

**The Coverage of the Multi-Sided War on IS in Syria by
AJA and RT**

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By

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Abstract

International divisions over Syria's internal crisis have shaped the map of the war against international terrorism which has erupted amid anti-government protests. Since September 2015, Syria has witnessed a multi-sided war on the Islamic State organisation (IS) as the US-led coalition and Russia fought against this transnational armed organisation in separate military campaigns with the stated purpose to eliminate IS threats at home and abroad. Then, many political actors that have divergent policies in Syria and different approaches towards fighting IS, participated in the war against that common enemy.

The news media have devoted close attention to the situation in Syria and contributed to shaping the role of each military campaign; then, they have an influence on how this conflict can be imagined. Therefore, this study is intended to examine and compare how the multi-sided war on IS was reported by transnational news media to Arab viewers. It takes the Doha-based AJA and the Moscow-based RT Arabic as case studies. The research is qualitative. It relies on a sample of (480) news reports [240 reports from each broadcaster's YouTube channel] tracking a one-year period, from 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016. It applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a research method to examine how this multi-sided war is framed throughout the governance, the military and the humanitarian aspects.

The study shows that these transnational news media supported their governments. So, it confirms Samuel Azran's (2013) conclusion that AJA is a hybrid network whose independence is limited by the boundaries of Qatar's crucial interests. Also, the study supports previous research on RT's role as a tool of Russian public diplomacy.

This research contributes to studies on media and public diplomacy as it examined the coverage of a multisided war on terror in transnational media. It concludes that when states that have

different counterterrorism policies fight against a common enemy, their media will reflect that political divergence, rather than emphasising the shared global counterterrorism objective. The degree of convergence in anti-terrorism approaches between a political actor and the state from which the media operate has an influence on how the media portray the role of that actor in the war against the shared enemy. The closer the policy proximity between a political actor that is engaged in the conflict and the country in which the media operate, the more likely that actor will be framed positively. For instance, AJA's framing of the US-led military campaign, which involved Qatar, was less critical than its coverage of the Russian military intervention, in Syria. RT represented the US-backed SDF and the Russian-backed Syrian army as liberators. However, the anti-IS operations which were conducted by the opposition factions, that fight against the Russian-backed Al Assad regime, were not represented as liberation actions.

Furthermore, the study showed that transnational media outlets that are sponsored by authoritarian regimes may adopt significantly different reporting styles and so align with their governments in different ways. Unlike AJA, RT adopted a propagandist reporting style to support its sponsor's policies. Thus, this study contributed to understanding of the complexity of the operations of power in transnational media outlets and showed how the coverage of a global war against a common enemy is still driven by the national and regional policies of the countries from which the news media operate.

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List of abbreviations

AJ	Al-Jazeera
AJA	Al-Jazeera Arabic
RT	Russia Today
IS/ISIS/ISIL/Daesh	The Islamic State Organisation
SANA	The official News Agency in Syria
SNC	The Syrian National Council
PYD	The Kurdish-led Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat)
YPG	The Kurdish-led People's Protection Units (Yekineyen Parastina Gel)
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
SDF	The Syrian Democratic Forces
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
AQI	Al Qaeda branch in Iraq

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

With the eruption of the Arab Spring revolutions in December 2010, the Middle East has witnessed significant changes which have led to redrawing the map of the region and influenced its geopolitical balance. Old dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya were overthrown. In Syria, anti-regime protests started in 2011. Backed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, Al Assad has managed to stay in power and suppressed the protesters by force. Then, the country has been pulled into a spiral of violence when peaceful demonstrations turned into an armed conflict between opposition factions and pro-regime forces.

The Syrian internal conflict has taken a sectarian character. Violent confrontations have erupted between Sunni opposition groups, supported by Sunni countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and the Alawite regime which is linked to the Shia (Brown, 2015; Hove and Mutanda, 2015; Olanrewaju and Joshua, 2015). For Hove and Mutanda (2015) “the Sunnis, Shi’ites, and Kurds took advantage of the Syrian conflict to advance their objectives amid increasing violence” (p.560). The Kurds managed to establish an autonomous area known as Rojava (Thornton, 2015). Also, Al Qaeda-linked jihadi fighters who were active in Iraq, where they established the so-called “the Islamic State of Iraq” in 2010 managed to expand to Syria. According to Litsas (2017) “the Syrian Civil War and its tragic evolution not only produced a failed state at the heart of the Arab world; it opened the way for a new hybrid form of jihadism” (p.60).

In 2014, the so-called Abu Baker Al Baghdadi declared the establishment of the Islamic caliphate - a state governed based on the Islamic law, or Sharia, by prophet Mohammed’s deputy on Earth, or the caliph. This transnational armed organisation includes fighters from different countries and

seeks authority over Muslims worldwide. It is known for its violent actions, mass killings and abductions, which targeted Arab and Western people. For example, IS executed two US citizens, Steven Sotloff and James Foley, in 2014. In response to IS threat, the then-US President Barack Obama declared his will to destroy IS, as he said: “I have made it clear that we will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are. That means I will not hesitate to take action against ISIL in Syria, as well as Iraq” (Obama, 2014). The US led an international coalition to fight against IS in Syria and Iraq. The Syrian government and its allies were excluded from this coalition. In September 2015, Russia intervened, in Syria militarily, declaring war on IS in cooperation with Al Assad (Notte, 2016). So, political divisions over Syria’s internal crisis influenced the fighting against IS; each superpower used its preferred local proxy to battle IS on the ground. According to Thornton (2015), the involved states provide “the training, the weapons, the technical support, and the airpower; but someone else has now to do the dying on the ground. Proxies are thus essential” (p.866). The US supported the so-called moderate Islamic opposition factions and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) while Russia supported Al Assad’s army. Nevertheless, the countries and non-state actors that are involved in the war on IS have conflicting interests in parallel with the fighting against their common enemy, which makes the war on international terrorism in Syria increasingly complicated. For example, the US supports Islamic opposition factions, but it has concerns about the growth of the Salafist groups in Syria (Minardi, 2016). Also, Turkey is a member of the US-led coalition, but it has concerns about the expansion of Kurdish armed groups that joined the US-backed SDF (Güner and Koç, 2017). Iraq is part of the US-led coalition, but there are strong ties between the Shia-dominated Iraqi society, Iran, as well as Syria in the war against IS. A point to take into consideration is that these countries and

Hezbollah seek to undermine the role of the Sunni non-state actors for this would increase the power of Iran and its Shia allies in the region (Brown, 2015; Cragin, 2015).

This multiplex and broader conflict is still more apparent in media communication. For politicians, mass media are considered as a central space of global politics where rival powers exert efforts to undermine each other and advance their own interests. So, governments created media outlets to promote their preferred messages to the world. Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson (1992) argue that news media provide us with “the lens through which we construct meaning about political and social issues. This lens is not neutral but evinces the power and point of view of the political and economic elites who operate and focus it” (p.374). This means that news media can participate in serving the interests of their sponsors. However, one should consider that the role of the news media in conflicts varies and is influenced by different factors. For example, in asymmetrical conflicts, the amount of hostility, the relative level of political power, and the cultural or political values of the actors can be influential in how such conflicts are imagined and reported in different countries (Sheafer and Shenhav, 2009; Sheafer, Shenhav, Takens, and van Atteveldt, 2014; Wolfsfeld, Alimi, and Kailani, 2008). According to Wolfsfeld (2011) since news media are ethnocentric, their portrayals are influenced by the political and cultural context in which they operate, and they tend to show maximum support for their governments in wartime; at the same time “the media have their own professional interests that have major effects on the construction of news stories. They do not only reflect political realities, but they also actively translate them into news stories that are both interesting and culturally resonant” (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008, p. 377).

In Syria, which is the focus of this study, the war on international terrorism is distinctive in that it is led by two superpowers (the US-led coalition versus Russia and its allies). They fight against a

global enemy while adopting different policies and conflicting agendas. In this situation, news media organisations can play a crucial role in shaping the meaning of each intervention against IS. Journalists can draw boundaries, by positive and negative discourses, between the in-group and the out-group, the good and the bad, to make the situation understandable for audiences, tell interesting stories, and at the same time respond to the policies of their sponsors (Sheafer and Shenhav, 2009; Wolfsfeld, 2011). Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine and compare how Al Jazeera-Arabic (AJA) and Russia Today-Arabic (RT) covered each military campaign, with focus on the roles of the US and its main local allies, the Syrian opposition factions and the SDF versus the roles of Russia and its local ally, the Syrian regime.

Analysis of these media outlets helps understand the construction of the war on IS in Syria in particular by exploring the extent to which media align with their respective governments, when the governments are participants in this war but are in disagreement with other key actors on how the war should be fought.

AJA is classified as a Pan-Arab network. It was created by Qatar in 1996, and since its establishment, it has emphasised that its mission is to give a voice to the voiceless in the Arab and Islamic world. It is known for its critical tone towards the US as well as Arab regimes. For example, when AJA covered the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan, it concentrated on “rallying Arab and Muslim masses and leadership to confront what was portrayed as the United States’ ‘arrogance’ and ‘disproportional’ action” (Jasperson and Kikhia, 2003, p. 126). Yet, the environment of the war on IS in Syria is more complicated, because Qatar is a member of the US-led coalition, but it is in disagreement with the US over how IS crisis should be managed. For the Qatari regime, the US-led coalition is not doing enough (Sciutto, 2015). Also, Qatar stands against Al Assad regime and does not welcome Russia’s military campaign in Syria (Hove, 2016).

According to Samuel-Azran (2013), AJA adopts state-sponsored-style broadcasting when covering issues or crises involving Qatar. Then, this study provides an opportunity to re-examine Samuel-Azran's conclusion regarding AJA dependence on Qatar since it will investigate how AJA represented the rival international interventions against IS, in the context of Qatar policies towards Syria. Will AJA frame the US-led intervention, which involves Qatar, as a war on Muslims as was the case in the coverage of the previous US-led wars? Will it delegitimise the Russian campaign? Will it frame the war in terms of the shared counterterrorism objective? Or it may adopt a more complex discourse.

RT was founded by the Kremlin in 2005. Since 2001, Russia and the US Administration have been partners, in the war against Islamic non-state actors (Dawisha, 2015). However, the war against IS has erupted in a tense political environment, where Russia and the US are rivals, but, at the same time, they act over the same skies against a common threat. In the context of information war, RT Arabic needs to compete with AJA and other news media outlets to communicate the Russian voice to the Arab world. So, this study will show how RT has reacted in this war towards the rival interventions: Will it present its sponsor's military action as a clean war? Will it delegitimise the rival air campaign or adopt a positive discourse which focuses on the shared objectives? Or it may need to develop a more complex news discourse.

AJA and RT Arabic, as transnational news media outlets that operate in authoritarian political systems, need to consider the local and global spheres in which they operate. They need to keep the attention of their viewers and respect basic principles of professionalism when representing the war on IS.

1.1 Aim and Questions of the Study

This study seeks to examine how a multi-sided war against a common enemy is reported, by transnational media, to Arab-speaking audiences.

To answer to this overarching question, the research addresses the following sub-questions comparing AJA and RT:

-How does AJA frame the US-led military campaign and Russia's military campaign, in the context of Qatar's policy towards Syria, particularly in relation to IS crisis?

-How does RT Arabic represent the US-led military campaign as well as Russia's military intervention in Syria in the context of the Kremlin's policies, particularly its approach towards fighting IS?

Answering the above questions leads to showing how these transnational TV channels responded to their professional norms and the political context in which they operate, and how they framed the roles of the actors that disagree with their sponsors' policies, when covering the war against IS. Examining AJA and RT war coverage will show how they differ in terms of themes as well as reporting styles.

1.2 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on news reports, collected from both AJA's and RT Arabic's YouTube channels, tracking a one-year period, from 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016. I conducted qualitative frame analysis to study the collected samples (240 reports from each media outlet). The analysis will cover verbal and visual texts. While asserting the active role of the news media in meaning-making processes, I shall, here, recognise that the reading of media messages is always open-ended because signs are polysemic, intertextual and contextual. So, one message can be understood in different ways (Fairclough, 2003). This brings to our attention the issue of

subjectivity in qualitative research methods. An important point to take into consideration is that in qualitative research, scholars cannot aim at collecting a representative sample through which they can make generalizable claims about a phenomenon. They are interested in the meaning of a particular question and seek deep interpretations about it (Patton, 1990). Accordingly, in this research, I apply qualitative textual analysis as my primary aim is to deconstruct the meaning of the news texts to explore how this unprecedented multi-sided war on terror is introduced to Arab audiences by the media outlets under study. I selected the abovementioned period, because, in September 2015, Russia started its military action in Syria in the name of the war on IS, while the US-led coalition has been already targeting this enemy in Iraq and Syria since 2014.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The research takes a comparative approach to study the content of two transnational media outlets that address Arab audiences: AJA and RT Arabic. Both TV channels are sponsored by authoritarian governments that are engaged in the war against IS. AJA is financed by the Qatari regime which participates in the US-led coalition but does not agree with the US counterterrorism policies on IS. Also, Qatar criticised Russia policies towards Syria including IS crisis. RT-Arabic is based in Moscow and financed by Russia, a significant rival to the US in the Middle East. The study shows the interactions between media and politics, particularly in wartime and how such interactions lead the media to deconstructing and reconstructing their discourses to respond to the circumstances around them. Furthermore, this research contributes to the literature on media and public diplomacy as it will explore how transnational media outlets will relate the rival campaigns to the war against international terrorism. Moreover, it contributes to comparative media studies as it compares and contrasts between AJ and RT whereas most of the previous research that took AJ as a case study put it in contrast to western media, particularly the US news media, such as (Al-

Majdhoub and Hamzha, 2016; Alshathry, 2015; Jaspersen and Kikhia, 2003; Kolmer and Semetko, 2009; Samuel-Azran, 2013). Also, whereas most of the previous research focused on the English language channels of international media, this research deals with the Arabic language channels of AJ and RT. It contributes to dewesternising media studies; it is a view from a Middle Eastern scholar concerned with the region, not just western concerns; furthermore, the study contributes to understanding the role of the media in shaping Arab public opinion.

1.4 Structure of the Study

This introductory section is followed by a background about the situation in Syria, particularly after the outbreak of the anti-regime revolution in 2011. That is to say, in the second chapter, readers can find information about how the situation developed dramatically and turned into an armed proxy war, which has facilitated the growth of IS. It discusses the conflict of interests between the superpowers as well as among other actors in the context of the war against international terrorism. Also, it provides an overview of IS's origin. Moreover, this chapter defines the scope of the concept of terrorism in this study. Finally, it shows how counterterrorism policies on IS that are adopted by the US, Russia and Qatar vary. The third and fourth chapters provide the theoretical framework of the study. The third chapter tackles media-state relationship, that is to say, it discusses the political communication theories of conflict reporting to assess how AJA and RT are expected to act when covering the war on IS. This chapter also discusses the media role in reproducing power and communicating terrorism and counterterrorism activities. The fourth chapter deals with the importance of the media as a tool for winning the publics' hearts and minds, particularly during crises. It provides an overview of the foreign policies of Qatar and Russia, particularly towards Syria after 2011. It also discusses the level of media independence in these countries, with focus on the roles of AJA and RT as tools for public diplomacy. The fifth chapter

provides details about the methodology and the analytical framework. The analysis of each intervention covers three aspects: the governance, the military and the humanitarian. The sixth chapter looks at how AJA framed the US-led intervention and the Russian military campaign throughout the abovementioned aspects. Similarly, the seventh chapter deals with how RT represented the rival interventions and positioned them against their enemy. This chapter is followed by comparative analysis and a conclusion.

Chapter 2

Contextual Background

This chapter discusses key topics related to the context of the multi-sided war on IS in Syria. It provides a background knowledge that will assist in the analytical chapters' exploration of the interactions between the media under study and their political contexts. Those analysis chapters will explicate the political agendas that shaped AJA and RT coverage of this conflict in the light of the developments that occurred in Syria after 2011.

2.1 Syria: conflicts, Proxies, and Interests

The Syrian President Bashar Al Assad was elected in 2000 after the death of his father Hafiz Al Assad who was a key figure of the Baathist political party. Al Assad family belongs to the Alawite minority that occupied dominant positions in Syria during and after the end of the French Mandate in the 1950s and the 1960s; “even though the Alawis make up a mere 12 percent of the total population, the regime continues to count on support from other minorities that fear Islamists coming to power and from important segments of the Sunni population who fear civil war” (Landis, 2012, p. 73). The Alawite ruling class has been engaged in conflict with the Islamists, particularly, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria since the 1970s when the latter used weapons against security apparatus and accused the regime of sectarianism and corruption. In 1982, Sunni people participated in anti-regime protests in Hama, where the Muslim Brotherhood members were dominant. The Syrian regime met the rebels with unprecedented brutality, killing thousands of people. Like his father, Bashar Al Assad suppressed the Muslim Brotherhood's activities in Syria (Conduit, 2016; Landis, 2012).

When he came to power, Bashar Al Assad sought to make Syria a secular state with a modern lifestyle, but in a way that reinforces the power of the ruling family. Landis summarises these developments as follows:

He introduced private banking, insurance companies and liberalized, real-estate laws. He dropped tariff barriers with neighboring states, licensed private schools, and permitted use of the Internet in an effort to encourage private and foreign investment. To avoid the emergence of a capitalist class that would be largely Sunni and not beholden to the regime, Asad turned to his cousin Rami Makhlouf, who became “Mr. Ten Percent” of the Syrian economy. He assumed a majority stake in many major enterprises and holding companies and ensured that the Asad family maintained control over the economy (...) A new class of businessmen drawn from the progeny of major regime figures — called the “sons of power” (*abna al-sulta*) — has become notorious for its wealth and economic assertiveness. The result has been an explosion of corruption and public resentment at the growing inequality and injustice of Syrian life (...) Growing poverty has underscored the failure of the Baathist regime and is a leading factor in the Syrian uprising (Landis, 2012, p. 79).

After the revolutionary waves that took place in Tunisia and Egypt, critical voices in Syria have called for political changes. One can trace the Syrian revolution back to March 2011. According to Spyer (2012),

The regime’s overreaction to the writing of graffiti demanding its downfall by a number of schoolchildren was the spark. The Syrian revolt, famously, began in the poor, southern Sunni region of Dar’a. The killing of 13-year-old Hamza al-Khatib in custody, and the return of his mutilated body to his family, led to widespread rioting throughout the province. In retrospect, this was the beginning of what would turn into the rebellion against Asad’s rule and the subsequent Syrian civil war (p.2-3).

After Dar’a event, masses took to the streets in other areas such as Idlib, Homs, Douma, and Latakia. In response, the Syrian regime attempted to calm down the public protests by removing

the governor of Dara'a from his position, announcing reform policies and full investigation into the death of Hamza al-Khatib (Muir, 2011). Also, the right of citizenship was given to a number of Syrian Kurds whose families were stripped of Syrian citizenship by the Baathist regime in the 1960s. As the protests have increased, Al Assad considered the revolt as a “conspiracy” against the Syrian republic deriving from the critical stance it took toward the US policies in the region (Spyer, 2012). In July 2011, Syrian officers who took the side of the rebels announced the formation of ‘the Free Syrian Army’ (Landis, 2012). Initially, the role of this armed group was to protect protesters, but then it has used weapons against pro-regime forces that have met the civil demonstrations with violence. Human rights activists reported that during the first six months of the revolt, 3000 persons were killed as a result of the regime’s brutality (Ajami, 2013). By 2012, the regime was unable to impose its control over all the areas where anti-regime protests have continued and where armed opposition factions gathered, despite the Russian and Iranian military support. Also, the rebels lacked the power to remove the regime; “neither side could deliver a fatal blow to the other” (Spyer, 2012, p. 6). In this environment, Al Assad’s forces withdrew from the Kurdish areas [Afrine, Kobane and Qamishli]. Then, the control over these areas was transferred to the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat – PYD), which declared an autonomous zone in Syria known as Rojava. This political party is described as the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). The armed branch of the PYD is known as the YPG (Yekineyen Parastina Gel – People’s Protection Units). In 2013, hundreds of the PKK’s armed wings, the People Defence Forces (Hezen Parastin Gel), as well as the Women's Protection Units, moved from Turkey to Syria. In 2015, members of these armed groups joined the US-backed SDF (Thornton, 2015).

Furthermore, in this chaos, radical Sunni figures were released from the regime's prisons and joined Islamist opposition factions (Hove and Mutanda, 2015). The Sunni armed group which used to be known as Al Qaeda in Iraq sent fighters to support the Sunni opposition factions. Also, fighters from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Pakistan joined the Syrian armed rebels which are divided into factions (Cragin, 2015). The opposition camp includes the Free Syrian Army and other smaller armed groups such as "Jbhat al-Nusra, the Syrian Liberation Front, the Syrian Islamic Front, and the Independent Brigade Alliances" (Hove and Mutanda, 2015, p. 560). As mentioned in the introduction, the conflict turned into a proxy war in which the Arab Sunni axis led by Saudi Arabia supported the so-called moderate Syrian opposition factions while Iran and Hezbollah supported Assad (Olanrewaju and Joshua, 2015). According to Hove (2016), "a regional Cold War is believed to exist between Iran and Saudi Arabia and is manifested in their leading conflictual roles in the weak states in the region, especially in Syria" (p.147). Thus, supported by Russia, and its Shia allies, Al Assad regime has continued to fight against the rebels. However, the division of the Syrian opposition can be another factor which contributed to the survival of Al Assad as discussed below.

The weakness of the Syrian opposition and failure of negotiations: The Free Syrian Army which was formed in Turkey under the leadership of Riyadh Al Asaad was "poorly organised." (Hove and Mutanda, 2015, p. 560). It had limited military capabilities; it did not have access to heavy weapons since the Western countries estimated that the opposition should adopt non-violent strategies (Landis, 2012). The political representative of the Syrian opposition is the Syrian National Council (SNC), which claims to have control over the Free Syrian Army. The SNC did not invite the leaders of the Free Syrian Army to its meeting in Tunis, in 2011 which resulted in tensions between them. Moreover, Landis (2012) explained

the SNC claims to speak for the entire opposition but has been struggling to contain divisions within its own ranks as well as to unite with competing opposition parties. The United States and Europe recognize the SNC as the rightful leader of the opposition and have sought to build up its legitimacy and authority, but they continue to wring their hands over its internal weaknesses (...) Secular supporters of the SNC often complain that the Muslim Brotherhood is the real power behind the organization (pp. 75-76).

Then, SNC failed to unify the opposition parties and create an organisation that represents the Syrian people ("National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution And Opposition Forces," 2017).

Another major political opposition body is the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change, led by Haytham Manaa (Olanrewaju and Joshua, 2015). The leader of the SNC Burhan Ghalioun led unity discussions with Mana, 2011; however, this initiative was not successful. The SNC members accused National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change of collaborating with Al Assad while the Committee accused the SNC of putting the Syrian people in danger by supporting military actions which would cause a spiral of violence and further foreign interventions in Syria's affairs. The Kurdish groups did not join the SNC as it is sponsored by Turkey and its Arab allies, that do not support the Kurdish demand for independence (Landis, 2012). As the internal conflict has continued, the opposition has become more vulnerable. According to Khaled Khoja, a key Syrian opposition politician, over the past five years, "the revolutionary forces on the ground in Syria have lost the majority of its military leadership. The political bodies abroad and the internal revolutionary movement have also lost influential members, and the burden of the revolution has become greater on those who seek its victory" (Khoja, 2017).

This study covers a one-year period starting from October 2015, when Russia launched its military campaign in Syria, to September 2016, when IS was driven out of Manbij, Jarablus, Al Bab and

most of its positions along the Turkish border with Syria. At the same time, the Syrian opposition factions were driven, by the Russian-backed Syrian army, out of many areas in Aleppo. It was reported that in 2016, the opposition factions lost 40% of their areas (BBC, 2016). Since then, the Syrian regime has strengthened its power further, while the Islamist opposition groups and particularly IS have weakened.

Bilaterally, the US urged Russia to convince Al Assad to leave power or negotiate with the opposition over power-sharing; “Washington contended that the best course to obviate the emerging jihadist threat would be to remove Assad, who was clearly motivating it. For Russia, the best course would be to support Assad, who clearly had the capacity and incentive to defeat it” (“The tenuous diplomacy of the Syrian conflict,” 2016, p. 1). By June 2012, a multilateral negotiation process under the auspice of the UN was necessary. So, the so-called Geneva process started. The US and Russia supported the formation of a transnational government which includes members of Al Assad regime as well as the opposition; this phase is known as Geneva I. However, this proposal was refused by parts of the opposition factions. In January 2014, another negotiation round took place- called Geneva II; no agreement was concluded. The parties disagreed over the position of Al Assad in a transition phase (“The tenuous diplomacy of the Syrian conflict,” 2016). The negotiations as well as the armed confrontations are going on at the time of writing this research, with no agreement at sight.

IS crisis: By mid-2014, the so-called “Islamic State organisation” (IS) gained territories in Iraq and Syria and committed itself to protect the Sunni Muslims and establish a Caliphate governance system that adheres to the Sharia (the rise of IS is discussed in the next section).

Then the violence escalated further as the US led an international coalition to destroy IS in Iraq and Syria. One year later, Russia has intervened in the name of the war on IS; “the Kremlin has

justified its involvement in Syria using a reductionist counterterrorist narrative,” establishing it “as IS vs. Assad struggle” (Notte, 2016, p. 59). However, Russia was accused of bombing the areas held by the Syrian opposition factions, and it was urged to stop targeting the rebels (Hove, 2016). The US and Russia signed an agreement that aimed at avoiding in-flight accidents in the skies over Syria. However, “among other things, the struggle for dominance by the two great powers both in vindictive speech and deed in Syria, among other conflicts, represent what the world once experienced prior to the collapse of the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics]” (Hove, 2016, p. 136). In line with the realist approach in international relations which empathises egoistic passion and self-interest in political relations (Burchill et al., 2013), it is possible to say that both America and Russia have their strategic and economic interests in the Middle East, which influence their policies on Syria and the whole region as shown below.

The US VS Russia: Conflict of interests in parallel with the war on international terrorism

There have been heightened tensions between the US and Syria since 2003, as the US have imposed economic sanctions on Syria for supporting Hezbollah and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. In 2011, the US took the side of the rebels for it seeks to establish a pro-US regime, which contributes to preventing “the jihadists linked to Al-Qaeda from establishing a safe haven in Syria” and limiting the influence of Iran and Hezbollah (Olanrewaju and Joshua, 2015, p. 49). In reaction to the US sanctions, Al Assad has strengthened Syria’s ties with Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah. This alliance which has been constantly strengthened may influence the US dominant position in the Middle East.

The US interests in the region exceed the security concerns. According to Kellner (2012), after the eruption of the Arab Spring, Obama commented: "We have witnessed an extraordinary change take place in the Middle East and North Africa (...) though these countries may be a great distance

from our shores, we know that our own future is bound to this region by the forces of economics and security; history and faith" (p. 165). This shows that the US Administration has concerns about the impact of the recent political upheaval in the Arab world on its interests. The US has agreements of cooperation with its Arab allies in different fields. For example, it has military bases and troops in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Jordan (Brull, 2017; George, 2002).

The US Combined Air Operations Center is located there [in Qatar], providing command and control of US and allied air power throughout the region, especially over Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. All of this makes Qatar one of the most important bases for American military power in the Middle East. Bahrain hosts the US Fifth Fleet, leaving them with just 7000 US troops. Otherwise, Kuwait has the most, with 15,000, then there are the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Iraq, with about 5000 each; and lastly Jordan, with only 1500 (Brull, 2017, p. 69).

Moreover, these countries are good markets for the American weapon industry. The USA exports long-range missile defence systems to many countries including the UAE (Wezeman and Wezeman, 2015). Generally, the Gulf weapons market is dominated by the US, with about 40 percent of all sales (Cunningham, 2015). So, any political changes, in the context of the Arab Spring may result in establishing pro-Russian regimes or enable IS or other armed organisations to expand. Therefore, the US needs to be actively present and cooperate with its allies to ensure that the ongoing conflicts, particularly in Syria and Iraq would not lead to consequences that operate against their interests in the future.

Another important field of investment is the energy market. The US imports oil from the Middle East, especially Iraq and Saudi Arabia. According to Chang (2015) the US supported a Qatari plan to transport gas to Europe through Syria and Turkey so that it can put a limit to Russia's hegemony over the European energy market. However, Russia has managed to decline this project. This means that the intervention of Russia in the region has operated against the interests of Qatar and

the US. Dr Robin McFee, a member of the US Counterterrorism Advisory Team, estimated that after the Russian intervention:

We are losing the game, and badly. This is not to be gloom and doom, but to remind that our future, and that of our children depends upon the economic and security future we create and pass along. The two are inextricably intertwined. One cannot separate the economy, energy, immigration, and security issues. Within that construct, the Middle East matters to our economy and security – unfortunately (McFee, 2015).

In relation to the Russian-Syrian alliance, the collaboration between the Soviet Union and Syria can be traced back to 1946. It was reported that “a secret agreement was signed on February 10, 1946, which entailed the provision of political and diplomatic support of the USSR to Syria in the international diplomatic arena, as well as Soviet military assistance for the foundational training and establishment of the national army of Syria” (Olanrewaju and Joshua, 2015, p. 45). With the accession of Hafiz Al Assad to power, he became Russia’s main ally in the region. Syria has hosted a Russian naval base at the port of Tartus, since 1971; it is the only foothold for Russia in the Mediterranean Sea (Plakoudas, 2015). The Soviet Union supported Syria during the Arab-Israeli conflict (Hove, 2016). Hafez Al Assad reinforced the diplomatic and military cooperation with the Soviets as the two parties signed a Treaty of Amity in 1980 (Olanrewaju and Joshua, 2015). By 2000, when Bashar Al Assad and Putin took control over their countries, the relations between Russia and Syria have grown. The Kremlin “has continuously extended military, economic and social aid to Syria. Syria has, in turn, become a trustworthy ally for Moscow from the point of view of Middle Eastern policies,” for strategic interests (Aghayev and Katman, 2012, p. 2068). Souleimanov and Petrylova (2015) argue that Russia considers IS as an outcome of US strategic failure in the region and has benefited from the emergence of this organization to protect and advance its investments; “Russia’s intervention in Syria has undoubtedly increased its profile in

the region and enhanced its claims of being an ‘indispensable global power’. It has ensured that it will now have a role in deciding the future of Syria and of the region” (Unnikrishnan and Purushothaman, 2017, p. 265).

It has been reported that the Russian military industry lost about \$4 billion worth of weapons contracts when Gaddafi's regime was overthrown, so Russia has lost one of its allies. This may justify its full support for Al Assad (Borshchevskaya, 2013; Unnikrishnan and Purushothaman, 2017). If IS or any other Islamist political actor replaced Al Assad, Russia may lose its influence in the region. Moreover, Russia is the world's second-largest arms exporter after the US. In 2017, it was reported that orders from Middle Eastern countries made up 20% of Russian weapons' exports (Sputnik 2017). According to Unnikrishnan and Purushothaman, “Russia has been exporting arms to countries such as Iran, Syria and Algeria. It wants to promote exports of arms, nuclear reactors and other goods as they are produced by enterprises key to sustaining its current political and economic order” (2017, p. 253). In the field of energy production, Russia is a leading player in the international market; Russian oil companies take part in the extraction of oil not only in Syria but also in Iraq (Souleimanov and Petrylova, 2015). As I mentioned previously, Russia is a key gas supplier to Europe. Thus, it seeks to restrict any potential projects that lead to the establishment of alternative gas lines to the European market (Fawzi, 2012).

In fact, the policies of the US and Russia in relation to the war on IS in Syria are influenced by their stances towards Al Assad as well as their strategic interests in the region. So, these rival powers struggle to build a strategic narrative that can explain their war policies convincingly and justify their counterterrorism actions, since they need to build coalitions and connect themselves to the ideas that build these alliances; also, they seek to shape international media coverage and public opinion in their favour. For example, the US Administration introduced its military

intervention against IS in Syria as an act of collective self-defence while the Kremlin represented its intervention as a pre-emptive war to face the threat posed by IS as well as the Caucasian fighters who were recruited by this transnational organisation, as will be discussed in section [2.4.]

2.2. The Growth of Radical Islam as a Global Threat

The debates about the link between Islam and terror groups, the so-called "Islamic terrorism" increased after the emergence of IS, a transnational radical Islamist organisation that took control over territories in Iraq and Syria. As this study focuses on the coverage of the war on IS by AJA and RT, whose countries of origin are implicated in this conflict, it is important to tackle IS ideology and development. This helps understand why it is seen as a global enemy by the international community.

On 29 June 2014, the so-called Abu Baker Al Baghdadi – his name is Ibrahim Awwad Al Husseini Al Qurashi – announced from Al Mosel, the second largest city in Iraq, the establishment of the ‘Islamic State’ (IS) as a worldwide Caliphate. IS is inspired by the Salafist ideology, which calls for the strict application of Sharia and emphasises the need to return to the Caliphate governance system to solve the crises which spread across the Middle East. This idea was initiated by Sayyid Qutub who was executed by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966 (Brown, 2015). For Qutub, armed jihad and martyrdom are part of a holy war against the so-called disbelievers. His view has paved the way for the foundation of an Islamic state (Rich, 2016). Also, IS like al Qaeda is influenced by the Wahhabi movement, which spread in Saudi Arabia and called for the return to “what they imagine to be the pure or pristine version of Islam as practised by Muhammad and his earliest followers. They often have strict interpretations of Islam, strict dress codes and separation of the sexes” (Hughes, 2016, p. 22). One manifestation that showed IS’s will to revive the Islamic Caliphate governance system was the removal of the border, which separated Iraq and Syria, as IS declared

the end of the Sykes-Picot agreement (1916). Also, the organisation destroyed sites of antiquity in Iraq and Syria, inspired by the Wahhabi doctrine which forbids the construction of mausoleums. (Gelvin, 2016).

IS is considered as a developed form of the Salafist jihadism which was established by Al Qaeda (Litsas, 2017). This can be traced back to the 1980s when the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan. At that epoch, thousands of Islamic fighters or “Mujahedeen” were mobilised and supported by the US and its allies, including Arab countries, to defeat the Communist Soviet Union (Rashid, 1999, p. 31). When the war ended, the US stopped its aid to them. In this environment, Osama bin Laden founded Al Qaeda organisation in Afghanistan in 1988. He concentrated on the ‘far enemy’ that is to say, he declared ‘jihad’ against the West, particularly the US. Then, Al Qaeda-affiliated members managed to carry out attacks against American targets in different countries. Bin Laden “portrayed the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States as an ‘act of defensive jihad’ or a just retaliation for American domination of Muslim countries” (Gerges, 2014, p. 341). After the events of 11 September, the US waged war on Afghanistan, where Al Qaeda had been based under the custody of the Taliban regime. The US-led strikes had destroyed most of Al Qaeda’s infrastructure and killed many of its members. Under such circumstances, many fighters fled Afghanistan to Iraq, where they could resume their activities. Among those who moved from Afghanistan to Iraq was Abu Musaab Al Zarqawi; he founded “Al Tawheed and Al Jihad” as a jihadist organisation that put the protection of the rights of the Sunni Muslims at the top of its agenda. Then he expressed allegiance to Al Qaeda and led Al Qaeda’s branch in Iraq (AQI). Al Zarqawi and his group declared ‘Jihad’ against the ‘US occupation’ in Iraq (2003), carrying out many suicide-bombing attacks against US soldiers and the Shia as well. Unlike Bin Laden, Al Zarqawi focused on the near enemy. That is to say,

He ignored repeated pleas from his mentors, bin Laden and Zawahiri, to stop the indiscriminate killing of Shia and to focus instead on attacking Western troops and citizens. Although Salafi jihadists are nourished on an anti-Shia propaganda diet, al-Qaeda Central prioritized the fight against the “far enemy”—America and its European allies. In contrast, AQI and its successor, ISIS, have so far consistently focused on the Shia and the “near enemy” (the Iraqi and Syrian regimes, as well as all secular, pro-Western regimes in the Muslim world) (Gerges, 2014, p. 340).

