

FRAMING PRACTICES OF WIRE SERVICES IN MODERN WARTIME:
INTERNATIONAL FRAMES DURING THE FINAL SIX MONTHS OF THE
BATTLE OF ALEPPO

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by
JOHN SADLER

Dr. Tim P. Vos, Thesis Supervisor

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FRAMING PRACTICES OF WIRE SERVICES IN MODERN WARTIME:
INTERNATIONAL FRAMES DURING THE FINAL SIX MONTHS OF THE
BATTLE OF ALEPPO

presented by John Sadler,

a candidate for the degree of master of arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Tim P. Vos

Professor Yong Volz

Professor Beverly Horvit

Professor Bryce Reeder

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FRAMING PRACTICES OF WIRE SERVICES IN MODERN WARTIME:
CONTRASTS AND SIMILARITIES OF FRAMES DURING THE FINAL SIX
MONTHS OF THE BATTLE OF ALEPPO

John Sadler

Dr. Tim P. Vos, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the journalistic articles published by three major wire services — *Associated Press*, *Reuters*, and *TASS* — during the final six months of the Battle of Aleppo, a major offensive that essentially tilted the tide of the Syrian Civil War to the regime of Bashar al-Assad. The goal of this work is to discern the types of frames utilized by these three wire services, and how source selection may have influenced the creation of these frames. The articles, limited to the longest 15 published by each service, were analyzed for six frames defined by the researcher — finality, sympathy for civilians, legitimacy — opposition, legitimacy — Assad, internal affairs, and international affairs. They were also analyzed for source selection, in which the types of sources were broken down into aid/research organizations, U.S. government, Russian government, civilians, journalists, Assad government, and rebels. The work found that *Reuters* and *Associated Press* framed the battle as an internal affair and an international affair, respectively, and integrated elements of the sympathy for civilians frame, while *TASS* was predominately interested in the international affairs framing. The use of sources in the studied articles also fit into the framing scheme they employed

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Battle of Aleppo, which ended in December 2016, was the longest and arguably the most destructive battle in the Syrian Civil War, an ongoing conflict between multiple secular and Islamist factions for control over the country. Russia, a major player in the Syrian conflict, was instrumental in retaking Aleppo, helping Syrian President Bashar al-Assad by engaging in a bombing campaign halfway through 2016. A Western-led coalition headed by the United States has been pointedly critical of many of Assad's campaigns and actions over the course of the war, and has, at times, supported rebels who fought against the Syrian government and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The positions taken by world powers have arguably influenced the positions taken by the mainstream media in both countries. American and Western media are generally critical of Russia's involvement in the war and take a positive or neutral stance on the rebels, while Russian media continue to legitimize Assad's regime and dispute American and Western journalistic criticism against Russian intervention.

Examining the differences in how Russian, American, and British wire services report on the Battle of Aleppo will give insight into how different states and cultures influence media perception and media frames. The information provided to Western and Russian societies has the ability to divide opinion between the two on the conflict even more so than it already is. Understanding how other countries view the conflict can open up more discussion on differences in public opinion and, hopefully, give a better understanding on how to bridge the gap in communication between the peoples.

The 2013 chemical weapons attack in Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus, is one of the most contentious disputes between Western and Russian media sources. Like the earlier chemical

attack in the Khan al-Assal suburb of Aleppo, the Ghouta attacks launched a media war between the two powers. While the basic fact of the chemical attack's occurrence was not in dispute, Russian and Western governments did not agree on the identity of the perpetrators. While Russian sources overwhelmingly said they doubted the Assad regime's role in the attack, instead calling it a frame job by Free Syrian Army rebels, Western news sources generally placed the blame solely on the regime — following through with the official stance of the American and European political communities.

The disparity between the countries' coverage of the events shows a disconnect between the two superpowers over which side in the war is considered "good" or "bad." In the Western view, Assad is running an oppressive dictatorial regime, though the stances on the rebels in media channels throughout America and the Commonwealth have varied. In the Russian view, the rebels are a violent militia attempting to overthrow a legitimate government. Both countries have an interest in the war — Russia's stated goal is to defeat terrorism, but is more likely an entrenchment of the Assad regime, America's goal seems to be the containment of ISIS and the stopping of human rights violations, which they contribute to Assad —, but they disagree on which side should be (or *how* they should be) supported or defeated. Media coverage differing so dramatically in both countries does nothing but engender a multi-sided proxy war and creates obstacles in reconciling the two countries who have the most potential to help end the Syrian conflict.

Scholarly research has illuminated various aspects of this topic, including the differences between Russian and American media coverage of the Syrian Civil War as a whole and the use of propaganda in fueling proxy wars. One of the most striking articles (Brown, 2015) mentioned the difference between Russia's and the West's handlings of the 2013 chemical weapons attacks.

The framing around both the attack and the response of Americans and the West was extraordinarily different, showing that Russia adopted positions that were distinctly pro-Assad, regardless of the otherwise nearly unanimous opinion of the international community that the regime was responsible (Brown, 2015). Studies have also been performed that demonstrate media framing of international conflicts significantly influences cultural perception of war, even influencing which “side” citizens identified (Adarves-Yorno et al, 2013). Other studies show that different international media outlets have framed past conflicts, such as the Iraq War, in different ways, with Arabic countries framing the stories from the conflict as war stories, while Western media framed the stories as reconstruction-themed issues (Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007).

The most obvious deficiency in the literature in regards to the topic of this paper is that no scholarly research has been written on differences between Russian and Western media sources on the final push of the Battle of Aleppo — the multiple Aleppo offensives at the end of 2016. The outcome of this battle was widely seen as a turning point in the civil war to the Assad regime. The presentation of these events could and likely did present different definitions of the outcome to each wire service’s respective publics, which could entrench ingroup identification and restrict outside considerations of the battle through information instead of censorship. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the different frames used by three international wire services, the British-based, Canadian-owned *Reuters*, the American *Associated Press*, and the Russian *TASS*, in regard to the last five months of the battle. These three services were picked because of an estimation that *Reuters* and the *Associated Press* would run with similar information on the conflict. *TASS* will likely be a deviant source — classified by the European Journalism Centre as one of the four largest wire services but working under a different power structure. Additionally, this study will attempt to create a review of the differences in reporting

among key international wires services by examining the differences between *TASS*, *Reuters*, and *AP*'s framing of the Battle of Aleppo in the form of sources and information allowed through the wires.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

While much research has been done on framing, media reporting on the Syrian Civil War and the nature of conflict between international narratives on the conflict, they are merely pieces of the greater whole. Little research has been done on Russian media specifically regarding the Syrian Civil War, and none on the Battle of Aleppo, aside from mentions of the Khan al-Assal chemical attack, which is generally overshadowed by the larger Ghouta chemical weapons attack that occurred in Damascus. As such, a variety of research has been reviewed to try to discern differences between the two systems of media and how the difference in reporting potentially splits public opinion between citizens of different nations.

Framing Theory

Framing will be the predominant theory in use throughout this research. A frame is the method by which communicators or communications agencies share a particular view of the world. According to Robert Entman, a frame selects “some aspects of a perceived reality and make(s) 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” (as cited by McCombs & Ghanem, 2001, p. 58). The adoption or implementation of a frame does not necessarily refer to taking a specific stance on an issue, such as, say, writing a story about the recent NFL protests in a way that is sympathetic to the protestors — though stances on issues within stories can create frames as well. Reese (2001) writes that “frames are of greatest interest to the extent they add up to something bigger than an individual story. In that respect, we gain little from the concept if a frame is reduced to a ‘stance’ or position on an issue” (p. 13). Later, Reese (2001) writes that framing draws their attention to how “the principles of organization create a coherent ‘package’ by combining symbols, giving them relative emphasis, and attaching

them to larger cultural ideas. By definition, then, it should not be possible to reduce a frame to a single indicator, or ‘topic’” (p. 17).

Frames specific to the thought processes of the journalists crafting the story form a “context for understanding, interpreting, and, ultimately, expressing the facts of an issue,” or, in other words, journalist frames create a context through an “issue-specific position based on contextual orientation” (D’Angelo & Shaw, 2018, p. 210). These frames that are constructed by individual journalists are “formed and expressed” within larger newsroom contexts, which entrench journalistic codes and norms in the minds of said journalists (D’Angelo & Shaw, 2018, p. 211). Journalists’ framing patterns are influenced by sociocultural conditions. D’Angelo and Shaw write that frame building has “also been conceived in macro-level terms,” primarily influenced by the “societal, political, and economic conditions that shape newsroom culture.” (p. 9). Reese states that he regards frames as “embedded within a web of culture” that “naturally draws attention to the surrounding cultural context and the threads that connect them” (D’Angelo & Shaw, 2018, p. 211). In the same work, Reese (2001) also refers to frames as “specific and explicit agents of ideological processes,” which reveal more about the overarching culture than focused coverage of specific topics or themes (p. 18).

Reese (2001) defines a broader type of “cultural” frame that doesn’t “stop with organizing one story, but invite(s) us to marshal a cultural understanding and keep on doing so beyond the immediate information. These are the ‘strategic’ frames that speak to a broader way to account for social reality” (p. 13). Frames should not necessarily be viewed as an intended byproduct of journalists’ efforts to tell a story. He writes that “ultimately, frames may best be viewed as an abstract principle, tool, or ‘schemata’ of interpretation that works through media texts to structure social meaning” (p. 14). The frame itself may not even be a constructed outright

by the journalist, or communicator. Entman “suggested that frames can be located in the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture” (as cited by Reese, 2001, p. 14).

The difference between Russian and Anglo-American interests is obvious in their differing media systems, which have the capacity to serve as a circular verifier of cultural assumptions. Journalism has the capability of influencing the views of vast swaths of a country’s populace, as “audiences are generally distant from events and political actors, they are easily swayed,” and, since they are so, quality is of the “utmost importance” (Cozma & Kozman, 2014, p. 669).

Framing has the potential to create and strengthen “ingroup” identification in a country, and studies have shown that positive frames on conflict — that is, frames that present a conflict as having a positive impact on the society the frame is being presented within — strengthen consumers’ ties to their own countries’ interests (Adarves-Yorno et al., 2013, p. 29). Adarves-Yorno et al. also found that positive framing notions have the ability to create positive notions of perceived allies in a conflict. For example, they discovered that positive framing of the Iraq War in Britain created not only a higher percentage of “ingroup” identification, but it also created a higher connection toward American involvement in the area, as well (Adarves-Yorno et al., 2013, p. 32). Frames also “can affect how media consumers learn, interpret, and evaluate information about issues and events” (as cited by Cozma & Kozman, 2014 761). As such, it should follow that a portrayal of the Syrian conflict as an oppressed populace rising up against a despotic regime should create more public support for the rebels than negative support.

