

Framing Analysis of Syria's 8/21/13 Use of Chemical Weapons

Rita Daniels
Matthew M. Martin
Emily B. Hughart
Jessica Fabbriatore

The purpose of this paper was to examine the news source, tone of coverage, and the frames used by the New York Times and the Washington Post in reporting Syria's use of chemical weapons on August 21, 2013. Results of the study revealed that 50% of the news articles published from August 21, 2013 to October 1, 2013 were neutral on U.S. intervention in Syria's use of chemical weapons, while 24.03% and 25.97% were anti-U.S. intervention and pro-U.S. intervention, respectively. The two newspapers heavily relied on U.S. official sources, and used responsibility and conflict frames in reporting Syria's use of chemical weapons.

Keywords: Syria, Chemical Weapons, News Framing, U.S. Media

On July 1, 1968, when the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was opened for signature, Syria signed the treaty in Moscow with full-scope International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. The NPT recognizes the United Kingdom, Russia, China, France, and the United States as nuclear-weapon states. Becoming party to the NPT demanded deposition of instruments of accession, succession, or ratification to the capitals of the three designated depository states: Moscow (Russia), London (United Kingdom), and Washington, D.C. (United States). Syria deposited its instruments of ratification in Moscow on September 24, 1969. However, Syria seems to have overtly breached the agreement with the NPT.

This study examines two U.S. newspapers' coverage of Syria's August 21, 2013 use of chemical weapons; specifically, the framing of a mass destruction that was distant only in geography but closer in heart and mind to the United States, a depository state to the NPT. News reports (i.e., editorial choices) ultimately have the capability to wield influence over the course of events (Lynch, 2001). Therefore, how Syria is portrayed in the U.S. media has implications because the American public forms perceptions of the region's stability and people based on these reports. Boyd-Barret (2004) argued that the media tends to be bias in reporting conflict by reporting it from the point of view of the country of origin (of the media) and its foreign policy elites (in this case, Russia). According to Foucault (1980), this point of view is only a repetition or mirror of a cultural code that directs the character of knowledge; the framing of a story is a reflection of ideas engrained in a culture and fully dictates which discourse is acceptable. From Foucault's argument, we infer that the unique position of the United States as a depository state to the NPT will influence the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post's* news framing of Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons. These two news outlets are considered 'first-tier' or 'prestige-press' news sources (Boykoff, 2007). Policy makers routinely rely on them for important aspects of contemporary public discourse (Doyle, 2002; McChesney, 1999). Additionally, other news outlets across the nation often consult the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* for decisional cues on what to report (Boykoff, 2007). Selecting these two news outlets for this study broadens the possibility of examining the dominant news frames associated with Syria's use of chemical weapons in the U.S. media.

It is important to fully understand Syria's involvement in the use of chemical weapons as well as the context in which the United States functions as a depository state to the NPT in order to appreciate the scope of the news coverage as examined in this paper. In the next section, we provide background information to Syria's use of chemical weapons and elaborate on attempts made by the United States as a depository state in combating the use

Rita Daniels (Ph.D., West Virginia University) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Western Washington University. **Matthew M. Martin** (Ph.D., Kent State University) is a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University. **Emily B. Hughart** (M. A., West Virginia University) is a Graduate Student at King's College, London. **Jessica Fabbriatore** (M.A., West Virginia University) is an Instructor at West Virginia Wesleyan College. Direct inquires to Rita.Daniels@wwu.edu.

of chemical weapons, to argue for why it is important to examine the frames used to represent Syria in two influential U.S. media outlets.

Background to Syria's Use of Chemical Weapons

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) 2011 report to Congress indicated that Syria had been involved in a covert nuclear program with assistance from North Korea for more than a decade (Unclassified report..., n.d.). A nuclear reactor which could have been used to produce plutonium for chemical weapons was secretly constructed at Al Kibar, Syria, but destroyed in September, 2007. According to the ODNI 2011 report to Congress, Syria is in possession of "a large ballistic missile force that includes liquid-propellant Scud SRBMs and Scud-class variants such as Scud C and D" (p. 6).