Al Zarqawi was killed as a result of an American air raid, in 2006. Then, the so-called Abu Omer Al Baghdadi took the leadership of this branch of Al Qaeda which became to be known as “the Islamic State of Iraq” (Atwan, 2015). He followed Al Zarqawi’s Jihadi line, targeting the near enemies. So, he and his followers planned and committed attacks, especially against governmental institutions in Iraq. When Nuri Al Maliki took power in Baghdad in 2006, the Iraqi army supported by the US, launched a campaign to degrade the Islamic State of Iraq. In this mission, the US mobilised and trained 100,000 Sunni fighters from Iraq tribes. They succeeded to some extent to degrade the threat of this organisation (Atwan, 2015). Then, the US recommended to Maliki, who was in charge of the Iraqi military institution, to integrate those fighters into the Iraqi army, but Al Maliki formed a Shia-dominated government and marginalised the Sunni Iraqis. As a result, the fighters who helped Al Maliki face the Islamic State of Iraq were deeply frustrated. (Atwan, 2015). In reaction, they decided to initiate contact with members of the Islamic State of Iraq. In 2010, when Abu Omer Al Baghdadi was killed, his relative, the so-called Abu Baker Al Baghdadi, took the leadership of this organisation, and he welcomed the Sunni soldiers who were disbanded by Al Maliki’s government as well as Sunni young people who suffered from marginalisation and discrimination (Brown, 2015).

In 2011, when the Syrian revolution started, Al Baghdadi and Ayman Al Zawahiri, Bin Laden’s associate, decided to send fighters to face Al Assad regime, so the former sent the so-called Abu

Muhammed Al Julani to Syria, where he formed the Al Nusra Front. Al Julani managed to gather thousands of fighters and to carry out successful attacks against the Syrian army. Atwan (2015) reported that in 2013, Abu Baker Al Baghdadi unilaterally announced the unification of Al Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the formation of the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL). This organization is also known as “the Islamic State of Iraq and Al Sham” (ISIS) or Daesh¹ in Arabic. Abu Muhammed Al Julani refused Al Baghdadi’s decision and declared Al Nusra Front as Al Qaeda branch in Syria. Since then, the two organisations have become rivals, and Al Baghdadi criticised both Al Zawahiri and Al Julani’s ‘Jihad strategy’ (Atwan, 2015).

After occupying key territories in both Iraq and Syria, Al Baghdadi proclaimed himself a caliph of a worldwide Islamic State (IS) with Al Raqqa – in Syria – as its capital. It was reported that IS fighters in Syria and Iraq grew from 30,000 in 2014 to 50,000 in 2015 (Gunaratna, 2016). IS’s adherence to Sharia and its vision to establish a society in which Sunni Muslims live in dignity encouraged many Sunni Muslims to support it. Moreover, among the reasons that made many people in Iraq and Syria respond positively to IS is the political chaos in these countries where the governments have been unable or unwilling to answer their citizens’ needs. As mentioned above, the Iraqi Sunnis have been marginalised and suppressed by Al -Maliki government; therefore, some of them preferred to join IS. The Caliphate created an organised Sunni community whose affairs were managed through councils such as the Advisory Council, the Sharia (religious legislations) Council, the Defence and Intelligence Council, the Economy Council, the Education Council, and the Media institutions (Atwan, 2015).

¹ Daesh is the Acronym of the Arabic term (الدولة الاسلاميه في العراق والشام). The equivalent term in English is (the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham). The acronym “Daesh” is widely used in the Arab world to refer to IS.

Similarly, IS has benefited from the sectarian division in Syria where the Alawite regime of Al Assad has oppressed the Sunni majority and refused to transfer power to them as shown in the previous section. Furthermore, IS answered the civilians' needs in the areas under its control, whereas the Syrian government has become unable to respond to the needs of its people adequately after 2011. This encouraged many Syrians to join IS-held territories and cooperate with it:

In Raqqa, ISIS's Syrian headquarters, the organization has built a new market, installed new power lines, initiated public transport and fixed potholes on the streets. ISIS has orphanages where children and parents displaced by the conflict are often reunited. They even organize fairs for children, complete with ice cream and inflatable slides. They also run soup kitchens, offer health services, including vaccination programs against polio. These efforts of state building and governance, though far removed from what most of the population may actually want, do provide stability in a chaotic environment. They also provide ISIS with a community that is more willing to support them, making the insurgent organization's job of mobilizing, recruiting and arming its insurgents, as well as developing a market and economy capable of financing the leadership and insurgency, possible (Brown, 2015, p. 211).

Furthermore, IS managed to attract Muslims who were born and grew up in Western societies. According to Gerges (2014),

Muslims living in Western countries join ISIS and other extremist groups because they want to be part of a tight-knit community with a potent identity. ISIS's vision of resurrecting an idealized caliphate gives them the sense of serving a sacred mission. Corrupt Arab rulers and the crushing of the Arab Spring uprisings have provided further motivation for recruits. Many young men from Western Europe and elsewhere migrate to the lands of jihad because they feel a duty to defend persecuted coreligionists (p.342).

Those who migrated from Europe, the US or Caucasus to "the Islamic State" are considered as a significant threat in case they returned to their countries of origin; this is one of the concerns that Western politicians raise to present the war on IS as unavoidable, for security reasons. As

mentioned above, this overview of the environment in which IS was created, and its ideology is needed for this study since IS is a key actor in the war story. One should have some background knowledge about this organisation to recognise why it is seen as a global threat and targeted by Russia and Qatar among other countries.

2.3. Terrorism

The rival international campaigns against IS are introduced by their members as counterterrorism actions. However, one should take into consideration that terrorism as a concept cannot be reduced to one meaning. It concerns a range of matters from violence and attacks of various kinds to threat, fear, and vulnerability. It can be attributed to non-state actors or state actors. So, to understand the media coverage of this multi-sided conflict, we need to consider the role that the highly unstable notion of terrorism can play in how the war on IS is represented by various actors.

According to Bonanate (1979), terrorism is not a static fact. It is a product of "social judgment rather than a description of a set of phenomena" (pp. 197-198). So, one man's terrorist is another man's Mujahid or hero. The signification of the so-called terrorism is shaped by power relations in any society. Since the ruling elites have regular access to mainstream media, they can promote their preferred interpretation of what terrorism means; "who the terrorists are in the first place is a question largely determined by these officials" (Livingston quoted in Jackson, 2005, p.165). After the attacks of September 2001, this term has received growing attention and has been linked to Islamic non-state actors.

In 2015, the UN Security Council designated IS as a terrorist group and supported any military actions taken against it. It issued a resolution which,

Calls upon Member States that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures, in compliance with international law, in particular with the UN Charter, as well as

international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law, on the territory under the control of ISIL also known as Da'esh in Syria and Iraq (...) and entities associated with Al-Qaida, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the UN Security Council, and as may further be agreed by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and endorsed by the UN Security Council (O'Connor, 2016, p. 76).

So, the term "terrorism" in the context of this study refers to the politically motivated violence committed by transnational non-state actors. In what follows, I show how this notion is approached in different ways by scholars and how it is so flexible to carry different significations including the violence practised by transitional armed organisations, like IS. This flexibility allows governments and their media to use this term in different ways and contexts to justify military projects such as the wars in Syria, Iraq and other places. For Tiffen (2006), powerful metaphors such as terrorism and war on terrorism encourage strategies which "may be substantially ineffective, perhaps even counter-productive, while politically benefiting the governments adopting them" (p.99).

Etymologically, the term "terrorism" is derived from the Latin stem "terrere" which means "to frighten" (Weimann and Winn, 1994). Some scholars focused on the violence committed by non-state actors. For Hoffman (1998), in the 20th century, terrorism refers mainly to political violence committed by non-state actors. Richardson (1999) defines terrorism as a "politically motivated violence" committed by transnational armed non-state actors "directed against non-combatant or symbolic targets, which is designed to communicate a message to a broader audience" (p. 209). From the perspective of the US Federal Statute, the term 'terrorism' means "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience" (Watson, Covarrubias, and Lansford, 2013, p. 4). Based on the abovementioned conceptualizations, the victims who are

exposed to terror attacks are different from the target audience whom the perpetrators seek to force to take a particular decision or action.

However, other scholars argue that the notion of terrorism cannot be reduced to refer to non-state actors, for the specific character of terrorism is vague; this term is used as a synonym to describe different actions such as street battles, rebellions, or civil wars (Laqueur, 1978). Therefore, like any text, the so-called terrorism signifies intertextually and contextually. That is to say, the meaning of this term lies in the cultural, social, and political context in which it is used. For example, the Islamic armed groups that fought against the communist Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, were considered by the US and its allies as freedom fighters, but later these fighters were designated as terrorists (Mamdani, 2004). From another perspective, Chomsky and Herman (1979) adopted a critical approach when dealing with the concept of terrorism. They focus on the terror acts committed by the US and its allied leaders in the Third World against the peoples there, to maintain the interest of America and its client states. According to Herman (1982),

There is a huge tacit conspiracy between the U.S. government, its agencies and its multinational corporations, on the one hand, and local business and military cliques in the Third World, on the other, to assume complete control of these countries and "develop" them on a joint venture basis. The military leaders of the Third World were carefully nurtured by the U.S. security establishment to serve as the "enforcers" of this joint venture partnership, and they have been duly supplied with machine guns and the latest data on methods of interrogation of subversives (p 3).

In fact, the public outrage against state-sponsored terrorism is a key reason that stands behind the eruption of the Arab Spring revolutions. Critics consider that the US policies towards the Middle East have led to the growth of radical movements in the region. Graham Fuller, a former CIA analyst, said, in reference to IS, "I think the United States is one of the key creators of this organisation" (2014).

In Syria, there are various types of political violence such as:

- State-sponsored terrorism: the violence practised by the Syrian regime of Al Assad backed by Russia and Iran, and Hezbollah.

- Local terrorism: the violence committed against civilians by non-state actors who fight against the Syrian regime and its allies.

- Transnational terrorism: the violence perpetrated by IS, which has carried out attacks in Syria, Iraq as well as different places all over the world, targeting non-combatants. For example, the organisation killed David Haines and Alan Henning from the UK, in addition to Steven Sotloff, James Foley, and Peter Kassig from the US. It also claimed responsibility for many attacks such as the destruction of a Russian passenger plane, killing 224 passengers (2015), killing 130 people in Paris (2015) and 84 others in Nice (2016).

The state-sponsored terrorism lies beyond the scope of my study. As mentioned above, for the purpose of this research, the concept of terrorism focuses on the violence practised by the transnational non-state actor. However, the thesis acknowledges that the uses made of the term are unstable and partial. Russia and RT use the term “terrorist” when describing IS, as will be shown below. The Qatari regime uses this term to refer to IS as well while AJA uses the organisation’s name (IS). The next section provides an overview of the counterterrorism policies adopted by the US, its ally Qatar, and Russia to deal with IS crisis.

2.4 Counterterrorism on IS: Different strategic narratives and Policies

In wartime, governments introduce their violent actions through various moral and ideological justifications. Then, the media react to the official narratives they report according to their professional norms and political interests. So, to understand how AJA and RT news discourses

about the war on IS are influenced by the policies of their sponsors, one needs to have an idea about the anti-IS approaches which are adopted by Qatar as a member of the US-led coalition and by Russia. The discussion, below, starts with the White House's counterterrorism policy on IS, for the war should be first understood in terms of the strategy of the US, the leading power of the international coalition against IS. Then the Qatari policy towards fighting IS will be explained to show the critical stance of Qatar vis-à-vis the US and Russia's war strategies. Also, the Kremlin's counterterrorism policy on IS is discussed.

These political actors need to develop what Lawrence Freedman (2013) refers to as a "strategic narrative": a story that can explain the political developments convincingly and justify their policies. Levinger (2015) argues that

As strategic narratives are essential for non-state actors seeking to exert influence on the global stage, they are equally vital for those at the pinnacle of power—such as heads of state—who need to motivate and co-ordinate actions by thousands or even millions of subordinates, as well as to build and sustain coalitions involving diverse domestic constituencies and international partners (p. 29).

The US stance: The White House has introduced its military intervention against IS in Syria as an act of collective self-defence. It has established the cause for this decision in a letter presented to the UN Security Council on September 23, 2014, stating that

ISIL and other terrorist groups in Syria are a threat not only to Iraq, but also to many other countries, including the United States and our partners in the region and beyond. States must be able to defend themselves, in accordance with the inherent right of individual and collective self-defence, as reflected in Article 51 of the UN Charter, when, as is the case here, the government of the State where the threat is located is unwilling or unable to prevent the use of its territory for such attacks. The Syrian regime has shown that it cannot and will not confront these safe-havens effectively itself. Accordingly, the United States has initiated necessary and proportionate military actions in Syria in order to eliminate the

ongoing ISIL threat to Iraq, including by protecting Iraqi citizens from further attacks and by enabling Iraqi forces to regain control of Iraq's borders (Scharf, 2016, p. 34).

The legality of the US-led air strikes in Syria is beyond this research interest. The point that I want to emphasise is that Obama's Administration introduced its intervention as a legitimate action, which is needed to protect the civilians who have suffered from IS. When Obama declared the expansion of the US-led airstrikes to target IS in Syria, he justified this decision to the US public in terms of individual and collective self-defence as he said: "I have made it clear that we will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are. That means I will not hesitate to take action against ISIL in Syria, as well as Iraq," (as cited in Levinger, 2015, p. 37). He added: "in a region that has known so much bloodshed, these terrorists are unique in their brutality. They execute captured prisoners. They kill children. They enslave, rape, and force women into marriage" (as cited in Levinger, 2015, p. 30). Thus, the US is aware that it needs to "engage in robust efforts to craft and communicate a coherent strategic narrative that can enlist cooperation and support from America's friends and international partners (...). Protecting threatened civilians throughout the world from genocide and mass atrocities is one imperative around which American interests and American values coalesce" (Levinger, 2015, p. 41).

Obama introduced his strategy to defeat IS, saying this intervention "will not involve American combat troops fighting on foreign soil" (Obama, 2014). However, the White House has changed this strategy and deployed special forces in Syria in 2015. On the ground, the US supported two proxies: the so-called 'moderate Syrian opposition factions' and the SDF. Nevertheless, in the context of "the Western involvement in Syria, (...) using proxies is concerned of 'escalated involvement', of 'unintended consequences'" (Geraint Hughes as cited in Thornton, 2015, p. 867). The US faced difficulties in classifying the armed groups in Syria into moderate and extremists; then it has supported some groups, that were classified as "moderate" but, at the same time, the

US fears the growth of Islamic groups in Syria (Minardi, 2016). Moreover, the US counterterrorism strategy has faced obstacles because of political tensions among its partners. For example, the SDF include Kurdish members who have conflicting agenda with Turkey. The SDF is “a multi-ethnic and multi-religious armed force made up of dozens of militias that is committed to the political project of ‘democratic confederalism’, the participatory democratic project associated with the Kurdish-led Rojava revolution” (“Raqqqa liberated: ‘We dedicate this to all women,’” 2017, p. 16). So, Turkey, like the SDF, has aligned with the US in the war against IS, yet the Turkish government considers the SDF and other Kurdish armed groups in Syria as a threat to its national interests (Thornton, 2015). This explains why Turkey has supported the Free Syrian Army in its efforts to drive IS out of Jarablus and Al Bab as well as other areas in northern Syria, and it has sought to ensure that these lands are free of the SDF as well. Also, the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar have a negative stance towards the Kurds’ political ambitions in Syria (Güner and Koç, 2017; Shaswar, 2016). For the Gulf countries, the US-led air war is not enough to defeat IS. Saudi Arabia and Qatar raised the need for more involvement against IS in Syria (Sciutto, 2015; Yeranian, 2016). However, Obama’s Administration did not support further intervention; “it is highly likely that Russia was successful in Syria, partly because Obama wanted to avoid an Iraqi-style intervention, with its consequent implications for American casualties” (Hove, 2016, p. 148). Munardi (2016) criticised the US counterterrorism policy in Syria and Iraq, and estimated that:

Practically, U.S. counterterrorism used other hands to defeat ISIS such as Iraq forces army, Peshmerga, and other allies groups which resulted into large and complex conflict (...)
More importantly, the U.S. and its allies have to prove that they are defeating terrorism instead of making new enemy and war as their interests (p.205).

In fact, the US war strategy is inconsistent, and it has led to more tensions arising in the region since it does not take into consideration the conflicting agendas of the coalition's members, such as the Kurdish armed groups, Iraq, and Turkey. Besides, the changes that Obama made to the war strategy, during the period studied here, such as the deployment of special forces, reflect that the US Administration does not have a clear vision about how IS can be defeated.

Qatar's stance: Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan have been the first countries to support the US-led actions against IS in Syria, in the UN Security Council (O'Connor, 2016). However, the Qatari regime has reservations on the US counterterrorism policies in Syria. The Emir of Qatar Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani has told CNN that he did not agree with Obama's administration decision to limit the mission of the US-led coalition in Syria to the fight against IS. He estimates that the Syrian regime is the cause of all chaos and it must be held accountable. For him, the Syrian people have suffered from the Syrian regime and terrorist groups. He said: "the whole thing has to be solved. If we believe that we can get rid of terrorist movements and leave Al Assad regime especially do what he is doing, then the terrorist movements will come back again" (Al-Thani, 2014). Moreover, CNN's senior correspondent Jim Sciutto reported that Qatari officials "believe the coalition is not doing enough to fight the terror. In particular, these officials say the training of moderate rebels needs to be accelerated and expanded" (2015). In a meeting with Obama, in February 2015, the Qatari Emir questioned how IS could be degraded, while Al Assad has been still in power (Abdul-Hussein, 2015). Later in a speech in front of the UN General assembly in 2016, the Emir maintained that the growth of terrorism in Syria had something to do with the violence committed by the Syrian regime against the Syrian people that has been abandoned by the world (Al-Thani, 2016). The linkage between the growth of IS and the Syrian internal conflict, the condemnation of the Russian air strikes, and the whole Qatari

policy towards Syria were partly shaped by the desire to limit the Shia power led by Iran in the region through the removal of their proxy Al Assad and the placement of a Sunni regime (Hove, 2016; Hove and Mutanda, 2015).

The Russian stance: In Syria, Russia is a rival power to the US. The Kremlin has not supported the US-led coalition air strikes against IS in the Syrian territories and considered this intervention as an act of aggression because it has been conducted without the permission of Al Assad (O'Connor, 2016). This was not the case during the war in Afghanistan (2003) where Russia supported the US military actions and provided military aid to anti-Taliban rebels (Covarrubias and Lansford, 2007; Rywkin, 2015). It is noteworthy that Russia is engaged in armed conflict with Islamic separatist movements in the Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya. So, when Putin supported the US-led war in Afghanistan, he raised the Islamic identity of the non-state actors in the Caucasus as a threat and linked them to Al Qaeda. In this way he has given the impression that both Russia and the US face a common enemy; that is the radical Islamists, who are trained or inspired by Osama bin Laden (Simons, 2006). According to Rywkin (2015),

Despite overwhelming opposition from Russia's Security Council, he [Putin] endorsed Washington's antiterrorist campaign without preconditions and accepted the American deployment in Central Asia. Those decisions allowed him to gain better American understanding of his policies and to sell his military campaign in Chechnya as a purely antiterrorist enterprise (p.235).

In 2015 Russia intervened militarily in Syria in the name of fighting against IS at the request of the Syrian regime. The Kremlin highlighted that IS recruited more than 1700 fighters from Caucasian origins, particularly Chechnya, so Russia should lead a pre-emptive war against IS to protect its national security (Souleimanov and Petrylova, 2015).

For Putin, IS should be fought in terms of a broad coalition and in cooperation with Al Assad regime:

We think it is an enormous mistake to refuse to cooperate with the Syrian government and its armed forces, who are valiantly fighting terrorism face to face (...) Moscow's stated aim was to fight the IS and to stop its terrorists from returning home and continuing with their 'criminal activities' (Putin, 2015).

According to Plakoudas (2015) "By putting forward the idea of an international alliance of antijihadi powers with the United States and Russia at the forefront, the Kremlin inter alia strives to convince the United States that they must cooperate as allies against the common enemy-the Islamic State and jihadism" (p.36).

Since Putin created a church-state alliance, the Orthodox Christian Church in Russia has supported his policies (Skillen, 2016). Thus, the Church defined the Kremlin's intervention in Syria as a "holy war" on terrorism (Parfitt, 2015). That is to say, Russia employs religious discourse as well as the national security discourse to legitimise its recent action in Syria.

In November 2015, a Russian passenger plane was brought down by IS. In reaction, Putin stressed his will to punish the perpetrators, saying: "It is not the first time that Russia confronts barbaric terrorist crimes... We will search for them anywhere they are hiding. We will find them anywhere on the planet and punish them." He called for global actions against terrorism (Kremlin, 2015). While taking such security concerns into consideration, one should not forget the geopolitical interests which influence Russia's use of military power in the Middle East. As mentioned previously, "challenging the west, and particularly the US, Putin used hard power against Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria;" he "is striving to transform the international system into a multipolar world

in which the United States will share power with Russia and other powers (e.g. China) rather than operate unilaterally” (Plakoudas, 2015, p. 35).

Thus, the state actors that are engaged in the war against IS in Syria have their agendas which shape their counterterrorism policies. The US, Russia and Qatar’s involvement in the fight against IS need be understood on multiple levels at once – it is connected to regional aims as well as national security concerns. Nonetheless, each actor adopts a strategic narrative that justifies its position as shown above. In this context, I stress that war discourse is a practice of power, a selective process through which officials aim at providing a preferred meaning to what happens in Syria to shape the media and the public debate in their favour.

Chapter 3

Media and War: Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the political communication theories of war reporting and the media's role in communicating terrorism and counterterrorism actions.

3.1 The Media as Space for Struggle Over Meaning and Power

In every nation, there is a ruling class that seeks to impose its ideology on the whole nation to maintain its position. The ruling elites usually adopt a nationalist discourse which fixes the sense of the self (We/in-group) versus the other (They/outgroup) in a way that serves their policies and justifies their actions. This operates within the Gramscian term “hegemony” which means “the ideological predominance of bourgeois values and norms over the subordinate classes that accept them as normal (Daldal, 2014, p. 157). The elites use the media to tell the public what is good and what is bad or who belongs to the self and who can be seen as other. In this context, Van Dijk (2013) argues that the news media help reproduce and maintain power relations since news reporters rely on officials as primary sources of information. These authoritative voices have permanent access to the news media; “it is not surprising, therefore, that most news comes from and is about such institutions or the elite persons that control them. (...) news production routines are finely tuned to the representation of ruling elites' actions, their points of view, and ultimately their ideology” (p155).

He maintains that “due to their organized and routine contacts with the political power structure, the media largely reproduce the concomitant political panic of the authorities” (Van Dijk, 2013, p. 155). This happens when the news media cover crises such as terrorism.

So, news media representations are not neutral practices; news discourse is shaped by an ideological power which seeks to communicate a particular worldview to the public(s). News frames involve processes of inclusion and exclusion through which news media organisations decide what to tell their audiences, how such events should be communicated, and with what possible effect. This role is very crucial in wartime when news discourse is employed to reflect the voice of the ruling elites. Hall (1997) defines discourse as the capacity of signifiers to construct reality within specific social power relations. In war reporting, news as discourse operates deeply within Van Dijk's (2006) "ideological square", which is based on the positive presentation of the in-group and the negative presentation of the out-group: "Emphasize Our good things, and Their bad things, and de-emphasise Our bad things, and Their good things" (p. 125).

This research deals with television news coverage of the war on IS in Syria. For Chouliaraki (2005) "it is difficult to deny that the power of television to provide images and information is crucial in the shaping of public opinion" (p.144). According to her:

The viewing asymmetry of television does not explicitly thematize the economic and political divisions of our world but reflects and consolidates them. Who watches and who suffers reflects the manner in which differences in economic resources, political stability, governmental regimes and everyday life enter the global landscape of information. Similarly, who acts on whose suffering reflects patterns of economic and political agency across global zones of influence – North and South or East and West (p.84).

So, she argues television has the power "to represent the world to the world" and "to map information flows in terms of geographical neighbourhoods, cultural affinities and political alliances" (Chouliaraki, 2006a, p. 4)

Television is a powerful and attractive medium as it provides a hyper-mediated regime of representations through the usage or co-appearance of language and image. It helps audiences see,

hear and read information about things that take place in far places where wars are fought, people suffer, or other events occur. Therefore, this medium is a multi-modal space where political powers compete and seek to legitimise their actions. A noteworthy example is the US war in Iraq where “the coalition sought to gain legitimacy over the war (...) mainly through the humanitarian argument of relieving the Iraqis from the oppressive Hussein regime. The coalition also appeared on our television screen as aggressors that daily bombed the city of Baghdad for three consecutive weeks” (Chouliaraki, 2005, p. 145).

For Chouliaraki, “the dilemmatic identity of the troops on screen as, at once, benefactors and bombers, is therefore instrumental not only in managing the spectator’s emotions vis-à-vis the spectacle of Iraqi suffering, but crucially in managing the political task of taking sides in the conflict and thereby of establishing or withdrawing public consent to the legitimacy of the war” (2005, p.146). According to her, the BBC represented the spectacle of war in Iraq in a way that “effaces the presence of Iraqi people as human beings and sidelines the question of the coalition troops’ identity either as benefactors or bombers (...) there is no reference to the Iraqi as a human being, either in language or in image”, while the actions of the coalition soldiers are “represented in non-human terms” and in this way, the BBC “suppresses the emotional, ethical and political issues that lie behind the bombardment of Baghdad” (Chouliaraki, 2005, pp. 147-152). She estimates that the BBC does not let the audiences witness Baghdad’s streets, hospitals and “therefore, it is unable to shift the position of the spectator from the ‘detached’ overview to an ‘involved’ observation of suffering in proximity as for example Al Jazeera did” (p.151).

People all over the world have turned to news media to learn about the recent crises in Syria, particularly the war on IS; the news programs they watch on TV screens shape their understanding

of the situation there and help them develop a particular view about the meaning of this war, as well as its expected outcomes.

3.2 War Reporting: Political Communications Theories

For politicians, the media are soft power instruments that enable them to connect with their audiences. According to Wolfsfeld (1997, 2011), all politicians are aware that access to media, with positive coverage, is a key factor for success in the political arena. So, they compete over the news media along two dimensions: one is structural which deals with the access to the news media, i.e. the interaction between media and media sources, and the other is cultural which focuses on the media frames, i.e. the interpretive frames that organise the construction of the news. He describes the relationship between media and politicians as a symbiotic: politicians seek publicity while journalists are looking for interesting stories, and each one wants to get the maximum from the other without paying so much (Wolfsfeld, 2011, p. 10). Also, he argues that while politics and media influence each other, politics have more effect on the media rather than the other way round, for the media often respond or react to what happens in the world of politics.

This brings to our attention the ‘indexing hypothesis which was developed by Bennett (1990). He argues that “mass media news is indexed to the dynamics of governmental debate” (p. 110). This means that governments influence the media’s agendas and that news coverage is indexed within the range of debate among the elites.

In his book, *The Uncensored War* (1994), Daniel Hallin discovered that journalists operate in three spaces: first, the sphere of consensus when journalists show full support for their governments’ policies and mute the opposition. Within this sphere, the media takes a ‘patriotic’ rather than critical stance. When journalists start to give access to voices from the opposition, then they move from the sphere of consensus to that of legitimate controversy; this happens when the government

is unable to control the events on the ground or convince the opposition to take its side (Wolfsfeld, 1997, 2011). For Hallin, it is within this sphere that media takes a balanced stance during wartime. Hallin argues that the move to this sphere depends on elite debate. The third sphere is the sphere of deviance where we can find the views that are marginalised within mainstream society when the media (rarely) give voice to deviant views such as the anti-war movements or terror groups, but at the same time frame them negatively and reinforce their exclusion. When placing their news sources in these three spheres in ways that reflect elite views, news media strengthen the frames that prevail amongst those elites and help them maintain their authoritative positions.

It is noteworthy that these theories were established within liberal media systems and were applied particularly to the US media. However, RT which is under study in this thesis can be classified as belonging to an authoritarian media system in which access and pluralism are tolerated but within limits. In the Russian political system, media freedom should be controllable (Skillen, 2016). So, the state owns key media outlets, particularly the TV networks, while private media organisations are owned by loyal businessmen who support the Kremlin's policies (Gehlbach, 2010; Skillen, 2016). Becker (2004) describes the Russian media system as a neo-authoritarian system in which the state exercises control over important issues such as elections and Chechnya and tolerate pluralism in other issues. Non-news programs are free to set their agenda as long as they do not criticise the political system in Russia (Gehlbach, 2010).

RT was launched in 2005 to promote Russia's policies abroad. RT's freedom is limited by the Kremlin's interests, as Skillen (2016) maintains that this international TV network is allowed to display a pluralism of opinions on non-crisis events. This means that RT depends fully on Russia when it covers crises in which Russia is implicated. Similarly, Samuel-Azran (2013) maintains that AJA represents a model of "hybrid network whose independence is limited by the boundaries

of Qatar's crucial interests" (p.15), so AJ supports Qatar policy in crises but "operates independently in routine affairs" in which Qatar is not involved.

Hence, whereas journalists in liberal media systems can operate in three spheres, moving from the sphere of consensus to that of legitimate controversy or deviance, RT and AJA journalists, who work under authoritarian political systems, are expected to have limited freedom. However, this study provides an opportunity to explore whether there is a space for legitimate controversy or deviance where these TV channels, being global media organisations, can promote frames that are not preferred by their governments, including the enemy's voice when covering the war on IS in Syria.

It is noteworthy that notions like 'democracy' or 'global public debate' are not addressed in my research since I do not seek to examine to what extent the news organisations under study contribute to democracy, pluralism, or global publics. As I mentioned, AJA and RT operate in authoritarian countries, where public debate is restricted. This research focuses on how the news discourses of these international TV channels are influenced by their political contexts not on their contribution to a global public sphere.

3.3 Media, Terrorism, and Counterterrorism

The role of media in conceptualising terrorism as well as counterterrorism is a very sensitive one as they are lines of communication among the ruling elites, the publics, and the so-called terrorists. Yet, news media organisations are not passive agents, for they participate in framing terror/anti-terror-related questions and putting them on the public agenda. According to Paletz and Tawney (1992),

The media are the central connection in the terrorism-government-public nexus. Which terrorist activities are reported, how prominently, how framed, with what emphases, and

whose views predominate—all influence the behavior of terrorists, the reactions and responses of government officials, and the views of the public. The media, moreover, can often become more than chroniclers of terrorists' actions: They may contribute to or interfere with the resolution of an incident by transmitting terrorists' communiqués; they may become a party to the negotiations; they may even jeopardize the lives of hostages by broadcasting personal information (as cited in Marin, 2011, p. 257).

In what follows I discuss the media's role in covering terrorism and counterterrorism actions:

Media and terrorism

Communication scholars such as Weimann and Winn (1994) Wolfsfeld (2011) Camphuijsen and Vissers (2012) argue that non-state actors that are labelled as terrorists in their communities rely on the media to pass their violent messages, terrorise the public, achieve publicity, and put their governments under pressure. According to Jetter (2017), “international news outlets are extensively covering Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and recently the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (...) the attention of the public seems to be a fundamental objective and potential driver of terrorist activities with the media serving as an indispensable platform” (p. 34). Supporting this view, Wojtasik (2017) maintained: “it should be underlined that terrorists have always been dependent on the media which showed, quoted and, so to speak, mediated in spreading fear” (p.105). Terrorists know that the media are eager to cover dramatic events to attract the attention of their audiences and make money. That is to say, there is a symbiotic relationship between media organisations and terrorist groups. According to Aaron Hoffman et al.,

News organizations supply terrorists access to their audiences in exchange for the right to publish information about events that will entice consumers to purchase their products. [...]. Both terrorists and news organizations benefit when information about terrorist attacks is turned into the commodity of news (2010, p. 576).

Yet, this symbiotic relationship does not mean that media and terror groups are friends. For Tiffen (2006), there is a hostile relationship between mainstream media and terror groups because news media frame terror acts and groups negatively. It should be taken into consideration that the media rely on official sources when covering violent events. Moreover, those who are defined as terrorists consider media personnel as their enemies and target them.

IS understands that media are very helpful in information and psychological warfare. Therefore, the organisation produced many media materials, documenting beheadings, mass killings, and fighting operations. For Neer and O'Toole, ISIS's violence is premeditated, purposeful, cold-blooded, and predatory and has a sadistic quality to it. It is an "instrumental violence and is the type typically preferred and engaged in by psychopaths" (Neer and O'Toole, 2014, p. 147).

According to Camphuijsen and Vissers (2012), terrorists as non-state actors design media-oriented events to achieve many goals. First, they seek to intimidate political regimes, showing their vulnerability to violent acts. Disseminating terror acts through the media help terrorists prove their power and demonstrate to audiences that their governments are unable or unwilling to protect them. An example worth recalling is when IS filmed John Cantlie, a British hostage, while he was criticising his government for refusing to make a deal with the IS to save his life: "Only the British and American prisoners were left behind. [...] Our governments had chosen not to negotiate with the Islamic State through our families and friends. And while everyone else had fulfilled conditions for release, for us there was no deal" (as cited in Neer and O'Toole, 2014, p. 88). This journalist was forced to appear in multi-part footage titled 'Lend me your Ears – Messages from the British Detainee John Cantlie.'

Second, terror groups may seek to use the media with the aim to show the inappropriate or excessive use of power by governments in reaction to violent events; this includes any oppressive

actions and decisions taken in the name of the war on terror. A clear example of that is when IS and its followers employ media to show the impact of the US and Russia's air campaigns on civilians and then call for 'jihad' against Russia and the West as well as their allies in Syria and Iraq. Also, armed groups can use the media to gain the sympathy of audiences (Wojtasik, 2017). Linked to this purpose is another goal, which is to convince people to adopt their ideologies and then recruit more members who help them disseminate their ideas. Within this framework, media may be accused of being instigators of violence. However, this is not a very tenable view, because according to selective exposure theory, audiences are always selective; they tend to watch the media content that reinforces the assumptions, the ideas, and the beliefs that they already have in their minds (Whitaker et al, 2013).

So, some viewers support IS or watch its videos for such materials resonate with their pre-existing views. Also, Cottle (2006) argues that the media cannot be seen as a cause for promoting terrorism because mainstream news media organisations portray terrorists negatively and use episodic frames. This type of news framing represents stories isolated from their context and from a narrow perspective (Iyengar,1994). Then, audiences cannot make well-informed judgements about what happens around them. Alternatively, news media outlets can use thematic news frames, which apply a wide-angle lens to the coverage of the issues, like terrorism or the so-called war on terrorism. Thematic frames provide information about the context of the reported stories (Iyengar,1994). When reporters use thematic frames, they investigate the reasons that led to the rise of crises like IS and raise the need for better policies to encounter violence. However, it should be taken into consideration that news media prefer episodic frames due to broadcast constraints or restrictions imposed by governments on what can be reported.

Armed non-state actors, like Al Qaeda, initiated contacts with international media as Bin Laden accepted to be interviewed by AJ in Afghanistan, and he used to send Al Qaeda's tapes to this key international media outlet (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003). Today, with the growth of online communications, armed groups have developed their media outlets. So, they can act more independently and strategically to achieve their goals. According to Wolfsfeld (2011), the media help these groups collect and exchange information so that they can plan their attacks successfully. Also, they can publish videos and other materials that inspire other movements or encourage their supporters to commit violent actions. In fact, IS uses new media efficiently and regularly.

The Internet is currently the most popular ground used by terrorist organizations for publishing, communicating and exchanging information. Currently, teams of specialists from groups such as al-Hayat Media Center (associated with ISIS), al-Malahem Media, as-Sahab and al-Fajr Media Center (media wing of al-Qaeda) and al-Furqan Institute (ISIS) prepare professionally informative and propaganda-like campaigns, produce documentaries, online magazines, and directed executions. They prepare various materials and publications (Wojtasik, 2017, p. 109).