While in the overarching sense of media coverage of the conflict most frames boil down to pro-Assad or pro-rebel, there are many smaller available frames for use in the Syrian Civil War. While there are overarching frames in different media systems, some less granular frames

include conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility frames (Cozma & Kozman, 2014, p. 671). Another large area of framing conflict is war and peace journalism. War journalism focuses on the outright conflict, while peace journalism focuses on ideological and political differences and conflict solutions (Cozma & Kozman, 2014, p. 673). A study by Cozma and Kozman (2014) also found a significant lack of morality framing in American stories on the 2013 chemical attacks, a development the authors hypothesize could be due to social identity theory — the theory that means a person’s beliefs are derived from the social system they exist within— making it harder for American journalists to identify with Syrian citizens. They cite as evidence the Abu Ghraib torture incidents, during which American news organizations overwhelmingly did not use the term “torture,” in contrast to international and other Western news agencies (Cozma & Kozman, 2014, p. 680). Additionally, in a statement that backs up this study’s previous points about the necessity of civilian journalism, Cozma and Kozman (2014) write that the reason for the lack of human interest stories about the chemical attacks and mass killings is simply due to the fact that being stationed as a journalist in Syria is too dangerous, and therefore there are a dwindling number of stories published that require shoe-leather reporting (p. 680).

Framing is not necessarily confined to words. For example, a study done by Stuart Soroka, Peter Loewen, Patrick Fournier, and Daniel Rubenson focused on the impact certain wartime framing of photographs had on the viewers. Participants in one study were shown two separate photos, one with a soldier holding the hand of a young Afghan boy while walking down the road, their backs turned to the photographer, the other with a soldier looking directly into the camera with a machine gun in his arms. Participants in the study who were exposed to the photo of the soldier and the boy, a prime example of a “peacekeeping” frame, were shown to have a

higher percentage of support for military intervention in the region (Soroka et al., 2016, p. 568). As such, it has been shown that exposure to photos that advocate peacekeeping, much like exposure to stories that advocate peacekeeping, creates a media audience that is much more malleable to the idea of a righteous conflict.

There is, then, a substantial body of research on wartime framing and its effect on the public consciousness. Framing is a powerful method of control, whether intentionally used or not, and it can be used to create societal and ideological tribes separated from one another by the morass of opinion. Therefore, the differences between media reports in the two countries can create large populations of people that consider a conflict, in this case the Syrian Civil War, in radically different ways. This creates a problem when trying to end the conflict through international diplomacy, as the populations of the two most relevant superpowers consider the war entirely differently.

It is also necessary to discuss news sources and their impact on the frame building process. Societal elites interest themselves in the news framing process and attempt to control information flow in order to create frames more beneficial to their ultimate worldviews. Driedger (2008) writes that the media as a whole does not create reality, but “discourses of reality, often through a reliance on sources to help provide the media with context, important facts, as well as interpretations of different events” (p. 25). Kee et al. (2012) write that such “frame sponsors” attempt to craft messages that “are carefully designed during the competition (strategic framing) in such a way to not only capture editors and journalists’ attentions but also to induce target audiences’ acceptance of the interpretations that favour their interests or goals” (p. 18). This is not to say that the media exist solely as a propaganda arm of whichever sources attempt to manipulate them, but that sources can have a vested interest in participating in the framing

process (Driedger, 2008). The fact that journalists oftentimes rely on official sources to a disproportionate amount allows narratives that are officially endorsed by elite sources to be pushed through (Kee et al., 2012).

Superpowers and Framing

American news, until recently, created a hegemonic data stream that controlled international perception of various conflicts (Seib, 2005, p. 601). Recently, however, the rise of Middle Eastern news networks such as Al Jazeera has challenged American hegemonic news interests. The War in Iraq and its aftermath destroyed the grip Western and American media had on international news framing (Seib, 2005, p. 601). Seib (2005) writes, "Policymakers must deal with the fact that more of the world is getting more information than ever before," in regards to the end of mainstream American hegemony over the media (p. 613). This has allowed dissenting voices to float alternative views of international events, as well as to utilize information in the larger data stream in order to push these viewpoints. As such, American media hegemony, which was prevalent in most international, mainstream opinions of previous wars, was neutered during the Iraq War, a process which has not reversed itself as of the present day.

Russian media sources have a history of opposing or doubting American and Western media reports in regards to conflicts in the Middle East (Storie et al., 2014). After the United States launched a raid to kill Al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden at his hideout in Pakistan, Russian media sources framed the raid in a variety of ways, none of which was favorable to American interests. They doubted even the fact that the Americans killed bin Laden, with one paper citing Iranian intelligence that said bin Laden was dead before the raid, and that Americans had staged the event for international credit (Storie et al., 2014, p. 433).

Some Russian media sources cited American secrecy around bin Laden's death as evidence for distrust (Storie et al., 2014). They also cited the closeness to the 2012 election as a suspicious circumstance, hinting that Obama engineered the raid in order to boost his approval ratings. One paper even wrote an article called "Obama will fan the flame of Arab revolutions," directly linking U.S. involvement to unrest in the region (Storie et al., 2014, p. 433). In contrast, the American press generally framed their coverage of bin Laden's death in one of three ways: "national security threat," or how bin Laden's death would affect America, "victory and progress," and "event catharsis," or how people affected by 9/11 and the War on Terror reacted to the news (Storie et al., 2014, p. 433). As such, it is clear to researchers and readers that coverage of an event deemed important to American national interest is not deemed worth respectable coverage from the Russian media. "Respectable" here does not mean ill-researched, but more about operating on an assumption of American falsity.

Russia, an international superpower with perhaps even more interest in the Syrian conflict as the United States due to its alliance with Assad, has created its own media narrative surrounding the war, oftentimes directly refuting the claims of the American media (Brown, 2015). This is most prevalent in the two countries' coverage of the chemical attacks that massacred citizens in the Ghouta suburb of Damascus. Originally, some Russian media denied that an attack even occurred, claiming it was the work of opposition propagandists (Brown, 2015, p. 237). Brown cites an article from *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, which passes on the assumption of falsity to its audience. He quotes the paper as asking "Who since yesterday has not doubted whether the images of the chemical attack alleged to have taken place in the outskirts of Damascus are real?" (Brown, 2015, p. 237). Russian media makes a point of running with evidence that fits their narrative. Brown writes that "headline attention" is given to comments by

a State Department spokesperson who said the U.S. government was unable to confirm the use of chemical attacks from an independent source (Brown, 2015, p. 237).

While Western media was initially condemnatory toward the Assad regime, citing overwhelming evidence that the Syrian government was behind the massacre, Russian media sources were inherently suspicious of Assad's involvement (Brown, 2015). While most admitted that the attack occurred, they claimed the opposition forces operating in Syria were responsible (Brown, 2015). Russian media sources also criticized comments from Ahmad Jabra, the head of the Syrian National Coalition. In Russian media, his claims of Assad's involvement were discredited by bringing up alleged ties to Saudi intelligence and references to an alleged criminal past (Brown, 2015).

The severity of the media response to the attack also differed between countries. American media framed the Ghouta attack as a war crime, a line that Assad had crossed that pulled the conflict onto the international stage as an event worthy of historical significance. Russian media, however, were subdued in their portrayal of the attack. While it was ultimately reported, it was lumped into the larger Syrian conflict (Brown, 2015). Western media's headlines included titles such as "horror in Syria" and "chemical weapons massacre," which created a narrative that the attacks were exceptional incidents within the larger conflict and not merely repetitions of the day-to-day violence (Brown, 2015).

Russian media is significantly more sterile in its coverage of the Ghouta attacks than Western media, reporting on casualties of the attack in a much more matter-of-fact method, and, in some instances, completely glossing over mentions of regime violence. Brown (2015) writes that the overall sense in the Russian media "is that a serious incident did occur in Ghouta on August 21, but that it is not something without precedent in the Syrian conflict and certainly not

an event of international historical significance” (p. 238). Contrast this with the aforementioned American media coverage of the chemical attacks, which is much more empathetic and focused on human interest stories. The contrast between the two is so drastic that American coverage occasionally seems “melodramatic” compared to the reporting of its Russian counterpart (Brown, 2015, p. 238).

Western and Russian media sources also disagree on the prevalence of jihad in the region (Brown, 2014). While Russian sources hold that jihadi-level violence was used on the part of the anti-Assad “rebels” since the beginning, Western media sources point to the arrival of jihad-level violence as a much later development, and as one that does not have roots in the original peaceful protests that marked the beginning of the Syrian conflict (Brown, 2014, p. 59). They also hold a view that the violence that emerged from the opposition to Assad grew out of Assad’s unchecked brutality toward the rebels, thereby legitimizing the rebels’ actions (Brown, 2014, p. 59).

Russian media, in some circumstances, distance themselves from direct linkage to the Assad regime stationed in Damascus (Brown, 2014). Instead of portraying Moscow as having an unvested interest in keeping Assad in power, media sources in Russia portray Putin and Moscow’s involvement as that of an “impartial peacemaker” (Brown, 2014, p. 58). As such, Russian media companies, especially those like TASS that are explicitly run by the Russian government, again reject the Western narrative, here being Putin’s entanglement with the interests of Assad in Syria. Instead, they cast themselves as the “good guys,” involved with the conflict only so power-hungry Western nations cannot “impose regime change on a sovereign country” (Brown, 2014, p. 58).

Gatekeeping Theory

Elements of gatekeeping theory will be used throughout this research. Gatekeeping and framing theories are intrinsically intertwined due to the effect that closing or opening “gates” can have on a story’s frame. Choices on what to let through the gates can frame or re-frame stories (Tandoc 2015). Oftentimes, certain stories do not fit gatekeepers’ ideas of what is good for their publication, so they often “open the gate but only after reshaping — or re-framing — the story, highlighting one piece of information over the others, just to meet the demands of the news cycle” (Tandoc 2015, pg. 132) Since the methodology will focus on textual analysis and not interviews or surveys, there is little way to factually examine journalistic gatekeeping choices at an individual level. Instead, this research will pull from work on sociocultural influences and their possible effect on gatekeeping choices. Sociocultural impacts on gatekeeping exert themselves in the background, influencing how journalists and participants in a specific society “adopt meaning systems” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 105).

Framing and gatekeeping processes are linked in that both work through what information is presented to the press and in what way. Media pieces will go through multiple rounds of gatekeeping before publication, resulting in many possible instances of re-framing (Tandoc, 2015). The selection of sources, whether by purposively denying or allowing them through or by limitations of access, also can create new frames — journalists often re-frame news sources by clipping out information that is not necessary for the meat of the news and rearrange or juxtapose information given by sources (Tandoc, 2015). Shoemaker and Vos (2009) write that gatekeeping exists as the “process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day” (p. 1). This culling and crafting of information inevitably results in a framing or reframing of the underlying story.