The United Kingdom (Joint Intelligence Organization, 2013) and United States (The White House, 2013) issued public intelligence assessments on August 29, 2013, and August 30, 2013, respectively, stating that the government of Syria under the presidency of President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons on August 21, 2013, against the opposition-held Damascus suburb of Ghouta. British intelligence reported at least 350 fatalities (Joint Intelligence Organization, 2013). On the other hand, the United States government preliminary assessment revealed that 1,429 people including at least 426 children were killed in the August 21 attack even though the statistics could evolve upon further investigation (The White House, 2013). This action endangered Syria's bordering countries: Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq.

Prior to the August 21 attack, there were allegations on March 19, 2013, of Syria's use of chemical weapons against civilians in the village of Khan al-Assal (near Aleppo), and on June 13, 2013, the Syrian government had used chemical weapons on multiple occasions, on a small scale against the opposition (Nikitin, Kerr, & Feickert, 2013). Russia and the United States feared that Syria's use of chemical weapons in these outbreaks could escalate chemical weapon warfare or make chemical weapons accessible to terrorist groups. In light of this fear, some attempts were made to combat the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Russia and the United States have an "overwhelming mutual interest in combating nuclear proliferation" which can be traced to their neorealist goals of foreign policy and the past they share as great powers (McAllister, 2007, p. 279). Inasmuch as some issues require mutual concern in designing a framework of intervention, others require the respect of state sovereignty. McAllister (2007) suggested that issues such as religious radicalism, WMD proliferation, border security, and export controls should be dealt with cooperatively or multilaterally. Multilateralism is contrary to the trend of hegemonic or great-power politics and can be achieved by virtue of investment in international law and institutions. U.S. invasion to further security and Russia's insistence on single handedly addressing Islamic problems can alienate the international community to the background and further weaken the powers of the international community that should rather serve as a nation's best defense in a war of nuclear proliferation and terrorism.

The United States violates P-5 obligations under the NPT as Washington has abrogated the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and circumvented the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The United States has reserved the right to experiment and develop nuclear weapons and is in a strategic nuclear partnership with India. These actions may have rather incited competing states to secretly develop and contribute to the proliferation of WMD. Therefore, the current study is designed to examine how two prominent U.S. newspapers (through the editorial choices of its newspaper outlets) despite their country's circumvention of some aspects of the NPT, frame Syria as a culprit for breaching agreements with the NPT.

Framing

Research on framing can typically be traced to Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1974). Bateson described a psychological frame as a set of messages which includes and excludes some information. Goffman, on the other hand, described a frame as a way of defining and interpreting situations. According to Entman (1993), "to frame 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, casual interpretation, more evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 52). There are two components of framing: selection and salience. In the description of a given situation, the message will include a selection of some aspects of the situation and exclude others. The decision to include some information is dependent on how salient that information is to the situation under

discussion. There is a myriad of definitions of news frames. Gitlin (1980) defined frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse” (p. 7). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) referred to frames as “interpretive packages” (p. 3). All four definitions emphasize the fact that frames reflect salience and this is simply captured in de Vreese’s (2005) description of a frame as “an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic” (p. 53). The concept of news framing has widely been used in mass communication research (Bryant & Miron, 2004) but there is no universally accepted definition. Generally, researchers have used operational definitions of news frames as deemed fit for a specific study (de Vreese, 2005).