The cyber-space provides IS and the like with a sense of belonging to a particular community where they can express their sense of self versus the other. They can explain their views, trying to influence the political arena around them. However, Tinnes (2015) maintains that IS still recognises the importance of the mainstream media to get the maximum publicity, not only in terms what acts should be reported but also how such actions are portrayed. She estimated that IS forced Cantlie to produce video series for it to encounter the western media discourses which always frame the organisation negatively. So, when Cantlie reported in IS's favour, the organisation took the opportunity to promote its story, its sense of self versus the Western other(s). She quoted Cantlie, who said on IS' behalf:

I'm gonna show you the truth behind the systems and motivation of the Islamic State and how the Western media, the very organization I used to work for, can twist and manipulate that truth to the public back home. There are two sides to every story – think you're getting the whole picture? [...]. Join me for the next few programs and I think you may be surprised at what you learn (2015, p. 87).

She added that IS employed Cantlie as news analyst to promote selected opinions from different media reports which “fit into the IS’ argument that an intervention by the US.-led alliance is doomed to fail” (p. 88). In so doing, IS wanted to warn the US and its allies over the continuity of the war or the launch of more attacks. I conclude this part with a quote from Al Qaeda leader Ayman Al Zawahiri: “we are in a battle and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media” (Lynch, 2006, p. 50).

Media and War on Terror

Like terrorism, the so-called War on Terrorism is contextual and intertextual. It is oriented to serve political ends (Altheide,2007). For example, the US presented its actions in Afghanistan as a war on terror, and then it used the same frame to justify its intervention against the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Also, the Turkish government considers its fight against the Kurds as a war on terrorism. As noted in chapter [2], journalists rely on official sources, particularly when they define the meaning of terrorism and war on terrorism. So, news media organisations play a role in reproducing and circulating the views of this class and participate in preparing audiences for official decisions and policies declared in the name of war on terrorism. This may lead to accepting such policies as normal without question and reinforcing the hegemonic position of the ruling elites in their societies. The abovementioned Gramscian concept of hegemony allows us to examine the relationship between news media and political power without having to claim that news

organisations are forced to reflect the voice of the ruling elites since the notion of hegemony implies willing agreement and support by the media actors.

Wolfsfeld (2011) maintains that reporting terrorism and war on terrorism lies within a Politics-Media-Politics (PMP) circle: he argues that the cycle starts with what takes place in the political context. For example, when IS killed two American journalists, this act caused the US Administration to mobilise and discuss the need to launch a global war on IS. In their turn, the US media, index themselves against the US policies, and other news media around the world have given more attention to IS crimes. This may accelerate the US response. The framing of counterterrorism actions is an exercise of power in which the news media rely on the official discourse of their governments. For news media organisations, war stories are newsworthy, so they do their best to broadcast live stories and images from the battlefields. In conflict areas, media personnel such as reporters or photographers may lose their lives. Examples worth recalling are Mohammed Al Hurani and Zakarya Ibrahim who worked for AJA in Syria. In fact, every media outlet is eager to provide its audiences with exclusive reports, to keep a high rate of watching. When CNN was the only western channel that covered from the field during the Gulf War (1990), and when AJA covered the war in Afghanistan (2001), from the front line, they enjoyed a privileged status in terms of economic benefits, respect and popularity.

Therefore, war coverage is always a dramatic newsworthy question, but the construction of its meaning is shaped by the political and cultural context in which the media operate. The US-led military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan were framed, in the US media, as humanitarian interventions which aimed at liberating Arab and Muslim people from dictatorship regimes; however, these invasions were framed, by AJA, as wars against Muslims (Jasperson and Kikhia, 2003; Samuel-Azran, 2013). According to El-Nawawy (2004), the US military intervention in Iraq

was referred to as an act of “occupation” by AJA. Also, some Arab reporters used the term ‘martyrs’ to refer to those who were killed by the US-coalition forces. Another example is Russia, where the frame of the “war on terror” is used by the Kremlin and reproduced by the Russian media to justify oppressive military actions against Chechnya. According to Vartaniva and Smirnova (2012), when this conflict started in 1994, the Chechens were not labelled as terrorists in the Russian media, but after 1999 and onward the Russian media framed Russia’s offensives in the Caucasus as anti-terrorist operations and the Chechens were defined as terrorist groups. Of course, the events of 11 September provided a strong ground for the Russian officials to reinforce such a discourse.

So, the war on terror frame has no fixed definition. It can be used by any government and their media to describe any internal or external other. Given the ethnocentric character of news media, they index their coverage according to the range of debate among the elites. In today’s global communication system, when international broadcasters are established by state actors and operate in the context of a rise in securitising narratives in national and international politics, the space of autonomy is likely to be limited. So, AJA and RT are expected to operate within the limits of their countries’ policies when covering the war on IS. Moreover, the portrayal of this common enemy as a terror group is expected to be influenced by the political contexts in which these news media outlets work.

Chapter 4

The Media as Instruments to win the publics' minds and hearts

As discussed in the previous chapter, news media reporting is often ethnocentric, and media outlets need to appeal to the political and cultural contexts in which they work. So, this chapter will discuss the role of media as public diplomacy tools, with focus on AJA and RT, for these news channels need to be considered not only as transnational media outlets but also media set up in national self-interest contexts. Both broadcasters operate under authoritarian political systems, then they can be used by their governments to move away from other political actors in this multi-sided war or bring them closer.

4.1 Media as tools of public diplomacy in the context of counterterrorism

In the context of the rise of transnational terrorism led by non-state actors, governments need to develop counterterrorism strategies that involve not only military actions but also information war to encounter the ideas promoted by terrorist organisations (Archetti, 2010). In line with this view, Yarchi, Wolfsfeld, Sheaffer, and Shenhav (2013) maintains “since terror threatens a country’s security, countries must promote a foreign policy that will enlist other countries’ support to combat terrorist organisations. A country’s projected image and its foreign policy are two parts of the same issue because public diplomacy is a strategic foreign policy tool that helps recruit allies in the struggle against terror” (p.266). This view supports Joseph Nye’s argument that countries need to combine hard power and soft power, which he refers to as “smart power” to defeat transnational terrorism (Nye, 2008, p. 94). The idea is that governments can lead military actions to fight IS and the like, yet an essential part of winning this war is to obtain the support of the publics, i.e., to win the hearts and minds of people around the world through what is known as “public diplomacy.”

Seib (2012) defines this concept as “the element of diplomacy that involves a government reaching out to a public, rather than to another government” (p. 64). Wang (2006) maintains that public diplomacy aims “to communicate and cultivate on behalf of a nation-state a desired image and reputation, and to build common ground and understanding among nations and peoples” (p. 32).

The media are one of the public diplomacy tools, through which politicians can establish sustainable and durable relations with the international community and create a favourable environment to conduct their policies (Nye, 2008). In this context, Entman (2008) and Gilboa (2008) focused on media diplomacy which involves the use of “the media and other channels of communication to influence public opinion in foreign societies;” this includes “media framing, information management, PR, nation branding” (Gilboa, 2008, p. 58). This issue is very crucial in times of conflict since a country’s positive image and external relations with other nations may contribute to generate international support and so alter the outcomes of a conflict in its favour (Gilboa, 2000). Being aware of the power of media in public diplomacy, many political actors have paid attention to international broadcasting and created media outlets to promote their policies to the world. For example, AJ, in Qatar, RT in Russia, Al Alam in Iran, and the BBC World in the UK. Besides, presidents exert efforts to promote a positive image of their policies in foreign media. For Entman, media diplomacy refers to “the organised attempts by a president and his foreign policy apparatus to exert as much control as possible over the framing of his policy in foreign media” (Entman, 2008, p. 89). He empathises that the success of a government to promote its preferred frames in foreign media “depends most importantly on political cultural congruency” between that government and the targeted nations” (p.87). According to him, the more the cultural and political congruence between a particular government and the target nation, the more this government is framed positively in the target nation’s media. Similarly, previous research on the

coverage of terror-related conflicts in international media proved the influence of cultural and political proximity on how the media that operate in a particular country relate to the wars that are declared by other state actors against armed organisations (Sheafer and Shenhav, 2009; Sheafer et al., 2014). In addition to the factor of proximity, Yarchi et al. (2013) maintain that if a country has experience with terror, its media are more likely to frame counterterrorism actions adopted by other countries positively.

From a political perspective, Sheafer and Shenhav (2009) argue that while mediated public diplomacy is supposed to be a means for creating or reinforcing positive relations among states, it happens in practice that countries use mediated public diplomacy to “move away from other states rather than bringing them closer. In these cases, governments apply public diplomacy to draw lines and borders by positive and negative discourse, to ratify and redefine collective communities in the international arena” (p. 279). This study provides an opportunity to examine how the media under study frame the roles of the actors that disagree with their governments’ policies and approaches to IS in Syria but at the same time contribute to the war against this common enemy.

4.2 Qatar and Al Jazeera

In the previous section, I tackled public diplomacy as a theoretical framework that explains aspects of the media-state interaction, but there is a need to consider how it emerges out of specific circumstances. So, I will discuss Qatar’s case for the purpose of this research which examines AJA coverage of the war on IS. Qatar is a small country; it is not in a position to shape a global strategic narrative in which it stands at the centre. In what follows, I provide an overview of the Qatari foreign policy, particularly after the eruption of the Arab Spring revolutions as well as AJA’s relation to Qatar. The Russian context will be discussed in section [4.3].

4.2.1. Qatar Foreign Policy: An Overview

Qatar is a small Gulf country ruled by Tamim Ben Hammad Al Thani, with a population under half of a million. It is rich in natural Gas and oil resources. Although it is a tiny state, Qatar is an active regional player.

As a result of a highly beneficial combination of a small indigenous population and massive hydrocarbon wealth, Qatar has transformed its peninsula from an impoverished backwater to a sophisticated metropolis, boasting the world's highest per capita income and immense growth figures. Qatar's fast-paced economic development has facilitated its emergence as an important diplomatic power broker. Amid a precarious regional context, Qatar has pushed forward with an activist international agenda defined by high-profile mediation initiatives (Mohammadzadeh, 2017, p. 19).

According to Khatib (2013), Qatar is known for its role as a mediator in the region and international conflicts and as a provider of humanitarian aid to vulnerable people around the world. For example, Qatar acted as a mediator between the Palestinian rivals Fatah and Hamas in 2007. It played a similar role in Lebanon, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Yemen. Through this policy, Qatar seeks to achieve several goals: The first goal is to maintain its security; “by increasing its international profile, Qatar aims to protect itself from the perils of small-state anonymity and vulnerability—perils of the kind from which Kuwait suffered in 1990” (p.418). According to Nuruzzaman (2015), “surrounded by giant neighbours, Qatari rulers, especially after 1995, have attempted to maintain relations with both friends and foes to minimise security risks” (p.230). By engaging in mediation between conflicting factions such as the Houthis and the Yemeni government, or between Hezbollah and its allies on the one hand and the Lebanese March 14 bloc on the other, Qatar can be seen as attempting to contain those conflicts and put a limit to the expansion of Iran (Khatib, 2013). Also, Qatar hosts US military bases (the al-Udeid and As-Sayliyah); “with negligible military capabilities of its own, Qatar's defence is almost wholly dependent on the United States’

security umbrella” (Mohammadzadeh, 2017, p. 21). Furthermore, Qatar, through its active role as an essential ally to the US, tries to distract attention away from its non-democratic political and life system (Khatib, 2013; Nuruzzaman, 2015).

Khatib describes the Qatari foreign policy as pragmatic, but not coherent. For example, it hosts the Israeli trade mission; also, Qatar provides “a home to Islamists such as Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi—who is close to the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement vocal in its criticism of Israel” (2013, p. 420). In the context of the Arab spring, it adopted an inconsistent foreign policy. In Egypt, Qatar supported the Egyptian people in their anti-government protests in 2011 (Pourhamzavi and Pherguson, 2016). In Bahrain, Qatar intervened, along with other Gulf countries, to protect the throne of Al-Khalifa. In Libya and Syria, “Qatar’s support for the anti-Gaddafi and anti-Assad rebel forces has ranged from use of the powerful Al Jazeera news channel to direct military intervention to a large follow of cash and arms for the rebels to diplomatic backing for the rebel groups at different regional and international forums” (Nuruzzaman, 2015, p. 228). In Syria, Qatar has supported the Syrian opposition factions.

Not only has Qatar been actively involved in arming Syrian rebels such as the Free Syrian Army, it has also successfully brokered the creation of an umbrella organization unifying the different factions of the Syrian opposition (...) In November 2012, it was revealed that Libya had been the Syrian opposition’s main source of finance, providing half of the Syrian National Council’s budget, with Qatar being the next largest source of funds (Khatib, 2013, pp. 424-425).

So, since 2011, Qatar has been an active regional player in the Syrian crisis, supporting the Syrian opposition, logistically and financially. As mentioned in the second chapter, Qatar holds Al Assad as responsible for the growth of IS, so for the Qatari regime the internal crisis and IS crisis should be dealt with as a whole. Qatar supports more military involvement against IS and urges the US to

increase its military assistance to the Syrian opposition in the war against IS and the regime (Al-Thani, 2014; Sciutto, 2015).

4.2.2 AJA In Qatar.. Qatar in AJA

AJA which was established in 1996 by the royal family of Al Thani is seen as a public diplomacy tool, a global platform to serve Qatar's foreign policy. This channel criticises 'everybody' except its government, and it ignores sensitive matters related to Qatar, such as violations of human rights and lack of democracy (El-Nawawy, Iskandar, and Iskander, 2003; Samuel-Azran, 2013; Zaidi, 2003). The Freedom House organisation reported in 2016 that

Media houses and professionals in Qatar are subject to significant restrictions, and the overall landscape encourages a high level of self-censorship. While the country's flagship satellite television channel, Al-Jazeera, is permitted to air critical reports on foreign countries and leaders, journalists are subject to prosecution for criticizing the Qatari government, the ruling family, or Islam.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, AJ is classified as a "hybrid network which acts independently when it addresses routine affairs; and this "gives it the credibility of a privately owned station", yet it "reverts to state-sponsored-style broadcasting only during a crisis in which Qatar is implicated" (Samuel-Azran, 2013, p. 2). So, it is possible to say that AJ's power to report independently is constrained by demands that it indexes itself against political orthodoxy in Qatar.

The dependence of Al Jazeera on Qatar is noticed clearly in the context of the Arab Spring (Khatib, 2013; Nuruzzaman, 2015; Pourhamzavi and Pherguson, 2016). In words of Nuruzzaman (2015), "Al Jazeera has played a supportive role to promote Qatar's foreign policy objectives in the Arab Spring" (p. 232). It is noteworthy that AJ has adopted an inconsistent editorial policy towards the Arab Spring revolutions, which has raised questions about its credibility and its popular image as a platform for the voiceless people.

The Arab Spring has presented a tough challenge for Al Jazeera's credibility. After an initial surge in popularity due to the channel's intensive coverage of the Egyptian revolution, the channel was faced with the conundrum of the Bahraini uprising that coincided with the Libyan one. While Al Jazeera fully embraced the Libyan uprising as a legitimate rebellion, its lukewarm stance towards the Bahraini case appeared contradictory to its image as a supposed champion of Arab freedom. It also revealed the limits of the channel's self-promoted 'independence' from the Qatari state (Khatib, 2013, p. 428).

This channel has been known for its criticism of the US as well as Arab regimes. This critical editorial policy has led some Arab governments to ban its activities in their countries. During the presidency of George W. Bush, it has been reported that the US government complained to the Qatari regime over the negative tone adopted by AJ towards the US: "the US Secretary of State Colin Powell met with Sheikh of Qatar Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, asking him to use his influence to tone down Al-Jazeera's coverage" (Samuel-Azran, 2010, p. 55).

During the war in Afghanistan, AJA was considered by the US officials and media as a mouthpiece of Islamic terror and was accused of supporting Bin Laden through diffusing his videotapes. According to Jaspersen and Kikhia (2003), AJA addressed "the impact of the war on the ordinary Afghan as well as the perceived ineptness and paralysis of Arab regimes in influencing events on the ground. Hence much of the coverage focused on the havoc U.S. bombing had on Afghanistan's people, cities, and already dilapidated infrastructure" (p.125). In 2003, AJA was accused of being pro-Saddam Hussein and of supporting the Iraqi armed groups. This channel played a role in revealing the vulnerability of the US army when it showed videos of killed US soldiers, lying face up and interviews with five others captured by the Iraqi armed groups at the very beginning of the war. AJA, also, focused on the high toll of civilian deaths in Iraq. In this context, some critics accused the US of deliberately bombarding AJ's offices in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). According to Samuel-Azran (2010) a top-secret document leaked to the Daily Mirror in 2005

revealed that the US President, Bush, discussed with Tony Blair the bombardment of AJ's office in various places, but Blair stood against that plan and considered that such attack would lead to "a worldwide backlash" (p.46). AJA's consistent coverage of the US-led military actions shows that it can operate independently when it covers issues in which Qatar is not involved directly.

There is enough research on AJE overall, but there are few research studies on how Arab-speaking audiences are addressed in global conflicts. So, pinning down how AJA can operate in the context of a key Qatari foreign policy area and in an area where there are tensions across the Arab world and its neighbours is a valuable question to study. This research builds on Samuel-Azran's (2013) conclusion about AJA's attachment to Qatar's policies, so it examines how Qatar's direct involvement in the US-led war against IS has influenced AJA coverage of this multi-sided conflict.

4.3 Russia and RT

This section addresses how public diplomacy can emerge out of the specific circumstances of Russia since this research looks at RT's coverage of the war on IS. Russia is a great power, so it is in a position to shape a global strategic narrative in which it stands at the centre. In what follows, I provide an overview of Russia's foreign policy, particularly towards the Middle East as well as the media-state relationship in Russia.

4.3.1 The Russian foreign policy under Putin: An overview

The Russian President Vladimir Putin was re-elected in 2012. He occupied that position previously between 2000 and 2008. Throughout his presidency periods, Putin has adopted an authoritarian political system (Dawisha, 2015). He "dictates" in the sense of "having the final word on all matters" particularly foreign policies, security, and defence (Motyl, 2016, p. 35). Putin muted and oppressed oppositional voices and restricted the right of free press and other civil liberties (Dawisha, 2015; Motyl, 2016; Skillen, 2016).

Putin's foreign policy is driven by his will to restore Russia's superiority as a global power (Dawisha, 2015; Motyl, 2016; Plakoudas, 2015; Stent, 2008). According to Rutland and Kazantsev (2016), "a central theme of Putin's presidency has been his concern to restore Russia's standing in the world, and he recognises the importance of all dimensions of the issue – security, diplomacy, economics, and image" (p.397). In 2011, when the revolutions of the Arab Spring erupted in the Middle East, Russia did not show enthusiasm towards such significant political developments in the region. For example, Russia did not welcome the intervention of the NATO in Libya, and it has supported the Syrian regime against the rebels as it considers that the removal of its regional ally in Syria will reduce its influence. Also, it has strengthened its relations with Egypt; "Putin has begun to flirt with Abd al- Fatah al-Sisi, the new strongman of Egypt" (Plakoudas, 2015, p. 35).

In 2015, Russia started to conduct air strikes in Syria in the name of the war on IS. In addition to protecting its allies in the region, Russia fears the growth of Islamic jihad inside its territories, particularly the threat posed by IS as it has been reported that there are up to 5,000 Russian-speaking members in this organisation. Russia estimated that over 3,000 IS fighters might be Russians (Unnikrishnan and Purushothaman, 2017). As mentioned previously, Russia considers that IS should be fought in cooperation with the Syrian regime as Putin said: "We have been providing and will continue to provide the necessary military and technical assistance to the Syrian government and urge other countries to join us" (Sputnik, 2015). So, unlike the war on Afghanistan, the role of Russia in the war on IS is not merely assistive and complementary. Russia is a leading superpower which acts as a rival to the US-led coalition. As mentioned in the background of this study, Putin seeks to limit the US expansion in the Middle East. Also, he aims at changing the geopolitical balance of the region and creating a new world order in which Russia shares power with the US (Plakoudas, 2015; Souleimanov and Petrtlyova, 2015).

4.3.2. RT

The Freedom House reported in 2015, when Russia intervened in Syria, that the Russian media outlets “became more firmly incorporated into the Kremlin’s policy efforts, moving from supporting the government with biased news to actively participating in an ‘information war’ with its perceived adversaries.” The report has mentioned that the Russian government controls the news agendas and that debates are rarely allowed but not in political issues. In 2016, the organisation continued to criticise the complete dependence of news media organisations in Russia on the government’s narrative when covering military incursions into Ukraine and Syria:

The nationalistic tone of the dominant Russian media continued to drown out independent and critical journalism in 2015, stressing patriotic themes associated with Russia’s 2014 military incursions into Ukraine and the launch of air strikes in Syria in September 2015. Russian leaders and progovernment media outlets also sought to mobilize public support and suppress any dissent in the face of an economic downturn linked to falling oil prices and Ukraine-related sanctions.

As mentioned above, the political system in Russia is authoritarian in which the state owns key media outlets, such as major television networks, radio outlets, news agencies, and newspapers, while private media organizations are owned by Russian businessmen who have friendly relationships with the Kremlin (Gehlbach, 2010; Skillen, 2016). So, any voices that criticise the Kremlin are muted (Gehlbach, 2010). In 2005, Russia created Russia Today (RT) as a toot of Russia’s media diplomacy. Its goal is to promote positive image about Russia abroad in terms of politics, culture, and language study, “in close cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church, which in itself has come to serve as a tool of Russian soft power” (Rutland and Kazantsev, 2016). Critics consider that RT was initiated mainly, by Russia, to compete with the BBC, CNN and other key international news media outlets for Russia seeks to break the monopoly of Western news outlets in the global media market (Rutland and Kazantsev, 2016; Yablokov, 2015). It is

mentioned, in the third chapter, that RT's freedom is limited by the Kremlin's agenda. According to Skillen (2016), this international TV network is allowed to show a pluralism of views on non-crisis events; it is not allowed to criticise the political system. That is to say, RT operates as a national news media when it deals with issues in which concerns the Kremlin. Hutchings and Szostek (2015) showed how Russia employed its news media including RT to legitimise its intervention in Ukraine. They noted that the Russian media described the Western governments which stood against the Russian action as hypocritical and foolish. Also, the Russian news media accused the West of adopting double standards policies (Hutchings and Szostek, 2015).

For Ioffe (2010), RT- America is a propaganda tool for Russia and a weapon used by Putin to deal with its rivals, mainly, the US. In one article published in Columbia Journalism Review's website, she argues that

Russia Today was conceived as a soft-power tool to improve Russia's image abroad, to counter the anti-Russian bias the Kremlin saw in the Western media. Since its founding in 2005, however, the broadcast outlet has become better known as an extension of Vladimir Putin's confrontational foreign policy. Too often the channel was provocative just for the sake of being provocative. It featured fringe-dwelling "experts," like the Russian historian who predicted the imminent dissolution of the United States; broadcast bombastic speeches by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez; aired ads conflating Barack Obama with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; and ran out-of-nowhere reports on the homeless in America. Often, it seemed that Russia Today was just a way to stick it to the U.S. from behind the façade of legitimate newsgathering (Ioffe, 2010).

McClennen (2016) argues that there is a difference between the editorial policy of the Moscow-based RT office and that of RT America regarding opinion show. She maintains that RT America has more freedom. She noted that Abby Martin, former host of "Breaking the Set," a talk show that aired on RT America from 2012 to 2015, criticised the Russian military action in Ukraine in

2014 and continued to host her show for another year before quitting her job. However, the Moscow-based RT anchor Liz Wahl resigned, citing disagreements with the network's editorial policy. McClennen suggests that we should divide at RT America over editorial freedom in opinion shows versus news coverage, which depends on the Kremlin's agenda. For her, while it is crucial to hold RT America accountable for bias when covering Russia's military campaign in Ukraine, one should hold the U.S. media equally responsible for following the White House's agenda when covering the events of September 2001 and the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Unlike AJ, the BBC, and CNN, there is not enough research to date on RT, so more is needed to explore how it operates in relation to the Kremlin's policies or/and the theories of conflict reporting or media diplomacy. This research is intended to fill this gap since it examines how RT has reacted to the professional standards of war reporting and its political context when covering the war on IS.

Chapter 5

Methodological approach

This research seeks to examine and compare how RT Arabic and AJA covered the US-led military campaign and the Russian military campaign, in the context of the multi-sided war declared against IS in Syria.

The study applies a qualitative research method to achieve its purpose, for analysing news reports qualitatively helps researchers find out not only what is said about the war but also how messages are articulated to portray the roles of the rival interventions against IS. As mentioned in the third chapter, the role of the news media in reporting terrorism and counterterrorism actions is not passive. They can decide which stories are newsworthy and how to cover them. In this context, news organisations tend to rely on official sources, but at the same time, they seek to tell good stories to keep their audiences' attention. So, media messages are not neutral and can shape public perceptions of what happens in Syria.

This study takes a constructionist approach to frame analysis. In this perspective, social and political realities are created within the border of discourse. I support the Foucauldian argument: “nothing has a meaning outside of discourse” (cited in Hall, 1997, p. 45). Foucault links between truth or knowledge and power. For him,

Every attempt to put something into meaning comes about from a position of power because power connects and organizes the social positions that cause meaning to come about. Meaning, then, makes a claim to truth precisely because of the power position that enunciates it. This is not the truth but always a truth effect – a truth that seeks to reconstitute and re-establish power in meaning” as cited in (Chouliaraki, 2006a, p. 83).

This thesis aims at deconstructing news texts to show the power relations that inform their structure. According to Maingueneau and O'regan (2006), “critical approaches to texts and talks

would show how these hide power relations, prejudices, discrimination, and so on. It is doomed to question the authority of any text, by reflecting on the very process by which a text gets ‘authorised.’” So, texts are looked at “as connected to the interests implied by social practices” (pp. 229-230).

I understand the framing of political news as an “imprint of power”, which in words of Entman (1993) “registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text” (p.55). For him, “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p.52). He maintains that some information can be made more noticeable by placement or repetition. Supporting Entman’s argument, Wolfsfeld (2011) defines news frames as “tools for providing meaning to events. Once a news frame has been established, journalists use frames to tell us how to understand a particular event” (p.51). According to him, “in news stories connected with the war on terror, for example, one finds heroes and villains as well as victories and defeats” (p.51). For Gitlin (1980), frames are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse whether verbal or visual” (p.7). Then, the power of frames lies in the selectivity process through which the news media tell their audiences how to think about a particular issue. Entman (1993) says: “most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include, and the omissions of potential problem definitions, explanations, evaluations, and recommendations may be as critical as the inclusions in guiding the audience” (p.54). Thus, in this study, conducting qualitative frame analysis of news reports means analysing news as a discourse, to explicate how the news media under study have selectively constructed the meaning of each military intervention through

patterns of inclusion, exclusion, repetition, interpretation, evaluation, and/or visualisation of some aspects of the conflict.

5.1 Context of the study

This study takes a comparative approach to examine how AJA and RT Arabic represented the separate military campaigns declared by the US and Russia, in cooperation with their allies against IS. I selected these media outlets because they operate in a sensitive context: their countries of origin are engaged in the war on IS but disagree with key actors on how this common enemy should be fought. That is to say, AJA operates in Qatar which is a close ally to the US and a member of the US-led coalition against IS, but the Qatari regime is in disagreement with both the US and Russia over counterterrorism policies in Syria. RT is sponsored by Russia. The Kremlin aligned with the US in its war against the Islamic non-state actors like Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, as I have mentioned previously; however, in this war, Russia does not belong to the US-led coalition, and it disagrees with the US over counterterrorism approaches in Syria. Moreover, these media are similar in that they are sponsored by authoritarian governments and target Arab viewers. By comparing how these news media represent the rival campaigns, the study explores how the meaning of this multi-sided war on terror is affected by the surrounding political environments in which the media operate and shows the similarities and differences in their reporting styles.

In this context, one should consider that, in comparative media studies, the state remains a strong marker of difference and a principal reference point “, on the basis of which media systems, media markets, and media cultures are theorised” (Couldry and Hepp, 2009, p. 10). Hallin and Mancini (2004) classified media models as democratic versus authoritarian and directed attention to the political system under which the media operate, which means that conducting comparative media research relies on the state as a basic unit of assessment and comparison.

5.2 Samples of the Study

This research examines news reports (images accompanied by running voiceover), collected from both AJA's and RT Arabic's YouTube channels, tracking a one-year period, between October 2015 and 30 September 2016.

In qualitative studies, like this research, scholars seek to make deep interpretations about particular issues. Generally, the significance and conclusions drawn from such studies have more to do with the information richness of the samples. So, there is no standard sample size in qualitative studies; instead, the researcher makes his/her decision based on some guidelines, such as the research question(s) and aims, the timeframe of the study, and the resources available to him/her (Patton, 1990). When I collected the sample of this study, I took into consideration that its size should be manageable, and it should include enough information about the roles of the main actors (Russia, the US and their local allies) to address the research questions.

This research relies on a sample of 480 news reports in total. I selected (20) reports per month from each channel between 1 October 2015 and 30 September 2016. As a result, 240 reports were collected from AJA's YouTube channel and 240 ones were selected from RT Arabic's YouTube channel. I collected my data from YouTube because AJA's website does not include online archive of TV news footage. RT's website includes online archive, but since I seek to follow the same data collection procedures when studying AJA and RT, I decided to use the YouTube channels of both media outlets. There were many reports that deal with the war on IS in Syria on these channels. Concerning AJA, the sample (240 reports) was selected from an overall output of 625 reports. Regarding, RT, the sample (240 reports) was selected from an overall output estimated to be 460 reports collected from its YouTube channel.

I decided on this sample size as it is thought to be manageable and provide enough data to achieve the purpose of the study. One of the limitations of using YouTube is that it may not include all broadcast videos about the war, so there is a risk that important stories were left out by the broadcaster. However, (20) reports per month are expected to cover most of the events that occurred in that month since they did not include too many stories about one event and therefore represent a broad spread of reporting. Another limitation is that the broadcasted reports were put up without the news reader's introduction which is important to understand the framing of news. Nonetheless, the news reports, by themselves, provided reasonable evidence of media-state interactions and variations in war coverage in these two channels. So, I did not miss the introductions too much.

It should be taken into consideration that this research focuses on the discursive patterns of the news texts and the ideas that are communicated about the roles of each intervention to explicate the political and moral agendas that inform the war discourse. It is noteworthy that neither Russia nor Qatar has changed its policies towards Syria throughout the study period, so audiences are not likely to find a developing picture with different patterns or a shift in the war discourse. Therefore, the sample has not been segmented for analysis of different moments in the reporting.

5.3 Data Collection

Regarding the data collection process from AJA, the news reports about the war on IS in Syria were broadcast in two playlists created by the broadcaster. The first one is concerned with the international campaign against IS. There were 322 reports published on this list between 1 October 2015 and 30 September 2016. They are related to IS's violence, and the war on IS in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. I selected 85 reports only from the list. These are the news reports that deal with the US and the Russian interventions in Syria during the above-mentioned period. This means that any

report that deals with IS in Egypt, Libya, or IS attacks in Europe was excluded. Also, any news reports related to IS in Syria whose length was less than 1:30 minutes were discarded as they were found to contain too little details to study the research questions. The second list concentrated on Syria. This list includes 820 reports during the said period. After watching all the news reports, I selected the reports that covered the Russian and the US campaigns in Syria. Any materials related to talk show programs about Syria were excluded in addition to any reports which were already found in the first list. Also, any news reports about the Russian and the US-led roles in Syria whose length was less than 1:30 minutes were discarded. As a result, 540 reports were collected from this list. Then, 625 reports were collected in total from both lists. These reports were listed and put into order according to their dates. Twenty reports were selected per month throughout the study period. To be precise, the first 20 reports which appeared in the list every month were selected. So, in total 240 reports were taken as a study sample, while the 385 others were discarded. Analysing 20 reports per month provides a ground to trace the discursive patterns in news texts throughout the period of study. These reports covered most of the events that happened in that month. I did not miss out reports about important events, and I did not include too many reports about any one event.

In respect of data collection from RT, news reports about the war on IS in Syria can be found in a playlist dedicated to political news. This list includes news about different issues including Syria. I surveyed the list which is composed of over 1000 reports. I followed the same procedures I adopted when collecting data from AJA. So, the news reports related the Russian and the US-led interventions in Syria, whose length was at least 1:30 minutes were selected. As a result, 460 reports were collected. Then, these reports were listed and put into order according to their dates, and 20 reports were selected per month. These comprised the first 20 reports which appeared in

the list every month throughout the year of study while 220 reports were excluded. Thus, 240 reports in total were selected as a study sample. Certainly, as a researcher, I cannot claim that the samples of this study are completely exhaustive; AJA and RT are television news outlets, and the reports used in this study were selections from the overall output. However, since the research approach to understanding frames is primarily qualitative, that aims at deconstructing the meaning of the stories, rather than quantitative, the selected samples help show how AJA's war coverage differs from RT.

5.4 Data Analysis and Translation

The textual analysis takes an inductive approach. First, I watched all the selected reports three times to gain an overall impression and idea about their content. Then, I watched them a further two times to notice any recurring themes or discursive practices throughout the reports. This research builds on Jaspersen and Kikhia's study (2003). They took a qualitative approach to frame analysis to compare how CNN and AJA covered the US war on Afghanistan. They discussed three main frames, which are the governance, the military, and the humanitarian. So, in this research, these aspects serve as a general framework under which the discursive constructions of the roles of the actors involved in the war are analysed.

So, the analysis was divided according to three aspects, as three different representational domains regarding the conflict in Syria emerged in initial readings. These were:

- The Governance aspect: It looks at the representation of local and international support for the approaches of the US and Russia to IS crisis in Syria.

- The Military aspect deals with the depictions of the military power and actions of each campaign. This aspect also looks at the framing of the interaction between the Russian and the US-led air forces in the skies of Syria.

- The Humanitarian aspect deals with the depiction of humanitarian situation in Syria and how each military campaign is related to the suffering of civilians in the context of the war.

The focus on these three aspects helps me achieve the aim of the study. Through examining the portrayal of each intervention at these three levels, it is possible to show how the meaning of the war is influenced by the political sphere in which these media operate and look at their professional practices. Dividing the analysis into three main themes helps me identify aspects of exclusion, inclusion, emphasis, evaluations, and interpretations in the meaning-making processes. This three-fold analysis will shape the findings of the study, as I will focus on the aspects mentioned above, while other issues that may be related to the war coverage will not be addressed. Adopting that three-fold analysis allows to develop a focused analytical framework and answer my research questions. It also helps the readers notice the development of the discussion as they move from one section to another.

Moreover, the analysis addresses the visualisation of the military and humanitarian frames to examine how each media outlet employed visual elements to establish the meaning of this war and how the visual and the verbal texts interrelate. For Nabi (2003), visuals arouse emotions that affect message processing. Graber (1987) states that visuals “make audiences care about an issue and the people involved in it” (p. 76). For her, war images have a strong effect on how audience respond in wartime. Therefore, the selection of visuals in news reflects ideological values, and it aims at shaping viewers’ perceptions in a particular way; “features of television messages guide our attention to certain parts of the message” (Lang, 1995, p. 89). A clear example of how visuals were

ideologically selected to serve political interests is the US media coverage of Operation Desert Storm. According to Elihu Katz, the US media “mobilised huge audiences for a live television war But the fact is that we didn’t see war at all. . . . We saw portraits of the technology – advertisements for smart planes, tanks, missiles, and other equipment in dress rehearsals of what they are supposed to do in combat, but we rarely, if ever, saw them in action. Indeed, it was as if there was no other side” (Katz, 1992, p. 8).