The selection of sources is one aspect of gatekeeping theory that has major impact on the ultimate frame of a media piece. For example, media professionals do not always directly witness events, and must rely on sources for information. As such, “the version of reality as processed by sources is extremely influential in determining what comes to the attention of the media” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 85). In many cases, sources have influence in what information reaches the public at large. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) continue, stating “sources may either facilitate or constrain the movement of information through channels they control, thus affecting the introduction of an item into the media channel or into a section of the channel” (p. 85).

Most societies’ media systems are set up in a way to favor a flow of information from the elite in said society. Gans writes that “powerful sources have more access to the media and, therefore, more opportunity to insert messages into media channels. As such, non-elite groups that hope to break into the media mainstream generally have to ‘resort to deviant acts’” (as cited by Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 85). The way this dichotomy is set up in societies leaves media gatekeepers “vulnerable to the agendas of elites” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 85).

It would be interesting to discuss how American media allowed certain voices through from the Syrian conflict — namely, how American that sources have created a media environment in their coverage of the Syrian conflict which engenders and encourages the involvement of Syrian citizens that are not explicitly involved with one side or the other, in terms of actually taking up arms. This is an important part of the media flow from Syria, as the country has become a “no go” zone for international correspondents. In the absence of any safe travel to and from the country, Syrian civilians have stepped up to fill the gap left by the lack of international journalists.

“The Lede,” the blog arm of *The New York Times*, has made videography and photography from Syrian citizens a distinct part of its makeup (Wall & Zahed, 2014). There is a lack of research connecting civilian journalism from the war with specific types of framing, but a connection can be built. While citizen-reported news in and of itself does not necessarily create a type of frame, the tendency of civilian-created videos from the Syrian Civil War to favor pro-rebel, anti-Assad interests feeds the narrative that American and Western news stories are framed against the Assad regime. In Wall and Zahed’s research into the videos posted by The Lede, it was shown that the publication did not edit the civilian-taped videos, thus removing the reporter’s traditional ability to frame the story and grant it to the civilian. Additionally, without the general stoicism expected by correspondents, audiences are left only with scenes of destruction and unbridled emotion, removing any form of calming assurance given by a journalist (Wall & Zahed, 2014). Therefore, these videos give a raw, disturbing account of the war that is inherently biased toward sympathy for the rebels. By almost exclusively featuring citizen-recorded videos from one side of the war, it could be argued that media sources are humanizing one side at the expense of the other.

Wall and Zahed (2104) also found that “The Lede” had a tendency to separate the citizen-reported clips from “professionally” produced journalism. They labeled these videos “clips” most prominently, but also called them “streams, footage, messages” and most sparingly, “report” and “piece” (Wall & Zahed, 2014, p.170). The separation of these citizen-reported pieces from professional news reports humanizes the creators, and shows the scope of the war’s destruction. By keeping professional labels off of the videos, “The Lede” has allowed the creators to become part of the story. The videos are “clips” from their *lives*, not reports from their *job*.

American media's use of "civilian" voices, perhaps in a broader sense better called "insider" voices, also extends to enemy combatants in the conflict. American news sources have given radical factions a voice in the media, albeit in a much less sympathetic way than their considerations of civilians caught in the crossfire. The rise of the Islamic State can be traced back to the beginning of the Syrian conflict, and the group has used media throughout the war as an effective propagandizing tool. One of the most prevalent topics in these videos has continuously been the murder of Western journalists (Friis, 2015). By releasing content like beheading videos into the media atmosphere, ISIS has gained a voice in the media coverage of the crisis. American news sources, of course, do not play the clips in their entirety, instead showing screen grabs (Friis, 2015). Friis calls these screen grabs "probably *the* most conspicuous visual icon in the war against ISIS" (p. 740). These screen grabs left enough of an impression on viewers to blatantly communicate what was happening in the videos without showing the out-and-out violence (Friis, 2015).

These studies show that American news organizations have no problem using "insider" voices in their reporting, and they discriminate between civilian and combatant videos only by censoring the acts of violence. As an aside, of course media opinions of ISIS and civilians are not the same. While these studies show a rather comprehensive view of the "insider" voices used in American media reports (i.e., the sympathetic citizen and the violent jihadist), there is significantly less written on Russian news *practices*. While there is research on Russian framing (Brown 2014) (Brown 2015) (Cozma & Kozman 2014) (Godefroidt, Berbers, & d'Haenens 2016), there has not been an in-depth look at how Russian media handle the influx of internal information leaking out of Syria.

There has been, however, some scholarly research (Powers & O’Loughlin, 2015) done on how the influx of said data is actually doing more to *dissuade* media consensus. Information has the power to connect two sides, but both sides must be ready and willing to accept information that does not support their viewpoints (Powers & O’Loughlin, 2015). While Powers and O’Loughlin were applying this logic to policy decisions, it works equally well in regard to media framing. In fact, they discuss how competing international narratives around the Syrian Civil War, including and, most importantly, focused around the disagreement on the best government for the country, create an environment that is not conducive to ending the conflict in its totality. The amount of information being released to the public about the war “results in a proliferation of narratives and no shared understanding of what is happening or what that means” (Powers & O’Loughlin, 2015, 177). In fact, such a barrage of competing information makes trying to connect the copious narratives a borderline impossibility (Powers & O’Loughlin, 2015).

The use of insider and citizen journalism can have serious consequences on the nature of framing in a news organization. Videos of wartime chaos, unencumbered by connection to a journalist and given to no serious narratives other than “look at the destruction wrought,” are extremely effective at garnering sympathy. At the same time, it would be hard to publish these videos and maintain a pro-Assad frame. More research needs to be done, however, on how these civilian-produced forms of journalism influence framing of stories. Such influence could be affected by video editing, insertion of an outside voice, or outright censorship of civilian-produced videos from Syria.

Summary

Overall, in a look at Russian and Western framing of interests in the region, a picture of international distrust is painted. Russia distrusts Anglo-American involvement and desires a

different outcome in the war from their Western counterparts — namely a continuation of the Assad regime’s control. Russians have used the press in the past to link the United States to political unrest and destabilization in the Middle East (Storie, Madden, & Liu 2014). Russian and Western reporting on the Syrian conflict is also entirely different, each legitimizing and delegitimizing different sides in the conflict. Additionally, as it has been demonstrated peacekeeping frames — here defined as a frame that focuses more on the elements of the conflict related to “keeping the peace” rather than the war’s atrocities — create a larger surge of public interest around the war, a link can most likely be established with Russian media’s portrayal of Moscow as an “impartial peacemaker” with a solidification of public interest in intervening in the conflict (Brown, 2014, p. 58).

While there is a plethora of interesting research on different aspects of Russian and Western media conflicts in the Middle East, the role of framing in global conflicts, and the differences between Russian and American reporting on the Syrian conflict, there are significant gaps on the micro-level. There is little to no *direct* research on how Russian and Western media report differently on the Battle of Aleppo. Aleppo acts as a synecdoche for the entirety of the conflict. Victory was almost assuredly tied to who prevails in Aleppo, as Assad’s regime has overwhelmingly overtaken the future of the war with its win in the city. Russian military were also directly involved with the battle, thus creating new considerations of how the battle itself was reported. After all, the narrative of the impartial peacemaker is hard to maintain whilst also running a destructive bombing campaign.

Further research is required in order to narrow down the differences between Russian, American, and European media coverage of the Syrian Civil War. In this study, the three will be represented on a smaller level by *TASS*, the *Associated Press*, and Reuters, respectively. As such, the present research attempted to answer the following questions:

RQ1a: How does each wire service frame the conflict?

RQ1b: What are the differences in these frames?

RQ2: How do the sources selected by the wire services contribute to a certain framing of the narrative?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research relies on qualitative textual analysis focusing on the coverage of the last five months of the Battle of Aleppo, which was made up of numerous offensives and counter-offensives. The term “texts” does not explicitly refer to a printed document, but to “cultural artifacts” or “material documentary evidence that is used to make sense out of our lives” (Brennen, 2013, p. 193). Brennen briefly defines textual analysis as an attempt to “evaluate the many meanings found in texts and ... to understand how written, visual and spoken language helps us to create our social realities” (Brennen, 2013, p. 193).

Qualitative textual analysis is more relevant to this research than quantitative content analysis due to the ultimate goals of the research. Quantitative content analysis considers repetition of key terms and words part of testing a hypothesis. Qualitative textual analysis, as defined by Siegfried Kracauer, is less concerned with repetition of key phrases and more with the consumption of a text in its entirety. As Brennen (2013) writes, “Kracauer maintained that the goal of textual analysis (which he initially called qualitative content analysis) was to bring out the entire range of potential meanings in text” (p. 194). Without making a value judgment on the importance of quantitative research, qualitative textual analysis will be the best method for finding the answers to the questions posed by this research.

Phase One: Gathering and Analyzing Texts

To begin the study, the researcher pulled the 15 longest news articles written during August to December 2016, a major time period during the battle of Aleppo, from *TASS*, *Associated Press*, and *Reuters*. These were pulled directly from the wire services’ websites in the case of *Reuters* and *TASS* and from the University of Missouri’s database for the *Associated Press*. This date range falls in line with the push into the city’s outskirts by the rebel forces and

the counter-offensives launched by the Assad regime. The decision to pull 15 articles from each service was made for two reasons. It would give a look into the topics deemed *most* salient by the wires' gatekeepers. By ignoring briefs and mid-sized stories, the most deeply covered topics would rise to the surface. The second reason is practicality — the number of stories that fall under Aleppo and Syrian Civil War coverage from that time period numbers into the thousands. It's not truly feasible to examine them all in the scope of this project.

The articles are only “traditional” news articles. Articles that fall under an opinion section, editorial section or any derivative are not included, due to the inherent framing that comes with an outright opinion piece. This research is concerned with more subtle framing used in traditional news pieces. The articles were found by simply searching “Aleppo” on each site and limited the date range to the desired timeline. Any article relevant to this study would have “Aleppo” in it, and while some were more broadly concerned with the Syrian conflict as a whole rather than the Battle of Aleppo, the size and impact of the battle meant it was inevitably linked to coverage of the conflict in the time it was happening.

After the text was gathered, the researcher read through the entirety to help derive coding schemata. Data analysis begins by “reading data repeatedly to achieve immersion and obtain a sense of the whole as one would read a novel” (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). The codes will be derived by uncovering words from the text that “appear to capture key thoughts or concepts” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). This research concerns itself with the building of frames, and as such I will attempt to “identify the relationship between categories and subcategories” (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279).