Entman (2004) associated the absence of a universally accepted definition of framing to the intangible nature of news frames and the fact that frames are a part of people’s cognitive schemas and discussed as part of media coverage. For the purpose of this study, Entman’s (1993) definition is employed and it is also the most cited definition on news framing (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2008). Scheufele (2000) further outlined the integral components of the framing process: (a) frame-building, (b) frame-setting, and (c) individual and societal level consequences of framing. Frame-building is a process that occurs in a continuous interaction among journalists, social movements, and elites (de Vreese, 2005). This interaction influences the structural qualities of news frames. Frame-setting occurs between individual’s prior knowledge and or predisposition, and media frames. According to de Vreese (2005), this interaction has widely been studied with the aim of assessing the extent to which audiences react to news frames. News frames may influence audiences’ interpretation and evaluation of events and issues. The influence of news frames can be experienced either at the individual or societal level. On the former level, attitudes can be altered due to exposure to a particular news frame while on the latter level, collective actions and decision making can be shaped.

Shen (2004) reported a correlation between media frames that are consistent with individual schemas and media effect on its audience. With regard to international events, studies (e.g., Clausen, 2003) have shown that journalists target a specific national audience by localizing the news story. Clausen (2003) reported that in a quest for local cultural framework, journalists in different countries relied on different elements as news communication strategies to report the September 11 attacks in the United States in their respective media. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) identified three determinants of frames: media practices, sponsor activities, and cultural resonance. Reese, Gandy, and Grant (2001) also identified political actors and their ideologies, journalistic norms and routines, reporters’ individual schemas, and culturally rooted interpretations, and outlooks as strategic communication actions that can influence news frames. Having examined the cultural differences between the way America and Greece reported the reasoning for the Kosovo war, Bantimaroudis and Kampanellou (2007) identified evidence of cultural portrayals in a considerable portion of media content. The researchers postulated that culture is increasingly a significant frame mechanism in explaining what drives modern conflicts. Research on news framing (e.g., Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2008; Entman, 2004) supports the view that news framing is impacted by the national political elites.

Journalism studies are usually focused on the sole application of news frames; journalist must know and understand the logistics of writing a piece that subtly influences readers, with emphasis on the idea that only one article cannot create an overarching mentality of the issue. However, in communication studies, scholars are particularly interested in ways in which strategic framing of news stories can potentially mold public discourse and influence opinions of the masses (Altheide, 1996). Two paradigms that explain framing research are agenda setting and priming. The typologies of framing research as expounded by Scheufele (1999) are: studying research frames as (a) media frames or (b) individual frames; and as opposed to studying frames as (c) dependent variables or (d) independent variables. In this study, we are interested in examining media frames.

Rationale

Framing has conceptually been categorized into two broad foundations: psychological (Goffman, 1974) and sociological (Iyengar, 1991). The sociological foundations focus on “frames in communication” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 106). Research on framing based on the sociological foundations are tailored towards assessing the construction of the presentational styles (which includes images, phrases, and words) of news stories. Given that frames foster the organization of what people see in everyday life, the presentational style (frames) could have significant connotations on the interpretation of news stories. Though framing effects can be measured from both

the perspective of the audiences as well as the media (Scheufele, 1999), this study rationalizes media effects from the perspective of the media. Framing research in the past decade has concentrated more on the sociological aspects by examining message design (Borah, 2011).

With reference to the news coverage of the downing of Iran Air Flight 655 by a U.S. ship, and the destruction of Flight 007 of the Korean Airlines by a Soviet fighter jet, both happening in the 1980s, Entman (2004) reported that despite the similarity in the nature of the events, the U.S. media framed the former event as a technical problem and the latter event as a moral issue; this framing can be associated with the national interest of the U.S. administration. Yang (2003) also reported that the U.S. mainstream media framed NATO's involvement in the air strikes in former Yugoslavia as "humanitarian aid" whereas two Chinese newspapers framed NATO's involvement as "intervention." Findings from the two studies (Entman, 2004; Yang, 2003) support the fact that the national political environments in which journalists operate have an influence on news framing. Given that the United States is party to the NPT and a depository state, as expected, President Barack Obama, in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief, decided to curb Syria's use of chemical weapons. President Obama was convinced that it was in the national security interest for the United States to take military action against Syrian regime targets. The President, however, faced congressional and public opposition and it appeared that "the specter of another Iraq" loomed over President Obama's decision to launch a military attack (Elving, 2013, para. 8).