Similarly, Baudrillard (1995) provocatively claimed: “the Gulf war did not take place,” noting that the war existed more as a media event than a physical occurrence. Therefore, it is important to analyse the military and the humanitarian aspects of the war on the visual plane to explore how visuals were used by AJA and RT to shape their audiences’ perceptions. The analysis will show how the verbal and the visual discourses interrelate. That is to say, it will examine whether the visualisations of the roles of the military actors confirm, contradict, or have nothing to do with the verbal discourses, which describe their actions in the battlefields and the impact of such actions on the humanitarian situation.

For the purpose of this study, there is a need to translate news texts from Arabic into English. Since the text is the vehicle through which the meaning is ultimately transferred to the reader, language differences generate additional challenges that might hinder the transfer of meaning and might result in loss of meaning. For Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, and Deeg (2010),

Language differences may have consequences, because concepts in one language may be understood differently in another language (. . . .) Translation of quotes poses specific challenges, because it may be difficult to translate concepts for which specific culturally bound words were used by the participants (. . . .) Using quotes is not unproblematic because participants might feel that they are not fairly represented, when they see their spoken

words in written form. Translating the quotes to another language enlarges this problem, because in the translation the words are literally not their own anymore (pp. 313-315).

I did the translations needed for the texts that will be discussed in the next chapters. I was able to do this to a high level of accuracy, addressing some of the issues noted above, because my mother tongue is Arabic, and I have a BA in English. Also, I worked as a translator and news editor, so I have experience of providing English translations for Arabic news texts; however, I acknowledge that the abovementioned problems that arise when translating news texts for academic research are one of the limitations of this study.

5.5 Analytical Framework

As mentioned above, the research takes a constructionist approach to frame analysis, so it looks at news texts as a site of meaning-making; however, one should take into consideration that news is a special political language (Stenvall, 2007) and this language is constructed through discursive practices which take place within journalistic norms. Journalism, as a professional discipline, is based on the idea of telling the truth and informing audiences about what happens around them; therefore, journalists are required to convey a fair and reliable account of the events they cover (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007). This means that they need to report verified facts, seeking out multiple witnesses, disclosing as much as possible about sources, or asking various sides for comment. Journalists can provide their own evaluative statements as observers or eye-witnesses. However, sourced materials are the backbone of news stories, as they provide legitimacy and credibility to journalists' accounts (Cozma, Hamilton, and Lawrence, 2012). The more sources and various voices the reporters include in their texts, the more their coverage shows evidence of credibility and balance. According to the literature of journalism studies, news media prefer to rely on official sources (Bennett, 1990; Gans, 1979).

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) state that news frames reflect and maintain traditional values in such a way that reflects and reproduces the official view, leaving much of the task of defining what is news to sources representing those values.

The dependence on official sources and their accounts increases in wartime, despite general public expectations that the reporters give access to the conflicting parties. They may seek to incorporate non-official voices such as civilians or experts, who reflect and evaluate the difference among the rivals as evidence of balanced coverage. However, when reporting and framing these conflicting claims or viewpoints, scholars note that reporters tend to support the political stand of their governments; an 'in-group' VS 'out-group' dichotomous mentality guides their coverage (Wolfsfeld, 2011). Non-official voices such as experts or civilians are often used in stories to reinforce the rhetoric of the officials (Bennett, 1990). It is important to look at sourcing practices and particularly how political and military sources are contextualised since they are the primary sources of news stories. By tracing the way in which they are textured in relation to other sources, it is possible to show media-politics interaction in this multi-sided conflict and investigate whether the voice of civilians is used in a way that reinforces the stances of the ruling elites.

For the purpose of this research, I used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine news texts, addressing the governance, military and humanitarian aspects of this conflict in turn. To do this, I did not use van Dijk's CDA framework although it is the major approach in this sub-field. Rather, I followed Fairclough's (2003) approach to critical discourse analysis. He defined a set of analytical questions that can be applied to texts to explicate the power relations that inform their structures. As shown below, I used some of these questions as a framework to study the portrayal of this war, with focus on the depictions of the actors involved and their actions as well as the intertextual relations of news texts which address the interaction between the reporters' voices and the sources

they report. Also, I have drawn on some insights from Van Leeuwen (2008) and Chouliaraki (2006) to examine the visual representations of the military and the humanitarian aspects of the conflict.

According to Fairclough (2003), intertextuality provides a useful analytical resource, particularly in news texts for the genre of the press depends on the distribution of information between the authorial voice and attributed voices. He proposes that analysing the intertextuality of a text allows to examine how the authors (e.g. reporters in news media organisations) incorporate the voices and the claims of others into their text. Then, intertextuality is a matter of recontextualisation, a process through which reporters texture different voices in a particular context to communicate a particular idea. For Fairclough (2003), contextualisation has something to do with framing: when a voice “is incorporated into a text, there are always choices about how to ‘frame’ it, how to contextualise it, in terms of other parts of the text” (p. 53). So, analysing intertextuality in news texts has something to do with how the sources are represented: whether they are quoted or constructed through nominalisation or metonymy and whether the information is attributed to identified sources or non-identified ones. Intertextuality concerns the ordering of voices. The way in which voices are ordered in relation to each other in a text may carry ideological significations; for example, the structuring of conflicting voices can help set or classify the good actors vs the bad ones (Fairclough, 2003). So, journalists participate in the framing of their sources, structuring the reported information and evaluating them. However, Michael Parenti maintains: “Like editors, reporters are granted autonomy by demonstrating that they will not use it beyond acceptable limits. They are independent agents in a conditional way, free to report what they like as long as their superiors like what they report” (as cited in Simon 2006, p 53). Moreover, in analysing news as discourse, I look at the features which characterise the news texts in terms of semantic and

grammatical relations as well as lexical choices and how these elements are articulated to represent the roles of actors involved and set the information within the borders of the political and cultural context in which the media operate. The analysis covers not only the verbal but also visual discourse. Van Leeuwen (2008) argues that verbal, written, or visual discourses are representations of social practices, which not only depict what is going on, but also “they evaluate it, ascribe purposes for it, justify it, and so on” (p.6). According to him, when looking at how images depict people, two questions should be asked: “How are people depicted?” and “How are the depicted people related to the viewer?” and in this context,

three dimensions are considered: the social distance between depicted people and the viewer, the social relation between depicted people and the viewer, and the social interaction between depicted people and the viewer. In all three cases, the relation is, of course, symbolic, imaginary: we are made to see the people depicted as though they are strangers or friends, as though they are “below” us or “above” us, as though they are in interaction with us or not, and so on, whatever the actual relations between us and those people, or those kinds of people (2008, p. 137-138).

Analytical questions

In the governance aspect, which deals with the framing of local and/or international support for the policies of each superpower in the war on IS, I address the following: what official voices from the US administration or the Kremlin are included and how these voices are incorporated in relation to other voices; how journalists construct the official or non-official voices which criticise the strategy of the US-led coalition or Russia; how the voices which support any of these actors are contextualised; and whether the reported sources are quoted or represented through metonymy or nominalization in their context. So, the analysis looks at the patterns that can be observed in the language (the semantic, grammatical, or lexical features) and the messages that are selectively promoted/ emphasised through the framing process. As mentioned above, the genre of press

reporting is based on how “reported texts and voices are re-contextualised within the reporting text – positioned and framed in relation to each other and in relation to the authorial voice” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 61). Fairclough (2003) maintains that analysing intertextuality directs attention to the ordering of voices, and the lexical and grammatical choices which are made by the text author.

The military aspect concerns the depictions of the military power and actions of the rival air campaigns. This includes their interaction in the skies and cooperation with their Syrian allies against IS. The analysis deals with the following:

How the military voices are incorporated and textured in relation to other non-official voices and/or in relation to journalists’ voices. How reporters texture opposing military voices/claims; and whether non-official voices are used to support one side of the conflict rather than the other. Also, the analysis covers how journalists represent the actors (passive, active, individualised, groups) and their actions [attacks, gains, fallings] against IS. When addressing all these points, the analysis looks at the semantic and linguistic features which characterise the framing of the military sources/actions and how they are selectively structured to create particular patterns and communicate value judgments about the role of each intervention. According to Fairclough (2003), the representation of social actors (Participants) involves a number of choices, including activated/passivated, individuals/groups, named/classified, and exclusion or inclusion. These choices "are socially significant for instance with respect to the representation of agency” (pp.154-155).

Furthermore, the analysis of the military aspect addresses how the actors involved and their actions are visualised. It will show how the visual and verbal discourses interrelate. In this context, the analysis looks at whether the visual discourse relates to the verbal one via an indexical relationship, whether the verbal texts about military power/actions lack the power of pictorial presence, and

whether some other relationship holds. The visual analysis also addresses the framing of actors and their agency; and whether the fighters are shown as engaged in violent or non-violent acts, acting or acted upon, the distance and the gaze.

In the humanitarian aspect, I examine how the reporters construct the role of each military campaign when depicting the human suffering in Syria. I address the following points: how the reports represent the identity of Russia and the US-led coalition as bombers, in the context of their support for their Syrian allies; how military sources are incorporated; how the sufferers are represented; whether impartial sources (experts or human rights organizations), are included, to emphasise the role of any of the bombers as an aggressor. The answers to these questions relate to the patterns that can be observed in the language of the news reports (semantic, grammatical or lexical choices) and the political/moral implications that can be read through these patterns. Like the military aspect, the analysis of the humanitarian aspect includes the visual discourse (the camerawork). For example, the analysis will show the framing of dead or injured people and how visuals relate to the verbal discourse to communicate the human suffering in Syria. It will also examine if the sufferers are filmed in groups or individualised and how they are related to viewers (their gaze) in the images. As Van Leeuwen (2008), argued through the camerawork, audiences are made to see the persons depicted as though they are strangers or friends, as though they are below or above them and as though they are in interaction with them or not. According to Chouliaraki (2006a), “choosing to capture the sufferers' gaze with the camera is also one of giving them a voice and humanising them” (p.89).

I conclude this section by asserting that qualitative textual analysis is not fixed in advance and is a matter of interpretation and negotiation. This can be very challenging as the door is never closed on one interpretation or analysis, and each new interpretation can lead to a further critique. Besides,

researchers cannot look at all aspects when analysing texts; therefore, they need to focus on specific manifestations which help them answer their research questions. Then, the abovementioned framework will hopefully enable me to achieve the aim of this research.

5.6 Researcher's Position and Reflexivity

In qualitative research like this study, the cultural background and the personal views of the researcher influence the way in which he or she conducts his/ her study (Berger, 2015). This includes how he/she gathers information, uses language, asks questions, analyses the collected data and makes meaning of them. That is to say, the analyst's position in relation to the topic of research may shape the conclusions drawn from it. Therefore, qualitative researchers need to be reflexive. Reflexivity refers to "the active acknowledgement by the researcher that her/his actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation" (Horsburgh, 2003, p. 309). This means that scholars in qualitative studies are aware of their position as part of the question they investigate and know that their social, cultural, and political background affect the knowledge they produce, so they use reflexivity to monitor the effect of their involvement in their research (Frisina, 2006; Josselson, 2007).

There are different strategies that qualitative researchers can use to maintain reflexivity and enhance the quality of their work. For Berger, "reflexivity is demonstrated by use of first-person language and provision of a detailed and transparent report of decisions and their rationale" (2015, p. 222). Also, it can be demonstrated by the identification of the research limitations, careful observation or prolonged engagement and use of a theoretical framework (Barusch, Gringeri, and George, 2011).

In my case, I acknowledge that my cultural background as an Arab scholar affects the way I have conducted my study, particularly how I analysed and interpreted the news texts collected for this

thesis. However, I adopted some strategies that helped me monitor the effect of my involvement in this study.

My reflexivity as a researcher is demonstrated by using first-person language when I have provided details about my methodological approach and when I have written parts of the analysis, linking them to the introduction or the background of the study. Also, I have provided justifications for the decisions I made regarding the selection of the samples and the division of the analysis into three main themes [the governance, the military, and the humanitarian aspects]. Furthermore, the study is guided by a coherent theoretical framework, and the limitations of my research are identified. I analysed the news discourses, with careful observation of linguistic and visual patterns. In this context, because my mother tongue is Arabic, I can understand the news texts easily and notice their discursive patterns. My knowledge of both Arabic and English as well as my work experience enabled me to translate the news texts from Arabic into English. Finally, I quote Sword (1999) as saying: “no research is free of the biases, assumptions, and personality of the researcher and we cannot separate self from those activities in which we are intimately involved” (p.277). So, this study is affected by my personality as researcher.

Chapter 6

AJA's coverage of the multi-sided war on IS in Syria

This chapter looks at how AJA covered the military campaigns which the US-led coalition and Russia separately waged in the name of war against IS. I should recall that although Qatar is a member in the US-led coalition, the Qatari regime does not agree with the US Administration over the strategy of this war which started during the Arab Spring uprising in Syria. As mentioned previously, for the Qatari regime, the coalition is not doing enough to degrade IS (Sciutto, 2015). Qatar considers that the US-led campaign should expand beyond targeting IS and provide more support for the opposition factions. Also, Qatar stands against Russia's intervention in Syria.

Moreover, I recall that for Samuel-Azran (2013), AJA's independence is limited by the boundaries of Qatar's interests. So, I re-examine this claim as I trace how AJA reacted to the political context in which it operates and to the professional standards of journalism in the coverage of the multi-sided war on IS.

6.1 The representation of the US-led intervention against IS in Syria

In what follows, I explore how AJA covered the US-led war throughout the governance, the military, and the humanitarian aspects to explicate the political agenda that informs the news discourse.

The governance aspect of the US-led Intervention

This section deals with the representation of local and international support for the US war strategy in Syria. So, the analysis looks at which voices from the US are included and how the voices of the White House officials are incorporated in relation to other critical or supportive voices and in relation to the journalists' voices. Also, it examines how AJA contextualises international voices

that express reservations on the US war strategy and those that agree with it; this leads to explore how the news discourse is influenced by the context in which AJA operates.

When contextualising the domestic reactions in the US to Obama's anti-IS policies, AJA promoted official voices from the White House such as Obama, Carter, Kerry, Patterson and the Congress [the Republicans], in addition to non-official sources (experts). The White House officials were framed in a weak position in front of the Congress, and their messages were followed by critical voices that raised the need to change the war strategy. So, the structuring of sources followed a consistent framing of the situation in the US that was critical of the Administration policy.

For example, AJA reported: "The Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter admitted the slow progress in anti-IS military operations and declared the US had sent 50 members of its special forces to support the Kurdish fighters in Syria. He attributed the reported little progress to the difficulty to find local groups that are willing to encounter IS." Then, Carter was quoted as saying: "If they grow in size we will send more troops." The voiceover mentioned: "The Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East Affairs, Anne Patterson, has admitted to the Congress that IS has gained more territories since the beginning of the war." The reporter commented: "Yet, the Pentagon has asserted its so-called achievements, which include killing about 10000 IS fighters." Then, an ex-member in the US National Security Council, commented: "The war on IS should target not only IS but also Al Assad's regime." The voiceover commented:

The situation on the ground appears to operate in favour of IS since it managed to gain territories at the Turkish-Syrian borders. In fact, the mission of the coalition has become more complicated after the Russian intervention in Syria. According to Anne Paterson, 90% of Russia's strikes have targeted the Syrian opposition, and this has caused more disappointment to the Republicans. For some members of the Congress, Obama has no clear strategy to defeat IS (AJA, 12 November 2015).

This text is typical. Opposing US voices were quoted, allowing them to frame the debate. Considering the distribution of information, the way in which the voices of the White House representatives were ordered in relation to other voices carries an ideological signification since it shows contrast and contradiction between the White House's statements and the Pentagon's assessments of the results of the air campaign. Also, the ordering of voices reflects that the US Administration's preferred policy has met resistance from local officials/ non-officials, which means that it is not in control of the situation. This resistance can be noticed in all reports that addressed the domestic reactions to Obama's war strategy, as shown in the next examples.

One of AJA's reporters framed Obama's decision to send soldiers to Syria as a step to "calm the anger of the Republicans." Then, Carter was quoted as saying: "We won't hold back from supporting capable partners in opportunistic attacks against ISIL or conducting such missions directly whether by strikes from the air or direct action on the ground." The reporter estimated: "This step appears to be not enough, for the Republicans believe that the US faces problems in the world today because of the weakness of its Democratic President." A member from the Congress was quoted as saying: "if I am Assad, this is a good day for me because America said it would not fight to change me, this is a good day for the Russians, the Iranians and Hezbollah as well since Al Assad does not face a real military challenge." Then, the voiceover commented: "There are deep disagreements between the US government which has launched an air war and sent special operations forces to support its partners in their fight against IS on the ground, and the Republicans who call for a more decisive role in Syria against the Syrian regime and its allies" (AJA, 27 October 2015). Similarly, AJA reported: "The US President asserted he agreed with his French counterpart that the Russian move has reinforced Al Assad's position and that Russia could help reach a ceasefire agreement in Syria." The voiceover added that Obama and his guest "agreed on

information sharing and discussed the possibility of sending additional special forces to fight against IS.” Then, an American expert of strategic studies was quoted as calling for a more decisive role in Syria against Al Assad and Russia. He also called for supporting the Syrian opposition factions in their war against IS. He said: “It is important to demonstrate our capabilities to the Syrian regime and Russia, not because we want to target Russian pilots in the skies but because we should prove that we can protect the groups with whom we work” (AJA, 24 December 2015).

Throughout these examples, critical voices from the US were selectively included and reported directly or indirectly. The direct quotations function in journalism as a device which allows to give the reported news a sense of immediacy, authority, and credibility and so convince audiences of the truthfulness of the messages which journalists seek to promote (Fairclough, 1992). Besides, AJA used non-specific sources, such as the “Republicans” that were indirectly reported. This imprecise language gives the impression that there have been widespread disagreements over the White House counterterrorism policies in the US. No voices from the Congress or the public were quoted while supporting Obama war strategy, throughout the sample. Instead, the reports focused on the critical views, showing that the White House had failed to get Congressional support in this war.

A number of textual practices support these patterns of quoting. The reporters made negative lexical choices when contextualising the US Administration stance. They referred to “slow progress”, “the weakness of the US president,” “disappointment,” “deep disagreements” and “anger,” showing that the Republicans “call for a more decisive role in Syria against the Syrian regime and its allies.” The reporters used the verb “to admit” to communicate the claims made by Carter and Patterson, which gives the impression that the White House is in a defensive position since both officials acknowledge the limited effect of the war strategy, as shown in the first text.

However, when US military gains were contextualised, the reporter used another strategy, which is metonymy. The reported information was attributed to the Pentagon, and no official source from the Pentagon was quoted. According to Martin and Wodak (2001): “metonymies enable the speakers to conjure away responsible, involved or affected actors [...], or to keep them in the semantic background” (p.58). AJA used the prefix “so-called achievements” when reporting the Pentagon’s story, and in this way, this channel distances itself from the Pentagon’s claim. Also, AJA used gerund “killing about 10000 IS fighters,” which does not need an agent. This contextualisation shows that AJA reporting emphasises the shortcomings of the strategy rather than its positive effects.

The reported sources evaluated the US counterterrorism policy, after the intervention of Russia in Syria, negatively. These patterns emerge clearly in the evaluative language through which sources were framed and preferred meanings were established. Journalistic evaluations were added to show the inadequacy of Obama’s strategy, particularly after the Russian military move. As shown above, one of AJA’s journalists estimated: “the situation on the ground appears to operate in favour of IS” and “the mission of the coalition has become more complicated after the Russian intervention in Syria.” Similarly, AJA reported: “The American President Obama stressed once again that the US strategy in the war against IS would not involve pulling the US into a ground war. This view is shared by members of the coalition. They will provide military support and training for local groups who will fight IS on the ground.” Then, Obama appeared on the screen; he said: "We should not be drawn once more into a long and costly ground war in Iraq and Syria." The voiceover commented: “Things in Syria got complicated given the intervention of Russia to the side of Al Assad, and the weakness of the opposition factions. So, to defeat IS, something needs to be done to change the equation” (AJA, 7 December 2015). In this contextualisation, the reporter raised the

need for a more effective strategy to make progress as “things got complicated” after Russia’s involvement. Although AJA journalist mentioned that the US anti-IS strategy was approved by its partners, no state was named, and no official or non-official sources were quoted as showing support for the position of the White House, unlike the US critical voices that were quoted as criticising the war policy. So, the reporting style differed consistently depending on whether the story was supportive or critical of US strategy.

Regarding the international responses to the US strategy, AJA quoted official voices when communicating messages that raise the need for more efforts to encounter IS. However, it used nominalisation or metonymy, without quotes when promoting messages that carry reservations on the US policies towards its local partners in Syria and the internal conflict in the context of this war. For example, AJA reported: “The US Secretary of Defence has praised the coalition members, particularly the Gulf countries for their commitment to increase their financial and military contributions to the war on IS.” According to the voiceover, “Riyadh offered to send ground troops to fight terrorism in Syria, provided the coalition leaders agree.” Then a Saudi official appeared on the screen; he said: “The Kingdom’s initiative to deploy forces in Syria, as well as, other military affairs were discussed” (AJA, 11 February 2016). Also, Carter was quoted as saying: “Today, we reviewed the war strategy and agreed on next plays in our campaign that will destroy IS in Mosul and Raqqa.” Then, Qatar’s defence minister Khaled Al Attiya was interviewed in the report; he said: “The current military counterterrorism efforts should be combined with political efforts and reform procedures to degrade terrorism” (AJA, 21 July 2016). Similarly, AJA reported: “The French President François Hollande said it was a matter of urgency to close the border between Turkey and Syria, to prevent the terrorists from reaching Europe.” Then, Hollande was quoted directly as saying: “We should destroy Daesh members wherever they are, dry up their

financing sources, hunt down their leaders, and recapture the territories they took.” Then the voiceover commented: “The French President and his US counterpart discussed the possibilities to increase the intelligence cooperation” (AJA, 24 December 2015). In the sample, no international voice was quoted directly or indirectly as criticising the US strategy.

AJA used metonymical expressions to contextualise reservations from international actors on Obama’s strategy as shown in the following example,

Washington adopts a view which is approved by several partners in the US-led coalition; this strategy is based on supporting local forces that are motivated to fight against IS on the front line and that can take control over the territories recaptured from the organisation, such as the Peshmarga, in north Iraq and the Kurdish People's Defence Units in north Syria. However, key members of the US coalition have reservations on this policy. For example, Baghdad government has concerns about the expansion of Peshmarga’s role in Al Mosel. Also, Turkey has concerns about the participation of Kurds in the war on IS. For Ankara, both IS and the Kurdistan Worker Party are terrorist organizations that should be encountered (AJA, 22 June 2016).

Once again, AJA reported that several partners approved the US strategy, but it did not provide further information. It used metonymical expressions (Baghdad, Ankara) to communicate the reservations on Obama’s policy. The metonymical expressions in this example give further explanations; it helps the reporter provide information, without having to specify the source or the agent.

Using the same strategy, AJA reported: “Being the leader of the anti-IS international coalition, the US has faced criticism from its allies in the NATO. France has rebuked Obama’s Administration, estimating that the US has not assumed its responsibility towards the Syrian crisis when Russia has tipped the military balance in favour of Al Assad while the supporters of the Syrian opposition have not taken any action.” Then the voiceover added: “This view traces the essence of things

based on the belief that the Syrian regime is the origin of the growth of groups categorised as terrorists” (AJA, 11 February 2016). Referring to the NATO and France, the reporter portrayed disagreements between the US and its partners over the situation in Syria and established a link between the internal conflict and the growth of IS, and the like. This framing emphasises the Qatari view which maintains that IS cannot be defeated as long as the Syrian regime is in power for Al Assad stands behind the expansion of terrorism (AJA, 2014). The reporter made negative lexical choices: “criticism” and “rebuke.”

Nominalisation was used once to communicate reservations on the US counterterrorism policies. AJA mentioned: “Washington counterterrorism policy faces obstacles in Syria, as there has been Arab resentment towards the US ambiguous and sometimes indecisive policies vis-à-vis Al Assad” (AJA, 20 January 2016). Unlike the previous examples, where AJA quoted officials, allowing them to frame the debate, or used metonymy, in the above text, it used the phrase “Arab resentment.” In this context, one should take into consideration that not all Arab countries are part of the US coalition in Syria. According to Fowler (1991) nominalisation process helps authors delete agents and references to time since there is no verb to show the tense of the reported information. This technique of concealment is used in political news as it helps reporters background their voices and communicate information through imprecise language without agency.

Thus, AJA used different strategies to construct political responses towards the US approach to IS crisis. Quotes, as well as, metonymy and nominalisation were selectively used in a way that promoted the need for changes in the US strategy, which operates within the limits of Qatar’s policies. Gans (1979) argues that political balance in news is “usually achieved by identifying the dominant, most widespread, or most vocal positions, then presenting ‘both sides’” (p. 175).

However, this balance risks being false as reporters may report one side of the story insufficiently or inaccurately or amplify its view, even if it represents a minority. In this way, they may provide an inaccurate picture of the question they report (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004). Throughout the sample, the White House is always balanced by critique, leaving audiences with not much information about the voices that supported the White House policy, but plenty of critical ones. AJA quoted US voices that disagree with the White House over the war strategy and that call for action against IS as well as the Syrian regime. AJA quoted international voices that promoted the need for more counterterrorism efforts. Nominalisation or metonymical expressions, without quotes, were used when promoting messages that criticised the US policy towards its local allies and the internal crisis in the context of the fighting against international terrorism. So, viewers do not hear these critical messages precisely, and the agents turned into objects.

Moreover, as shown above, the reporters made negative lexical choices such as “complicated,” “resentment,” “criticism,” “rebuke,” “reservations,” “deep disagreements,” and “anger” when they contextualised local or international official responses to the US anti-IS strategy. This negative tone invites Arab viewers to question the effectiveness of anti-IS operations.

Generally, AJA news discourse is oriented to emphasise the need to take more actions in the context of the US-led war on IS. This framing contrasts with the coverage of the US-led war against Afghanistan, where AJA raised the need to take action to stop the war and tried to rally the Arab and Muslim streets against the US and Arab regimes, that were portrayed as collaborators and submissive to the Bush Administration. Jasperson and Kikhia (2003) reported that “Taysseer Allooni, al Jazeera's correspondent in Kabul on more than one occasion after viewing the havoc caused by U.S. bombing raids lamented that Afghans are looking towards brothers of faith for support, but will they find support in the hurried attempts by the Arabs and Muslims to satisfy

America's arrogance?" (p.126). In Syria, AJA discourse put the American intervention in the context of confronting IS. Furthermore, the Arab regimes, which were portrayed as collaborators with the US in AJA coverage of the war on Afghanistan, were not portrayed with the same negative image in Syria, throughout the studied sample. This shift in discourse raises the question of why. The study suggests that a key factor is Qatar's involvement in the US-led coalition, which has influenced AJA reporting of the war on IS.

The military aspect of the US-led intervention

In what follows, I examine AJA coverage of US-led military actions against IS in Syria verbally and visually in the light of Qatar's direct involvement in this conflict.

On the verbal plane:

This section looks at how AJA portrays the US-led air campaign and how it constructs the roles of the US-backed SDF and the Syrian opposition factions on the ground against IS. So, the analysis covers how the US forces and their local allies are represented in terms of action and agency and how their voices are incorporated in relation to other sources or in relation to journalists' voices. It explores whether non-official voices are used to evaluate the US-led military actions and whether the military dimension is reported differently to the critically evaluated political one. Also, the framing of the interaction between the Russian and the US-led air forces in the skies of Syria is discussed.

The analysis begins with the framing of the US-led coalition air strikes that was distanced but not highly critical. AJA reporters represented the US forces in positive terms, yet at the same time, they brought to viewers' attention the limited effect of the US-led air campaign. Throughout the sample, the reports did not provide details about the type of munitions/bombs used by the US-led airpower to strike IS. American pilots were interviewed in one report, in the sample. On this

occasion, one of AJA's journalists reported from US Aircraft Carrier, Harry Truman in the Gulf. He allowed two US pilots to express their voices and show the contribution of their country to this conflict. The journalist referred to the role of the US warplanes in targeting IS energy resources in north Syria, saying: "The US air forces have launched air strikes and intensified their manoeuvres in the region as they are the main power in the war against IS. The US naval forces stress that the air strikes have led to undermining IS ability to carry out attacks and contributed to drying up its financial sources." Then, an American pilot was interviewed; he said: "We carry out operations inside the Gulf to demonstrate commitment to our partners in the fighting against IS. 25% of our operations seek to support our allies on the ground." The reporter commented: "The US air strikes contributed to drying up IS resources, but they are not the best option." Another pilot was interviewed. He said: "This aircraft carrier can confront IS, but it is obvious that we need support on the ground from the members of the coalition. We provide our local allies with important information that enables them to carry out attacks against IS." The reporter estimated: "The air strikes have a limited effect on the ground, which makes the war on IS a difficult mission. This situation shows that the coalition needs to be activated through real contributions by its members." He added: "The US air strikes on IS are painful but are not enough to win the battle. So, the fight against IS may need direct confrontations on the ground, but the US appears to be not enthusiastic about this option, at least at this stage" (AJA, 25 March 2016).

In another report that covered the killing of Mohammed Emwazi², by British-American air strikes in Al Raqqa, AJA quoted John Kerry as saying: "The terrorists associated with Daesh needs to know this: your days are numbered, and you will be defeated." Then the voiceover commented:

² Mohammed Emwazi, known as "Jihadi John," was identified as being a member of IS. He was believed to be the person seen in several videos produced by IS, showing beheadings.

“According to experts, the effect of this operation is symbolic since IS is still able to expand in the world despite the US-led campaign.” The report described Kerry’s response as “unrealistic” for it reduces the power of IS to one person (AJA, 13 November 2015).

So, in the above examples AJA framed the US-led efforts against IS critically. Similarly, other reports provided negative evaluations about the outcomes of the US-led coalition strikes against IS. One report revealed that AJA had access to IS records of oil revenues. The reporter commented: “Statistics showed an increase in the payments allocated to wells maintenance as a result of the US-led coalition strikes.” Nevertheless, he estimated: “More than 14 months into the US-led air campaign in Iraq and Syria, statistics show that the effects of the strikes are limited for IS has found alternative options to ensure the continuity of its oil production such as digging new oil wells or repairing the destroyed ones” (AJA, 14 December 2015). Moreover, one of AJA reporters commented: “Al Raqqa, the headquarter of IS in Syria, appears to be a safe place for IS. There are no ground forces that can attack the city. IS considers the US-led strikes as ineffective since its members are always able to avoid these attacks” (AJA, 23 November 2015). Another reporter estimated: “The US-led coalition has launched hundreds of air strikes against Manbij, yet, IS appears to be unaffected by the surrounding conditions. It is still able to concentrate in Al Raqqa and answer the needs of more than 200 000 inhabitants there, in spite of the cut of the supplies’ route that runs from Turkey” (AJA, 27 June 2016).

In these examples, no specific official or non-official voices were quoted to evaluate the effect of the US-led air campaign on IS fighting capacity. Negative evaluations were attributed to non-identified sources (experts) or statistics or provided by journalists. The use of imprecise language such as abstract entity (statistics) or non-specific sources enables journalists to background their voices, as they report information. IS at the same time was framed as an active agent that was able

to withstand the air strikes and answer the needs of people [not a source of human suffering]. As shown, the framing of the US-led air strikes was negative but not highly critical. AJA acknowledged that the “air strikes contribute to drying up IS resources, but they are not the best option,” and that they are “painful” but “are not enough to win the battle.” The reports also included negative lexical choices such as “limited” or “ineffective.” that reinforce this negative evaluation.

Another central point in the analysis is the highly distanced framing of military cooperation between the US and the Kurdish-led forces, particularly the SDF against IS. Like the US pilots, the US special operation forces in Syria were given voice in one report throughout the sample, and the reporter used a critical frame when contextualising the cooperation between these forces and the Kurdish armed groups. AJA broadcasted footage showing US soldiers standing next to their Kurdish allies, and the voiceover commented: “These exclusive images show US soldiers who assist the Kurdish People’s Protection Units in the fighting against IS to recapture Al Raqqa’s countryside.” An American soldier was interviewed; he said: “I came to support the Kurdish forces and the SDF; I believe that the areas which they control are the key to peace in the Middle East. I came to support them in the war against IS.” A Kurdish fighter was quoted as saying: “We came from the Al Jazira area to liberate North Al Raqqa from IS.” The voiceover added: “The deployment of US forces in the Kurdish areas is not a newly-occurred event, but it has been no longer hidden. The US has already established Rumilan airbase to the west of Tal Abyidh city. Additionally, the commander of the US Special Operations, Joseph Votel visited Kobane last week.” The report estimated:

Showing images of American soldiers in Syria operates within the interests of the Kurds and the Americans. The US Administration seeks to prove itself as a partner in Al Raqqa ground offensive and so in the victory when IS is driven out of the city, while the Kurdish

People's Protection Units aim at presenting themselves as a legitimate partner, although they have been designated as a terrorist organisation.

It concluded: "The images of the US soldiers have raised questions about the US policy. Circulating such images may indicate the end of the US support for the moderate Syrian opposition and the shift towards another partner" (AJA, 28 May 2016).

The framing of the US-Kurdish cooperation in Syria is metatextual as the reporter talks about images rather than just showing them. Genette defines metatextuality as "references of one text on another text" so it "unites a given text to another, of which it speaks" (1997, p. 4). By using a metatextual style, the journalist provided a distanced critical evaluation about the US policy towards its allies. As shown, AJA promoted the US and Kurdish voices, as they talk about their contributions to the war; however, the reporter brought to viewers' attention the designation of the Kurdish armed groups as terrorists and the inconsistent policy of the US in Syria.

The coverage of the military actions on the battlefield was striking in its focus on the description of both the SDF and IS perspectives on the fighting and the absence of the analysis seen above of US forces. Particularly in the representation of armed clashes between the US-backed SDF and IS, the journalists included opposing claims without providing information about the context, or evaluations from experts or the journalists themselves. That is to say, the framing of the events on the ground is episodic. Iyengar (1994) suggested that norms and standards within news organisations and news production favour episodic framing. This practice simplifies complex issues and represents them as isolated, without connecting them to political issues. Also, episodic framing better suits the constraints of the broadcast. For example, AJA reported:

The SDF said they have been advancing towards IS positions in the centre of Manbij, with intensive air cover from the US-led coalition warplane, and they have killed members of the organisation. In the meantime, IS said it has retaken control over 6 villages in Manbij's

countryside and it has killed soldiers from the SDF and destroyed their vehicles, according to IS news agency, Amaq (AJA, 4 July 2016).

Similarly, another report read:

The US-backed SDF have been advancing slowly towards the East of Manbij. Local sources reported that these forces recaptured IS-held positions in the north and the east of the city. But IS said that its members launched a counterattack against Awn Dadat village and killed soldiers from the SDF (AJA, 7 June 2016).

As shown, AJA promoted opposing claims, equally, which gives the impression of political balance although the information was not attributed to specific voices. Also, deaths on both sides were represented equally through aggregation. The reports did not include a precise number of the killed fighters. The reported deaths were not personalised. No specific details about their identities such as names or ages were reported.

This contrasted markedly with the reporting of the deaths of US personnel who were killed as they assisted the SDF, in the battlefield. On one occasion in the study sample, AJA referred to four US military advisors who were killed in a missile attack launched by IS in the north of Manbij. The voiceover reported: “In Manbij, the list of victims included 4 American military advisors who were targeted in a missile attack launched by IS, according to US media sources” (AJA, 21 June 2016). No military source was quoted to confirm the claim. The soldiers were personalised by referring to their nationality and rank; they were not reduced to numerical references. Interestingly, AJA used the term “victim”, which carries a positive value, representing the killed person as innocent [the Arabic equivalent term is ضحية]. This term is usually used to refer to non-combatants who suffer during conflicts. Such a term was not used by AJA when it portrayed the American forces’ military failings in the previous US-led wars. Even if this text included this term because it was reproducing a term used by the US media sources, AJA could be expected to distance itself as it

usually does when it uses qualifiers such as “so-called” before terms like “US war on terror” or “terrorism.” The use of the unqualified term “victim” is a striking case of how differently and more positively, US actors are represented than the SDF and of course IS fighters.