To arrive at a frame, each article is coded to identify textual elements that, building on Entman (as cited by McCombs & Ghanem, 2001, p. 58), promote a “problem

definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” The following is part of the text of a New York Times article about the Battle of Aleppo in which the first step in the coding process is initiated as an example:

Undeterred and infuriated by Western accusations (**anti-America sentiment**) of war crimes and barbarity in the aerial assault on Aleppo (**anti-Assad sentiment**), the Syrian government (**legitimacy of Assad**) and its ally Russia intensively (**seriousness of campaign**) bombed the city in northern Syria on Monday for the fourth consecutive day (**seriousness of campaign**). Residents and rescuers (**sympathy toward civilians**) there described the bombardment as among the worst yet in the five-year war.

Both the Kremlin and the Syrian government appeared to harden their position (**unconcerned with American opinions**) that the United States and its partners had caused the disintegration (**tenuousness of situation**) of a fleeting (**tenuousness of situation**) cease-fire last week. The Russians went as far as suggesting that the Western portrayal of them as war criminals in the Syria conflict risked a further alienation in relations (**anti-America sentiment**).

Insurgent-held neighborhoods in eastern Aleppo were hit with dozens of air attacks in the predawn hours, killing and wounding many people, according to doctors, nurses and activists in the city (**sympathy toward civilians**). By some estimates the deaths totaled 100 or more for the fourth day.

A number of monitor groups disseminated graphic photos and video clips portraying the medical mayhem wrought by the bombings (**sympathy toward civilians**).

The Aleppo Media Center, **(Relief organization)** a group of antigovernment activists and citizen journalists who have sought to document the conflict, posted video footage of civilian victims on a dirty hospital floor getting little more than simple bandages for wounds **(sympathy toward civilians)**.

Stockpiles of food and supplies have dwindled to near nothing on the rebel-held side **(illegitimacy)**, according to a report from Aleppo by Agence France-Presse **(journalists – “borrowed” news)**. It also said a shortage of blood for transfusions had forced doctors at the few functioning hospitals to amputate limbs of the seriously wounded **(sympathy toward civilians)**. Save the Children, the international charity, said children were “dying on the floors of hospitals” for lack of ventilators, anesthetics and antibiotics **(sympathy toward civilians)**.

The crisis in Aleppo has drastically worsened **(tenuousness of situation)** since Thursday, when Syrian and Russian warplanes sharply escalated **(Russian blame)** the bombing of the divided city as the cease-fire, negotiated by the Russians and Americans, collapsed **(tenuousness of situation)**.

The volume of bombings has increased, residents and rescue workers in Aleppo have said, and incendiary weapons and heavy-duty bombs that can destroy underground shelters have been used for the first time, wreaking havoc on crowded neighborhoods **(anti-Assad sentiment) (anti-Russia sentiment) (sympathy toward civilians)**.

One Syrian ambulance crew called Shafak **(Relief organization)** said Sunday that half the dead it had collected over the weekend were children **(sympathy toward civilians)**, according to Save the Children **(Relief organization)**. Forty percent of the

population in eastern Aleppo are children, Save the Children said, a statistic that helps to explain the high rates of young casualties (**sympathy toward civilians**).

Ahmad Mustafa Makiyya, a volunteer with the ambulance team, (**citizen**) said he had to pull his own family members from the rubble of their house, which was struck on Monday (**sympathy toward civilians**). The house was close to a gathering point for day laborers, he said, making the area especially crowded.

At an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Sunday, the United States, Britain and other allies said that the Russians were abetting war crimes in Aleppo by the government of President Bashar al-Assad (**Russian blame**) (**anti-Assad sentiment**).

“Bunker-busting bombs, more suited to destroying military installations, are now destroying homes, decimating bomb shelters, crippling, maiming, killing dozens, if not hundreds,” Matthew Rycroft, Britain’s ambassador to the United Nations, told the Council session (**Western government source**) (**sympathy for civilians**). Mr. Rycroft said that “in short, it is difficult to deny that Russia” is committing war crimes (**Russian blame**).

Samantha Power (**Outside government source**), his American counterpart, accused the Russians of “barbarism” (**Russian blame**).

Russia’s government, which has called the military campaign a necessary response to terrorist (**illegitimacy**) (**terrorism**) groups in Syria, responded harshly (**anger at Americans**) on Monday to the criticism.

“We note the overall unacceptable tone and rhetoric of the representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States, which can damage and harm our relations,” Dimitry S. Peskov, a Kremlin spokesman, **(Russian government source) (anti-American sentiment)** told reporters in Moscow.

Mr. Peskov said moderate Syrian opposition groups backed by the United States and Western and Arab allies had not complied with the terms of the cease-fire by failing to separate themselves from the jihadist fighters of the Nusra Front, which now calls itself the Levant Conquest Front **(illegitimacy) (terrorism)**.

“Terrorists continue their encroachments, they continue offensives,” he said, so that “naturally the fight against terrorists is ongoing, and must not be stopped.” **(illegitimacy) (terrorism)**.

International aid groups that have long denounced the indiscriminate brutality **(sympathy toward civilians)** of the Syrian war were aghast at the intensified bombings in Aleppo. The city is home to roughly two million people, including at least 250,000 who live in the insurgent-held **(illegitimacy)** eastern zones **(sympathy toward civilians)**.

The Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations, **(Relief organization)** a Cincinnati-based group that supports hospitals in Syria, said the use of bunker-busting bombs in recent days had made the crisis more desperate **(sympathy toward civilians)**.

“These bombs have the capacity to destroy fortified hospitals, medical points and underground shelters (where tens of thousands are taking shelter) at high risk,” the group said in a statement **(sympathy toward civilians)**..

The United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, (**International government source**) who has repeatedly denounced what he has called the Syrian government's culpability in most civilian casualties of the war, also expressed shock at the use of bunker-busting bombs (**sympathy toward civilians**) (**anti-Assad sentiment**) (**anti-Russian sentiment**).

"These bombs are not busting bunkers," he said. "They are demolishing ordinary people looking for any last refuge of safety. International law is clear: The systematic use of indiscriminate weapons in densely populated areas is a war crime." (**sympathy toward civilians**) (**anti-Assad sentiment**) (**anti-Russian sentiment**)

The power of these bombs is far more destructive than the barrels stuffed with explosives and shrapnel that Syrian government forces have been dropping on rebel-held areas, where they kill and maim indiscriminately. (**sympathy toward civilians**) (**anti-Assad sentiment**)

An ordinary building hit by the so-called barrel bombs will crumble, but the bunker busters obliterate buildings and also leave deep and wide craters, said James Le Mesurier, director of the Stichting Mayday Rescue Foundation, (**Relief organization**) a group that supports the civil defense search and rescue crews known as the White Helmets. (**sympathy toward civilians**) (**anti-Assad sentiment**)

While underground bunkers in eastern Aleppo have afforded civilians some measure of protection from barrel bombs, Mr. Le Mesurier said, the bunker busters leave no place to hide. (**sympathy toward civilians**) (**anti-Assad sentiment**)

In this example, the New York Times selected sources and language that gave the story a primary frame I would define as “civilian sympathy.” While the article ended with a quote of rebuke of Russian involvement, and Assad was framed as inherently brutal, the coverage of the battle was framed by problem definition in such a way as to focus on the conflict’s impact on the city’s civilian population.

Wire services were chosen for a few reasons. One major reason is the impact they have on gatekeeping practices within news organizations. In a quantitative content analysis by Whitney and Becker (1982), it was suggested that “wire service editors, in broad terms, ‘set the news agenda’ for newspaper news editors, by suggesting the proper ‘news mix’ and proportions within news categories” (p. 61). One suggestion for this finding made by the authors is that wire services and news organizations likely share similar news judgment values, as they are both indicative of the society as a whole (Whitney & Becker, 1982). These services, by default, are not restricted to a smaller geographical area of influence like smaller, non-national news organizations. The number of organizations making use of wire services grew in the first few years of the 20th Century from 68 percent in 2001 to 85 percent in 2005 (Johnston & Forde, 2009). It can be said, then, that wire services carry intense agenda-setting power over other media sources, and their usage is on the uptick.

Also, practically, studying wire services gets around the language barrier, as *TASS*, *Reuters*, and the *Associated Press* all publish in English. Translating a Russian-language news service would require much more work and have more potential for contextual errors. The intricacies of a statement can be lost between translations. One potential problem is the lack of information on how often a specific wire story was published. However, since the focus of the study is on the content produced and not audiences reached, the impact of this will be minimal.

Phase Two: Data and Category Refinement

After the texts were gathered and the first stage of the coding scheme put into place, two data tables were constructed, each categorized by wire service. The first tracked the prevalence of each category in the examined body of works, and the second tracked each type of source in the same body of works. This was used in order to further refine the defined categories. For example, terms such as “illegitimacy of the rebels” and “pro-Russia sentiment” could be combined in a more wide-ranging “legitimacy of Assad” frame. A “legitimacy of Assad” frame would fit into Entman’s definition by proposing both a treatment recommendation (cementation of Assad’s regime) and/or a moral evaluation (Assad deserves power). Other frames, such as criticism or championing of American and/or Russian involvement, could be seen as a causal interpretation or treatment recommendation. The source data table was also refined in order to separate it into its most basic group identifications.

At the end of this step, I produced another table with the broader categories. I then did another read-through of the body of work to ensure I did not miss data. If data was found that did not fit within the broader categories I had defined, it was “analyzed ... to determine if (it) represent(s) a new category or a subcategory of an existing code” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1282). The discussion then focused on how language and source selection contributed to create a certain framing of the narrative. For example, the above New York Times article made prevalent use of language and sourcing that implied intense sympathy for the afflicted citizenry, creating a peace journalism frame that ultimately creates a vision of this part of the conflict that casts blame for civilian deaths and war crimes on Russia.

Validity

The study's focus on the last six months of the Battle of Aleppo (a series of battles referred to here as the Aleppo offensive) and its limit to the longest of the articles will narrow the focus down to a manageable size, and justify considering the influence of direct Russian involvement, since the country participated in bombing campaigns. The researcher is also aware of his assumptions about TASS and influence from the Russian government — namely, that the organization would not likely report news that would reflect poorly on the Kremlin due the Russian government's ownership of the service. The researcher will keep aware of these assumptions as he reads to put a barrier up against possibly subconsciously creating misleading data. This is a problem because it is difficult to view sociocultural and ideological influences on gatekeeping theory. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) write that “because scholars stand within their own systems, they cannot escape and look at them objectively, a well-recognized shortcoming of systems of functional analysis” (p. 98). As such, attention must be paid in order to ensure a true view of sociocultural influences are found. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 316) write of qualitative research that “since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter.” The researcher will leave a large enough data trail where the results are as transferable and reproducible as possible in qualitative research.