If news framing is indeed influenced by the political environment and the dominant public opinion, then it is expected that the news coverage of Syria's use of chemical weapons in the U.S. newspapers will be neutral in the attempt to cover both the dominant public opinion and President Obama's decision. This dual stance in the presentation of news will be as a result of the disagreement on U.S. military intervention among President Obama, Congress, and the public. Thus, the following hypothesis was posited:

H₁: The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* will have a neutral tone in the coverage of Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons, to reflect President Obama's decision to launch a military attack against the Assad regime, and congressional and public opposition to that decision.

News source is an essential framing mechanism in news reporting. According to Tumber and Palmer (2004), news media generally depend on official sources such as government and military sources for information, when reporting on conflicts. The challenge that the media may face is governments' control of information through restriction of access to conflict zones. Brown (2003) postulated that there is interdependence among the media, government, and military establishment. Herman and Chomsky (2002) argued that in the coverage of international events in the U.S. media, the *New York Times* particularly frame news to resonate the U.S. government policy and most often than not misrepresent events to project the interests of the *dominants*, thereby marginalizing the *other*. Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2008) also posited that the U.S. journalists heavily rely on U.S. official sources, and in the absence of foreign policy disputes, the official sources set the agenda for the media. Based on Dimitrova and Strömbäck's, and Herman and Chomsky's assertions, we posited the following hypothesis:

H₂: The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* will heavily rely on U.S. official sources in reporting Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons.

There are basically two approaches to examining news stories. One is the inductive approach where news stories are identified with a priori new frames. This approach is criticized for its difficulty in replication (Hertog & McLeod, 2001). The other approach is deductive where frames are operationalized prior to analysis of the news stories. It is more quantitative and convenient for the analysis of a large number of articles (Bosman & d'Haenens, 2008). Gan, Teo, and Detenber (2005) and Bosman and d'Haemens (2008) used the deductive method which employs generic frames and so does this study in examining news stories on Syria's use of chemical weapons.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified five generic frames: the conflict, responsibility, morality, economic consequences, and human-interest. Based on President Obama's conviction and determination to intervene with a military attack on the Assad regime, and congressional and public opposition to President Obama, it is expected that the U.S. media will employ conflict and responsibility frames more frequently to report on the conflict in Syria while projecting President Obama's position on U.S. intervention. Frames provide a dominant

interpretation through placement, repetition, and reinforcement of the images and texts that it constitutes so much so that the interpretation becomes readily acceptable, perceivable, and memorable than other interpretations of the text or image (Entman, 1991). The responsibility frame will be used frequently to solicit support for President Obama's position on U.S. intervention in the show of democracy as the President sought congressional authorization.

H₃: The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* will use the conflict and responsibility frames more frequently than the human interest, morality, and economic consequences frames in reporting Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons.

Method

Data Analysis

To test the predictions forwarded in the study, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of two U.S. newspapers: the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. The *New York Times* has long been studied as an international elite newspaper with an influence on the local and global media (Bantimaroudis & Kampanellou, 2007). The two newspapers were chosen for their quality and quantity in coverage (Downie & Kaiser, 2000). They are also recognized for their international presence, coverage of the federal government, and nationally organized news service (Vultee, 2010). The selection of the newspapers was not meant to reflect the poles of a partisan axis nor a neutral midpoint. Rather, the selection was primarily based on audience coverage and the fact that framing researchers have long studied these newspapers.

Procedure

The period from August 20, 2013, to October 2, 2013, was chosen as the content frame for the study. August 21, marked the day of the chemical weapons attack whereas October 1, 2013, marked the day the U.S. federal government entered a shutdown due to the disagreement on the budget for the fiscal year. The shutdown curtailed most routine operations of Congress and drifted the attention of the media from the Syrian conflict to matters at home. Additionally, on September 27, 2013, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons executive council took a decision to destroy Syria's chemical weapons and began on-site inspections of Syria's declared chemical weapons-related sites on October 1, 2013 (Nikitin et. al, 2013). Therefore, August 21 to October 1 was deemed an appropriate content frame.