As shown above, AJA promoted IS as a powerful enemy who can carry out counterattacks, and who was “unaffected” by the air campaign, which requires the US to review its war strategy. This was not the case in the coverage of the war on Afghanistan where, according to Jaspersen and Kikhia (2003), AJA compared “the Taliban's antiquated arms with the modern military of the United States” presenting “a vivid image of a foregone conclusion that it was going to be a one-sided war that will end with the decimation of the Taliban” (p. 132).

A noteworthy point in AJA coverage of the US-SDF cooperation against IS is that on more than one occasion, the reports linked the US-backed SDF's activities to the Kurds' attempts to establish a self-governing zone in northern Syria. No official sources or experts were used to comment on this issue. Raising this question in several reports carries an ideological signification since it shows that AJA news discourse has been shaped by Qatar's regional concerns. The Qatari regime along with other Gulf countries as well as Turkey stand against the Syrian Kurdish autonomy. For Erdogan, the Kurdish-separatists in Turkey, as well as Syria, are terrorists. The Gulf countries led by Saudi Arabia also stand against the Syrian Kurdish move and described their attempt to establish democracy and federalism as “an attempt to split Syria” (Shaswar, 2016). Moreover, the progress of the SDF in north Syria would limit the expansion of the so-called moderate Syrian opposition groups that are close allies to Turkey and Qatar in these areas. In line with this view, AJA framed the US-backed SDF's actions against IS in terms of their struggle for independence, rather than showing them as benefactors or liberators that aimed at helping their people. In this

way, AJA can contribute to mobilising Arab public opinion against the SDF for it gives the impression that these forces took advantage of the war on IS to advance their interests.

For example, one report read:

IS has exploded the bridge, which links between the banks of the Euphrates to prevent the SDF from crossing the river, yet these forces managed to reach the western bank, using US vessels. It appears that the SDF will not stop until they take full control over Aleppo countryside and link Afrin to Kobane in the context of a project which seeks to create an enabling environment to realize their autonomous aspirations in the region” (AJA, 24 June 2016).

Similarly, another report read: “Backed by US-led coalition air cover in addition to intelligence support from the US, the so-called SDF, which is dominated by the Kurdish fighters, launched an offensive to recapture Manbij, one of the main IS’s headquarters in Syria.” The journalist defined the goal of the offensive, saying: “This operation aims at cutting off the IS supply route to Al Raqqa and undermining its military capabilities.” Then, he estimated: “If the Kurdish-led forces manage to recapture Manbij, this will secure geographical continuity between the Kurdish-held cities Afrin and Ain Al Arab” (AJA, 1 June 2016). In this context, one of AJA’s reporters introduced the group’s name -the SDF- as “a new label which allows the Kurdish forces to hide their ambitions for expansion beyond their self-governance areas and which enables them to receive the US military assistance that was once allocated to the Syrian opposition” (AJA, 15 October 2015). So, AJA framing is ideologically oriented since it emphasised that this armed group have a particular agenda which goes beyond destroying international terrorism. It should be highlighted that the SDF adopted the US war policy and did not target Al Assad’s forces, and this approach is not consistent with Qatar’s policies towards Syria.

Another key theme in this section is the representation of the interaction between the US and the Syrian opposition factions in the context of the war on IS.

As was the case in the coverage of the SDF's military actions in the field, AJA often relied on episodic frames when covering clashes between IS and the Syrian opposition factions. It relied on the journalists' factual claims. But it also used indirect quotes attributed to the actors involved. So, AJA promoted various sources that have different views which is a standard of professional reporting. However, episodic frames do not help the audiences make informed judgments about what they watch since the events are reported in simple language, without context, as shown below.

One report read: "The Syrian opposition factions have recaptured Dalha and Herjullah villages from IS yesterday. In this battle, the US-led coalition provided air support for the Syrian opposition forces, for the first time" (AJA, 22 November 2015). So, the reporter brought to our attention that the US-led coalition's support was not available before. Another report read: "With modest support from the US-led coalition warplanes as well as Turkish fighter jets, Syrian opposition factions have entered Jarabulus after short-lasting confrontations with IS" (AJA, 24 August 2016). In a third example, the voiceover referred to the progress of the opposition factions against IS despite the lack of the US support. It reported: "The village of Al Ghazal and Al Khirba, near the Turkish border, became under the control of Syrian opposition factions after fierce battles with IS. This progress has been made by the Syrian opposition despite the lack of the US-led coalition air support and the presence of Russian warplanes which targeted their positions" (AJA, 5 December 2015).

Also, one report read:

IS announced that it has arrested 8 members from the opposition factions, in Tulil Al Hissin village in the northern countryside of Aleppo, according to Amaq news agency. In the meantime, factions from the opposition announced their withdrawal from the villages of

Zitan, Al Khaldiya, and Barna in the western countryside, as they could not withstand the Russian-Syrian air strikes” (AJA, 10 April 2016).

Reflecting Qatar’s view, throughout the above texts, the reporters made lexical choices that referred to the limited military support provided to the Syrian opposition, unlike the SDF that were backed by US forces, vessels, weapons, and air cover. The opposition factions were reported to have been able to make gains despite the limited US military assistance and their failing in front of IS was justified. The finding of this positive framing supports an argument that AJA aligns with Qatar’s interests, in this case, that the Qatari regime supports the Syrian opposition factions in their struggle against IS as well as Al Assad regime.

The last point which this verbal analysis tackles is the framing of the US interaction with Russia in the context of the war on IS. After the military involvement of Russia in Syria, AJA emphasised the need for the White House to coordinate with the Kremlin to ensure the safety of the US coalition’s airmen. Official voices from both countries were quoted directly as expressing the US refusal to cooperate with Russia in the war against IS. One report read: “Russia has blamed the US for the lack of cooperation between the two sides in Syria.” Then, the Russian minister of defence, Lavrov was shown saying: “We are told they cannot send a delegation to Moscow and cannot receive a delegation in Washington either. It seems that our American friends are interested only in steps that could help avoid accidents in the skies.” The voiceover commented: “Observers have raised concerns about the possibility of inadvertent incidents in Syria, and this appears to be the Americans’ primary concern.” Then, Carter was quoted as saying:

Russia must act professionally in the skies over Syria and abide by basic safety procedures. We'll have another conversation with the Russians tomorrow on this subject. Those discussions are progressing. Nothing has been finalised. Even as we continue to disagree

on Syria policy, we should be able to at least agree on making sure our airmen are as safe as possible.

The voiceover commented: “It appears that the Americans have not yet developed a clear strategy to deal with the situation in Syria after the Russian intervention” (AJA, 14 October 2015). This final comment of the reporter involved a negative evaluation for the US conduct as it gives the impression that the US has been unable to control the situation on the ground. In another text, AJA reported: “The Americans accept to coordinate with Moscow to make sure that the plans of the US coalition in Syria will not be affected, but they refuse to cooperate with the Russians there” (AJA, 7 October 2015). A third report read: “Moscow showed its willingness to coordinate with the US-led coalition to recapture Al Raqqa, but the US refuses any joint military operations with the Russians because they support Al Assad regime” (AJA, 24 May 2016). Then, AJA reports reflected the divergence between the US and Russia and provided justification statements for the US refusal to cooperate with Russia in Syria

On one occasion, in the sample, AJA evoked the possibility of close cooperation between the rival interventions, but it referred to the US negative policy towards the Syrian opposition. When AJA reported about the recapture of Palmyra by the Syrian regime, the voiceover commented: “The representative of Syria to the UN, Bashar Al Jafari, has stressed his country has been ready to cooperate with the US in the context of the so-called international coalition against terrorism. The US Secretary of State hailed the recapture of Palmyra and said it was too early to evaluate the results of this operation.” The reporter questioned: “Will Washington continue to refuse Al Jafari’s offer?” and added: “The answer is no longer a definite No.” According to the report, “The US Secretary of State Kerry has visited Moscow recently, where he met with Russian officials in a cordial ambience.” The reporter estimated: “The recapture of Palmyra may operate within the interest of Al Assad and Moscow, but what should not be ignored is that the Syrian opposition

factions have always asked their international friends for assistance in the war against IS but to no avail” (AJA, 28 March 2016). This framing involves an ideological position since the possibility of cooperation among the US, Russia, and the Syrian regime is not framed in terms of the potential positive impacts of such cooperation on the progress of the war against IS. Rather, it is framed critically in terms of the inconsistency of the US policy towards Syria, and particularly the lack of western military support for the Syrian opposition factions in the fight against IS, which is one of Qatar’s reservations on the US war strategy (Sciutto, 2015).

In the light of the above discussion, it can be said that AJA’s coverage of the military aspect is consistent with the framing of the previously discussed political one for both emphasised the limited effect of the US-led air campaign and the inconsistency of the US policy on IS. The framing of the US-led military actions was not highly critical, and it reflected Qatar’s voice. AJA’s construed the legitimacy of the US-led intervention through promoting the role of the coalition in targeting IS positions and oil resources, but it showed that this military campaign was not doing enough. In their comments, AJA’s reporters evoked the need for more military involvement to degrade IS in Syria. The reporters raised the SDF’s connection to the YPG and their nationalistic ambitions in parallel with the war on IS. They also drew attention to the sufficient military support that the SDF have received from the US. Moreover, AJA showed that the Syrian opposition forces managed to make progress against IS in spite of the limited military support available to them. These evaluations were not confirmed by external sources. AJA reporting style relied on episodic framing when covering the armed clashes between the SDF or the opposition factions and IS. It promoted opposing claims made by the actors involved, including IS-affiliated sources. Overall, AJA adopted consistent patterns in terms of both the explicit evaluations and the textual features that accompany them. This reporting style in which audiences do not find different patterns is

expected since AJA and the like react to what happens in the political sphere. Throughout the study period, Qatar has not changed its policies on Syria. Then, the framing of the US-led military actions is consistent with Qatar's policies, which means that AJA aligns with Qatar in this crisis.

On the Visual plane:

In what follows, I show how visuals are related to the previously discussed verbal discourse, creating a coherent discourse across both planes. I show how the visuals focused on the precise bombing of IS energy resources and the intensive support for the SDF. Before proceeding into the visual analysis, it is noteworthy that AJA depended on local reporters in the coverage of the violent events inside the Syrian territories. So, in the news reports, these journalists used the visual materials which they filmed, but they also remediated images from the SDF media sources when they covered their military activities. Similarly, they used images from IS-Amaq news agency, or the Syrian opposition when they reported about their actions. That is to say, AJA reports included visuals from different sources.

The first point in this analysis is that AJA contributed to legitimising the US-led war on IS when it broadcast images that illustrated the use of military technology to precisely identify and target IS oil fields as well as trucks that conveyed oil from IS held-territories to different places inside and outside Syria. As shown in figures [1, 2] oil delivery trucks are destroyed, while the accompanying voiceover refers to the efforts deployed by the US coalition to dry up IS energy resources in Syria.



Figure 1 Precise bombing of IS oil trucks



Figure 2 IS oil convoy destroyed by US-led coalition strikes

Moreover, AJA broadcasted images from the US Aircraft Carrier Harry Truman in the Gulf. The US warplanes were filmed from different distances, and these various images dominated the whole report. While the voiceover referred to the power of the US aircraft carrier and its role in the war against IS, Arab viewers were invited to see American warplanes from a close distance, as if they were on the ship, so they could see things from the US side. Also, viewers could see precision munitions, which communicated the advanced military technology used by the US, being the leader of an international coalition against IS. This is a common strategy in wartime when reporting the in-group or ‘our’ military actions. Jaspersen and Kikhia (2003) and Samuel-Azran (2010)

showed how, during the US-led attacks on Afghanistan in 2001, CNN focused on the advanced military technology of the US airpower and showed the precise bombing of Taliban targets, including fuel convoys.

The US warplanes were shown taking off or flying in the skies. Moreover, AJA showed US pilots in their uniform while they were performing their duties. Two of them were interviewed and filmed from a medium distance. In figure [3] the pilot gazes at audiences while telling them about the mission of the US air forces against IS. This eye interaction between the pilot and viewers is helpful since it humanises him. Such images encourage viewers to distinguish between the US-led air campaign and Russia's air campaign in Syria and to consider the US-led role in Syria as legitimate, though the voiceover, as noted earlier, emphasised the limited effect of the strikes.



Figure 3 US pilot on the Aircraft carrier Harry Truman

As shown below [figure 4], on the US aircraft carrier, the warplanes are surrounded by professionals who are busy performing different maintenance tasks.



Figure 4 US Aircraft Carrier Harry Truman

In relation to the visuals of the US-led air strikes, in AJA reports, which portrayed these air strikes in north Syria, particularly in Al Hol, Manbij, Al Shaddadeh, and Jarabulus, viewers are invited to see panoramic views – wide long shots – in which neither the fighter jets nor their targets are clear. Arab audiences can see the smoke or the fumes which are resulted from the reported air strikes [figures 5,6]. The verbal texts which accompany both images link them to the US-led air support for the SDF in battles against IS. So, it is possible to say that such visual framing of air strikes gives the impression that these are sites where intense military actions take place. The absence of human agents in the scenes of air strikes, like the ones below, contributes to de-emphasising the responsibility of the US coalition in causing human losses. Of course, AJA reports have mentioned that the US-led air strikes have caused deaths in Syria, but such verbal references are not accompanied by visuals of casualties, as will be discussed later.



Figure 5 Smoke as a result of US-led air strikes



Figure 6 Panoramic view of US-led air strikes

Regarding the portrayal of the US special forces in Syria, these forces were shown on AJA's screen while they were exchanging talks with Kurdish soldiers cordially. In figures [7,8] audiences are invited to see two US soldiers, hugging each other. As shown below in figure [7], an American soldier is filmed from a medium frontal position. He told the audiences: "I came to support the Kurdish forces and SDF. I believe that the areas which they control are the key to peace in the Middle East. I came to support them in the war against IS."



Figure 7 An American soldier in Syria



Figure 8 US soldiers hug each other

The images [7, 8] show US soldiers as if they were in a peacekeeping mission. These images reflect the soldiers' humanity apart from their serious and hard mission and draw the viewers' attention away from the human suffering for which the US-led coalition is responsible during this war. This is in contrast to AJA coverage of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq where the US forces were portrayed consistently as persecutors (Samuel-Azran, 2010). The voiceover which accompanied the visuals above described these images as worthy since such images revealed and proved the presence of the US forces in the Kurdish areas. At the same time, the voiceover raised questions about the US inconsistent policy towards its local partners.

Furthermore, in this war, AJA did not foreground the vulnerability of the US forces. As I mentioned previously, throughout the sample of the study, one report revealed that four US military advisors who assisted the SDF in north Syria were killed by IS, but the images which

accompanied the voiceover showed material damage in Manbij. The report did not show images of US deaths. Thus, the visuals did not reflect the verbal text. This practice is unlike the coverage of the war in Iraq, where AJA showed videos of dead US soldiers, lying face up and interviews with five others captured by the Iraqi armed groups (Samuel-Azran, 2010) and in Afghanistan, where it revealed that a US spy plane was shot by Taliban (Jasperson and Kikhia, 2003).

Supporting the verbal discourse, the visuals portrayed the close military cooperation between the Kurdish-led forces and the US. The American assistance to the Kurdish-led forces was illustrated through visuals of military support provided to the SDF, such as the heavy weapons, armoured vehicles, and vessels, as shown below.



Figure 9 US military support for the SDF



Figure 10 The DSF transfer heavy weapons to the western bank of the Euphrates



Figure 11 The SDF cross the Euphrates by US vessels



Figure 12 The SDF's trainings in Syria

The SDF appeared in groups in most images, but several soldiers were given voice and personalised in a few reports, as shown in figure [13]. The soldier here is framed from a medium distance, in his uniform. He is activated; his gaze engages us, and his name and profession appear on the screen while he addresses Arab viewers. The soldier's gaze humanises him and may lead audiences to identifying with his anti-IS mission.



Figure 13 A member of the SDF



Figure 14 A member of the Syrian opposition

Like the SDF's member who appeared in figure [13], the Syrian opposition fighter, shown in figure [14] is framed from a medium distance, gazing at audiences. He told them about the opposition's actions which helped put a limit on IS expansion in Syria. In most of the visuals throughout the sample, the opposition factions are represented in groups as shown in figure [15]. Also, the visuals reflected the lack of US support for the Syrian opposition on the ground, as shown in figure [16].



Figure 15 Members of the Free Syrian Army



Figure 16 Syrian opposition factions reach the entrance of Jarablus

The visual representation of IS fighters accords them power. In most reports, they are portrayed as active agents, who have been able to carry out counterattacks and withstand the US-led war.

Throughout the sample, they were shown while they were holding their guns on the front line or moving in groups, but the goals that they targeted were not clear in the images. They did not wear a military uniform. AJA displayed images of IS military parade in north Syria. In such footages, viewers are invited to see trucks, which carry military hardware and/or IS members who hold the black Islamic State flags, moving along Al Raqqa streets while the voiceover reports the ability of IS to launch violent attacks and recruit members. The figures [17,18] below are examples of visuals which communicate IS military power.



Figure 17 IS military parade in north Syria



Figure 18 Vehicles loaded with IS members and weapons

Moreover, AJA reproduced images from Al Raqqa, IS headquarter, showing public institutions established by IS. The visuals below [19, 20, 21, 22], give the impression that the situation is stable in Al Raqqa and Manbij. People walk in streets. AJA did not refer to any manifestations of human suffering, that were attributed to IS's governance system, throughout the sample. Such a portrayal shows that IS is a powerful and organised religious community, and this might lead conservative

viewers to admire and welcome IS religious governance system (the Caliphate). The verbal texts which accompanied such images show that IS is strong enough to withstand the air strikes and evoke the need for ground forces to chase IS fighters. This verbal-visual framing is in contrast to how the Western media represented IS. For example, the US news media followed a typical reporting style that focused on IS's brutality. They also focused on IS members' lack of experience and training and emphasised the US military strength to confront the danger posed by this organisation (Colhoun, 2014; Zelizer, 2016). So, AJA news discourse reflects the Qatari reservations and supports the Saudi offer to send troops to Syria.



Figure 19 A view of Manbij city



Figure 20 IS-held city of Manbij



Figure 21 Shops open in IS-held city of Al Raqqa



Figure 22 Administrative departments established by IS in Al Raqqa

The last point in this analysis is the visual representation of losses on the side of IS, the Syrian opposition, or the SDF. Throughout the sample of study, no images of dead fighters from these groups are found. In relation to the territories which were recaptured from IS in Syria, such as Manbij, Al Hol, Al Shaddadi, and Jarabalus, these areas are shown after the withdrawal of IS fighters, with focus on material damage as shown in figure (23). No images of IS losses in terms of weapons, logistics, or deaths were shown throughout AJA reports, unlike RT's reports, as will be shown later.



Figure 23 Material damage in Al Shaddadi after the withdrawal of IS members

Thus, the visual framing of the military actions showed images of the local armed groups that fought against IS under the US-led coalition air cover but in ways that did not produce a narrative of violence. The objects which the military actors targeted were not displayed. They were not shown engaged in actual fighting. AJA showed the precise bombing of IS targets by the US-led coalition warplanes. That is to say, the US coalition was not framed as a military power that targeted non-combatants intentionally in Syria, in contrast to the coverage of the war on Afghanistan where, according to Jaspersen and Kikhia (2003), AJA framing of the military aspect concentrated on the question: “Why is the U.S. targeting civilians who have nothing to do with al Qaeda or bin Laden?” (p.127).

The humanitarian aspect of the US-led intervention

As I mentioned previously, in wartime, political actors seek to be represented by the media positively, in a way that suppresses their responsibility for human suffering and justifies their violent actions. So, they need to regulate how viewers see the sufferers and the persecutor. According to Butler, “to produce what will constitute the public sphere [...] it is necessary to control the way in which people see, how they hear, what they see. The constraints are not only on content — certain images of dead bodies in Iraq, for instance, are considered unacceptable for

public visual consumption — but on what ‘can’ be heard, read, seen, felt and known”, as cited in (Chouliaraki, 2005, p. 145).

AJA is known for its focus on human suffering in areas of conflicts. According to Jasperson and Kikhia (2003), “al Jazeera earned the reputation as one of the very few mediums ‘bearing witness’ to social and political injustice in the region” (p.128); they quoted Nic Gowing, a presenter on BBC, who maintained that the US bombed al Jazeera's offices in Kabul deliberately because "it was ‘bearing witness’ to events the U.S. would rather it did not see" (p.128). For el-Nawawy (2006), in the coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, AJA adopted what Wolfsfeld, Frosh, and Awabdy (2005) refer to as the ‘victims mode’ of conflict reporting, when civilian casualties and losses occur, in areas that lay within the reporter’s cultural worldview. In the coverage of these circumstances, the “weaker antagonists who have been victimised will talk about ‘massacres’ and ‘war crimes’” (Wolfsfeld et al., 2005, p. 404). This applies to AJA coverage of the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, where the reporters showed the wide scale of destruction and loss of civilian lives. It gave voice to the sufferers to demonise their persecutor, which raised questions about the US moral justifications of these military interventions. So, AJA coverage was different from CNN coverage in that CNN presented a clean or a sanitised image of the US-led military actions, with minimal civilian losses (el-Nawawy, 2006; Iskander and El-Nawawy, 2004; Jasperson and Kikhia, 2003). For example, in the Iraqi city of Falluja, AJA covered the death of 6000 civilians in US strikes, showing commitment to human rights. In response, US officials accused the AJA of being the main source of anti-Americanism and endangering the lives of the US soldiers (Samuel-Azran, 2010).

I highlight that unlike the previous US-led wars, AJA’s sponsor, Qatar, is part of the US-led coalition against IS in Syria, so one may question if AJA would adopt the highly critical

humanitarian discourse for which it is known when covering the humanitarian situation in Syria in the context of the US-led air campaign against IS. To put it differently, will AJA focus on images of casualties and allow the sufferers, particularly children and women, to express themselves and demonise the bomber?

On the Verbal plane

The analysis will examine how AJA reporters construct the role of the US-led coalition in inflicting human suffering in the context of the war against IS in Syria. This includes how the voices of the military sources and the civilians are incorporated and how they are portrayed in terms of action and agency, to explicate the political or moral implications that are involved in this framing.

The analysis begins with the representation of the identity of the US-led coalition forces as bombers. When covering the humanitarian situation in the areas where the coalition warplanes launched air strikes, AJA adopted a reporting style which backgrounds the agency of the coalition forces as persecutors. Their identity as bombers was constructed in non-human terms throughout the sample.

AJA's reporters used metonymy, nominalisation and passive constructions to refer to the coalition forces. For example: "The SDF backed by foreign forces have launched an offensive to recapture Manbij from IS. Over 300 civilians were killed during this battle, in US-led coalition air strikes" (AJA, 8 August 2016). In this example, the reporter used a passive structure, putting the object (civilians) in subject position and used metonymy to refer to the agent. Also, the reporter used a preposition that helps blur the responsibility of the US-led coalition for human suffering, as civilians were reported to have been killed during clashes and in [not by] US-led air strikes against IS. This language choice gives the impression that these people were killed unintentionally. In this

way, AJA helps mitigate the involvement of US-led coalition in inflicting human suffering in Syria.

This reporting style was common. Another report read: “US-led aerial bombardment, as well as ground battles, resulted in more than 400 civilian deaths while dozens were injured. Half of the deaths were killed in a US-led air strike on Manbij” (AJA, 12 August 2016). In this text, the reporter used nominalisation and passive voice to background the identity of the involved forces. One text stood in contrast as AJA used the strong language of “massacre” while reporting about civilian deaths caused by the US-led coalition. The voiceover reported: “The death toll has reached more than 450, of whom 220 were killed as a result of the US-led coalition’s air strikes. The biggest massacre was in Tukhar Kabir village where more than 200 civilians were killed” (AJA, 11 August 2016). This was the only occasion throughout the sample when AJA used the negative term “massacre.”

It is noticeable that AJA referred to the sufferers’ identity as “civilians” which is a collective reference, that demilitarises these sufferers and emphasises their status as illegitimate targets in this conflict. However, the sufferers (deaths, injuries) in the abovementioned examples were dehumanised since they were aggregated to a form of numbers (450, 220). They were represented as a homogenous group, with no reference to their names or specific personal identities (such as age and gender); these specifications if added would help generate more sympathy towards them as humans. The above-mentioned verbal references to deaths were not supported by visuals. It is noteworthy that AJA’s framing of civilian casualties resulting from the US-led coalition’s airstrikes was less critical than the representation of deaths caused by Russia in Syria. That is to say, the casualties resulting from Russian air strikes were personalised and visualised. So, viewers

can find information about the sufferers' identities, such as their names, gender, ages, origins. [the coverage of Russia's role in Syria will be discussed later].

AJA mentioned that children and women were killed in US-led air strikes only on one occasion, throughout the sample. The voiceover reported: "More than 30 civilians, including children and women, were reported to have been killed in US-led air strikes on the towns of Al Ghandora and Rabita in Manbij." The voiceover added:

IS-affiliated Amaq news agency has broadcast images showing the results of the strikes, but AJA refrains from displaying such images fully for they are horrific. The US central command announced it opened an investigation in relation to reports about victims targeted by an air strike near Manbij, but it has not received any confirmations in this regard yet (AJA, 29 July 2016).

In this text, AJA referred to the sufferers' specific identities as women and children and used a lexical choice that reflected their vulnerability, being "civilian victims." This contextualization contributes to humanising the sufferers and helps raise the moral demand to take actions to alleviate the suffering of the Syrians. Nonetheless, the report brought to viewers' attention that the US reacted responsibly and opened an investigation concerning this event. This involves a classic move to soften responsibility for deaths – it opens up the possibility that there might be a reasonable explanation (even if there is no evidence for that possibility). Furthermore, the voiceover reported that AJA chose not to remediate Amaq's images which show the results of US bombing for reasons that have something to do with public decency. However, it is noteworthy that AJ, on both its Arabic and English channels, broadcast reports showing horrific images of deaths who were reported to have been killed by chemical weapons used by Al Assad regime. AJ's journalists warned audiences that such reports contained distressing images. These reports

included, for example, images of dead people or children who were stripped off and who struggled for breath in hospitals (AJ, 2016).

Another event which is reported in a way that softens the responsibility of the US-led coalition for human suffering is the death of civilians in US-led coalition air strikes on Manbij, where AJA reported:

A few days ago, the US-led coalition warplanes killed dozens of civilians in Tukhar. According to local sources, civilian casualties occurred because the SDF had intentionally provided the US-led coalition with misleading information about IS positions, with the aim to get rid of the Arab population in the village; however, the SDF denied such accusations and said that IS used civilians as human shields (AJA, 23 July 2016).

In this example, although the first sentence established a causal link between the US-led coalition and the death of civilians, the next sentence provided an explanation that helps relieve the coalition of such a moral responsibility. On the one hand, the SDF was blamed, by locals, for causing this death toll intentionally after providing misleading information about IS positions. On the other hand, IS was accused by the SDF of using civilians as human shields. AJA showed evidence of balance as it incorporated conflicting truth claims; in the light of these claims, the US-led coalition was not held responsible for intentionally killing civilians. The report did not include civilian testimonies which blamed IS, the SDF or the coalition forces for the reported deaths. Also, no images of deaths were shown in the report.

In contrast to its typical reporting style that shows commitment to human rights and focuses on sufferers' voices in conflict zones, AJA did not give the civilians in the areas where the US-led coalition operated much space to show their suffering and demonise the bomber. Refugees from these areas were interviewed in two reports throughout the sample. In one of these reports, the voiceover commented: "Most residents of Al Shaddadi, who are estimated at 40,000 people, have

fled the town as the US-led coalition warplanes have begun to target the city; the displaced people wish to return to their homes safely after the end of the military operations.” Then, a young man was interviewed; he said: “People fled to Thahara and Rabia” (AJA, 10 March 2016).

In the other report, the voiceover commented: “According to local sources in Manbij, the humanitarian situation has been aggravated due to the ongoing clashes as well as the siege imposed on the city by the SDF.” Then, an old man addressed the viewers saying: “The situation is miserable, people suffer from hunger and fear” (AJA, 29 July 2016). These sufferers complain about the situation in general; what they say can be said about the humanitarian situation in other places such as Yemen or Iraq. They did not talk about the particularity of their suffering, and they did not refer to their persecutor. Also, the interviewees are unknown; the reports did not tell anything about their personal characteristics. As the sufferers have not blamed the US coalition or its allies for their misfortune, this limits viewers’ identification with their suffering. Also, such a portrayal does not suggest any way of engagement with the reported misfortune. Generally, it is safe to say that, throughout AJA reports, the suffering of civilians in the context of the US-led war was addressed but consistently softened.

Beside causalities, a similar textual strategy was apparent in the way AJA showed the material damage resulting from the US-led coalition air strikes which paved the way for the SDF to progress in north Syria. The reporting of material damage recurred in many news texts in the sample. As shown in the following examples, AJA used nominalisation in the subject position which backgrounds the identity of the aggressor. It reported: “The US aerial bombings caused huge material damage, resulting in the destruction of 7 schools, 9 mosques, 3 central hospitals, bakeries as well as most of the bridges in the city” (AJA, 12 August 2016). Another report read: “The living conditions of about 100,000 people in Manbij is becoming increasingly difficult after the closure

of bakeries due to the US-led coalition air strikes” (AJA, 24 June 2016). In these texts, AJA established a causal link between the damage caused to civilian infrastructure and US-led air power, but it used nominalisation to background the bomber’s agency.

Throughout the sample, the Syrian opposition forces were not blamed for human suffering when AJA communicated their military actions against IS, and no civilian voices were given access to express their suffering. In terms of material damage, AJA reported that the damage occurred in IS-held positions. One journalist took the position of an eyewitness, reporting: “We entered some villages which were recaptured by the opposition factions from IS, and we saw IS positions that got destroyed as a result of the coalition air strikes. IS left mines everywhere, and the inhabitants are waiting for the opposition factions to remove them” (AJA, 9 June 2016).

In this text, the destroyed areas were specified as IS-held positions. Unlike the SDF, that were reported to have provided the US coalition with misleading information, and they were accused of causing civilian deaths, the Syrian opposition factions were represented as benefactors who help the displaced return safely to their homes. Similarly, one report read: “Tens of civilians have started to return to Jarabulus after the opposition factions had recaptured the city. Locals said preparations have started to receive the refugees who wish to return from Turkey” (AJA, 27 August 2016). Then, the US-backed Syrian factions which are allies of Qatar were not blamed for human suffering in the course of the war on IS, as far as the sample provides evidence for.

Thus, in contrast to AJA’s longstanding discourse of demanding accountability for human suffering and its focus on identifiable victims, who were given space to tell their stories in the coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, this news channel adopted a softer tone vis-à-vis the US-led coalition in Syria. The bomber is dehumanised through the use of metonymy or nominalisation. In many reports, AJA used the passive voice, so the subject [the bomber] was

delayed. The sufferers were represented through collective references in most stories: even those who were interviewed and individualised did not hold the coalition accountable for their suffering. The soft tone towards the US-led intervention can also be noticed in the way the human suffering was visualised as will be discussed below.

On the visual plane

Throughout the sample, when AJA reported about civilian deaths resulting from the US-led coalition air strikes, these verbal references lacked the power of pictorial presence. This is to say the reports did not show images of dead people. According to Zelizer (2005), the political and/or cultural context in which news organisations operate determines how they deal with images of deaths. She recalls:

It's perfectly acceptable, if not mundane, to show piles of skulls in Rwanda or a skeletal and swollen-bellied African baby on the verge of death. . . . Except last year, when the bombs were crashing down on Iraq and houses were flattened, their inhabitants incinerated, the very same networks and newspapers [in the US] that proclaimed their high moral ground and concern for reader sensibilities refrained from running pictures of the civilian casualties (Zelizer, 2005, p. 10).

This argument can be applied to AJA framing of the human suffering inflicted by the US-led coalition, which includes Qatar, in Syria.

In contrast to its common reporting style in conflict areas, AJA did not show deaths when it reported, for example, that the US-led coalition warplanes had killed dozens of civilians in Tukhar village. The accompanying images showed a group of men digging in the rubble, without specifying whether they were digging bodies out or searching for possessions. As shown in figure [24] men are filmed from a long distance, and most of them are filmed with their backs to the camera. So, they are passive, as they do not have eye interaction with Arab viewers. This limits

viewers' engagement with their suffering. However, in the footage, there are some indications of human suffering, such as images of blood drops on a mattress [figure 25]. Zelizer (2005) maintains that by hiding images of deaths in wartime, news organizations can obscure “the more problematic finality of death itself. No surprise, then, that images are used in the news with varying degrees of detail” about what is reported (p. 14).



Figure 24 Men dig through rubble in Nawaja village



Figure 25 Blood on a mattress

As mentioned above, the verbal texts which anchored these images reported that the bombardment of residential areas occurred because the SDF had intentionally provided the US-led coalition with misleading information about IS positions in the village to get rid of the Arab population, according to local sources. This justification contributes to relieve the US-led coalition of the responsibility for killing civilians intentionally or carelessly.

Moreover, when the voiceover reported about “a massacre” in which the US-led coalition air strikes killed about 200 civilians in Manbij, the images which appeared on the screen have nothing to do with these verbal references. The report did not include visuals of deaths or injuries. This contrasts with AJA’s coverage of the US-led war in Afghanistan. For example, when AJA reported that 200 Afghans had been killed in US-led air strikes, this channel broadcast scenes “from the village of Ismarzi where 200 of its 1500 inhabitants died. The dead had to be interred in mass graves and the remaining inhabitants had to leave and seek shelter because no structure remained standing in the village” (Jasperson and Kikhia, 2003, p. 128).

As discussed previously on one occasion AJA has given an excuse for choosing not to show deaths, as a practice of decency and good taste censorship. In parallel with the voiceover, audiences are invited to see the material damage resulting from the bombing, such as the image shown below [figure 26]. However, as mentioned above, AJA showed shocking images from Syria, when Al Assad has been accused of using chemical weapons against his people.



Figure 26 Burning truck as a result of US-led air strikes

Moreover, throughout the sample, AJA did not broadcast images of people who lamented the loss of their family members to support the verbal texts that refer to the responsibility of the US-led coalition for killing civilians. This softened framing is in contrast to AJA coverage of the war in Afghanistan where, according to Jasperson and Kikhia (2003),

Some of the most disturbing videos of the campaign were those that specifically dealt with the personal lives of Afghans that lost loved ones (...) One such image was presented of an Afghani who had lost fifteen members of his family in a bombed building in Kabul... Video footage showing the man searching for his relatives in the rubble was enough to make viewers empathize with his pain” (p.128).

A news report included images of injuries that were reported to have occurred as a result of clashes between IS and the SDF (not in air strikes). Also, it showed men carrying a dead body, and the voiceover mentioned that IS, and the SDF exchanged accusations about the responsibility for the casualties. In figures [27, 28], the injured do not look at the camera. In figure [29] audiences do not see any part of the body of the dead person. They do not know anything about the identity of these casualties. This portrayal tends to dehumanise them and again distance viewers.



Figure 27 Injured man in north Syria



Figure 28 Casualties in confrontations between IS and the SDF



Figure 29 A civilian killed in confrontations in north Syria

As mentioned earlier, the Syrian opposition factions were not blamed for inflicting human suffering, according to the sample.

Another important point in the visual analysis is the portrayal of the displaced people: when AJA represented these sufferers, they were portrayed in groups. That is to say, their personal and individual identities were assimilated into a collective one as shown in figures [30,31,32]. In figure [30], the sufferers are filmed with their back to the camera as if they are not aware of being filmed. In some images like figure [31] they are filmed frontally, but there is no zoom on their faces. Also, the images [30,31,32] do not show active interaction among the sufferers themselves or the surrounding environment. So, although they are visible on the screen, these sufferers lack the appellative power to communicate their misfortune.