Chapter 4: Results

This section of the thesis focuses on the granular, thematic frames identified by the researcher and how they may fit into larger frames based on Entman's four identified framing concepts mentioned earlier. The chapter will be broken into two sections: an introductory look at the more granular frames and an analysis of how they fit in with the macro-frames based on Entman's research and a look at the results of framing analysis that includes a table recounting which articles fit which of the frames. Again, 45 stories were analyzed, and it is important to note in the initial granular framing section that the framing elements are not exclusive. This means that all of the articles had elements of at least two of the more granular frames within them. Citations for the 45 stories that were analyzed can be found in Appendix I.

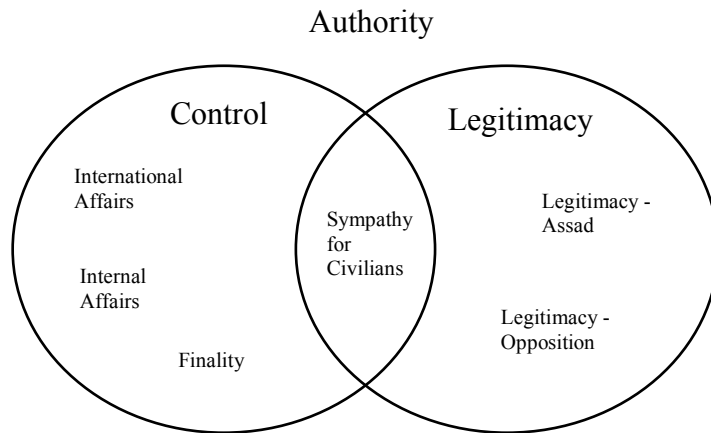
Defining Frames

By the end of the preliminary read-through, six major frames were identified: finality, sympathy for civilians, international action, internal action, legitimacy – Assad, and legitimacy – opposition. These codes were not necessarily pulled directly from the texts — for example, language that could be read as not supporting the legitimacy of the opposition would be filed under a legitimacy of Assad framing scheme as opposed to falling under its own scheme. These frames were summations of the themes found in the article, and in order to ensure that the final analysis was a framing analysis instead of a purely thematic analysis the six were broken down and discussed in the terms of Entman's (1993, p. 52) four frame elements: causal diagnosis, problem definition, moral judgment, and remedy suggestion.

These frames all operate under the overarching theme of authority — under which they are broken into two other themes of legitimacy and control. Both legitimacy frames fall under the larger legitimacy sphere, while most of the remainder fall under the control sphere. The

sympathy for civilians frame connects to both, as it can be used to delegitimize a side of the war and to display a sense of morality that would justify, in a stereotypical sense, control over the conflict. For example, criticism of human rights violations by a United Nations representative can work to put a sense of control in the hands of the organization.

Figure 1. Frame categories by larger framing type



Finality, a frame defined here as having to do with change or the “next step” in the conflict, was the hardest to define. The overarching sense of change could fall under “problem definition” depending on who was speaking in a story. Rebel or rebel-friendly sources could see the unstoppable end of the Battle of Aleppo as a problem due to it being inextricably linked with a major, so-far insurmountable setback to their cause. Official Syrian sources and/or their allies could see it as a suggestion for a remedy to the problem, as an outright takeover of Aleppo from the rebels would deal them a setback that will likely end up winning the war for Assad, barring any unforeseen international intervention or circumstance.

Frames concerned with the impact of the battle or the war in its totality on civilians — here referenced as sympathy for civilians — was a much easier frame to fit within the larger macro-frames. There were instances of the sympathy frame acting as a sort of problem

definition, showing the impact that the war had on those that were not *directly* involved in it. However, a much more prevalent use of the frame was as moral judgment. Stories involved with this frame focused on phrases like “cold,” “hunger,” and “displacement,” and made use of sources that would engender sympathy, such as small children or the elderly. More of these stories used civilian suffering as a condemnation of the conflict rather than to start a discussion on solving the problem.

The most pervasive frame in the findings was the international affairs frame, a catch-all term for framing the conflict around the international power struggle around the Syrian Civil War. All of the 45 articles contained elements of this frame to some degree, and it was especially pervasive in the *TASS* coverage, in which many stories contained single sources, often from the upper echelons of Russian government. This fit within Entman’s remedy suggestion frame, in that many international governments — U.S., Russia, Turkey, France, the UN — presented themselves as the arbiters of what is fair or right in the conflict as a whole. There were also times in which the frame would have fallen under the causal diagnosis macro-frame, in that, many times, actions by outside actors served to simply anger other outside actors, which, in turn, contributed to a longer, more destructive war.

Interestingly, a similar *internal* affairs frame was not as prevalent. While it would be disingenuous to report on the war as a simple regional conflict, many times this left opposition fights or opinions by the wayside and presented the war as an affair for other countries to act within rather than for the Syrian people to decide. When the frame was present, it fell under the larger macro-frame of remedy suggestion, in that it focused on how best to end the battle, or, at the very least, to come to a conclusion that would be at least temporarily agreeable to both sides. It would be interesting, in later studies, to see how the lack of internal framing would create a

sort of causal diagnosis frame in and of itself, in that it silences voices that, by all rights, should be part of the conversation surrounding the war they are fighting.

The final two frames are both concerned with legitimacy — for Assad and for the opposition. Legitimacy, in this case, is concerned with standardized behavior of the international community. For example, an accusation that Assad engaged in chemical warfare would be a delegitimizing factor in that it would insinuate that Assad took part in behavior that would not be accepted in an international community. The same would go for the rebels. Another legitimacy factor is control. Despotic and violent actions do not delegitimize a government fully, and if one side has major control or is about to seize control than oftentimes international legitimacy is not the end factor. *Reuters* had less opposition legitimacy than the *Associated Press*. *TASS* had none, likely due to Russia's official stance in support of Assad. Surprisingly to the researcher, however, was that *TASS* did not contain many references to the legitimacy of Assad, even referring to his presidency, through Russian government sources, as tangential to the larger conflict on multiple occasions. Legitimacy frames would fall under the macro-frame of a remedy suggestion or causal diagnosis, in that sometimes they can mean the legitimacy (read: control) of a certain side could create a more peaceful or stable area, and, in other articles, mean the exact opposite.

Framing Analysis

Out of all of the minor framing elements, the most prevalent in all of the stories was a sense of concern for civilian casualties and quality of life due to the conflict. Out of the 45 articles examined, 37 of them contained at least a passing reference to the trials of the Syrian citizenry during the siege and outside conflicts. Fourteen of the *Associated Press* articles were

missing language that could be considered as engendering sympathy toward civilians. Thirteen of the *Reuters* articles had sympathy themes, while *TASS* came in last in the count at eleven.

Sympathy for the Syrian citizenry was not a difficult framing aspect to find. While, as stated above, almost all of the articles analyzed contained some framing elements of civilian sympathy, many contained longer-form information of civilian suffering. A few examples follow.

In this excerpt from *Reuters*'s "Rebel Aleppo's Final Agony," (the name of which already conjures anti-war image), the language is stark:

*Thousands of people trapped in eastern Aleppo faced cold, hunger, destitution and an uncertain wait to leave their city as refugees while government forces seized the last rebel pocket, a major prize in the Syrian war.
As reports spread of killings by government soldiers and allied militiamen, denied by Damascus, many were hit by the painful reality that they may never return home.*

In the article, attention is immediately given to the plight of the affected citizenry, focusing on their uncertainty of the future and the challenges they face in their day-to-day reality. The official denial from the Assad regime of mass killings is given lip service while the "painful reality" that the citizens may not be able to return home becomes the focus.

In the *Associated Press*'s "The Latest – Istanbul Protest Blames Iran for Deal's Failure," the final update is of a large-scale Iranian protest:

*Hundreds of Turkish and Syrian demonstrators assembled outside the Iranian consulate in Istanbul to blame Tehran for the failed start of a cease-fire deal that aimed to stop the bloodbath in Syria's Aleppo.
The demonstrators shouted "Killer Iran, get out of Syria!" and held up banners that read "Save Aleppo" on Wednesday night.*

The focus here, on the protest blaming Tehran, highlights the displaced Syrian diaspora. Their demands that Iran leave Syria and their “Save Aleppo” banners emphasize the destruction happening in the city. In the *TASS* piece “Russia expects unbiased assessment of crimes in Aleppo from international community,” the writer began the story with statements from a Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman highlighting civilian suffering:

"Syrians took to Aleppo streets to celebrate the city's liberation congratulating each other on the victory and thanking Russian and Syrian servicemen," the diplomat noted.

"However, that was a holiday with tears in one's eyes. We continue to learn new details of what happened in Aleppo when it was controlled by terrorists and extremists. In particular, mass graves containing the remains of dozens of people have been found there. What's more, it turned out that these people had been tortured."

"There is every reason to believe that these terrible discoveries will continue," Zakharova said. She noted that "evidence of these crimes will be handed over to media by the Russian military and made public." "We hope that the international community will provide an impartial assessment of this bloody carnage, when Syrian citizens were subjected to torture and violence by extremists and terrorists," the diplomat stressed.

Framing of the battle and conflict as a whole as an international problem was the most prevalent of all of the frames. All of the articles contained framing elements that presented the conflict as an international affair, focusing on the international community's diplomacy and aid toward the different sides of the conflict. This was not always the primary frame and was frequently used as a minor frame that showed the international consequence of a relatively small region at war. For example, many of the articles touched on international condemnation of violence, bickering between countries about fault and diplomatic angles. Many of the stories, however, were framed entirely through the lens of international cooperation or wrangling over the direction of the war. Examples from each of the services in on these longer pieces follow.

In the *TASS* piece “Russia keeps urging West to set up wide coalition against terrorism,” a one-source story, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov’s comments on U.S.-Russian relations are played up, casting blame on the United States for not fulfilling “obligations”:

“But the U.S. failed to fulfill its part of the obligations or didn't feel like doing it for the reasons known to no one else but itself,” Bogdanov said. “In the first place, (it failed) to ensure the separation of the so-called moderate opposition from Jabhat Al-Nousra and other terrorist groupings.”

“We're confident the ceasefire can and must be resumed,” he said. “A clue to the situation is found in the separation of the moderates and the terrorists.”

The statements of the diplomat, again, presented without any contradiction, are used to immediately delegitimize American involvement and sow doubt that the rebels are consistently focused on what is considered best for the Syrian people. In *Reuters*’s piece, “U.S.-led forces strike Syrian troops, prompting emergency U.N. meeting, the ramifications of actions on the ground are made clear. The ramifications are presented rather simply, without much color, but shows that an action on the ground has consequences both in and out of Syria.