Files from the newspapers in the Lexis-Nexis database were searched for content containing the word "Syria" and the phrase "chemical weapons." The Lexis-Nexis database search yielded a population of 271 news articles and blog posts (93 from the *New York Times* and 178 from the *Washington Post*). From the population, blog posts were excluded because they present a range of views regardless of the papers' own views. The sample generated for the study was 168 news stories; 82 from the *New York Times* and 86 from the *Washington Post*.

The stories were content analyzed by two coders who were independently trained on the coding instrument and worked independently. Upon discussing results on the code sheet, both coders identified eight stories from the *New York Times* and five from the *Washington Post* that were deemed non applicable to the study. Those eight stories merely mentioned Syria's possession of chemical weapons and focused primarily on other issues with the president or politics in Syria. The unit of analysis for the study was individual news articles. There were 154 news articles (81 from the *Washington Post* and 73 from the *New York Times* stories) and each coder worked on all the articles. Both coders had same coding results for the *New York Times* articles, but disagreed on coding categories for eight articles from the *Washington Post*. A thorough discussion resolved the disagreement. First, each coder re-read those eight articles from the *Washington Post*. Second, the two coders elaborated on their choice of codes for the articles and came into an agreement on the coding categories. Intercoder reliability was therefore calculated using Holsti's coefficient (Holsti, 1969) and established at .95 for all categories. We used this statistic because it relies on simple agreement between coders, the formula is easily replicable, and it provides a comprehensive insight of the intercoder reliability (Mouter & Vonk Noordegraaf, 2012).

The coding categories were adopted from Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five generic news frames: conflict, human interests, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility. The conflict frame reflects

disagreement among and between individuals or groups while that of human interest presents a human angle to the presentation of the issue in order to dramatize or emotionalize the news to capture and retain audience attention. The frame of economic consequences reports an issue by placing emphasis on the outcome of an action with regard to the consequences on individuals whereas morality frame presents an issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions, emphasizing collaboration and fellowship. The responsibility frame reports an issue by attributing cause or solution to the government or an individual/ a group.

Other coding categories were ID number, date of publication, and publication name. The type of news sources cited (see Table 1) and the tone of coverage in the news articles were also recorded. The dominant tone was coded as anti-US intervention, pro-US intervention, or neutral tone (neither clearly shows support nor opposes US intervention in Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons).

Table 1

Sources Cited in the New York Times and the Washington Post in Reporting Syria's August 21, 2013, Use of Chemical Weapons

Type of source	<i>n</i>	%
Syria	2	1.3
U.S.	105	68.2
United Nations	14	9.1
Russia/USSR	8	5.2
Other	25	16.2
Total (<i>N</i>)	154	100.0

Results

H1 predicted that the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* will have a neutral tone in the coverage of Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons, to reflect the disagreement among President Obama, Congress, and the public on U.S. decision to launch a military attack against the Assad regime. The dominant tone was coded as anti-US intervention, pro-US intervention, or neutral tone (neither clearly shows support nor opposes US intervention). The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 41.62$ (2), $p < .001$) shows support for H1. Forty of the stories in the newspapers were pro-US intervention, 37 were anti-US intervention, and 77 were neutral. As predicted, 50% of the news stories were neutral, with 24.03% and 25.97% being anti-US intervention and pro-US intervention, respectively.

H2 predicted that the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* will heavily rely on U.S. official sources in reporting Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons. The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 403.42$ (4), $p < .001$) shows support for H2. The newspapers heavily relied on U.S. official sources (See Table 1). The type of news sources cited were coded as Syria, United States, United Nations, USSR/Russia, and "Other" (for any other source other than Syria, United States, United Nations, and USSR/Russia).