Figure 30 Displaced people in Syria



Figure 31 People flee their villages in Manbij



Figure 32 Panoramic view of internally displaced persons in Syria

As I mentioned previously, only in two reports, sufferers were interviewed. They are filmed from a medium distance as shown in figures [33, 34]. In their testimonies, these people talk about difficult living conditions in Syria in general.



Figure 33 A refugee from Al Shaddadi



Figure 34 A refugee from Manbij

Also, AJA broadcast images showing streets in Manbij as well as other places empty, after their inhabitants had to flee, as shown below in figures [35,36].



Figure 35 Empty streets in Al Shaddadi



Figure 36 Empty areas in Manbij

Furthermore, throughout the reports, viewers can see images of destruction and material losses in different places.



Figure 37 Material damage as a result of US-led air strikes in Northern Syria



Figure 38 Material destruction caused by US-led coalition air strikes in Manbij

When AJA reported that the US bombardment hit civilian infrastructure, including 7 schools, 9 mosques, 3 central hospitals, and bakeries, the accompanying images did not show destroyed hospitals, schools, or mosques. So, the surveyed losses lacked the power of pictorial presence. Again, this contrasts with its reporting from Afghanistan where “Al Jazeera's footage showed the impact of U.S. bombing on mosques. The footage depicted destroyed mosques and pictures of torn Qurans laying amidst the rubble.” Also, AJA “aired video footage of the destruction of radio transmitters' antennas, burning Red Cross depots' housing grain and other food supplies, as well as many dead and wounded civilians” (Jasperson and Kikhia, 2003, p. 127).

Thus, the sample provides evidence that in the visual framing of the humanitarian aspect of the US-led war in Syria, AJA exercised the power of excluding imagery of casualties as well as material losses in medical centres, or religious places that were hit by the US-led air strikes. The

taking sides, in line with Qatar policy, connects to the way AJA combined the verbal and visual elements to introduce the identity of the sufferers and their persecutors to the public. On the one hand, the bomber is consistently represented in non-human terms such as metonymic expressions, nominalisation. On the other hand, the sufferers are dehumanised and reduced to numbers. Generally, the sufferers lacked the appellative power. This may limit the potential for emotional engagement with the suffering of the Syrians and the denunciatory feeling against the bomber. Like the deaths, the sufferings of families, particularly, the widowed and orphans were concealed according to the sample. AJA did not take the audiences to homes, hospitals, or shelters where sufferers may tell their stories and blame the US-led coalition for their calamity. Finally, I would like to mention that this research is not intended primarily to compare AJA's framing of the US-led war in Syria with its coverage of the previous US-led wars, but I used Jaspersen and Kikhia's study on AJA's coverage of the US-led war on Afganstan to show evidence of AJA dependence on its government. Due to Qatar's involvement in the US-led coalition against IS, the US-led intervention in Syria was represented, by this channel, less critically than the US-led war against Al Qaeda and Taliban that was portrayed as a war against Muslims.

6.2 The representation of Russia's military intervention in Syria

It was mentioned in the background of this study that when Russia declared war on IS in cooperation with the Syrian regime, Qatar was among the countries that criticised the Russian strikes on Syria. In what follows, I examine how AJA covered Russia's military intervention in the light of Qatar's policy.

The governance aspect of the Russian intervention

In this section, I discuss how AJA represented local and international support for the Kremlin's intervention in Syria. So, the analysis will look at which voices are quoted from Russia, and how the Russian official claims are incorporated in relation to other sources and in relation to journalists' voices. It shows how the international voices that support the Russian intervention are incorporated, how those which criticise it are textured, and what messages are promoted through the news texts.

When representing the Russian stance, AJA quoted the voices of the Russian President, Putin, and the minister of foreign affairs, Lavrov. The reports referred to consensus among the Russian official institutions on intervention in Syria. However, in all reports that tackled the Russian policy throughout the sample, the voices of the Kremlin officials and their Syrian allies were followed by critical messages which evaluated the Russian cooperation with the Syrian regime in the name of the war on IS negatively or contested the Kremlin's claims. That is to say, AJA followed a typical ordering of voices when structuring the news texts and incorporating Russian and Syrian sources in relation to other sources. It is noteworthy that this is same reporting strategy which AJA used to promote dissent in the US regarding the White House war policy; I showed previously how the voices of the White House officials were followed by dissenting local voices.

In the following examples, the way in which the Russian and Syrian voices are ordered in relation to other voices in the news texts gives the impression that there is an ‘antagonist–protagonist’ structuring which effectively sets the out-group -Russia and the Syrian government- versus the in-group- politicians from around the world.

One of AJA reports read: “President Putin obtained the parliament’s approval to use of military power abroad in response to a request by the Syrian President for urgent support. Then, Russia launched air strikes in Syria. The Russians said they targeted eight IS-held positions with twenty air strikes.” Putin was shown saying: “We will not become mired in the Syrian conflict. This military operation is limited in time. The Russian Air Force will help Al Assad's army in the war against the terrorist organisations. There will be no boots on the ground.” The voiceover continued: “Russian officials say the strikes are intended to support the Syrian president against IS. Kerry warned that the fight against IS should not be confused with support for the Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad.” Then, Kerry was shown saying:

We have also made clear that we would have grave concerns should Russia strike areas where ISIL and al Qaeda affiliated targets are not operating. Strikes of that kind would question Russia's real intentions-fighting ISIL or protecting the Assad regime. Most countries are aware that IS will not be defeated as long as Al Assad remains the President of Syria.

The voiceover added: “Like the Americans, the French and the British appear to have doubts about the true intentions of the Russian move” (AJA, 1 October 2015). In this contextualisation, Kerry’s statement was framed as a warning which involves a negative response from a powerful or authoritative person. AJA’s reporting style shows balanced coverage since the reporter promotes the voices of the superpowers equally. This framing portrays Russia as ‘other’ and reinforces the position of the US whose view was reported to have been shared by other Western countries.

In another news text, the voiceover reported: “Russia called for the formation of a broad international coalition under the auspice of the UN to fight against IS and said this effort should be accompanied by a political process that ensures the survival of Al Assad regime in Syria.” Then, Lavrov was shown saying: “We support Dimestora’s efforts, and we will support a political process that involves representatives from all parties. There is a need for a comprehensive counterterrorism plan which involves the USA, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, the UAE, Jordan and the EU.” The voiceover commented: “The Americans replied that the US-led coalition is already active, and there is no need for the Russian suggestion.” Kerry was shown saying: “If Russia’s recent actions and those now ongoing reflect a genuine commitment to defeat that organisation, then we are prepared to welcome those efforts;” he added: "But we must not and will not be confused in our fight against ISIL with support for Assad." After that, the Syrian minister of foreign affairs, Walid Al Mua’lim was quoted as saying: “Those who seek to encounter terrorism need to coordinate with the Syrian government.” His voice was followed by the Qatari voice. The minister of foreign affairs of Qatar commented: “We express our concerns and condemnation for this unjustifiable action. We invite the countries which intervene militarily in Syria to take the side of the Syrian people against the regime which has committed more crimes than the terrorist organisations” (AJA, 3 October 2015).

The structuring of voices in this text sets the in-group [the US and Qatar] versus the out-group [Russia and the Syrian regime]. AJA shows that Qatar and the US hold a similar stance in Syria and reports precisely their shared critical views regarding Russia’s cooperation with the Syrian regime.

Both examples follow the same ordering of voices in which the Russian officials were quoted in the first part of the report and the US officials in the following part. In this contextualisation, the

Russian and Syrian officials were framed critically by others, inviting Arab audience to see them as part of a 'them' category rather than 'us.'

This pattern was repeated in other reporting on Russian actions involving other countries. In particular, the critical Saudi stance towards the Russian move was promoted. AJA reported: "Saudi officials have expressed concerns about the Russian military operations in Syria and have insisted on the departure of Al Assad." The Saudi foreign minister was shown saying: "We will continue to support the Syrian opposition." Then, Lavrov said: "We are required to increase military and intelligence cooperation." The voiceover commented: "This diplomatic visit has taken place while Russia has intensified its strikes against the opposition-held areas." A political expert was also quoted in the report, giving further credence to the Saudi view: "The Russian move aims to change the situation in favour of the Syrian regime. The Russian strikes increased when the Syrian army and its allies from Hezbollah and Iran resumed their military actions. But it is not clear if Russia will succeed in that effort" (AJA, 12 October 2015). The quoted voices raised concerns about Russia's role in the Syrian internal conflict while the reporter stated clearly that the Russian strikes targeted the opposition factions.

Also, indirectly quoted voices were reported to promote dissent for Russian-Syrian cooperation. The voice of the Syrian opposition was incorporated along with international actors in criticising Russia's intervention upon the request of the Syrian regime. AJA reported: "Moscow says it has destroyed IS infrastructure and supply routes. Russian officers have reported that hundreds of IS fighters fled their territories, trying to return to Europe." Then the voiceover added: "But, the British minister of defence highlighted that only one in 20 Russian air strikes in Syria targeted IS. The British Prime Minister has considered the air strikes as a terrible mistake since they have supported what he described a criminal regime, asserting that such strikes hit areas where IS targets

were not operating.” The voiceover continued: “The opposition factions affirmed that their positions were targeted by Russian strikes” (AJA, 4 October 2015).

Throughout the previous examples, a wide coalition is implied as AJA promoted a negative opinion climate about Russia’s role in Syria. The US, the UK, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the opposition factions criticised Russia’s cooperation with the Syrian regime, so it can be said that a commonsense position is constructed where everyone who is not on the regime and its allies’ side agrees. In this way, AJA may help unintentionally reinforce the US position as a global power and to reproduce a US-dominated worldview, inviting audiences to align with that world order which has been destabilised after the Russian involvement in Syria and other crises around the world. According to Weimann and Winn (1994), the media report stories about terrorism in a way that reproduces power relations in their societies and maintains the existing world order. The analysis of AJA’s reporting of Syria supports this critique.

Dissent was also represented in some reports in the sample, through metonymy and nominalisation to communicate international criticism and reinforce the established political blocs. For example, AJA reported: “The Russian President visited the Elysee as tensions between his country and France have flared, due to Russia’s decision to bombard Syria and accusations by Paris that this intervention is aimed at strengthening Al Assad regime only” (AJA, 2 October 2015). In this text, Russia was reported to have bombed Syria not IS. This framing gives the impression that Russia has led war against the Syrian people not IS targets. Moreover, unlike the previous examples where AJA quoted certain officials, allowing them to frame the debate, in the above example, the reporter used metonymy and nominalisation, but no official source was quoted as directing accusations at Russia. As mentioned previously, nominalisation enables reporters to avoid agency and time when reporting information for there is no verb that can communicate the time of the event; also,

nominalisation makes the news language imprecise and turns people's talk into objects and so beyond questioning. In the next example, the reporter also used metonymy and nominalisation to refer to Western reservations towards the Russian military involvement in Syria. According to the report: "Paris accepts the need to cooperate with Moscow on three conditions: Bombing IS and al Qaeda affiliated targets exclusively, ensuring the safety of civilians, and launching a political process that leads to the removal of Al Assad." However, the journalist provided her evaluation at the end of the text, accusing the Russian forces openly of having intervened in Syria to ensure the survival of Al Assad regime primarily rather than fighting IS. She says: "The third condition cannot be attained since the Russian army have already moved to ensure the survival of Al Assad regime above all" (AJA, 13 October 2015). So, the journalist chose to add a comment that reflected the voice of the ruling elites in Qatar.

A clear pattern emerges that AJA communicated critical responses towards Russia and Syria. That picture is reinforced by the absence, in these examples, and throughout the sample, of quotations from supportive voices like Iran or Hezbollah. To delegitimise the role of Russia, the voice of civilians and their suffering in Syria were instead employed as a political force to raise the moral demand to stop the Russian action, and this is part of the strong humanitarian discourse for which AJA is known when reporting conflicts. In one of the reports, a Syrian activist was filmed while he was addressing a crowd of people who participated in a protest against Russia's military intervention. The activist who called for fighting against Russia said: "I will carry my soul in my hand and throw it in the valleys of death. It is either a life that makes a friend happy or a death that makes Russia angry." Then the voiceover commented: "This is the response of the residents of Ma'arat al-Nu'man towards the strikes launched on their city by Russian warplanes. The residents organised a demonstration to condemn the crimes committed by the so-called 'new killers.' The

demonstrators have emphasised the war on IS is a pretext to kill their children” (AJA, 2 November 2015). In this text, the term “residents,” as a collective reference, implies that all the people in Ma'arat al-Nu'man stand against Russia’s military intervention. So, the reporter used imprecise language and spoke for all the residents, rather than showing different views from the Syrian society. The exclusion of supportive voices in this example and throughout the sample carries an ideological signification. By suppressing these voices, AJA helps reinforce the stance of Qatar and its allies towards the Russian intervention and justify their concerns about the motivations of Russia, in Syria. The reported demonstration is framed as a reaction against Russia’s military campaign. The reporter made lexical choices that carry negative values such as “to condemn,” “crimes”; this framing involves a discourse of denunciation which portrays Russia as a persecutor. He distanced himself from the term “new killers.” The voice of civilians is reported non-specifically to frame the Russian war as a ‘pretext’ to kill Syrian children. This contextualisation puts Russia in the position of a criminal, and it mobilises Arab public opinion against it particularly when audiences hear that Russia has been accused of killing children in the name of the war on IS. Moreover, AJA chose to promote protests organised by people in different countries against the Russian actions in Syria, as the voiceover reported: “The London-based Syria Solidarity Campaign organised a protest in front of the Russian embassy. The protesters condemned the bombing of a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders, calling on the UN to put an end to the suffering of civilians in Aleppo. In the capital of the Netherlands, dozens gathered in front of the Russian embassy in solidarity with Aleppo which has been targeted by Russian as well as Syrian warplanes. In Istanbul, Turkish and Syrian people participated in a sit-in, protesting against the massacres which are committed against the innocent people in Syria and the silence of the international community towards such massacres” (AJA, 13 April 2016). The text includes lexical choices that

hold Russia accountable for human suffering in Syria, and it makes the Russian intervention morally questionable. The references to attacks on a hospital which has nothing to do with IS targets as well as massacres against “innocent” civilians encourage Arab audiences to identify with the Syrian people and identify with the protesters themselves, who were reported to have condemned and stood against the military actions led by Russia and its allies in Syria. Then, AJA invites audiences to take a position against Russia and its allies (through the discourse of denunciation which establishes clearly the identity of aggressors and victims). It is noteworthy that there is no Russian response cited in the report. So, in contrast to the reports that include Russian claims, the civilians’ claims are not followed by Russian counterclaims. This reporting style recurred in many reports in the sample. The multiplicity of place, as the report refers to mass protests in different countries, reflects an international opinion climate that rejects Russia’s intervention in Syria.

So, in the light of the above mentioned, it is clear that AJA’s reporters used official and non-official voices as well as metonymy and nominalisation to communicate a climate of dissatisfaction over Russia’s policies. It emphasised that the war on IS is a pretext under which the Russian forces attacked Syria to ensure the survival of Al Assad above all. It can be said that this portrayal is in line with international coverage (outside Russian or its allied media).

Comparing AJA framing of the governance aspects in relation to the rival interventions, the analysis showed that AJA reflected internal dissent in the US over Obama’s counterterrorism policies in Syria. It promoted voices that referred to the inadequacy of the US war strategy and called for a more active role against Al Assad and his allies as well as IS. Nominalisation and metonymical expressions were used to communicate disagreements between the US and its Arab and Western partners over the war policy. The voice of civilians was not used throughout the

sample to raise the demand to stop the US-led war. In the portrayal of the Russian intervention, the claims made by Russian or Syrian officials were followed by voices that criticised Russia's move in Syria. Nominalisation and metonymy were also used in this meaning-making process. The reporters made negative lexical choices when representing the Russian role in Syria. AJA used the voice of civilians to frame the Russian actions in terms of human suffering. So, whereas AJA discourse raises the need for the US-led coalition to do more to encounter IS, it evokes the need for an action to stop Russia's "crimes" in Syria. This discourse, which operates within the boundaries of Qatar's policy, contributes to mobilising Arab viewers against Russia since it gives the impression that this superpower waged a war on the Syrian people.

The military aspect of the Russian intervention

In what follows, I discuss how AJA used verbal and visual elements to construct the Russian and Syrian military roles in the light of the Kremlin's claim that its military campaign targets IS and Qatar's critical stance towards this move.

On the verbal plane

In this section, I examine how AJA portrays the Russian air campaign in Syria and reports the anti-IS operations that are conducted by Syrian governmental forces, backed by Russia. So, the analysis covers how the Russian and Syrian troops are represented in terms of actions and agency and how their voices are incorporated in relation to other sources or in relation to the journalists' voices. It explores whether non-official voices are used to evaluate the role of the military actors involved and whether the military dimension is reported differently to the negatively evaluated political aspect.

The analysis begins with the framing of the Russian air campaign. AJA framed the military power used by Russia, in a way that raises questions about the legitimacy of that campaign.

In this meaning-making process, the Russian claims are followed by counterclaims, attributed to rival military sources, or non-official sources, or factual claims provided by AJA's reporters, deemphasising Russia's role in the war against IS. Moreover, AJA emphasised the use of internationally prohibited bombs by the Russian forces in Syria and framed their military actions in terms of human suffering.

For example, a Russian officer was shown, saying: "We have accomplished all the combat missions assigned to us, and we have not targeted any civilian objects." Then, the voiceover commented: "Sources from the Syrian opposition factions revealed the air strikes hit areas far away from IS positions and have resulted in civilian deaths, including women and children." It added a nominalisation: "Indications show that Russia has intervened in Syria for different reasons and that its military operations, which concentrate currently in the North and West of Syria, very far from IS-held positions, may become part of more comprehensive military operations with long term goals" (AJA, 8 October 2015). Like the framing of the governance aspect, in this text the structuring of voices invites viewers to see the Russian forces as part of a 'them' category rather than an 'us': the Russians "said" they targeted IS while the Syrian oppositions "revealed" the complicity of Russia in targeting areas where IS fighters did not operate. The reporter used nominalisation to add information that supports the claims made by the opposition factions without that support having to be made explicit.

Similarly, in another report, the spokesperson of the Russian ministry of defence Igor Konashenkov was shown saying: "I would like to highlight that we have not targeted civilian infrastructure," but immediately the reporter said: "But images circulated by Syrian civilians tell a different story; the goal of Russia's military campaign is to protect Al Assad under the pretext of fighting IS" (AJA, 2 October 2015). The Russian version is not only contrasted but explicitly

contradicted, using a metatextual reporting style. The reporter not only shows images but also talks about them.

Also, AJA reported: “Five civilians were killed as a result of Russian air strikes in Talbisa and Ghirnata, in Homs countryside. In the meantime, Russian warplanes targeted the old city in Latakia countryside and Jisr Alshughur town in Idlib. There were no IS targets operating in these areas. All the targeted positions were under the control of the opposition factions and the Free Army.” A soldier in the Free Army was interviewed; he said: “We repositioned our forces and moved away from residential areas.” Then, the voiceover added: “The Syrian news agency, SANA, reported the Russian defence ministry as saying its warplanes had targeted 20 positions held by IS in different areas, including Ma'arat al-Nu'man city.” Nonetheless, the reporter commented: “This is one of the misleading claims circulated by Russian and Syrian sources. Ma'arat al-Nu'man is more than 150 km away from IS positions in Idlib” (AJA, 4 October 2015). Moreover, AJA reported: “Russia’s warplanes have continued to target different places, in Syria, particularly the countryside of Homs, Idlib, and Latakia, using new bombs. Activists circulated images showing Russian jets dropping bombs whose type has been unknown yet. The bombing resulted in dozens of deaths among civilians as well as the Free Syrian Army personnel and caused huge material damage.” The voiceover added: “The Russian air campaign appears focused on civilian targets as well as the positions held by the Syrian opposition to ensure the survival of Al Assad. However, few strikes have targeted IS-held territories, but they hit empty areas where there are no IS training camps or headquarters” (AJA, 6 October 2015). Five days after the start of the Russian intervention in Syria, one reporter commented: “For the first time, Russian air strikes have targeted positions held by IS in the north and west of Al Qaryatayn town, causing civilian casualties” (AJA, 4 October 2015). This contextualisation implies that the air strikes that occurred before that attack did not

target IS. Also, this anti-IS operation is contextualised in terms of human suffering, rather than showing its effect on IS.

In the above texts, AJA reporters incorporated opposing truth claims as an indication of balanced coverage, but they added negative evaluations about Russia's role. They used impersonal reporting style [indications or images show] to background their voices as they report information, which deemphasises Russia's contribution to the war against IS. AJA's reporters referred to the human suffering resulting from Russia's strikes or described the spatial characteristics of the targeted area as being away from IS positions, showing that Syrian and Russian sources provide "misleading information." Also, the visual narrative works against the Russian claims as I will explain later. So, the Russian actions were contextualised in terms of human suffering and hostility towards the Syrian rebels primarily, and the Russian claims were undermined in every story that their bombing was discussed throughout the sample. Only one text stood in contrast as will be shown below.

In response to the Russian air strikes, IS was portrayed as an active actor that was able to expand after the Russian intervention. For example, one report read:

Russia has announced that its air campaign seeks to destroy IS, yet after the Russian military intervention, the organisation has captured strategic areas in Aleppo. According to SANA, the Russian ministry of defence said it had launched 60 strikes against IS positions, but it also said the organisation took control over strategic areas in the northern countryside of Aleppo (AJA, 9 December 2015).

This was the only occasion in the sample when a Russian claim was not followed by a counterclaim. Another reporter commented: "Russia's air strikes have provided an opportunity for IS to reposition its members and to expand. IS fighters have taken control over several villages and towns between Izzaz and Mare" (AJA, 26 November 2015).

In the context of delegitimising Russia's air campaign, AJA promoted information about the types of weapons used by the Russian forces in Syria; the reporters brought to audiences' attention that Russia used internationally prohibited bombs. In this framing, it incorporated the voice of human rights organisations and activists as well as international media sources. For example, one report read:

Activists showed images of incendiary bombs fired by Russian warplanes in Khan Al Assal. Moscow has denied this accusation, but Russian media broadcast footage of Sergei Shoigu, the Russian defence minister, visiting Hmeimim airbase in Latakia and showed a pilot standing next to a strike fighter which carried bombs. Experts confirmed to the UK Daily Telegraph that these were incendiary bombs.

To further delegitimise the Russian role in Syria the voiceover continues: "Human Rights Watch confirmed this accusation and revealed that these bombs were known as RBK-500" (AJA, 23 June 2016). Here, the humanitarian organisation is given greater authority than the Russian minister.

Another news text read:

A report by Human Rights Watch referred to the use of internationally prohibited cluster bombs by Russia. This information was confirmed by local sources which reported Russian warplanes dropped such internationally prohibited bombs on Kafer Aleppo, which is under the control of Syrian opposition factions, and different places in Syria (AJA, 11 January 2016).

In this contextualisation, AJA invites Arab audiences to see Russia as persecutor and a war criminal, particularly when this transnational news channel reported verbally and visually that the Russian forces used internationally prohibited weapons.

The voice of an international human rights organisation was reported to demonise Russia whose voice was represented through metonymical expression (Moscow). This pattern cannot be explained as normal AJA reporting practice, for the voice of human rights organisations was not

used to evaluate the US-led military actions or comment on them throughout the sample. Furthermore, AJA provided details about the advanced warplanes used by Russia in Syria and therefore the military power being deployed. For example, one report read:

There are 13 types of military equipment currently in service in Syria: SU-34 costs about US\$50 Million. It was used to bombard north Homs. Its top speed reaches 2,000 km/1 h) and its highest altitude reaches 18,000 km. Its range is about 4,500 km, and its maximum weight is 44 tonnes. SU-30 is the most advanced strike fighter, with a top speed of (2,000 km/h), maximum high altitude at 19.000 km and range up to 3,000 km. It can hit more than one target at the same time. There are 28 SU-30s at Hmeimim airbase in Latakia” (AJA, 25 October 2015).

Such details about Russia’s military equipment contribute to making Russia seem a threatening power.

Another central theme in this section is the framing of the military actions led by the Syrian forces backed by Russia, against IS. The claims of the pro-regime Syrian forces were followed by counterclaims or critical messages, as was the case in the contextualisation of Russian military sources by AJA. For example, one report read:

Syrian governmental forces said they had recaptured positions from IS in the vicinity of Palmyra, which IS denied. IS has published photos showing Russian soldiers that were reported to have been killed while providing support for Syrian forces, west of Palmyra. The deaths include a Russian military advisor, called Mikhail Bogdanov (AJA, 18 March 2016).

It is noticeable that one of the deaths was personalised with reference to his name and rank. Unlike the US military advisors who were reported to be killed by IS in Syria, the dead Russian advisor was named, and his body appeared on the screen without showing his face. Another report read:

SANA news agency reported that the Syrian army took control over the old Palmyra castle and most of the city's neighbourhoods. Media sources allied to the Syrian regime said that Syrian forces started to enter the city and recaptured several areas as they have advanced towards the military airbase of Palmyra, which has been denied by military sources inside the city. Local sources have asserted that armed clashes are still taking place (AJA, 15 March 2016).

Moreover, AJA reported: "Syrian governmental forces recaptured a key supply route in the countryside of Aleppo from IS, according to Syrian media sources. IS said its fighters killed dozens of the Syrian government forces in these clashes." Also, when AJA covered the recapture of Al Qaryatain town, by the Syrian regime, it reported: "Backed by Russian air strikes, Syrian governmental forces announced the recapture of Al Qaryatain from IS after several days of fighting. Recently, the Syrian regime has recaptured Palmyra, east Homs, as well." The voiceover estimated: "The Syrian regime is not the most powerful actor that encounters IS in Syria, but its army seized the opportunity of the truce held across Syria and deployed thousands of soldiers, according to observers, to make this progress" (AJA, 3 April 2016). The reporting of Syrian and Russian military failings helps portray the active agency of IS and show that the Syrian regime is still weak, even after the Russian military intervention. In this context, some reports, provided details about military losses on the side of the government, relying on IS sources only. For example, one report read:

After clashes with Syrian governmental forces that were supported by more than 60 Russian strikes, IS fighters managed to cut Athreya-Khanaser highway, the only supply route owned by the Syrian regime into Hama. IS managed to take control over 9 villages to the north of Khanaser, as well as, Al Hamam, Al Hamam mountain, and Al Zarror tower. The organisation also seized 3 tanks, in addition to missiles and guns. IS said that it had killed more than 20 soldiers from the Syrian governmental forces and destroyed their

vehicles on the Salmiya-Athreya road, as well as shut down a Russian scouting jet (AJA, 23 February 2016).

Another report read:

After 3 days of clashes, IS announced that it took control over Al Shaer area and its oil fields. Also, it seized a huge quantity of weapons, including 20 tanks and Grad missiles, and killed dozens of soldiers from the pro-regime forces and their allies. IS seeks to show that it is still able to make gains although it had lost important positions in Palmyra and Al Qaryatain (AJA, 5 May 2016).

Similarly, AJA reported: “IS reported that its fighters launched attacks at positions held by Syrian governmental forces, west of Deir Ez-Zor province. As a result, it seized 4 T-72 tanks, 350 rockets, BMB armoured vehicles, 100 Cobra missiles, 3 Cannons, 400 RPGs, in addition to tonnes of munitions and heavy weapons” (AJA, 16 March 2016).

This kind of details magnifies the vulnerability of the Syrian government. I recall Entman’s (1993) argument: “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text.” Most frames are “defined by what they omit as well as include” (pp.52-54). No Russian or Syrian sources were incorporated to comment on the reported military failings, to help the viewers make more informed decisions. This reporting style contributes to emphasising the vulnerability of the Syrian army despite the Russian intensive support.

The framing of the Russian and Syrian actions against IS is episodic. This reporting leads to fragmented, decontextualised reporting that lacks explanatory power and so draws in a simple picture of the conflict, but as mentioned previously, episodic frames better suit the constraints of broadcast (Iyengar, 1994).

In the light of the abovementioned, the analysis showed that AJA coverage used the voice of activists, international human rights organisations, members of the opposition, as well as Western

and Russian media sources to delegitimise Russia's actions. AJA demoralised Russia's air campaign, by promoting its use of prohibited weapons against objects that have nothing to do with IS. In most reports, the Syrian regime's army was framed in a weak position in front of IS. The Russian and Syrian claims were followed by critical messages or counterclaims. It is noteworthy that the framing of the rival interventions is similar in that AJA has promoted IS voice and showed this organisation as an active agent against its local enemies who are supported by international superpowers. Also, when reporting events on the battlefield, AJA relied mainly on episodic framing. AJA emphasised the military failings of the Syrian regime. The reports drew attention that the Syrian government forces have been vulnerable in spite of Russia's support, while the opposition factions were reported to have made progress against IS with modest military support from the US. Qatar is among the countries which criticised Russia's intervention, and it has always called for the removal of Al Assad regime as mentioned previously. This shaped AJA's coverage of the Russian and Syrian actions in IS-held territories.

On the visual plane:

The visual representation of the Russian-Syrian military actions reinforced the verbal discourse, by showing Russia's air superiority and the prohibited bombs it used in Syria. The visuals also reflect the vulnerability of the Syrian army in spite of Russia's air support. The analysis begins with the visuals of the Russian military power. AJA broadcast images showing Russian warplanes in their air base, flying over the skies of Syria, or launching strikes [figures 39,40,41]. However, the accompanying voiceover did not support an idea of a powerful, high-tech and accurate bombing of IS positions. Instead, it reported the use of internationally prohibited bombs in different places across Syria and the concentration on targets that have nothing to do with IS.



Figure 39 Russian warplanes in Syria



Figure 40 Russian warplanes launch strikes



Figure 41 A Russian warplane in the skies over Syria

AJA showed images of incendiary bombs in addition to unguided munitions used by Russia in Syria [figures 42, 43, 44]. Such images were used to support the critical frame placed on Russia's military campaign, representing it as immoral and accountable for human suffering through the use of excessive force. This framing contrasts with AJA's coverage of the military power of the

US-led coalition. As mentioned previously the AJA showed the precise bombing of IS targets by the US-led air campaign.



Figure 42 Prohibited bombs used by Russia



Figure 43 A Russian pilot next to incendiary bombs in Syria



Figure 44 Unguided bombs used by Russia

When AJA reported Russian air strikes on IS targets, viewers are invited to see images of smoke and civilian infrastructure that were destroyed [figures 45 and 46]. The voiceover framed Russia's strikes in terms of human suffering, referring to civilian deaths and injuries. Children were shown next to destroyed houses, which emphasised Russia's responsibility for human suffering rather than its role in the fight against IS as the visual and the verbal texts did not show the effect of the strikes on IS [figure 47].



Figure 45 Smoke as a result of Russian air strikes



Figure 46 Material destructions as a result of Russian air strikes



Figure 47 Children stand near destroyed homes

The Russian soldiers were given voice in AJA reports. As shown below [figure 48] a soldier is framed in a close shot, gazing at audiences. His name and title are shown on the screen; he appears in his military uniform. He tells audiences that Russia has intervened against IS. However, as mentioned in the analysis of the verbal discourse, the Russian claims were followed by counterclaims from rival sources or non-official sources.



Figure 48 A Russian soldier in Syria

Also, Russian soldiers are represented in groups as shown below.



Figure 49 Russian soldiers in Syria

AJA remediated images of a Russian military advisor who was reported to have been killed while assisting the Syrian government forces in battles in Palmyra. By remediating images of Russia's losses from the IS news agency, Amaq, AJA draws attention that the consequence of the Russian involvement in Syria is the death of its soldiers while IS has been able to withstand the air strikes and launch counterattacks. Also, AJA showed the omnipresence of Russian forces that operate in the skies and on the ground. As mentioned previously, throughout the sample, there are no images of military losses or deaths related to the US-led coalition.



Figure 50 A Russian military advisor was killed by IS

Regarding the visualisation of the military actions led by Syrian governmental forces against IS, the Syrian army was not shown engaged in actual combat activities. It was portrayed in a vulnerable situation; its military camps and equipment were destroyed; its munitions and weapons

were seized. In addition, AJA showed images of soldiers who were reported to have been killed by IS fighters. Through montage, the reporters often juxtapose several shots that show losses on the Syrian side, which emphasises the weakness of the regime. According to Kuleshov, a Soviet filmmaker, the way shots are assembled, in parallel with other information affects how audiences will attach a specific meaning or emotion to them; this is known as the Kuleshov effect (Erik, 2015). For example, the figures [51, 52] were assembled, when reporting information about the military failings of Syrian governmental forces. Similarly, the figures [53,54] appeared together in another report, showing weapons seized by IS. Graber (2001) supports Birdwhistell's argument that people make sense of a particular situation through assessing different aspects or factors which are present in that situation. So, for Graber, in television news, the sequencing of images as well as the words and their relation to the visuals affect the way the audiences interact with what they watch.



Figure 51 A camp of Syrian government forces attacked by IS



Figure 52 Military losses of Syrian government forces



Figure 53 Weapons seized from Syrian government forces by IS



Figure 54 Members of Syrian government forces killed by IS

The Syrian soldiers were shown in groups and individually.



Figure 55 The spokesman of the Syrian government forces



Figure 56 Syrian governmental forces in group

In terms of military gains made by Russian and Syrian forces, AJA broadcast images from Palmyra and Al Qaryatain after the withdrawal of IS. The images show lifeless and destroyed places as shown below. Audiences do not see civilians or the Syrian army celebrating its victory.



Figure 57 Al Qaryatain recaptured from IS



Figure 58 Palmyra empty after being recaptured by the Syrian regime

IS fighters were represented as active agents, moving from one place to another, using guns, or conducting artillery attacks.



Figure 59 IS fighters in Syria



Figure 60 A member of IS stands near a tank

AJA showed various types of heavy military equipment and armoured vehicles owned by IS or seized from the Syrian regime, in an indication of its power. Thus, the visual and verbal portrayals

reinforced each other when AJA represented the excessive force and the military failings of Russia as well as the losses of its Syrian ally. AJA did not show IS's losses, unlike RT (discussed below). In fact, Russia was framed as an aggressor which deployed its advanced military technology and prohibited weapons to kill civilians in busy places like mosques and markets as shown in the next section.

The humanitarian aspect of the Russian-led intervention

In what follows, I examine how AJA represented the impact of the Russian campaign on the humanitarian situation, in Syria, where the Kremlin acted upon the request of the Syrian government. The analysis covers the verbal and visual elements and touches on the political and moral implications of AJA's humanitarian discourse.

On the verbal plane

This section examines how AJA employs verbal elements to represent the human suffering inflicted by Russia and its Syrian ally on the Syrian people. This includes how the voices of the military actors involved and the civilians are incorporated and how they are portrayed in terms of action and agency.

The analysis begins with the representation of the identity of the Russian Air Force as a bomber. Based on the study sample, the identity of the Russian forces as persecutors of the Syrian people was constructed through both human terms (Russians, Russian pilots) and non-human terms such as metonymy or nominalisation. Also, in some reports the bomber was represented in the active voice, in other reports, the priority was given to the sufferer, while the subject [the bomber] was delayed. That is to say, AJA used multiple strategies when portraying Russia as a persecutor. In more details:

There are three texts, in the study sample, which portray the Russian bombing of civilians in terms that foreground the human actors involved and therefore foreground the culpability of Russian forces for the death and destruction. In the first text, AJA reported:

Residential areas in Jisr Al Shughur have been targeted by Russian air strikes which resulted in civilian casualties, including children and elderly people. Food stores, humanitarian relief organisations, and vehicles have been hit as well. It appears that Russian pilots consider these facilities as IS targets (AJA, 29 November 2015).

Another text read: “The Russians continue to bomb Aleppo, killing children and women” (AJA, 12 June 2016). A third text read: “Hospitals were overflowing with injured civilians; many of them are children, women and elderly who were targeted by the Russians’ fighters” (AJA, 6 May 2016). In the rest of the reports that covered the impact of the Russian actions on civilians, the bomber was referred to in non-human terms (metonymy and nominalisation) as shown in the following examples.

