraft weapons, which could be a game-changer for the chronically under-equipped opposition forces, but the Obama administration has refused.

The U.S. decision to confront the militants, first in Iraq and eventually in Syria, also benefits Assad, although U.S. officials say they will act only in the interests of the United States.

As the international efforts gathered steam Monday, Iran played spoiler. Its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, tweeted his disdain for the international effort and revealed a back-channel U.S. offer of unspecified cooperation against the militants. Khamenei said Iran rejected the U.S. request because of Washington's "evil intentions," the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

The United States did not deny the outreach to Iran and said discussions with Tehran will continue, underscoring Iran's influence in the region as well as the political complexities of bringing the Shiite powerhouse into the emerging international alliance against the Islamic State. "I'm just going to hold open the possibility always of having a discussion that had the possibility of being constructive," Kerry said, without providing substantive details about the U.S. request. "I'm not going to get into a back-and-forth."

By going public with the U.S. offer Monday, Iran appeared to close off the possibility of cooperation against the militants for now.

However, Iran has sent its allied Shiite militias in Iraq to fight with Western-backed Kurds against the Islamic State. Iran's Shiite theocracy considers the Sunni militants a challenge to Iraq's majority Shiites - whose political parties have close ties to Tehran - and a destabilizing force against Assad, Iran's other main regional ally.

Although details of the U.S.-Iranian discussion remain vague, it appears to have been an offer of behind-the-scenes cooperation rather than public partnership. Any public cooperation with Iran would doom the emerging alliance between Iraq and Sunni Arab states in the Persian Gulf region and elsewhere that had

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feuded with Nouri al-Maliki, the former Iraqi prime minister. The Sunni states regard Iran with deep suspicion and considered Maliki, a Shiite partisan with strong ties to Tehran, as a pawn of Iran.

France had wanted to invite Iran to the talks, but the United States resisted the move. The United States is trying to stitch together a diverse alliance against the Islamic State and overcome reluctance among many states to intervene in any way in the Syrian conflict, now in its fourth year. Nearly 200,000 people have died in the Syrian fighting, according to the United Nations.

Kerry said Monday that Saudi King Abdullah had told him that if Iran attended Monday's session, the Saudis would boycott. The United Arab Emirates had drawn the same line, Kerry said.

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Gearan reported from Paris. Robert Costa, Paul Kane and Craig Whitlock in Washington contributed to this report.

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Manufacturing Consent

Malavika Mysore

The Attack on ISIS Expands to Syria

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By the time President Obama announced the authorization of airstrikes in Syria Wednesday night, he clearly felt that he had little choice militarily or politically. For three years he resisted American military involvement in Syria, where the Assad government and rebel forces are engaged in a bloody civil war.

But with the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria -- the vicious Sunni extremist group also known as ISIS and ISIL, which has seized territory in Iraq and Syria and beheaded two Americans -- Mr. Obama explained that he had to expand the fight into a perilous new horizon. "ISIL poses a threat to the people of Iraq and Syria, and the broader Middle East -- including American citizens, personnel and facilities," he said. "If left unchecked, these terrorists could pose a growing threat beyond that region, including to the United States. While we have not yet detected specific plotting against our homeland, ISIL leaders have threatened America and our allies."

In broadening the operation beyond airstrikes in Iraq, Mr. Obama says the aim now is to retake ISIS-controlled territory in Iraq and to degrade and ultimately destroy it wherever it operates, including in its strongholds in Syria. But even if discrete military goals are achieved in the short term, the expansion of the American role in that regional conflict carries substantial and unpredictable risks that Americans may not be willing to bear.

That's why this open-ended operation, which Mr. Obama says will take time, demands congressional approval, despite his claim of authority to expand the campaign in Iraq and take the fight to Syria under the Iraq war resolution and the War Powers Resolution.

Right now, opinion polls favor action, but that could evaporate if there are casualties. Many members of Congress would just as soon avoid taking a vote, but Mr. Obama should insist that Congress share responsibility in authorizing the mission. There will be no turning back once airstrikes enter Syrian

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territory, unleashing events that simply cannot be foreseen. Surely that's a lesson America has learned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mr. Obama says that military commanders are free to strike if they identify appropriate targets. The focus, he said, is ISIS, not forces and installations controlled by Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian leader that Mr. Obama has said must leave power. He has ruled out American ground troops although he said he would deploy another 475 military advisers to assist the Iraqi Army. And he has described his plans for organizing a broad coalition of partners under American leadership.

However strong the case for acting, the success of his plan depends on some pretty weak reeds. To be effective, American airstrikes need to be followed up by ground troops who can recapture and hold territory against ISIS. Administration officials have long argued against American military action in Syria in part because so-called moderate rebel groups were divided and ineffective. Now the White House is planning to train and support these groups, but it is by no means certain that this will work.