H3 predicted that the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* will use the conflict and responsibility frames more frequently than the human interest, economic consequences, and morality frames. The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 130.98$ (4), $p < .001$) shows support for H3. The newspapers used conflict and responsibility frames more frequently than the economic consequences, human interest, and morality frames (See Table 2).

The purpose of this study was to examine the news sources, tone of coverage, and the frames used by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in reporting Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons. Results of the study revealed that 50% of the news articles were neutral (neither clearly shows support nor opposes U.S. intervention in Syria's use of chemical weapon), with 24.03% and 25.97% being anti-U.S. intervention and pro-U.S. intervention respectively. The two newspapers heavily relied on U.S. official sources, and used conflict and responsibility frames in reporting Syria's use of chemical weapons.

Table 2

Frames Used in the New York Times and the Washington Post in Reporting Syria's August 21, 2013, Use of Chemical Weapons

Frame	<i>n</i>	%
Conflict	40	26.0
Human Interest	14	9.1
Responsibility	53	34.4
Economic Consequences	31	20.1
Morality	16	10.4
Total (<i>N</i>)	154	100.0

Discussion

Results of the study supported all three hypotheses. The hypotheses were rooted in the concept of news framing that: (a) the national political environments in which journalists operate have an influence on news framing (Entman, 2004; Yang, 2003), and (b) some U.S. journalists heavily rely on U.S. official sources, and in the absence of foreign policy disputes, the official sources set the agenda for the media (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2008). Though the influence of the national political environment in which journalists operate on news framing cannot be directly tested, one could speculate from results of the study that national political elites may have contributed to the tone of news coverage.

The political and media system in the United States likely impacted the coverage of Syria's use of chemical weapons in a neutral tone. President Obama was convinced about intervening in Syria's use of chemical weapons and his conviction could not have been ignored by the media given that he is the President of the United States and the Commander-in-Chief. Tradition demands that the President be given some coverage. It is likely to seem either unpatriotic or imply that journalists are projecting the views of their political affiliation if they criticized the President for U.S. military intervention. These possible impressions may not appear as good reasons to stop some media outlets from criticizing President Obama for military intervention. However, congressional and public opposition to the President's conviction could not be ignored either and so it was more likely that the media will report the Syrian conflict with a neutral tone. With Russia's intervention (to persuade Syria to deposit its chemical weapons) rather than U.S. military intervention, the responsibility frame was predominantly employed in reporting Syria's use of chemical weapons.

Findings of the study support Dimitrova and Strömbäck's (2008) assertion that some U.S. journalists heavily rely on U.S. official sources, and in the absence of foreign policy disputes, the official sources set the agenda for the media. They are also consistent with research on conflict framing (e.g., Bennett & Manheim, 1993; Dimitrova & Strömbäck's, 2008; Norris, Kern, & Just, 2003). The implication of this finding is that the views of government elites are highlighted to form the dominant discourse, whereas all other views are relegated to the background. This dominant discourse will eventually inform the views of the American people and their perception of Syria. It may also support arguments for decisions made on related policies while preventing the public from having a complete picture of the issue at hand.

Boyd-Barret (2004) noted that the media tends to report conflict from the point of view of its country of origin foreign policy elites. The political elite and official sources have their views indexed by the U.S. media (Bennett, 2004). By implication, it only takes a consensus among elite sources to deter U.S. journalists from investigating an issue for a bit of variation in the perspectives. This inclination may have also accounted for the reliance on Russia/USSR, the United Nations, and other elite sources as news sources on the reportage on Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons. A limitation to the reliance on this pool of sources is that the American public becomes ill-informed about the issue and develops increasingly idiosyncratic perceptions of the event. *Other* sources may for instance, highlight U.S. invasion to further security and Russia's insistence on single handedly intervening in Islamic problems or examine these issues as problematic in alienating the international community and further weakening the powers of the international community (that should rather serve as a nation's best defense

in a war of nuclear proliferation and terrorism). The media can raise critical questions such as: if the United States has reserved the right to experiment and develop nuclear weapons and is in a strategic nuclear partnership with India, is that a violation of the NPT? Why should Syria deposit its nuclear weapons?