AJA reported: “Russian warplanes have continued to conduct air strikes against residential areas in Homs under the pretext of fighting IS” (AJA, 21 October 2015). Another report read: “Russian warplanes launched three missiles on a field hospital in Aleppo” (AJA, 27 April 2016). AJA reported elsewhere: “Russian air strikes have killed dozens of civilians, most of whom are women and children in Al Ghouta in Damascus” (AJA, 2 December 2015). In these examples, the identity of the bomber is represented through metonymy. Some texts include both metonymy and nominalisation, for instance: “Russian warplanes targeted the town of Thahrat Awad with phosphorus munitions. The bombing resulted in massive material damage” (AJA, 26 June 2016).

By using human terms such as Russian pilots or Russians, AJA constructs the bomber as an active agent who should be brought to justice and held accountable for killing people in Syria. Also, the reference to internationally prohibited weapons, such as phosphorus munitions communicates the

brutality and the immorality of Russia's air campaign, since its military power is placed in the context of attacks against civilian targets. As mentioned in the previous section, AJA communicated the voice of Russian military officials who denied targeting civilians; however, the reports promoted impartial voices [activists, human rights organisations] and showed visuals that confirmed the use of prohibited weapons by Russia in Syria.

This critical humanitarian framing is made stronger through lexicalisation used to characterise Russia's actions in Syria as a crime or massacre: AJA repeatedly used the term "massacres" when reporting the impact of the Russian military actions on the people, as shown in the following examples:

"In Bab Al Al Hadid neighbourhood, a massacre took place when Russian warplanes launched 4 air strikes, killing a family, of whom only a child survived" (AJA, 28 April 2016). Or again: "In Talbissa town where IS does not operate, a massacre occurred when civilians including children and women were killed, as a result of Russian air strikes" (AJA, 4 December 2015). The reporter uses the term massacre and mentions that IS has no positions in the targeted area, which makes Russia's intervention morally questionable. As I have mentioned in the previous section, AJA's journalists reported that Russia's air strikes hit areas where IS targets did not operate, which helps mobilise Arab audiences against Russia. Moreover, one of AJA's reporters commented: "The systematic killing of civilians by Russian warplanes has continued in Aleppo. However, no one has taken action to save these innocents. Massacres have continued in the neighbourhoods of Al Qataterji, Al Mashhad, Al Maghyir, Alsakhor, and other places" (AJA, 29 April 2016). In this text, the reporter referred to the identity of Russia as a persecutor using the strong language of "massacres" and "systematic killing" against "innocents." Besides, AJA reported: "a new massacre has been committed by Russian warplanes in the Eastern Ghouta in Damascus" (AJA, 4 December

2015). By portraying Russia's actions as "massacres," AJA evokes the moral need to stop the Russian air campaign. The term "massacre" implicates the use of excessive force against non-combatants and constructs clearly an identity pair of the aggressor versus the victims (who were humanised, with references to very vulnerable groups, as explained below), raising the moral demand for action to protect civilians.

This is very different to the reporting of US actions. Referring back to the portrayal of the humanitarian aspect related to the US-led war, the identity of the US-led coalition as a bomber was not represented in human terms.

Regarding the portrayal of sufferers, in the context of Russia's war in Syria, AJA humanised the civilians who were reported to have been targeted by Russian warplanes. That is to say, the reporting style of the human frame of Russia's air war followed the common humanitarian discourse for which AJA is known and which was used in the coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq where the sufferers were personalised and given voices. The humanisation of sufferers, in Syria, occurs in different ways. One way is that the sufferers were referred to as civilians, with some personal specifications. So, in the reports, viewers can find not only numbers which portray the suffering as a collective experience and the sufferers as a homogenous group but also references to the sufferers' personal characters (age, gender, name, place of origin). Referring back to the examples which I have already mentioned above, the reporters indicated that women and children were among the casualties. In the texts below, I show how the sufferer is humanised, using multiple identification references such as names, profession, or family relations. One report read: "Riham and her mother were killed, and her brother was injured as a result of Russian air strikes on Izzaz" (AJA, 31 December 2015). In another text, AJA reported: "Hundreds of air strikes have been conducted against Aleppo and its countryside by Russian warplanes. The ongoing aerial

bombing of the city has resulted in dozens of civilian casualties. Children, women, and old people are victims of the Russian strikes. Sara, a child who lost her mother, is one of these victims” (AJA, 30 May 2016). So, the sufferers were personalised, as victims with reference to their relational status, gender, age and/or name. Through such personalisation of the sufferers as vulnerable categories in Syria, AJA discourse plays a role in generating sympathy towards civilians and demonising Russia.

In the next two examples, the sufferers were personalised based on their professions/age/name: “Dozens are killed and wounded, including 2 civil defence members and a child as a result of Russian air strikes” (AJA, 11 July 2016). Also, AJA reported: “Khaled Al Harh, a civil defence member, was killed by a Russian air strike a month ago while he was digging to remove a child from the rubbles” (AJA, 19 August 2016). By identifying civil defence members as targets of Russian military actions, AJA brings to viewers’ attention that even the local agents, the benefactors, who help the sufferers were attacked and persecuted. Representing a range of categories of sufferers (children, women, rescuers), AJA shows that no one has been safe in Syria, and this portrayal raises the moral demand for a humanitarian response to protect civilians. In the representation of the US-led role in Syria, AJA, in the analysed texts, referred to the sufferers in terms of numbers or as civilians without much focus on their personal characteristics.

Another way in which the sufferers were humanised is through giving them a voice. In line with its popular reporting style which focuses on the sufferers and gives them voice to demonise their persecutor in conflict areas, AJA gave a chance to civilians in Syria to express their misfortune and refer to their persecutor. The reporters interviewed injured people at hospitals, refugees, old men and women who lost their families. In these reports, the civilians were personalised through

specifications such as name, place of origin, or age, and they gazed at the camera while they were talking about their suffering, as shown in the following texts selected from the sample:

One report read: “Displaced people in Syria recall sad stories about their loved relatives who were lost.” Then an old woman was interviewed. She said: “I am from Maskana. Russian strikes killed my sons and my husband was injured” (AJA, 26 May 2016). In another report, a woman who was introduced to audiences as Um Mohammed from Aleppo said: “My son was killed by a Russian air strike. My daughter died as well, and I have to take care of her son. Russian and Syrian warplanes are always in the skies. I cannot reach the health centre to get some medicines” (AJA, 2 May 2016). Moreover, children were given voice: in one of AJA’s reports, Sara, a little girl who was reported to have been injured by a Russian air strike was shown on the screen crying: “I want my mother. I want my mother” (AJA, 30 May 2016). Similarly, another child grieved for his sister who was reported to have been killed by a Russian air strike. He cried: “My sister, Rimas, come back” (AJA, 23 August 2016). Furthermore, AJA interviewed injured people at hospitals. For example, AJA reported: “More than 1500 civilians were injured in Russian and Syrian air strikes against Aleppo.” The reporter took the viewers to a hospital where he interviewed some of the injured. One of the patients was introduced as Abu Ali. He said that he had lost two limbs after being targeted by a Russian air strike. Another amputee whose name is Abdulkarim said that he was injured as a result of air strikes near al Quds hospital (AJA, 12 May 2016).

So, AJA represented the sufferers in the context of the Russian campaign as active agents. They referred to their persecutor. AJA reported personal stories of children, mothers, and fathers who lost their families, inviting audiences to question Russia’s agenda in Syria and identify with the civilians. This highly activated human frame is similar to AJA framing of the humanitarian

situation in Afghanistan during the US-led war. According to Jasperson and Kikhia (2003), AJA showed Afghans who lost their relatives in moments of grief.

Regarding material damages caused by Russian air strikes, this aspect is constructed through space and time articulations which give the impression that Russia has killed civilians intentionally, a discourse that morally condemns its role in Syria, as shown below.

Throughout the sample, AJA showed the impact of the Russian military actions on civilian infrastructure that provides essential services, in different places across Syria. Also, AJA's reporters brought to audience's attention that the attacks on civilian infrastructure occurred during rush hours.

The bombing of markets is a recurring message in AJA coverage. This message was articulated in a way that emphasised the responsibility of Russia and the Syrian regime in inflicting the suffering in Syria. The reporters humanised the sufferers and showed symbolic images of damaged vegetables mixed with civilian blood.

For example, AJA reported: "Russian and Syrian warplanes target vegetable markets in Aleppo daily. Last week, five busy markets were hit. Most of the victims were children and women as usual" (AJA, 23 August 2016). Similarly, it reported: "Russian and Syrian warplanes targeted several vegetable markets in Al Sakhor neighbourhood, killing civilians among whom children and women. The vegetables were mixed with civilian blood due to the bombings" (AJA, 24 April 2016). Additionally, the voiceover reported: "In Tariq Al Bab neighbourhood, Russian and Syrian warplanes fired 3 missiles on a market, where goods were mixed with civilian blood" (AJA, 23 April 2016). In addition to humanising the sufferers, in the above texts, AJA used a strong language to describe the brutality of Russia and the Syrian regime. When using an image of contrast such as "goods were mixed with civilian blood," AJA's journalist reports casualties and activates

viewer's imagination, drawing a picture of a horrible situation where civilians were indiscriminately targeted in a "busy" place, and blood could be seen everywhere. Furthermore, when using adverbs such as "daily" and "as usual," AJA reporting gives the impression that the bombing of crowded civilian infrastructure by Russian and Syrian warplanes is not an incident that occurred rarely or by mistake. AJA tells audiences that such Russian and Syrian behaviours are typical and characterises the Russians and their Syrian allies as killers of innocents. The abovementioned verbal texts were supported by visuals of damaged markets and vegetables as well as rescue operations.

Another recurring message is the bombing of hospitals in Syria. For example, AJA reported: "Russian warplanes have destroyed 12 hospitals in Aleppo and its countryside recently, in addition to 2 hospitals in Hama countryside and 2 others in Al Hakam village in Dara'a" (13 May 2016).

Another report read:

Russian air strikes have concentrated on hospitals and medical centres. They targeted 7 medical facilities in Aleppo city, including Al Bayan hospital, Al Daqaq hospital, Al Zahra hospital, Al Hakam, hospital and a blood bank. In the countryside of Aleppo, medical facilities in the towns of Hreitan, Al Atareb, and Kofor Hamra were targeted (AJA, 24 July 2016).

The use of the verbs "concentrated" and "targeted" in this text directly accuses Russia of attacking hospitals on purpose. Similarly, AJA reported: "Russian warplanes hit a field hospital supported by Doctors Without Borders in Aleppo repeatedly, causing casualties, among whom were women, children, and medical staff." The voiceover added: "The Hospital of Ma'arat al-Nu'man was also targeted by Russian strikes, which resulted in civilian casualties and massive material damage" (AJA, 15 February 2016). Beside surveying damaged hospitals in Syria, AJA reporters incorporated the voice of human right organisations. AJA reported:

Russia's air forces have continued to target medical facilities in Syria. Amnesty International has issued a report, saying Russian and Syrian forces appear to have deliberately and systematically targeted hospitals and other medical facilities over the last three months to pave the way for ground forces to advance on northern Aleppo. Hospitals appear to have become part of their military strategy. The organisation said there were no military vehicles, checkpoints, fighters or front lines near the hospitals that were attacked and that the hospitals were exclusively serving their humanitarian function (AJA, 3 March 2016).

In addition to markets, and hospitals, AJA showed the impact of Russia's air strikes on bakeries, mosques, and relief centres during rush hours. For example, one report read "In Aleppo countryside, Russian warplanes targeted hospitals in Hreitan, Al Atarib, and Kofor Hamraa. Also, they targeted bakeries during rush hours" (AJA, 24 July 2016). It also reported "In Talbissa town, Russian warplanes hit a mosque which was full at the time for Friday prayers" (AJA, 19 February 2016) A third report mentioned: "Russian warplanes fired two missiles on a relief centre which offers Iftar meals to fasting people in Ramadan." According to the voiceover, "Russian strikes have continued during the holy month of Ramadan, and they have increased at the time of Iftar" (AJA, 18 June 2016). So, AJA showed that Russia's strikes hit holy places during holy and rush hours, which gives the impression that the Russian attacks are deliberate and are intended to kill a large number of people indiscriminately and sacrilegiously. Taking into consideration that AJA's primary audiences are Arabs and Muslims, the abovementioned articulations of space and time elements, in addition to other lexical choices such as killing, deaths, massacres, prohibited bombs, invite these audiences to think of Russia's war as an aggression against their Syrian brothers and sisters.

Thus, the multiplicity of places [busy markets, medical facilities, and mosques were reported as sites where strikes occurred] and the multiplicity of voices that shared stories about ongoing

Russian attacks (reporters, sufferers, human right organisations) help turn news reports into witnessing texts. Such texts enable audiences to witness the suffering in far places through live transmission of events, including the voices of the sufferers (Frosh, 2006). This highly critical framing of human suffering is part of AJA's common humanitarian discourse in conflict areas. However, it is also influenced by Qatar's stance towards Russia's policies in Syria, since AJA did not use that highly critical frame when reporting the human suffering resulting from the US-led air strikes.

AJA's role, in this context, is not limited to being an eye-witness, which involves descriptive reporting of what happened in Syria. AJA's coverage of the impact of Russia's military campaign involves practices of bearing witness against Russia in Syria. Tait (2011) argues that "under the conditions of mass mediation, to bear witness describes the act of appealing to an audience to share responsibility for the suffering of others" (p.1233). According to her, central to this process is the attempt to influence the audience's emotions and to elicit affect. Bearing witness also includes "hearing the appeal, being affected by it, and translating that affectedness into emotions that moralize public action" (p.1233). By constructing Russia's identity in human as well as non-human terms, giving voices to men, women, and refugees who blamed Russia for their suffering in front of the camera and transmitting testimonies from humanitarian organizations, as discussed above, AJA invites Arab audiences to react and show empathy towards the Syrian people. According to Tait (2011), empathy for the sufferer may be displaced by hatred for the perpetrator [Russia and the Syrian government], reproducing the mechanisms of violence. Rentschler argues that bearing witness as practices through which the media portray human suffering "is never innocent of politics; it is always constitutive of who is 'us' and who is 'them'" (Rentschler, 2004, p. 298). That is to say, the representation of human suffering in Syria is a selective process which reflects the

voice of the ruling power. I have already shown how AJA adopted a softer tone when covering the suffering caused by the US-led coalition, which includes Qatar. The next section addresses how the human suffering inflicted by Russia is portrayed visually.

On the Visual plane

In all the reports that cover Russian attacks on civilian targets, AJA provided visuals that confirm and support the verbal account. In these visuals, AJA took Arab audiences to streets, homes, and hospitals. It showed images of deaths, injuries and people who lost their relatives, as well as images of destroyed houses, markets, and hospitals, with rescue missions at the scene. That is to say, AJA enabled an involved observation of the suffering, in which the sufferers were shown in different situations (deaths, injuries, rescuers, refugees) and in different contexts (streets, homes, hospitals, markets). Also, it showed images of children and old people who grieve for their dead relatives. This visual discourse contrasts sharply with the reporting of the human suffering resulting from the US-led coalition strikes.

The first point in this discussion is that the AJA showed images of people who were reported to have been killed or injured by Russian air strikes. The verbal texts identified these sufferers, through referring to their age, gender, place of origin, or name, so they were presented as humans whom we are asked to relate to; some were shown from a close distance, and others were shown from a medium or long distance. Some bodies were covered while others were not. Figure [61] shows a dead baby filmed from a close distance, which may encourage viewers to identify with him and his parents. In figures [62,63,64] deaths are filmed from a medium distance, and in figure [65] the sufferers are shot from a relatively long distance, as they bury their dead relatives. Audiences are allowed to see deaths in different places such as streets, hospitals, and cemeteries.



Figure 61 A dead baby (close shot)



Figure 62 A young man killed in Russian air strikes (medium shot)



Figure 63 A man killed in Russian air strikes (medium shot)



Figure 64 A dead body in a hospital (medium shot)



Figure 65 People bury their relatives (wide shot)

Also, AJA showed images of injured civilians at hospitals. As shown in figures [66,67], injured children were filmed at hospitals from a medium distance. They have eye interaction with audiences, their gaze involves an appellative power, which encourages AJA’s viewers to identify with them and engage with their suffering.



Figure 66 A child injured in Russian air strikes



Figure 67 Children injured in Russian air strikes



Figure 68 An amputee interviewed at a hospital

Moreover, AJA's reports showed the suffering of the displaced people and allowed those who lost their relatives to tell their personal stories in front of the camera [figures 71,72].



Figure 69 Displaced people in Aleppo countryside



Figure 70 A Displaced child



Figure 71 An Old man talks about his personal suffering



Figure 72 A displaced woman interviewed by AJA

In figure [72] an old woman is filmed from a medium distance. She accuses Russia of her suffering. So, she has a voice, and she gazes at audiences, who are invited to relate to her and feel her pain. The woman says: “I am from Maskana. Russian strikes killed my sons and my husband was

injured.” She refers to her persecutor, which raises a moral demand to take action to protect the Syrians.

Furthermore, all the reports which cover Russia’s attacks on hospitals, markets and mosques include visuals which show that Russian warplanes hit crowded facilities that provide basic services such as food or medicines, or holy places as shown below.



Figure 73 A hospital damaged by Russian air strikes



Figure 74 A women hospital damaged by Russian air strikes



Figure 75 A mosque hit by Russian strikes in Talbissa



Figure 76 A vegetable market targeted by Russian warplanes in Idlib



Figure 77 A vegetable market targeted by Russian strikes in Aleppo



Figure 78 Fire and heavy smoke as a result of Russian strikes



Figure 79 A house targeted by Russian air strikes

As shown in figures [76,77,78,79], civil defence members, as well as other rescuers, are at the scene, trying to put out fire and rescue civilians. This kind of imagery appeared in many reports throughout the sample. In these visuals, the viewers can see structural opposition of victims and domestic benefactors versus warplanes, strikes, fire, and destruction. Some reports include images of Russian warplanes, followed by images of casualties, establishing verbal and visual discourse that juxtaposes the persecutor and the sufferers on the screen, and in this way, AJA reporting emphasises Russia's responsibility for human suffering.

Thus, AJA's coverage of the humanitarian situation in Syria is oriented to draw distinctions between Russia's war and the US-led war there. Arab viewers are invited to witness the suffering caused by Russia from a close position compared to the distanced human suffering inflicted by the

US-led coalition. The identity of Russia as a bomber was constructed through human and non-human references to emphasise its agency. The sufferers were humanised, verbally, as they were represented in terms of groups, with reference to their personal identities (name, age, gender, or origin). Some sufferers were interviewed and represented individually. Throughout sample, civilian casualties caused by Russia and those who lost their families and/ or houses were shown on the screen. AJA allowed civilians to tell their personal stories and blame Russia for their suffering. Children, men and women have an appellative power, calling on the people around the world to morally engage with their suffering and help them. The negative impacts of the Russian military actions on civilian infrastructure such as mosques, hospitals, and markets were shown verbally and visually on AJA's screen. In contrast, the linguistic references to human losses and material damage caused to hospitals or schools as a result of the US-led coalition strikes in Syria lacked the power of pictorial presence. I recall that the discourse of suffering is a selective process, which is shaped by a dichotomous view that draws boundaries between the in-group and the out-group (Rentschler, 2004). Therefore, one should consider the influence of Qatar's negative response to Russia's intervention in Syria on AJA's news discourse when watching this channel.

At the end of this chapter, I highlight that the above analysis sought to explore how AJA responded to its political context and its professional standards when shaping the meaning of the rival military campaigns. In this context, I cannot claim that the sample of the study is completely exhaustive; it is a selection from an overall output of news reports that are available on AJA's YouTube channel during the period of the study. Since my approach is thematic and comparative, the news stories used for the purpose of this research are helpful to trace the media-state relationship and then show similarities and differences in how the media under study covered the multi-sided war on IS in Syria. The next chapter will look at RT's coverage of the same conflict.

Chapter 7

RT's coverage of the multi-sided war on IS in Syria

As mentioned in the first two chapters, the Syrian internal conflict has influenced the conduct of the war on IS. Then, the US and Russia have fought against their common enemy in two separate military campaigns. The Russian President Putin called for the formation of a broader coalition to destroy IS. He stressed the need for the international community to cooperate with the Syrian government and its allies to achieve this goal. So, this chapter seeks to examine how RT Arabic responded to the Kremlin's policies as well as basic principles of professionalism when representing the rival campaigns to Arab audiences.

7.1 The representation of the US-led war in Syria

Below, I examine how RT represented the US-led intervention throughout the governance, the military, and the humanitarian aspects. Before I proceed with the analysis, I draw attention that RT uses the term "Daesh" to refer to IS.

The governance aspect of the US-led intervention

The analysis of the governance aspect examines how RT covers local and international support for the White House's counterterrorism policy on IS. So, it looks at which sources from the US government are promoted and how their voices are textured in relation to other local and international voices, and/or in relation to RT journalists' voices. It shows how RT represents the voices which criticise the US war strategy and those which support it, and what messages are communicated through these voices. This leads to exploring how RT coverage is influenced by Russia's policies.

Based on the sample studied, RT emphasised the ineffectiveness of the US counterterrorism policy on IS and the need for a global strategy to face international terrorism. It is noteworthy that the

representation of the US management of IS crisis has something to do with the ordering of voices. RT incorporated voices from the White House, such as the US President, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defence, but the statements made by these officials were followed by critical messages from the Republicans or political experts in the US or by international voices raising the need for a more effective strategy.

The analysis of this aspect begins with the situation in the US. In the framing of the American counterterrorism policy as ineffective, a typical strategy is to interview or quote specific critical voices from the US alongside spokespeople for the Obama Administration. The critical responses are at the same time further emphasised through the reporters' explanatory comments, as shown in the examples below.

RT reported the US Secretary of Defence Carter as saying: "I have met with representatives of 40 countries that participate in the US-led international coalition fighting ISIL, and I have asked them to increase their contributions. This includes military equipment such as strike fighters and scouting jets, in addition to training services." Then, the voiceover added: "Carter's statements have not led to tamping down internal criticism of the war policy." Senator John McCain was shown saying:

The threat is growing fast. The weakness of our Administration's strategy can be attributed to two reasons: first, we thought that time was on our side, but it was not. And it is still not on our side, particularly after the attacks that happened in Sinai, Paris and San Bernardino. Second, we thought we should not deploy ground combat forces.

The reporter commented: "Although the US-led coalition has conducted thousands of air strikes against Daesh's positions, the US Secretary of Defence has admitted that Daesh threat has not been contained yet. This admission will provoke new criticisms regarding the US counterterrorism strategy." (RT, 12 October 2015). So, in the above text as well as in the next two examples, the

claims made by the White House officials were followed by critical messages which refer to the failure of the US to contain IS threat. In their comments, RT's reporters have emphasised the critical views which were expressed by the reported sources. This ordering of voices is noticed in all reports that tackle the US policy on IS. In one of these reports, RT quoted the director of the CIA, John Brennan, as saying: "The coalition managed to destroy Daesh's financial resources, but unfortunately despite all our efforts, we have not undermined the organisation's capacity yet." Then the voiceover commented: "Brennan's statement is a straightforward admission that the coalition has failed to stop Daesh from launching terrorist attacks." In the report, a political expert commented: "This is a clear admission that the US has not succeeded in defeating terrorism." Then, the reporter questioned: "How can this organisation which has started to change its tactics be defeated if the coalition continues to pursue its current strategy?" (RT, 17 June 2016).

Similarly, RT quoted Obama as saying: "So far more than 8000 air strikes have been conducted against Daesh positions. These strikes in addition to the operations conducted by our partners on the ground have resulted in killing key leaders in Daesh organisation and recapturing lands in Iraq and Syria." The reporter then commented: "Obama has stressed that he will continue to pursue his counterterrorism strategy which has not led to driving Daesh back yet." Also, an American political expert was shown saying: "Some observers raise questions about alternative plans if this strategy failed. Should we change it? Should we send ground troops? But this requires more efforts. I am not sure if the President or the US military know what should be done." The reporter concluded: "It is noticeable that Washington stands on the edge of the war on terror. It is not decisive enough in fighting terrorism, and it does not leave this question to other actors that can eliminate such a threat" (RT, 26 October 2015).

It is noticeable that RT reporters made negative lexical choices such as “not decisive enough” and “new criticisms.” So, RT news discourse raised concerns about the situation on the ground and brought to Arab viewers’ attention that things were going from bad to worse. Within RT context, this contextualisation may lead to the inference that Russian intervention is needed.

In addition to quoting critical voices from the US, RT used non-identified sources [observers] to contextualise the US counterterrorism policy negatively, showing the representatives of the White House in a defensive stance.

For example, RT reported: “Carter said that the US would provide more support for the local forces fighting against the so-called Daesh in Syria. He stated that the US government might send more than 50 soldiers to Syria.” The voiceover commented:

The US Administration’s attempts to defend its strategy have provoked severe Congressional criticism as some senators call for deploying thousands of ground troops while others call for supporting Syrian forces. Such disagreements between the US Administration and the Congress affect the US-led counterterrorism efforts negatively, according to observers (RT, 2 December 2015).

In another report, RT quoted Obama as saying: “So far, 13,000 US-led air strikes have been conducted in Iraq and Syria. Daesh has lost many of its leaders; we have killed more than 120 fighters. Our message is clear: if you target the United States and its allies, you will be held accountable.” Then, the voiceover commented: “Observers read Obama’s statements as an attempt to defend his counterterrorism strategy, which has not led to degrading Daesh so far” (RT, 15 June 2016). In these two examples and the next one, RT journalists used the verb to defend to frame the US Administration’s position. RT relied on non-identified sources. Collective labels (observers/experts) which refer to non-identified news sources are often used in news texts to imply the truthfulness of the reported information; this strategy helps journalists background their voices and

report news without having to provide precise sources or claims (Publitz and Bednarek, 2009). This kind of sourcing practice is often used in RT reports through the sample.

This channel reported: “The spokesman of the White House has defended Washington’s recent decision to send special forces to Syria, though the US Administration has repeatedly stressed that it will not deploy troops there.” Then the US official was directly quoted as saying: “The US troops will support and train the local forces that fight against Daesh.” The voiceover commented: “However, the White House says that this step does not mean that its war strategy has changed. The US Administration seems to lack any clear counterterrorism strategy, according to some observers” (RT, 31 October 2015).

Furthermore, RT’s journalists used the same reporting strategy to raise the need for global unity to encounter international terrorism as shown in the following texts:

RT reported: “Kerry mentioned the US-led military campaign would continue to prevent oil smuggling from IS territories. According to observers, this step is not enough as there is a need for a global strategy to destroy terrorist groups.” Then the voiceover commented: “Daesh has increased its attacks in Iraq, Syria and Europe, so united efforts are required to face the growing threat of transnational terrorist movements” (RT, 19 November 2015). Similarly, RT quoted Brett McGurk, the US Special Envoy for the international coalition as saying: “Daesh has lost territories in Iraq and Syria. Therefore, the organisation will seek to inspire lone wolves to carry out attacks. And this danger will continue for a long time.” The report added: “According to experts, such challenges cannot be faced without a consensus counterterrorism strategy” (RT, 29 June 2016).

By using non-identified sources that raised the idea that IS, and the like, cannot be defeated “without a consensus counterterrorism strategy,” RT reporters distance themselves while they emphasise Putin’s call for the formation of a global coalition against IS. One can say that by

promoting the voices of US officials alongside non-identified sources, RT shows evidence of balanced coverage. However, this balance risks being false since it promotes competing voices as if they have equal weight (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004). When RT reporters attribute information to “observers” or “experts” who are unknown to audiences and use imprecise language to contextualise the reported stories, they do not provide an accurate picture of the situation in Syria, so the viewers cannot make informed judgements.

In this context, RT adopted the same reporting style when framing the US-led coalition members’ responses to the US war policy. It quoted specific US voices which were followed by critical voices that are not identified (observers). For example, RT reported a meeting which gathered the foreign ministers of more than 30 countries involved in the US-led coalition. The US Secretary, Kerry, was quoted as saying: “The coalition is resolved to defeat Daesh in Syria where the organisation’s capacity has been undermined, but its members are concentrating in Al Raqqa.” Then Carter was reported as saying: “The coalition campaign seeks to wipe out the cancer of Daesh in Syria as well as Iraq, since this organisation threatens not only the Iraqis or the Syrians but also our citizens around the world.” The voiceover added:

Observers say that this meeting has not produced any new results, as there are disagreements among the members of the coalition on how to encounter terrorism. Also, observers estimate that the US strategy does not cope with the new tactics of Daesh which no longer seeks to control new territories in Iraq and Syria. Instead, it has started to carry out attacks in Europe (RT, 22 July 2016).

This recurring reporting style involves vague criticisms. No member of the US-led coalition is named; also, no official source is quoted as expressing reservations on the US war strategy. So, this style does not show evidence of accurate reporting. It is inadequate as it does not help audiences to understand the situation in Syria.

RT used specific quotes, metonymy, as well as non-identified sources when contextualising regional voices that call for more military involvement in Syria. By using these techniques, RT sought to show evidence of accurate reporting. So, unlike the previous example which included non-identified sources and vague criticism, the following texts included specific voices from the Gulf. These voices raised the need for more military actions against IS in Syria. This reporting style is more likely to gain audiences' trust, because of the greater specificity in attribution.

RT promoted the willingness of Saudi Arabia and the UAE to send ground forces to degrade IS in Syria. It reported: "The Saudi military advisor, Ahmed Assiri, has said that Riyadh is ready to send ground forces to fight against Daesh in Syria, provided the US coalition agrees." Then, the report added: "Some observers raise questions about the progress reportedly made by the US-led coalition against Daesh, in the light of the Saudi offer to deploy ground troops" (RT, 5 February 2016). Another report read: "The UAE will participate in any ground offensive to be launched in the future in Syria. According to Emirati sources, the UAE will help the Syrian opposition forces recapture Al Raqqa, the main headquarter of Daesh." The reporter interviewed a political analyst who considered the current manoeuvres, known as the 'Thunder of the North', that are led by Saudi Arabia, as a simulated military operation in Syria. The interviewee said: "This is a warning message to the leading powers which have not taken the Syrian question seriously. The situation in Syria is unbearable." The reporter commented: "Observers consider the huge manoeuvres organised by Saudi Arabia in cooperation with other countries, as serious preparations for a ground offensive in Syria" (RT, 15 February 2016). In addition to quoting specific voices from the Gulf, as well as non-specified sources, RT used metonymy, that is, "Saudi Arabia", "Riyadh" and "the UAE." The comments attributed to observers give the impression that the Gulf countries that

participate in the US-led coalition are dissatisfied with the US war policy. Throughout, the sample, no voices were quoted as showing support for the US strategy.

Thus, it is possible to say that RT framed the governance aspect of the US-led war in a way that consolidates the Russian policies toward Syria. The reports emphasised the shortcoming of the US counterterrorism policy. RT represented the US government in a defensive position; the White House officials admitted the limited effect of the air campaign. This news discourse encourages the targeted viewers to think of the Russian military action as a necessary move to change the situation. Also, RT news discourse emphasised the need for global unity. The call for global efforts to respond to international terrorism creates the inference that the US Administration and its allies cannot eliminate Daesh by themselves. So, Russia and its allies should be partners of the US-led coalition in this war rather than being excluded. Souleimanov and Petrylova (2015) argue that Russia considers IS as an outcome of the failure of the US strategies in the region and has benefited from the emergence of this armed organisation to expand in the Middle East and advance its interests.

In terms of journalistic practices, RT reporters tried to give the impression of a balanced coverage, using various sources with different views. In all the reports, throughout the sample, the voices of the US Administration's representatives were followed by critical voices from the Congress or statements made by US experts who raised questions about Obama's war strategy. Also, RT relied on non-identified sources to show the shortcoming of the US war strategy and raise the need for global cooperation to face IS. This resulted in promoting unknown sources and gave the impression that such non-identified voices and the quoted official sources have equal weight. RT used quotes, metonymy, as well as, non-identified sources to promote regional demands for a ground offensive in Syria and reflect regional dissatisfaction with the US policy, particularly in the Gulf. In their

comments, RT reporters evaluated the US counterterrorism policy on IS negatively and raised the need for a global strategy to defeat international terrorism. As they often relied on non-identified sources, the journalists used imprecise language and reported vague criticisms; this does not help viewers make informed judgments about the US-led war.

The military aspect of the US-led intervention

In what follows, I examine how RT employed verbal and visual resources to portray the US-led military intervention against IS.

On the verbal plane:

This section discusses how RT portrays the US-led air campaign and how it constructs the roles of the US-backed SDF and the Syrian opposition factions on the ground against IS. So, the analysis covers how the US special forces and their Syrian allies are represented in terms of action and agency and how their voices are incorporated in relation to other sources or in relation to RT journalists' voices. Also, it looks at the framing of the interaction between Russia and the US coalition in the skies over Syria. Then, it explores whether the military dimension is reported differently to the negatively evaluated political one.

The first point in this analysis is the framing of the military power of the US-led air campaign. RT coverage brought to viewers' attention the advanced military technology used by the US-led coalition but did not provide details about the type of machines deployed in Syria. This channel covered the US-led military actions from the perspective of the US and its ally, the SDF, allowing them to show their roles in the war against IS. This is to say RT did not use IS sources or incorporate opposing claims throughout the sample. RT reporters made positive lexical choices when contextualising the military operations conducted by the US-backed SDF. In many texts, the

reporters used non-identified sources to distance themselves when framing the US-led intervention positively, as shown in the following examples:

One of RT reports read: “The US-led coalition warplanes are always in the skies over Ain Issa town. Equipped with advanced weapons, the US-backed SDF have driven Daesh fighters out of the town.” Then, a member of the SDF was interviewed; he said: “Daesh will be defeated in the coming days; we have received modern weapons from the US coalition, and now we can degrade Daesh.” The voiceover continued: “In this military campaign, US special forces have supported the Kurdish-led SDF, in battles against Daesh. The US forces in Syria act in coordination with the coalition airmen to guide the Syrian ground troops, that advance towards Daesh positions.” Then, an American soldier was shown saying: “We provided the SDF with military equipment to enable them to fight on the front lines.” The voiceover commented: “According to experts, with these new military supplies, which include heavy weapons, the SDF have become ready to attack Al Raqqa as well as other Daesh-held areas” (RT, 24 May 2016). In this text, the reporter used positive terms as he referred to the US military support for the SDF from the sky and on the ground. The military machines deployed in Syria were represented as “heavy” and “advanced” and the US-led coalition warplanes were reported to have been “always in the skies” over Syria.

In another text, RT covered the US Commander General Joseph Votel’s visit to North Syria. The voiceover reported that his visit sought to deploy more Arab and Kurdish fighters in the context of the coalition’s preparations for a ground offensive to recapture Al Raqqa. Votel was quoted as saying: “I came to meet with leaders from the SDF. We discussed the situation in the battlefield. The movements of the enemy on the front lines affect our operations.” The voiceover added: “It has been reported that the US-led coalition warplanes have dropped warning leaflets, calling on civilian residents of Al Raqqa to stay away from Daesh positions. Observers consider such

American tactics as part of the warfare against Daesh” (RT, 22 May 2016). Like the previous one, this example shows the close cooperation between the US-led coalition and the SDF and draws attention that their actions have been conducted with due regard for the safety of civilians.

Besides, RT reported: “The US-led coalition warplanes have conducted precision bombings against Daesh targets in Manbij and its countryside. In the meantime, US soldiers have provided logistics support to the SDF and removed mines from the areas recaptured from Daesh.” Then a member of the SDF said in front of the camera: “We are now advancing towards Manbij.” The soldier pointed at the sky, saying: “These are the coalition’s strikes which target Daesh positions to pave the way for us.” The reporter commented: “Military experts say most of Daesh fighters have fled to Jarablus and Al Raqqa” (RT, 8 June 2016). RT showed the US forces in Syria as active agents, who prepared for ground offensives, removed mines, and provided logistics support. Also, the US coalition was framed as a responsible agent that used precision bombs and so take actions to minimise or avoid collateral damage. No critical messages were promoted.