U.S.-led coalition air strikes reportedly killed dozens of Syrian soldiers on Saturday, endangering a U.S.-Russian brokered ceasefire and prompting an emergency U.N. Security Council meeting as tensions between Moscow and Washington escalated.

The United States military said the coalition stopped the attacks against what it had believed to be Islamic State positions in northeast Syria after Russia informed it that Syrian military personnel and vehicles may have been hit.

The United States relayed its “regret” through the Russian government for what it described as the unintentional loss of life of Syrian forces in the strike, a senior Obama administration official said in an emailed statement.

Framing the war as an internal affair, however, was less prevalent. Dialogue between the two sides and internal participation in outside affairs was not played up in as many stories. Nineteen of the stories contained it — 42% — and none of them were from *TASS*, which was more concerned with Russian involvement in the conflict and the international pushback and

fallout around it. Eleven *Reuters* articles and eight *Associated Press* articles were at least tangentially involved with framing the conflict as an internal affair by highlighting the two sides and the roles that said sides play in coming to diplomatic or wartime conclusions. Examples of internal affairs framing follow:

The *Associated Press* piece, “The Latest - Syrian groups say Russia behind violations”, the writers focus on the interaction between traditionally non-international Syrian actors with the larger international community, rooting the conflict with its traditionally internal conflict:

Four Syrian organizations have sent a U.N. commission a list of 304 attacks in Aleppo where they say Russia bears "a high likelihood" of responsibility for violating international humanitarian law.

Their letter to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, obtained by The Associated Press, said the attacks resulted in 1,207 civilian deaths, including 380 children.

It said "evidence clearly indicates that Russia has committed or been complicit in war crimes in Syria."

The letter is signed by the Syrian Civil Defense search-and-rescue group, also known as the White Helmets, the Syrian Network for Human Rights, Independent Doctors Association and Violations Documentation Center.

The finality frame was one of the hardest to define, but there was, in many articles, language that gave a sense of impending finality or change due to what increasingly becomes an obvious end to the Battle of Aleppo. The Battle’s end has not meant the end of the war, but the taking of the city left opposition rebel groups without any major strongholds, mostly relegating them to smaller cities such as Idlib (as of April 2018). This does not account for activity from anti-Assad Kurdish forces, which occupy much of northwestern Syria but do not ally themselves entirely with the goals of the other opposition groups. Examples of the finality frame follow.

In the *Reuters* piece “After Aleppo, Syria's Assad still far from regaining his state,” the finality frame focuses less on the end of the war more than a shift into a different period, one marked by a Syria with a less-powerful opposition force. Within the beginning of the article, the authors write:

However, the battlefield victories that seem - for now - to have secured Assad's rule have been won in large part not by his own depleted military, but by Russian warplanes and a shock force of foreign Shi'ite militias backed by Iran. Assad will rely on Moscow and Tehran to take back more territory, and to hold and secure it, meaning he will have to balance his own ambitions with theirs. At the same time, as the insurgents lose ground and as the jihadists among them grow more dominant, conventional warfare may give way to an era of guerrilla attacks and suicide bombings within areas held by the government.

In the *Associated Press* article “The Latest – Syrian opposition group supports call for talks,” the struggle for rebels to keep relevance in Aleppo talks comes through:

The state TV announcement Friday came hours after the evacuation of the embattled part of eastern Aleppo was suspended, apparently a final pressure card to push for the evacuation of the Shiite villages in northern Syria. Rebels had previously rejected linking the two evacuations, saying evacuating the Shiite villages is related to another separate deal.

Two rebel spokesmen privy to the talks say the fighters besieging the two Shiite villages, including al-Qaida linked militant group Fatah al-Sham Front, have agreed to evacuate several hundred wounded from the Shiite villages. If it happens, this may lead to the resumption of evacuation from Aleppo.

Thousands of Aleppo residents are believed still stuck in the enclave surrounded by government forces.

The remaining two frames are concerned with the legitimacy of Assad and the opposition, respectively. Examples of opposition legitimacy frames follow. In the *Associated Press* piece “The Latest – UN envoy regrets inability to end Syria fighting,” the linkage of the Assad government to accused war crimes delegitimizes its claim of control:

The Qatar Red Crescent says four bombs were dropped from a helicopter on the hospital in the rebel-held neighborhood of Sakhour on Saturday.

QRS said on Monday that the attack killed two patients, wounded eight and destroyed half the center. Initially, the Qataris had reopened the facility, which was originally built by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, in April.

Dr. Hashem Darwish, the head of the health program at the QRCS's mission in Turkey, called the attack a war crime.

In the *Associated Press* piece “The Latest – US holds Russia responsible for aid convoy hit,” the Syrian government and its Russian allies are linked to a bombing of an aid convoy, delegitimizing them again by reporting on information that would make them barbaric:

Hussein Badawi, who leads the Syrian Civil Defense — also known as the White Helmets — in Uram al-Kubra, says Tuesday the strikes came from helicopters and land missiles.

He accuses Syrian and Russian aircraft of taking part in an attack that lasted more than two hours, covering a 100 yard-radius. Badawi's team arrived on the scene after the first land missiles hit.

Another witness, Mohammed Rasoul, says the convoy was "erased from the face of the earth."

Badawi says the rescue effort was hampered by the dark and 11 strikes that came while the rescue team was searching for survivors.

Other articles contained language and themes that would lend credence to both legitimacy frames — Assad and the opposition. This was generally accomplished by reporting both on the imminent takeover of rebel strongholds and neighborhoods by Assad (thereby painting the conflict as “only a matter of time”) and similarly reporting on the Syrian government’s ruthlessness in its takeover. An example follows.

In the *Reuters* piece “Syrian government forces press attack in East Aleppo,” both sides are granted legitimacy through the chosen language:

The Syrian government said on Friday it was ready to resume dialogue with the opposition, without external intervention or preconditions. Rebels said no such contacts were taking place

The U.N. human rights office said hundreds of men from eastern Aleppo were missing after leaving rebel-held areas, voicing deep concern over their fate at the hands of government forces.

The government has dismissed reports of mass arrests, torture and extrajudicial killings by its forces as fabrications. Rebels for their part deny they have prevented civilians from leaving opposition-controlled areas.

Source Selection and Salience

There were two major areas of examination in regards to source selection in the wires services — the type of source selected, and the number of sources used. Eight different categories of sources emerged from the texts: aid/research, U.S. government, Russian government, Assad government, rebels, other governments, civilians, and journalists. The aid/research category contains any organizations that are concerned with research of the war (tracking statistics, challenging official narratives), or giving aid to afflicted civilians and refugees. Examples include the White Helmets, a Syrian volunteer aid agency, and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring organization based in Great Britain.

The U.S, Russian, and Assad government categories contain any source tangentially connected or employed by said governments, such as foreign ministers, generals or UN ambassadors. The rebel category is a little broader, as the conflict is not simply between the Assad regime and one unified rebel alliance. As there are many groups with many different ideologies, the rebel category contains sources selected from any Syrian-based group operating militarily against the Assad regime. While most of the rebel sources cited in *Associated Press* and *Reuters* articles (none at all were cited in *TASS*) were likely from rebel groups active in the Battle of Aleppo, such as Fatah Halab or Jaish al-Fatah, but there is generally no way to specify due to them being referred to as simply rebels. There is a bit of discrepancy between these more “official” rebels groups and other disconnected or fringe groups, such as ISIL or the People’s Protection Units, which defend the *de facto* autonomous Rojava region composed of mainly of Syrian Kurds. These groups are not represented as often in the examined stores, due to tenuous

and sometimes nonexistent ties to the Aleppo conflict, so it did not make much sense to create a separate category. Essentially, the rebel category contains all anti-Assad militias active in Syria, regardless of ideology.

The other government category is wide-ranging, created out of a few other categories in order to keep the count manageable. The Syrian Civil War has attracted input from many of the world's governments, including the EU, Middle Eastern countries like Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and the UN. These countries, besides Turkey, have rather tenuous effects on the conflict as a whole (in the case of the UN, it's mostly condemnation of war crimes), so to break them up into separate categories would create multiple categories of international outrage, rather than multiple categories of sources representing a stake in the war. In effect, any government or governmental union (the UN, the EU) that is not Russian, American, or Syrian (Assad regime) goes under this category.

The civilian category is concerned with refugees and non-combative Syrians and residents of Aleppo. It was a relatively rare category due to the difficulty of shoe-leather reporting in the conflict. Journalists were another rare category. Information attributed to journalists (such as, "*Reuters* journalists reported hearing bombs") was sorted into this category, as was any long-form retrospective or summation of the conflict as a whole. *TASS* had the most relevant example of the retrospective category: its piece "Russian operation in Syria- one year on," which sits at around 2200 words, is solely the work of one journalist writing a retrospective of the last year of the war, sans any "official" sources.

Sources are important in studying frames because of the consequence of giving a platform. For example, primarily sourcing U.S. and Russian government sources in a story could frame the conflict as an international conflict primarily driven by the two superpowers. One-

source stories, which were prominent in *TASS*, can give governments or organizations a way to drive the narrative and frame the conflict in any way they would like. Civilian sourcing can create a frame that could give more salience to sympathy themes.

Findings

Reuters had a plethora of framing elements within its stories, lacking *en masse* only significant opposition legitimacy framing. The breakdown was thus: 9 articles contained elements of the finality frame, 13 articles contained elements of the sympathy for civilians frame, 15 articles contained international affairs frame elements, 11 articles contained elements of the internal affairs frame, 5 articles, contained Assad legitimacy frame elements, and, finally, only one article contained opposition legitimacy frames.

In the 15 stories by Reuters analyzed, 184 sources were quoted. In order of most frequent category to least frequent category, they are as follows, 33 other government sources, 29 Assad government sources, 28 rebel sources, 26 civilian sources, 21 aid/research organization sources, 21 Russian government sources, 16 United States government sources, and 10 journalist sources. In almost all of the stories, diametrically opposed communities were represented alongside each other. For example, out of all of the nine stories that quoted U.S. government sources, only two of those lacked a Russian government equivalent source. It was slightly higher reversed. Out of the eleven articles that quoted Russian government sources, only two of them lacked an American government equivalent.

The *Associated Press's* frames overwhelmingly favored, like *Reuters*, sympathy for civilians and international affairs themes. The breakdown is as follows: 5 articles contained finality frames, 14 articles contained sympathy for civilians frames, 15 articles contained

international affairs frames, 8 articles contained internal affairs frames, 5 articles contained Assad legitimacy frames, and six articles contained opposition legitimacy frames.