The media is a cornerstone institution in the democracy of a country by virtue of its influential ability to shape public opinion through the framing of events and issues in particular ways. The media do a disservice to its audience by organizing news frames on Syria's use of chemical weapons to reflect some aspects (e.g., U.S. military intervention) and ignore others (e.g., anti-nuclear weapon protest, conflicts of interests, repercussions for military intervention). The implication is that the media limits audience interpretation of news stories and can increase, if not reinforce, divisions on world opinion on the use of WMD. The media are expected to be watchdogs and be sensitive to public opinion. This role of the media is particularly important in the reportage of international conflicts because of the likelihood of national media to engender varied interpretations for the national audience (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005). For instance, for the national audience who perceive international conflict resolution as the U.S. military success, they may be more inclined to support President Obama's call for military intervention than the audience who are exposed to reports on war protests and war victims who will consider possible effects of military intervention. In effect, the media implies a mirage national consensus on issues by not presenting alternative and opposing perspectives. Mutz (1998) further explained that "when media emphasize who or which side of an issue or controversy is ahead or behind, they may inadvertently cue the consensus heuristic, thus altering attitudes toward a candidate or issue" (p. 210). Also, while depending solely on official sources, the media may not be able to stay independent of the notions of national interest. Empirical evidence from research on news framing is therefore important to serve as evidence and guard against skewed representation in the media.

The U.S. media system is highly commercialized (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005). McManus (1994) described it as market-driven where the market represents political elites and government officials. The media landscape is dominated by commercial newspapers and broadcast companies so the market model supersedes the public sphere model (Croteau & Hoynes, 2001) and media self-regulation is non-institutionalized in the United States. Journalists are left to adhere to the norm of objectivity even though according to Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2005), objectivity in journalism is replaced with terms such as "impartial," "fair," and "non-partisan" (p. 403). Patterson (1998) further explained that among American journalists, objectivity means "expressing fairly the position of each side in the political dispute" (p. 22). This explanation to U.S. journalistic objectivity may be the reason for heavy reliance of journalists on official sources. However, in the absence of a dispute, only official sources will set the agenda of the media, under the guise of a market driven-media.

This study offers useful avenues for future research. An example of such avenues is the exploration of the degree of political parallelism (the extent to which political orientations influence the media's news and current affairs reportage) in the framing of Syria's use of chemical weapons especially because media self-regulation is non-institutionalized in the U.S. To further the understanding of news framing with respect to Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons, other media outlets in the United States should also be examined. A comparative study has the potential to contribute to our understanding of news framing, objectivity of journalism, political parallelism, and the relationship between media and political systems. We could also benefit from future research on how the news media from Russia and the United Kingdom (the two other depository states of the NPT) framed Syria's use of chemical weapons. Russia and the United States often differ in their views on chemical weapons as well as the need to intervene in other countries (McAllister, 2007).

One limitation of this study is that the content analysis of two newspapers is not a representative sample of the U.S. media even though as elite newspapers they offer an informative picture of the national press. Future research should examine and compare the extent of coverage, news source, tone of coverage, and the frame used by other U.S. media outlets, in reporting Syria's August 21, 2013, use of chemical weapons. Another limitation is the content frame as well as the search engine we used in collecting news articles on Syria's use of chemical weapons. It is possible that the news outlets we examined published articles relating to Syria's use of chemical weapons beyond our content frame which could change the results of our study. It is therefore important to consider the content frame within which news articles were collected for analysis to appropriately interpret the findings of our study. Ultimately, framing analysis provides an understanding of the media's representation of public opinion. This study contributes to research on framing as the first attempt to explore news coverage of Syria's August 21 use of chemical weapons. Future studies should continue in this vein to explore the media coverage after Syria's

deposition of chemical weapons. Alternative frames and tone of coverage may have been introduced upon U.S. rescindment from military attack.

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