The same goes for the Iraqi Army and the Kurdish pesh merga, both of which collapsed before the ISIS onslaught on Mosul in June. The Americans trained the Iraqi Army, and no one has explained how retraining could ensure a better outcome, although the approval of a new government in Baghdad this week could help if it addresses the political grievances of Sunnis and Kurds.

As President Obama moves the nation back onto a war footing, it is also vital to have a clear-eyed debate about how expensive that course could be. The Pentagon had a blank check to pay for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The price tag -- now more than \$1 trillion -- has been a severe burden for the country.

The formation of an international coalition that includes Arab states, Western allies and the United States Congress is crucial to give the American-led operation legitimacy. Beyond that, the partners will need to shut down financing for ISIS, close the Turkish border to militant recruits and weapons and help arm the Iraqis. Sunni Arab states must persuade Sunnis attracted by ISIS that it represents a perversion of Islam that must be rejected.

The American military's actions in the Middle East has often fueled Arab anger, even when the United States was spending billions of dollars on beneficial programs, including health and education. Mr. Obama expressed confidence that the plan against ISIS will work and, at the moment, seems aware of the risks he takes.

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Predicting larger battle with Islamic State

BYLINE: Dan Lamothe;Karen DeYoung

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The Islamic State cannot be defeated without addressing "both sides of what is essentially at this point a nonexistent border" between Iraq and Syria, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Thursday.

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The United States and its allies in the Middle East and beyond need to join together to defeat the terrorist group "over time," said Gen. Martin Dempsey. Asked whether the United States would extend its campaign of airstrikes in Iraq into Syria, Dempsey said airstrikes were "only one small part" of what is necessary to defeat the group.

"I'm not predicting those will occur in Syria, at least not by the United States of America," he said. "But it requires the application of all the tools of national power - diplomatic, economic, information, military."

President Obama has long resisted direct U.S. military intervention in Syria, where the Islamic State is the strongest of several militant groups fighting both the Syrian government and U.S.-backed rebels. But the group's rapid advance into Iraq, and this week's videotaped execution of an American hostage it was holding in Syria, have led to calls to revisit that policy.

The Islamic State video said that Foley was beheaded in retaliation for U.S. strikes in Iraq. The air attacks continued Thursday as the U.S. Central Command announced an additional six strikes around the Mosul Dam in northern Iraq.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, at a Pentagon news conference with Dempsey, said that "we are looking at all options" to stop the expansion of an organization he said was as "sophisticated and well-funded as any group that we have seen."

"They're beyond just a terrorist group," Hagel said. "They marry ideology, a sophistication of strategic and tactical military prowess. They are tremendously well-funded."

Asked whether airstrikes against the group in Syria were under consideration, Hagel said that "we continue to explore all options . . . and how best we can assist partners in that area, the Middle East, particularly in Iraq."

"We will continue to stay focused . . . on what we're doing now and exploring all options as we go forward," Hagel said.

A senior Defense official, speaking on the condition of anonymity after the news conference, said that no decision has been made to expand airstrikes into Syria, and the White House has not requested new military options.

U.S. airstrikes in Iraq began Aug. 8, as militants there continued their bloody sweep across the country and closed in on the Kurdish capital of Irbil, where the United States has military facilities and a consulate.

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U.S. military officials said Thursday that the U.S. military has carried out a total of 90 strikes, 57 of them in the vicinity of the Mosul Dam. This week, Obama announced that Iraqi and Kurdish forces had retaken the dam, near Iraq's northern border with Turkey, from Islamic State control.

After Foley's death this week, Obama called the Islamic State a "cancer," and Secretary of State John F. Kerry said the group must "be crushed." Dempsey, who was more measured in his remarks Thursday, said it is possible for the United States to contain the group. But he said the Islamic State threat must be addressed in both Iraq and Syria.

"This is an organization that has an apocalyptic, end-of-days strategic vision and which will eventually have to be defeated," Dempsey said. "To your question, can they be defeated without addressing that part of their organization which resides in Syria? The answer is no. That will have to be addressed on both sides of what is essentially at this point a nonexistent border."

Dempsey said one immediate concern about the deterioration in Iraq and Syria and the rise of the Islamic State is the number of Europeans and other foreigners who have traveled to the region to join the militant movement.

"Those folks can go home at some point," Dempsey said. "It's why I have conversations with my European colleagues about their southern flank of NATO, which I think is actually more threatened in the near term than we are. Nevertheless, because of open borders and immigration issues, it's . . . an immediate threat."

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