The *Associated Press* used the most individual sources out of all of the wire services, clocking in at a total of 283. In descending order, they are as follows. 87 other government sources, 54 aid/research organization sources, 52 Russian government sources, 33 Assad government sources, 23 rebel sources, 13 journalist sources, 12 U.S. government sources, and 9 civilian sources. The *AP* was less comprehensive than *Reuters* in ensuring that Russian and American sources were equally represented — Russian government sources appeared in every article, while American sources only appeared in 8. However, this is not necessarily an example of less *commitment* to fostering both sides in their articles, as many international communities that fall under the other government category, such as the UN and Turkey, are opposed to some of Russia's efforts in the region. The *AP* was also very interested in using aid and research organizations for information, which could help contribute to a sympathy for civilians frame. Though they used fewer civilian sources than *Reuters*, it should be noted again the level of difficulty in actually getting access to said civilian reporters when the conflict is so dangerous for journalists.

TASS, out of all three of the wire services, had the least amount of variation in its framing elements. One story contained finality frame themes, eleven stories contained sympathy for civilians themes, fifteen stories contained international affairs themes, and four stories contained Assad legitimacy themes. None of the stories contained internal affairs or opposition legitimacy themes. *TASS* was the only service studied whose longest stories did not contain even minor elements of all themes.

Its source selection process is interesting in what it does not do. There are 23 Russian government sources, four aid/research sources, one U.S. government source, and three Assad government sources, for a total of 32 sources in all. *Reuters* has almost six times as many sources, while the *Associated Press* has almost nine times as many. The vast majority of these sources are affiliated with the Russian government, and in ten stories, Russian government sources are the only quoted sources at all. U.S. government sources received lip service — paraphrases of quotes with no actual substance. Below are two tables that contain, in descending order of amount of times mentioned, framing elements and source selection by wire service. A more detailed graph that counts both per story can be found in Appendix II.

Table 1. Framing elements by wire service

	<u>Reuters</u>	<u>Associated Press</u>	<u>TASS</u>
<u>International Affairs</u>	15	15	15
<u>Sympathy for Civilians</u>	13	14	11
<u>Internal Affairs</u>	11	8	0
<u>Finality</u>	9	5	1
<u>Legitimacy – Assad</u>	5	5	4
<u>Legitimacy - Opposition</u>	1	6	0

Table 2. Source selection by wire service

	<u>Reuters</u>	<u>Associated Press</u>	<u>TASS</u>
<u>Other Government</u>	33	87	0
<u>Russian Government</u>	21	52	23
<u>Aid/Research Organizations</u>	21	54	4

<u>Assad Government</u>	29	33	3
<u>Rebels</u>	28	23	0
<u>Civilians</u>	26	9	0
<u>U.S. Government</u>	16	12	1
<u>Journalists</u>	10	13	1

Reuters, then, framed the war as an internal incident more so than a war that could be defined in initially diplomatic terms — that is, as a physical conflict involving two sides struggling for power. Sources and language chosen create an image of the war of two sides vying for power inside the afflicted area more so than focusing on the international community’s debates and involvement in the conflict. This frame creates a more stereotypical war frame, one more focused on the civilian impact of a *traditional* war rather than what the international community can or must do to prevent said civilian impact. *Reuters*’s internal affairs framing was strengthened by its reliance on sources pulled from the Assad regime and from different rebel groups. While figures from international governments were quoted, their information was more peripheral, focusing on reactions to occurrences in the conflict and outcry over civilian casualties and related tragedies from the battle.

The *Associated Press* departs from *Reuters*’s internal involvement-focused framing, focusing instead on international affairs framing and sympathy for civilian framing. This creates a combination of frames that highlights international diplomacy alongside the very thing said international diplomacy is supposed to prevent — civilian death and tragedy. The *Associated Press* did use the most civilian sources out of the three services, thereby lending credence to its

embracing of the sympathy for civilians framing model by virtue of its seeking of stories on the ground.

TASS's predominant framing was the conflict was, similarly, as an international affair, and an affair in which Russia plays a predominant and legitimate part. Lip service is paid to Assad legitimacy and civilian sympathy framing, but the majority of the minor frame elements are focusing on international affairs, namely American actions and Russian reactions and vice-versa. Its source selection — namely its predominant reliance on Russian sources and its relegation of others to the background — helps ensure this frame takes precedence. *TASS* was remarkably different in its sourcing than the two Western wire services. Primarily, Russian government sources and affiliated research organizations and nonprofits were used. U.S. government and other outside government sources were mentioned, but the information attributed to them was not remotely as important to the article as official Russian sources.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis attempted to answer the question of how three wire services framed one of the most integral engagements of the Syrian Civil War. It did so by examining researcher-defined frames in regards to Entman's four framing elements, and by examining the types of sources whose voices were used in said articles. The six frames defined here are, again, sympathy for civilians, finality, legitimacy – Assad, legitimacy – opposition, international affairs and internal affairs. The categories defined for the different sources are, again, aid/research organizations, Russian government, U.S. government, Assad government, rebels, other government, civilians, and journalists.

The first research question (RQ1) asked how each wire service framed the Battle of Aleppo and the differences in those frames. According to the findings, the results are as follows. *Reuters*, though concerned with both finality and international affairs framing, more frequently and intensely focused on a both a sympathy for civilians frame and an internal affairs frame. The sympathy for civilians frame was present in all but two of the longest pieces published by the service, and it pervaded through these stories with strong language, aid organization and civilian sourcing, and a focus on the impact of major military operations on non-combatants. While the internal affairs frame was less pervasive than the international affairs frame, the language and sourcing used in international affairs framing was mild and contained within certain parts of the articles it was present within. Internal affairs framing was more persuasive, and it was fed by *Reuters*'s frequent use of rebel or opposition sources. Essentially, the sum total of the *Reuters*

coverage creates a frame of the conflict concerned with internal diplomacy and the effect of the war on Aleppo's vast civilian population.

The *Associated Press's* coverage was focused on sympathy for civilians and international affairs framing. More minor framing elements such as both legitimacy frames and finality also appeared. Similarly to *Reuters*, their civilian sympathy language was pervasive and ran throughout the vast majority of their coverage. Their language concerning the international affairs frame was stronger than *Reuters*, and their source selection was much larger – very few stories lacked government sources from outside the United States. The *Associated Press* ultimately ended up framing the conflict as an international conflict — in which the international community debates on the best way to deal with the problem of civilian casualties.

Interestingly, however, neither *Reuters* nor the *Associated Press* overwhelmingly focused on any legitimacy frames. No stance was taken on either backing Assad or the rebels, and, as such, the conflict almost always existed at a removal from the region in which it was actually being raged. Voices at the Syrian level were no more amplified than voices at the French or Russian level in the *Associated Press*, but even when they were amplified in *Reuters* pieces, no legitimacy was given to any of the specific voices.

What readers are left with in *TASS* coverage is a version of the war that is emphatically Russian-centered, with the majority of the coverage focusing on Russian reactions to *international* actions and reactions. Other coverage focuses on Russian involvement in the war, presented as a legitimate form of interference compared to the presentation of the American and other international interference. In the coding scheme, *TASS* coverage was the most aggressively one-sided — almost solely fitting under the international affairs frame due to its focus on Russian legitimacy. It should be noted again that while other framing elements (such as

sympathy for civilians and Assad – legitimacy elements) were found, these were paid little more than lip service and ultimately used to advance the framing narrative of Russian legitimacy in the international debate surrounding the war. These findings back up Zhang and Hellmueller’s (2016) finding that “strategic games,” “political opportunism,” and “human rights crisis” frames are prevalent throughout international media. Though their frames were more granular, they contain similar elements to the larger frames employed here — for example, international and internal affairs frames contain elements of both strategic games and political opportunism.

The second research question (RQ2) asks how source selection in each wire service contributes to the prevalence of frames in the services’ coverage of the conflict. Civilians in *Reuters* were quoted from less often than the *Associated Press* and more often than from *TASS*, and the information was enough to add to the international government sources that decried civilian casualties in the war. The *Associated Press* similarly used sources that reinforced its framing narrative. While they did use internal sources — the Assad regime and rebels — the information these sources used was peripheral to the greater, overarching theme of international affairs framing. Internal debates, such as legitimacy or responsibility debates, between Assad and the rebels would gradually spiral outwards and bring in outside international voices.

The primary definers model of source-media relations states that official sources have privileged access to the media due to their “elite” status, and that the media operate as amplifiers of this elite voice (Anderson, 2017). This research has shown that official sources have a powerful presence in the coverage of the Battle of Aleppo – civilians are interviewed, but their presence is not as pervasive or powerful. The *TASS* findings also fit with research by Kohei Watanabe (2017), in which it was found that *TASS* gave higher prominence to Russian official sources, thereby presenting a more pro-Russian version of stories.

Research has been done that shows source framing, when attempted to be forced into a news story, is less regurgitated wholesale and more redefined by the journalists. Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt write that their findings “challenge the common assumption that political source frames cascade more or less in full into the news (Entman 2003): many sources cited in the news contributed merely a tiny fraction of unique meaning to the constructed news frames, supporting, challenging, or contextualizing ideas contributed by other sources; their claims and interpretations were presented neither fully, nor necessarily accurately, nor did they influence the news frame” (2016, pg. 156). This research, however, is more applicable to the findings in the *Associated Press* and *Reuters* articles, as *TASS* is, for all intents and purposes, a one-source publication and research on Western normative media practices may not apply.

This study is important due to its connection with strengthening social and cultural identification in regards to the Syrian conflict as a whole. Adarves-Yorno et. al (2013) showed that positive framing of wartime intervention can create stronger ties between news consumers and their countries’ interests; and Cozma and Kozman (2014) found that news consumers can be swayed by reporting on events they are geographically isolated from. This study’s conclusions are transferable in that similar conflicts will likely be able to be studied in the same way, with the same method, and give the same basic type of results. By looking at how conflicts are presented and how certain voices may be given importance within those presentations, similar frames will be able to be derived from similar war coverage. For example, legitimacy frames can come from language that presents one side of a conflict as a pretender to power, and international or internal affairs framing can come from content with a plethora of sources from international or internal organizations or powers, respectively. Large-scale international conflicts and proxy wars create much international disagreement, and it is useful to understand how different countries or

societies may be presented news of the conflict in order to be able facilitate discussions more openly.

One main limitation of this research was that the examined wire services are not solely presented to citizens of the services' countries of origin. Therefore, it was not possible in this research to ascertain whether or not the framing and gatekeeping decisions are made with national or international interests in mind. Another large limitation was the necessity of focusing on larger-scale articles. While the larger articles gave more textual content to work with to discern the ultimate frames, the lack of shorter pieces removes possible examination of more hastily-developed content and the resulting frames.

Future research could focus on the decisions made at the local level to run certain stories from wire services — why do editors decide to run these stories? Do they edit them or run them unabridged? If they do edit them, why? It would be interesting to see how readers' views of the war may be altered depending on the wire service that their local publication decides to make use of. For example, if a paper in New York decides to run *Associated Press* coverage of Aleppo while a paper in Boston decides to run *Reuters* coverage of the same event, how different would their opinions be of the war, the carnage, and who was responsible? Other newsroom research could focus on how sources were selected for these stories. While the sympathy for civilians frame was prevalent, civilian sources, though used, were less so. It would be interesting to see if the decision to not run as many civilian sources was an explicit one or one made by the circumstance of the war and the difficulty of reaching said voices.

It is important for journalists to realize how they can unconsciously (or, in some cases, consciously) shape a story by the addition or removal of certain language, events, and sources. In a tragedy such as the Battle of Aleppo, coverage of the conflict as a destructive war was

prevalent, and attempts were made by some services to seek out the voices of those affected but not involved explicitly with the fighting. One service disregarded this altogether, creating a clinical view of the conflict that effectively silenced the voices of the innocents harmed in the battle. Journalists must do a better job of not allowing the casualties caused by war to exist solely as statistics.

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Appendix I

Associated Press

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TASS Staff (2016, September 16). US hand over to Russia data on location of US-controlled Syrian opposition units. *TASS*.

TASS Staff (2016, September 19). Russian Defense Ministry says US, Syrian opposition fail to fulfill Geneva deal. *TASS*.

TASS Staff (2016, September 22). Russia does not rule out strikes against Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham. *TASS*.

TASS Staff (2016, September 26). Lavrov says West fails to meet its commits on Syria. *TASS*.

TASS Staff (2016, September 30). Russian operation in Syria: one year on. *TASS*.

Appendix II

Granular frame elements within examined wire services

	Finality	Sympathy for Civilians	International Affairs	Internal Affairs	Legitimacy - Assad	Legitimacy - Opposition
The Latest- Syria claims 99 percent control of Aleppo (AP)	X	X	X			
The Latest- Syrian envoy at UN hails 'liberation of Aleppo' (AP)		X	X			
The Latest- Istanbul protest blames Iran for deal's failure (AP)		X	X	X		
The Latest- Syrian groups say Russia behind violations (AP)		X	X	X		
The Latest- Syrian opposition group supports call for talks (AP)	X	X	X	X	X	
The Latest- 1st Aleppo evacuees in 2 days reported (AP)		X	X		X	X
The Latest- China calls killing of Russian envoy 'barbaric' (AP)			X		X	
The Latest- John Kerry concerned by rhetoric out of Turkey (AP)		X	X		X	X
Iraq's ascendant Shiite militias take the fight to Tal Afar (AP)	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Latest- UN envoy regrets inability to end Syria fighting (AP)		X	X			
The Latest- Russia says Aleppo escape corridors under fire (AP)		X	X			
The Latest- Lavrov, Kerry to meet again on Syria (AP)		X	X	X		X
The Latest- 20 countries seeking Syria peace may meet in NY (AP)		X	X	X		X
The Latest- UN says Syria meeting canceled (AP)	X	X	X	X		
The Latest- US holds Russia responsible for aid convoy hit (AP)	X	X	X	X		X

Syrian government forces press attack in east Aleppo (Reuters)	X	X	X	X		X
After Aleppo, Syria's Assad still far from regaining his state (Reuters)	X	X	X		X	
Battle of Aleppo ends after years of bloodshed with rebel withdrawal (Reuters)	X	X	X			
Hezbollah, other Shi'ite allies helped Assad win in Aleppo (Reuters)	X	X	X	X		
Rebel Aleppo's final agony (Reuters)	X	X	X	X	X	
Ghost soldiers - the Russians secretly dying for the Kremlin in Syria (Reuters)			X			
Rebels fend off Aleppo assault as nations seek to rebuild peace process (Reuters)		X	X	X		
Aleppo will eventually fall, but Syrian war will go on (Reuters)		X	X	X		
Iraq launches Mosul offensive to drive out Islamic State (Reuters)	X	X	X	X		
Syria ceasefire takes effect with Assad emboldened (Reuters)		X	X	X		
US-led forces strike Syrian troops, prompting emergency UN meeting (Reuters)			X	X		
Battle rages near Aleppo, air onslaught continues (Reuters)		X	X	X		
Warplanes knock out Aleppo hospitals as Russian (Reuters)	X	X	X		X	
Buses evacuate thousands of exhausted Aleppo residents in ceasefire deal (Reuters)	X	X	X	X	X	
Syrian general says Aleppo offensive in final stages (Reuters)	X		X	X		
Lavrov, Kerry round up 12-hours-long talks in Geneva (TASS)			X			
Russia expects unbiased assessment of crimes in Aleppo from international community (TASS)		X	X			

Contacts between Russian and US military on Syria suspended – diplomat (TASS)		X			
Lavrov- Russian S-300, S-400 air defense systems threaten no one in Syria (TASS)	X	X			
Russia ready to deliver strikes on militants moving into Syria from Iraq – general (TASS)	X	X			
Russia keeps urging West to set up wide coalition against terrorism (TASS)	X	X			
Results of trilateral talks of Russian, Syrian and Iranian top diplomats (TASS)	X	X			
Russia's Defense Ministry sends artillery intelligence assets to Syria (TASS)	X	X			
US-controlled Ahrar al-Sham armed units unwilling to cease fire in Syria (TASS)	X	X			
Russia, Syria stop bombing areas of possible location of opposition units (TASS)	X	X			
US hands over to Russia data on location of US-controlled Syrian opposition units (TASS)	X	X			
Russian Defense Ministry says US, Syrian opposition fail to fulfil Geneva deal (TASS)	X	X			
Russia does not rule out strikes against Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar Al-Sham (TASS)		X			
Lavrov says West fails to meet its commitments on Syria (TASS)		X			
Russian operation in Syria- one year on (TASS)		X			

Source count within examined wire services

	Aid/Research	U.S. Government	Russian Government	Assad Government	Rebels	Other Government	Civilians	Journalists
The Latest-Syria claims 99 percent control of Aleppo (AP)	5	1	2	3	3	2	2	1
The Latest-Syrian envoy at UN hails 'liberation of Aleppo' (AP)	6	1	3	1	0	10	0	0
The Latest-Istanbul protest blames Iran for deal's failure (AP)	3	0	3	1	2	7	2	2
The Latest-Syrian groups say Russia behind violations (AP)	6	0	3	6	0	6	0	0
The Latest-Syrian opposition group supports call for talks (AP)	4	0	3	5	3	8	0	0
The Latest- 1st Aleppo evacuees in 2 days reported (AP)	5	1	5	2	0	7	2	0
The Latest-China calls killing of Russian envoy 'barbaric' (AP)	1	3	4	1	0	5	0	3
The Latest-John Kerry concerned by rhetoric out of Turkey (AP)	6	2	6	1	1	6	0	2
Iraq's ascendant Shiite militias take the fight to Tal Afar (AP)	0	0	4	2	3	8	0	2
The Latest-UN envoy regrets inability to end Syria fighting (AP)	6	1	1	1	3	5	0	0

The Latest- Russia says Aleppo escape corridors under fire (AP)	1	1	4	2	2	0	0	0
The Latest- Lavrov, Kerry to meet again on Syria (AP)	3	0	2	0	3	6	0	0
The Latest- 20 countries seeking Syria peace may meet in NY (AP)	2	0	2	2	2	10	2	0
The Latest- UN says Syria meeting canceled (AP)	2	0	7	4	1	4	1	1
The Latest- US holds Russia responsible for aid convoy hit (AP)	4	2	3	2	0	3	0	2
Syrian government forces press attack in east Aleppo (Reuters)	0	2	2	3	6	4	2	3
After Aleppo, Syria's Assad still far from regaining his state (Reuters)	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Battle of Aleppo ends after years of bloodshed with rebel withdrawal (Reuters)	0	2	2	0	2	6	4	1
Hezbollah, other Shi'ite allies helped Assad win in Aleppo (Reuters)	4	1	2	5	3	3	3	1
Rebel Aleppo's final agony (Reuters)	3	1	3	2	1	4	2	1
Ghost soldiers - the Russians secretly dying for the Kremlin in Syria (Reuters)	1	0	0	5	1	3	0	0

Rebels fend off Aleppo assault as nations seek to rebuild peace process (Reuters)	1	0	0	1	3	0	8	1
Aleppo will eventually fall, but Syrian war will go on (Reuters)	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	1
Iraq launches Mosul offensive to drive out Islamic State (Reuters)	2	3	1	0	2	4	0	0
Syria ceasefire takes effect with Assad emboldened (Reuters)	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
US-led forces strike Syrian troops, prompting emergency UN meeting (Reuters)	0	2	1	1	2	2	3	0
Battle rages near Aleppo, air onslaught continues (Reuters)	1	1	2	2	3	0	2	0
Warplanes knock out Aleppo hospitals as Russian (Reuters)	1	3	4	2	2	2	0	0
Buses evacuate thousands of exhausted Aleppo residents in ceasefire deal (Reuters)	5	0	1	3	2	2	0	0
Syrian general says Aleppo offensive in final stages (Reuters)	0	1	0	4	1	2	1	0
Lavrov, Kerry round up 12-hours-long talks in Geneva (TASS)	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0

Russia expects unbiased assessment of crimes in Aleppo from international community (TASS)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Contacts between Russian and US military on Syria suspended – diplomat – diplomat (TASS)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Lavrov-Russian S-300, S-400 air defense systems threaten no one in Syria (TASS)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Russia ready to deliver strikes on militants moving into Syria from Iraq – general (TASS)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Russia keeps urging West to set up wide coalition against terrorism (TASS)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Results of trilateral talks of Russian, Syrian and Iranian top diplomats (TASS)	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Russia's Defense Ministry sends artillery intelligence assets to Syria (TASS)	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
US-controlled Ahrar al-Sham armed units unwilling to cease fire in Syria (TASS)	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Russia, Syria stop bombing areas of	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0

possible location of opposition units (TASS)								
US hands over to Russia data on location of US-controlled Syrian opposition units (TASS)	1	0	4	1	0	0	0	0
Russian Defense Ministry says US, Syrian opposition fail to fulfil Geneva deal (TASS)	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Russia does not rule out strikes against Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar Al-Sham (TASS)	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Lavrov says West fails to meet its commitments on Syria (TASS)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Russian operation in Syria- one year on (TASS)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1