Moreover, a news report, showing a member of the US special forces in Syria, read: “This American soldier is one of many foreign fighters who support the SDF in driving the terrorists out of Manbij.” Then the soldier was interviewed. He said: “I am proud to be one of the American soldiers who fight for freedom and democracy. The world should support the SDF in this war.”

The reporter commented:

The US-led coalition warplanes are in the skies over Manbij, and heavy clashes are taking place in different areas in the city. Although Daesh fighters have placed mines in Al Assadiya neighbourhood, we managed to enter the positions which were recaptured from the organisation, where we found records of oil, gas and agricultural products in addition to other funding sources (RT, 2 July 2016).

So, many reports throughout the sample showed the positive role of the US forces as part of the US-led coalition against IS. Concerning journalistic practices, RT reported the anti-IS operations as if there was no other side and as if there were no opposing or critical views. It incorporated military sources as well as non-official sources, that evaluated the US-led actions positively. Then the sample provides evidence that RT reporting is not balanced in perspective or portrayal.

What is true of the US-led forces is also true of the SDF. On the ground the SDF fighters were represented always as active agents who carry out attacks, recapture lands, and seize equipment from IS, as shown below. RT reported:

A special unit of the SDF has penetrated the village of Madnah after the soldiers involved got instructions from their leader, Rujha, on how to accomplish this mission. Madnah is the last remaining territory under Daesh control, south of Manbij. The military council of Manbij have recaptured strategic positions in the area (RT, 13 August 2016).

Another report read: “The SDF have gathered fighters from all provinces to face Daesh.” A fighter from the SDF was interviewed; he said: “We, Arab and Kurdish fighters, are here to defend Syria.” The voiceover commented: “The SDF’s members who managed to enter the city will participate in clearing the mines which Daesh left behind. According to experts, Daesh has booby-trapped many buildings” (RT, 10 June 2016). Similarly, RT reported: “After 10 days of heavy clashes, the military council of Manbij and SDF, backed by US-led strikes, stormed Manbij while Daesh fighters retreated to Al Raqqa, Maskana and Al Bab.” The voiceover added: “The SDF managed to cut IS supply route between Al Raqqa and Aleppo. They have taken control over Al Etihad University and a TV station” (RT, 2 August 2016).

So, the SDF were always framed as active agents that were reported to have recaptured strategic positions, stormed cities, cleared means, cut off IS routes, while IS fighters were passive. Their

voice was not reported while their territorial losses were promoted. Moreover, RT promoted IS's losses in terms of equipment, for example:

One report read “The military council of Manbij and the SDF have recaptured strategic positions and seized military equipment from Daesh.” A fighter from the SDF appeared on the screen showing communication devices, which were reported to have been taken from Daesh. “We seized 8 small devices and a big one which Daesh used to communicate with its members in Turkey” (RT, 13 June 2016). RT also reported: “Having advanced weapons, a special unit of the SDF managed to seize bombs made by Daesh and penetrate neighbourhoods in the centre of Manbij” (RT, 26 July 2016). As shown in the previous examples, the framing is simple and episodic. It tells the story from the point of view of the SDF fighters and shows their gains against IS. In this way, RT gave the impression that it was going to be a one-sided war. IS voice was excluded in all RT reports throughout the sample.

Moreover, the SDF's identity was constructed through a discourse of heroism in a few reports. This discourse was established through lexical choices made by the reporters, presenting the SDF's fighters as liberators who were resolved to defeat IS and who sacrificed their lives to save their people. In the following texts, RT reporters used the verb “to liberate” to describe the goal of SDF's operations against IS. For example, one report read:

The SDF assert that they are ready to face the terrorist organisation, Daesh, in Manbij, Jarablus, and Al Raqqa. They will liberate these territories in cooperation with all the Syrians who can fight for their country. So far, Daesh fighters have retreated as a result of the SDF's military attacks (RT, 6 May 2016).

Another report read: “According to military experts, there are tunnels leading from Manbij to Jarablus and Al Bab. These tunnels are used by Daesh to send military supplies to its members.” A member of the SDF was interviewed. He said: “We progress slowly because of IS landmines

and tunnels.” The voiceover commented: “The liberation of Manbij city in northern Syria near the Turkish border, is not an easy mission. The slow progress made by the SDF reflects their resolve to liberate the city” (RT, 12 August 2016). In a third news text, the voiceover commented:

Ongoing clashes are taking place between the SDF and Daesh fighters who committed crimes against civilians. The SDF’s members are resolved to drive Daesh out of Manbij and Al Bab, and they have deployed additional members to face Daesh-led counterattacks in Manbij (RT, 13 September 2016).

By representing the US-backed SDF members as liberators, RT legitimises their actions and invites the audiences to identify with them. Furthermore, RT represented the SDF’s members who were killed in battles against IS fighters as heroes who sacrificed their lives to defend their country and protect civilians. One report read: “In the battle for Manbij, the SDF have lost some of their members, but they managed to liberate 250 000 civilians from Daesh” (RT, 7 August 2016). Also, RT reported: “The SDF and Daesh have sustained huge losses in terms of fighters and materials. However, the SDF are resolved to pursue their military operations until they drive the terrorist organisation out of Manbij and all territories that remain under its control.” A soldier from the SDF was interviewed in the report. He said: “We will get rid of Daesh. We will follow them to Al Bab and Maskana. We will liberate Syria” (RT, 12 September 2016). In a third example, the voiceover reported: “The SDF have lost many soldiers but took control over new areas such as the squares of Al Dalla and Saba Bahrat” (RT, 4 July 2016).

So, the losses of the SDF were put in the context of their good intentions towards their people and their progress against IS on the ground. That is to say, the reported military failings were not framed negatively and attributed to the inadequacy of the US war strategy which has been described in the previous section as unlikely to succeed. In the light of the examples mentioned above, RT framing of the US-backed SDF activities seems to be unbalanced because it does not

contextualise the news critically. According to basic principles of professional war reporting, journalists are required to report the conflicting sides fairly, which is not the case in RT coverage of the war on IS in Syria as noticed throughout the study sample.

In the framing of Daesh's military role, RT has focused on Daesh fighting tactics, particularly underground smuggling tunnels, mines, booby-trapped vehicles, and suicide bombers but the organisation voice was not heard, as shown in the following examples:

One report read: "According to experts, more than 150 suicide bombers from Daesh are ready to carry out attacks against the SDF, using booby-trapped vehicles, in Manbij" (RT, 18 June 2016).

Another report read:

Daesh has reportedly prepared its members for armed confrontations that may last for weeks. Daesh snipers, booby-trapped cars, and smuggling tunnels are obstacles which affect the SDF's progress. According to experts, there are networks of tunnels leading from Manbij to Jarablus and Al Bab to convey military supplies to Daesh members.

The reporter interviewed a soldier from the SDF who said: "We are advancing slowly since there are tunnels and mines; clashes are still taking place" (RT, 25 July 2016). Similarly, RT reported: "According to military experts, 1750 fighters from Daesh were deployed in the centre of Manbij. Street fighting is taking place; Daesh lined the streets of Manbij with snipers and mines." A member of the SDF was quoted as saying: "The mines restrict our operations." The journalist commented "The SDF have removed more than 6000 landmines so far" (RT, 6 August 2016).

As shown above, RT showed Daesh's resistance and various tactics. The SDF's sources, non-identified sources in addition to the journalists' comments were structured in a way that communicates the serious efforts of SDF and the difficult missions they lead on the front lines to defeat IS.

Another central point in this analysis is the portrayal of the anti-IS operations which were led by the Syrian opposition factions, with US-led coalition air support. In all the reports which covered these actions, the role of the opposition factions was contextualised in terms of shared interests between Turkey and these factions which need to cooperate to prevent IS and the Kurdish-led forces, from progressing in north Syria. In the reports, there was no reference to the US-led coalition warplanes although the coalition and Turkey provided air support for the opposition forces in their operations against IS. For example, one of RT reports read:

Turkey has intensified its military deployment along the border with Syria, near Jarablus to fight Daesh. This operation which seeks to recapture the city appears to be a starting point for an offensive in which Ankara supports its allied Syrian opposition factions, according to official sources. Locals said that dozens of Turkish tanks and armoured vehicles crossed the Syrian territories to support the Free Army, that managed to drive Daesh back. According to the Turkish defence minister, this operation has no time limit as Ankara will not allow the Kurdish forces to take control over the territories recaptured from Daesh (RT, 25 August 2016).

In the report, a political expert said: “The aim of this operation is not only to drive Daesh out of Jarablus but also to clear the area of all the terrorist organisations which threaten Turkey.” The voiceover commented: “Establishing an area, where neither Daesh nor the Kurdish forces operate, allows the Syrian opposition factions to concentrate in the north of Syria, according to analysts” (RT, 25 August 2016). So, the Syrian opposition factions, backed by Turkey, were framed as fighters who take a role in the war against IS to achieve their self-interests primarily, unlike the SDF fighters who were represented as liberators who fight to save the Syrian people from IS.

In another text, RT reported: “Syrian opposition factions supported by the Turkish army have expanded and recaptured more positions from Daesh.” The voiceover reported the Turkish foreign minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu saying: “The Kurdish organisations must withdraw to the East of

Euphrates.” Then a Turkish political expert said: “The Kurdish organisations are the biggest threat. Therefore, the Turkish actions concentrate on them, while Daesh is an external threat.” The voiceover commented: “Turkey will not keep its forces in northern Syria, it seeks to transfer the control over these territories to its allied Syrian opposition factions, which serves their interests” (RT, 12 September 2016). Also, RT reported: “After the Turkish army and its allied Syrian factions had taken control over Jarablus, clashes occurred between the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army and Kurdish forces.” The Turkish President was reported as saying through a translator: “We are resolved to clear the region from the terrorist organizations, and we support any party that participates in this effort.” The voiceover continued: “Experts say the fast progress of Turkey’s allies against Daesh and the Kurdish organisations helps the Turkish government achieve its aims” (RT, 25 September 2016).

So, RT’s reporters promoted official Turkish voices and messages from non-official sources to show that the opposition factions and Turkey pursue a selfish agenda in the context of the war on IS. This framing contrasts with the portrayal of US-backed SDF that were shown on RT’s screen as liberators. RT excluded the fact that the US-led coalition warplanes have provided air support for the Free Army. Also, the voices of the Syrian opposition and IS were absent. Then, this channel did not follow the professional standards of war reporting, but it invited Arab viewers to question the role of the Syrian opposition factions and underestimate their efforts against IS.

The last point in this section is RT’s framing of the interaction between the US-led coalition and Russia in Syria. In this aspect, RT supported the policy of its country by representing the development of the US war strategy as a reaction to Russia’s military move while the US refusal to cooperate with Russia in Syria was always framed as a contradictory position.

One of RT reports read: “After the Russian intervention in Syria, the US has reviewed its strategy in the war against Daesh.” Carter was quoted as saying: “We will not hold back from supporting our partners by conducting air strikes or sending special forces.” Then, the voiceover commented: “This change in the US vision is motivated mainly by the Russian move” (RT, 28 October 2015).

In another text, the Russian minister of foreign affair Lavrov was quoted as saying:

Only when our Air Forces conducted strikes in Syria and destroyed Daesh oil trucks, did the US-led coalition warplanes start to bomb Daesh fuel conveys. The US-led coalition warplanes have been operating in Iraq and Syria for more than one year. I am sure they have already observed these IS targets.

Then, the reporter estimated: “The US-led coalition has failed to destroy Daesh so far” (RT, 27 November 2015). In terms of the coordination of military operations in the skies over Syria, RT framed the US refusal to coordinate with Russia, in Syria, except for the safety of the coalition forces, as a contradictory position. This framing relates to the ordering of voices. The voices of the US or the Russian officials were followed by messages from non-identified sources criticising the US stance, as shown below.

One of RT reporters commented: “The US Secretary of Defence Carter has stressed that the US will not cooperate with Russia as long as the latter supports the Syrian army, describing Russia’s strategy as a mistake.” Carter was reported as saying: “The strategy that Russia pursues is a mistake since its strikes hit areas beyond Daesh targets. We will not cooperate with them as long as they are pursuing that strategy.” The reporter commented:

Carter has also stressed that Washington maintains a channel of communication with the Russian military, to ensure the safety of the aircrews in Syria. Observers describe Carter’s statements as contradictory, recalling that the US-led coalition has not managed to undermine Daesh’s ability to recruit more fighters (RT, 3 December 2015).

Moreover, RT reported: “After communications with Washington and Riyadh, Moscow has realised that the US-led coalition is unwilling to cooperate with Russia in Syria to destroy Daesh’s headquarters.” Lavrov was quoted as saying: “We asked the US-led coalition forces to provide us with information about the terrorists’ positions, as well as the areas where the opposition factions are operating, but they refused.” The voiceover commented: “According to observers, Washington seeks to delegitimise Russia’s campaign given the US-led coalition failure to degrade Daesh, but such a negative response to Russia’s move contradicts with Washington’s counterterrorism goals in Syria” (RT, 12 October 2015). So, non-identified sources were used to show that Russia is open and ready to cooperate with the US-led coalition and that the coalition failed to degrade IS.

In the light of the above discussion, it is clear that the military aspect of the US-led war is reported differently to the political one. RT journalists relied on non-identified sources (observers, experts) when framing the US war strategy as ineffective, and they used this kind of sourcing practices when reporting positive evaluations about the progress of US-backed SDF against IS. Then, it is noteworthy that RT’s war discourse involves contradiction. That is to say, the negative portrayal of the US war strategy contrasts with the positive representation of the military actions led by the US-backed SDF. These forces were reported to have made gains against IS, with US-led coalition air support. One point that can explain why RT framed the US-led military actions positively is that Russia, like the US and other European countries, was attacked by IS. As noted previously, Yarchi et al. (2013) maintained that if a country has experience with terror, its media are more likely to frame counterterrorism actions taken by other countries positively.

RT reporting is oriented to draw distinctions between the roles of the US-backed armed groups [the SDF and the opposition factions] in the fight against IS in Syria.

The SDF were represented as heroes who sacrificed their lives to defend Syria and its people against IS. This positive framing is consistent with Russia's policies, since these forces target the common enemy, IS, only. The US and the SDF are not involved in military actions against Russia or its ally, the Syrian regime.

A significant point that shows the taking of sides in RT coverage of this war is the way the Syrian factions, that fight against Al Assad regime and its allies, in parallel with the war on IS, were framed. Their anti-IS actions which were backed by US-led air strikes, were not put in the context of the US-led war on terror. RT reporters emphasised that the opposition factions fight against IS in cooperation with Turkey to serve their interests. The reporters often used episodic frames to cover events in the field. The analysis showed that RT did not follow professional standards of journalism, for it reported the military actions from the limited perspective of the SDF and their US allies. IS and the Syrian opposition factions' sources were absent throughout the sample. Also, RT did not give access to official or non-official voices that criticise the US-led actions.

On the Visual plane

This section shows how the visualisation of the US-led coalition military actions relates to the verbal framing discussed above. RT represented the SDF's soldiers in control over the situation and visualised the weapons they seized from IS. Also, RT took viewers inside tunnels which were reported to have been cleared of IS. The SDF's members appeared next to dead IS fighters. It is noteworthy that RT did not use any visuals from IS media sources in its reports throughout the sample. It relied on the visuals filmed by its local and embedded reporters.

The analysis begins with the visualisation of the US soldiers and the SDF's members. These forces were not shown engaged in actual military operations. They appeared in their uniform, and they were filmed mostly from a medium distance. Throughout the sample, some of them were

interviewed and shown individually. Below, [in figures 80,81,82,83] soldiers are filmed individually while they are talking about their military roles against IS. Their active agency is communicated visually through their gaze as they have direct eye contact with audiences.



Figure 80 An American soldier in Syria

In the above image [figure 80], an American soldier who is filmed frontally as he expresses his proudness of being a fighter against IS in Syria. He calls on the world to support the SDF in their counterterrorism efforts.



Figure 81 A member of the SDF points at US-led coalition strikes

In this image [81] a member of the SDF points at US-led coalition strikes, telling audiences that the US-led coalition warplanes, in the skies of Syria, pave the way for the SDF to advance towards Manbij. As shown, he appears in his uniform and gazes at the camera. So, we are invited to associate ourselves with his subject position and see the war from his point of view.

In the following image [82], a soldier, called Ahamed, appeared on the screen. He addresses audiences, showing the SDF's commitment to free Syria of IS. Such direct eye contact with audiences reflects his active agency and encourages RT's viewers to identify with him.



Figure 82 Ahmed, a soldier in the SDF's offensive against IS in Manbij

Similarly, in the image below [83] a Kurdish fighter is filmed from a medium distance. She smiles as she shows the resolve of the SDF to degrade IS. She addressed the camera, saying: "We want to liberate Manbij, so the civilians can return to their homes and live peacefully."



Figure 83 A Kurdish soldier on the front line

This kind of visual-verbal framing in which the fighters are individualised and shown on the front line emphasises the efforts led by the US-backed SDF against IS. The visuals humanise the fighters and encourage audiences to relate to the US soldiers and the SDF.

In addition to showing some soldiers individually, in the reports, the US soldiers and the SDF's members were represented collectively. In figures [84.85] soldiers are shown as a homogenous

group while the voiceover refers to their military actions, which aim at destroying IS and liberating civilians who suffer from the organisation's persecution.



Figure 84 US soldiers in Syria

The above figure [84] shows a group of US soldiers who are reported to support the SDF in their fighting against IS.



Figure 85 Members of the SDF in Manbij

This figure [85] shows a group of the SDF that are reported to have recaptured villages from IS. The soldiers are shown wearing uniforms and holding their weapons. This helps introduce them to viewers as a regular army and legitimise their actions against IS. However, as I have mentioned, the soldiers were not shown engaged in actual combats.

Another point in this analysis is the visualisation of the air strikes. RT showed panoramic views (wide-long shots) of the US-led coalition strikes. In parallel with such images, the voiceover reported the precise bombing of IS positions. In the images below, the Arab viewers are invited to see the flames and smoke which have resulted from US-led air raids.



Figure 86 heavy smoke after US-led air raids



Figure 87 US-led coalition air strikes in Manbij



Figure 88 Smoke and fumes resulting from US-led air strikes in Syria

This kind of image, which recurred throughout the sample, involves what is called “strategies of sublimation” (Chouliaraki, 2009, p. 520). The scenes of flames and heavy smoke may activate

emotions of horror and awe, which limits the viewers' engagement with human suffering in Syria (Chouliaraki, 2006b, p. 173). The viewers do not see or hear about casualties, and they may find the attacks justifiable since the voiceover defines the targets as IS-held positions.

Furthermore, RT portrayed the military gains of the SDF. This includes military equipment, such as communication devices and bombs, as well as, documents that were taken from IS positions.



Figure 89 Communication devices taken from IS headquarters



Figure 90 Explosive devices found in IS headquarters



Figure 91 Bombs taken from IS positions

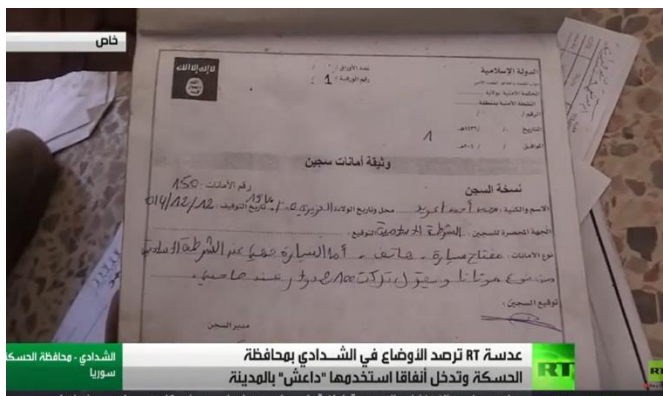


Figure 92 documents collected from IS headquarters

Additionally, RT showed IS smuggling tunnels, booby-trapped vehicles, and mines.



Figure 93 A member of the SDF in a tunnel used by IS



Figure 94 IS tunnels in Al Shaddadi



Figure 95 A member of the SDF points at a bobby trapped vehicle



Figure 96 Explosive devices made by IS

Showing the equipment and documents collected from IS headquarters and taking audiences inside tunnels establish a classic iconography of victory. Such images tell viewers that the areas where the US-backed SDF operate have been cleared of the enemy.

The reports that covered the military actions led by the opposition factions against IS included panoramic scenes, showing military deployments or smoke as a result of Turkish air strikes. However, the Syrian opposition factions and the Turkish forces were not visualised.



Figure 97 Turkish military deployments in Northern Syria



Figure 98 Turkish air support for the Syrian opposition

Finally, in terms of military failings, RT did not show military losses on the side of the SDF. It broadcast images, showing bodies of IS fighters who were reported to have been killed in battles with the SDF, in few reports. For example, RT quoted a member of the SDF as saying: “we will avenge from Daesh fighters and we will follow them to Manbij, Al Bab, Dir Ez-zor, and Jarablus. We will clear Syria of the whole organisation” (RT, 10 June 2016). At the scene, as he was talking, audiences were invited to see dead fighters from IS.



Figure 99 A member of IS killed in Manbij



Figure 100 Members of IS killed in clashes with the SDF in Syria

In conclusion, the visuals of the military frame support the verbal discourse, by showing the active agency of the US-backed SDF and the military failings of IS. The verbal texts which refer to deaths on the side of the SDF lack the power of pictorial presence. Throughout the sample, RT allowed the SDF and US soldiers to relate to viewers through the camera, but it did not give access to the Syrian opposition factions. As this research seeks to explore how RT as an international news channel responded to the policies of its country when it covered the multi-sided war on IS in Syria, it can be argued that the exclusion of the voice, as well as the visuals of the Syrian opposition, is an indication of taking sides in this conflict. By rendering the Syrian opposition factions irrelevant to the scenes of the war on IS and framing their military activities in terms of the common interests between them and Turkey, RT news discourse deemphasises contribution of the Syrian opposition to the war against international terrorism. RT reporting gives the impression that liberating the

Syrian people from IS is not the primary goal of these anti-regime rebels. This leads to conclude that when rivals fight against a common enemy, news media outlets may tend to support their countries of origin by deemphasising the role of the rivals that have greatly dissimilar policies, while the actors, that have less dissimilar policies, the SDF in this case, are represented positively.

The humanitarian aspect of the US-led intervention

In what follows, I discuss how RT framed the humanitarian situation in the context of the US-led war in Syria verbally and visually.

On the verbal plane

This section concentrates on the verbal framing of the impact of the US-led war on the humanitarian situation in Syria. It examines how the identities of the military actors involved and civilians are constructed. I have shown, in the previous section, that the US-backed SDF were represented on RT screen as liberators who seek to clear Syria of IS. So, in line with this positive portrayal, RT framed the US-led military operations in cooperation with the SDF as a humanitarian response to help the people in IS-held areas. To build this frame, RT focused on IS's brutality against civilians and relieved the US-led coalition and the SDF of their responsibility in inflicting human suffering in this war. So, RT coverage provided a simple representation, setting boundaries between the liberators or the benefactors [the US-led coalition including the US-backed SDF] and the persecutor [IS].

This discussion starts with the representation of IS identity. RT portrayed the violence committed by IS against civilians, such as deliberate killings, imposing a strict dress code on people, particularly women, or taking them as human shields. RT's reporters allowed civilians who fled IS-held territories to tell stories about IS's oppression, but the organisation voice was not represented throughout the sample.

For example, RT reported: “Thousands of civilians, who have escaped from Daesh-held areas in Manbij and Maskana, are sitting in the shade of olive trees to avoid sunburn. These women, elderly people, and children ran from Daesh’s persecution.” Then, a young man from Manbij said: “Daesh killed our families. The SDF are here to liberate us” (RT, 5 June 2016). Another report read: “In addition to imposing ultraconservative dress code on civilians under their control, Daesh members kill and kidnap those who do not obey their orders.” Then, a woman said: “Daesh forces us to cover our faces and hands. They do not allow us to move freely.” The reporter commented: “Civilians are seeking shelters in the areas controlled by the Military Council of Manbij. They wish to return to their homes after the withdrawal of Daesh” (RT, 16 June 2016).

This framing involves a clear distinction between the victims and their persecutor. Giving civilians a voice in this context operates “as a powerful means of introducing moral argument in the news, insofar as it communicates the people’s authentic experience of their suffering as a call for action” (Chouliaraki, 2015, p. 107). In the same context, RT reported:

Local sources have reported that there are more than 300 people, under siege in Daesh areas. Women are the most vulnerable group that have suffered from Daesh inhuman practices. Some of them have been separated from their husbands while others have been exposed to sexual harassment and slavery.

In the report, a woman was quoted as saying: I have been besieged in Daesh’s areas for 2 months. I want to join my husband; he is Kurdish” (RT, 10 August 2016). Also, one of RT journalists reported:

According to local sources, Daesh has been under pressure, as the residents of Manbij organised protests, demanding the organisation withdraw from the city. Daesh members have killed several protesters, while thousands of women and children have managed to flee the city. Women took off the black veil imposed on them when they left Daesh-held territories, celebrating liberation from the organisation’s restrictions.

In the report a displaced woman said: “Daesh have humiliated our families. We are starving under their siege.” A family man said: We were under threat of being killed by Daesh, but we survived fortunately” (RT, 20 June 2016). Furthermore, RT reported: “Daesh has killed entire families while they were trying to escape from the village of Alnawaja.” A survivor said: “Daesh has planted mines everywhere. Many women had lost their lives when they stepped on Daesh’s landmines.” The voiceover added: “Civilian residents, particularly women and children, in IS-held areas, have been living in very hard conditions” A young man said: “We have been under siege. We have been starving. I have no money to buy milk for my daughter” (RT, 11 July 2016).

So, RT used civilian voices to show the tyranny of IS. The reporters portrayed different aspects of suffering for which Daesh only was blamed. The abovementioned testimonies showed IS as an aggressor that does not care about the safety of those who live in the ‘Caliphate territories.’ Arab viewers are told that people are starving and are humiliated. RT reporting gives the impression that civilians fled their homes because of IS persecution only, not because of the US-led coalition strikes or the ongoing armed confrontations between the US-backed SDF and IS. RT showed how women have been persecuted and how they have taken off the black veil imposed on them by Daesh after they fled IS-held territories, which is a marker of freedom from IS. So, civilians in these examples and throughout the sample are used as a source of information about what happens in IS-controlled territories. Their voice helps legitimise international interventions against IS in Syria.

In respect of the representation of sufferers and the structuring of RT’s audience relationship with them, the findings are mixed. In some texts, RT represented the sufferers in terms of statistical or collective references (such as civilians, thousands) and humanised them with reference to their personal characteristics such as gender or age, for example:

- “Thousands of civilians, who have escaped from Daesh-held areas in Manbij and Maskana, are sitting in the shade of olive trees to avoid sunburn. These women, elderly people, and children ran from Daesh’s persecution” (RT, 5 June 2016).

- “Local sources have reported that there are more than 300 people, under siege in Daesh areas. Women are the most vulnerable group who have suffered from Daesh inhuman practices (RT, 10 August 2016).

- “Civilian residents, particularly women and children, in IS-held areas, have been living in very hard conditions” (RT, 11 July 2016).

Besides, the sufferers were personalised in several reports. In the following examples, civilians were identified by name and place of origin; also, they were allowed to express themselves and blame IS for their suffering.

One report read: “Abu Abdulla and his family are among dozens of civilians who have managed to leave the centre of Manbij. They took a dangerous adventure to escape from Daesh.” Then, Abu Abdulla addressed audiences, saying: “Daesh besieges many families. They tried to prevent us from leaving the city, but fortunately, we left.” The voiceover commented: “These practices are part of the organisation’s oppressive rules which are stricter than the law of the jungle” (RT, 8 August 2016). The report also told the story of Um Khaled: “Um Khaled is an old woman from Manbij whose son was killed by Daesh because he refused to join the organisation.” Then, she said in front of the camera: “My son has 6 daughters and two sons. He was killed by Daesh. They burned my heart.” Another report read: “Daesh planted mines in Al Haj Awwad’s farm. One of his grandchildren has lost his hand, after a mine exploded.” The grandfather commented: “Daesh planted landmines in the farm. This is dangerous. These explosive devices can cause deaths.” His relative, Jassim, added: “Daesh’s mines exploded when our children stepped on them. One lost his

hand, and the other lost his leg.” The voiceover commented: “Dozens were killed by Daesh’s mines, and hundreds of besieged civilians have been under threat of being killed by the terrorist organisation” (RT, 26 July 2016). Furthermore, RT reported the story of Ibrahim Al Azzawi whose relative was killed by IS. According to the voiceover, “Ibrahim Al Azzawy has witnessed the execution of his cousin by Daesh in Al Jazira Square.” Al Azzawi said: “They had slaughtered my cousin and crucified his corpse, here, for 4 days” (RT, 17 September 2016).

RT reporters contextualised their stories in a way which emphasises the brutality of IS. Not only do RT’s audiences hear the story, but also, they imagine it as they see Al Azzawi showing the place and the way in which his relative was crucified. Also, they can see the tears of Um Khaled, who cried in front of the camera. In the light of the examples mentioned above RT emphasised the agency of IS as a persecutor; this news discourse is morally rich to justify the use of military power in Syria through a human discourse which establishes clearly the identity of the aggressor and the victims.

Another central point in the framing of the US-led intervention as a legitimate action is that RT always emphasised that the US-led military operations were conducted with due regard for the safety of the non-combatants in Syria. Furthermore, RT showed the US-backed SDF’s members as benefactors who assisted the displaced people. This portrayal of good conduct during the war on terror suppresses the identity of the US-led coalition as a persecutor. In this meaning-making process, the voices of the SDF, as well as civilians, were promoted. For example, one report read:

Arab and Kurdish fighters came from Al Hassaka, Aleppo and Idlib to Manbij in response to the appeals of civilians who suffer from the tyranny of Daesh. Manbij is not their final destination. They will drive Daesh out of Jarablus, Izzaz and Al Bab. As the US-backed SDF have been advancing towards Manbij, they have continued to provide humanitarian

assistance to displaced people. In the village of Tal Ursh, the Military Council of Manbij provides humanitarian aid to civilians (RT, 16 June 2016).

Another report read: “The SDF have been slowly advancing. More than 85% of Manbij’s territories became under their control. However, they face difficulty in recapturing the whole city as they try to avoid casualties.” Then, a member of the SDF said: “We came to help our brothers and sisters in Manbij.” Another soldier said: “We managed to liberate some innocent civilians who were taken as human shields by Daesh” (RT, 21 July 2016). The voiceover continued: “The US-led coalition warplanes strike Daesh’s positions and have occasionally caused civilian casualties” (RT, 21 July 2016). The use of the word ‘occasionally’ reduces the impact of the statement; it gives the impression that the coalition tries to minimise the human costs of the air strikes, but there are unavoidable incidents that occur occasionally. In another report, the voiceover commented: “The US-led coalition dropped warning leaflets, asking civilians to leave Al Raqqa. Therefore, hundreds of people flee to the Kurdish-controlled areas daily.” A displaced person said: “They say that the US-backed Kurdish forces will attack the city. People are afraid and want to leave Al Raqqa, but Daesh has prevented them” (RT, 5 June 2016).

Likewise, one of RT’s journalists reported: “When the SDF resumed military operations against Daesh in Manbij, they made efforts to avoid civilian casualties. So, they negotiated with Daesh, presenting three initiatives to protect the residents who remained in the city, but to no avail” (RT, 10 August 2016). The abovementioned reports represented the US-backed SDF as responsible fighters who care about the safety of civilians, in contrast to IS that used them as human shields, a contrast which emphasises the humanity and morality of the US-backed SDF versus their enemy.

The last point in this section is the framing of material damage. RT framed the damage which resulted from the US-led air strikes and the ground offensives led by the SDF as collateral, that is,

as unintended since it occurred in areas where IS targets operated. RT incorporated voices from the SDF's members and civilians who emphasised the SDF's positive role in Syria. For example, one report read: "US-led coalition air strikes and armed clashes between the SDF and Daesh have resulted in huge material damage in Manbij. The central market has been burned to the ground by Daesh." A soldier from the SDF said: "This is Manbij's market. Daesh ordered civilians to evacuate the market and burned it then. Daesh's mission is to destroy everything" (RT, 21 August 2016).

Another report read: "The residents of Manbij have started to return gradually to the city where the US-led air strikes against Daesh have resulted in material destruction. The SDF's members assisted the returnees. Daesh logos can be seen everywhere in the city." A member of the SDF said: "We liberated Manbij for our people and now we exert efforts to help civilians as they return to their homes." A young woman said: "We are happy we returned to our city safely." The voiceover commented: "Dozens of residents returned to the city after they lost some of their relatives who were kidnapped or killed by the terrorist organisation" (RT, 13 September 2016). This framing invites audiences to consider the material damage caused by the US-led coalition strikes in Manbij as justifiable since the mission was accomplished and IS was degraded.

Hence, RT employed the verbal discourse to show the suffering inflicted on the Syrians by IS while the US-led coalition and the SDF were framed as benefactors of the Syrian people. As was the case when framing the military aspect of the US-led intervention, RT covered the humanitarian situation of the conflict from the perspective of the US-led coalition, particularly, the SDF. The sufferers' voice supports the claims made by the US-backed SDF. RT reporters did not provide different views or critical messages. The sufferers were personalised and given the opportunity to refer to their persecutor. The humanitarian situation was not raised in the reports that covered the

anti-IS operations that were conducted by Syrian opposition factions throughout the sample. As I have mentioned earlier, their role was framed in terms of the common interests between them and Turkey in northern Syria. Below, I discuss the visual framing of the humanitarian aspect of the US-led intervention.

On the visual plane

The visual discourse reinforced the verbal one, showing images of sufferers, including women and children, who were reported to have been persecuted by IS. As on the verbal plane, IS fighters were not visualised. RT reported that the US-led air campaign caused casualties occasionally. The visuals showed material damage, but no civilian deaths were reported or shown.

The analysis starts with the visualisation of the displaced people, who fled IS-held areas. As shown in figure [101] a displaced family sit in the shade of olive trees, while the accompanying voiceover tells audiences that these people fled IS's oppression. In the image, the children look at the camera which gives them agency and invites RT's viewers to identify with them.



Figure 101 A displaced family that fled IS-held territories



Figure 102 A displaced child from Manbij

In figure [102] the sufferer is individual. A displaced child is filmed frontally sitting in the shade of a tree. This sufferer has an appellative power; his gaze touches the hearts of viewers and evokes the moral demand for actions to help the refugees who escaped IS-held territories.



Figure 103 Displaced children

In this figure [103], a group of displaced children look happy, while the voiceover reports that these sufferers and their families feel safe, as they have managed to leave IS-held territories, and that the Military Council of Manbij offered assistance to them. This framing invites viewers to appreciate the role of the SDF and the US-led coalition generally as benefactors.



Figure 104 A child who lost his hand because of a landmine planted by IS

In the above figure [104], an amputee child is seen. He was reported to have lost his hand as a result of the explosion of a landmine planted by IS. The child is filmed frontally, from a medium distance, and he has direct eye contact with audiences who can see and relate to his suffering. This image evokes the moral demand to save children, in Syria, whose future is under threat because of IS brutality. As RT viewers see this child who has become disabled, they are invited to bear witness and denounce IS brutality. This kind of images contributes to moralising the US-led military actions.

In addition to the images of children, RT repeatedly showed images of women who told audiences about their suffering and blamed IS for their misfortune. The image below shows a woman who was liberated by the SDF. She said she was held captive by IS for two months.



Figure 105 A woman liberated from IS



Figure 106 A young woman persecuted by IS

In the above image [figure 106] a young woman appears along with other civilians. She looks sad and tired, and she removed the black veil after she fled IS territories. She has eye contact with the audiences, who are asked to relate to her. The accompanying voiceover reported that women were exposed to sexual harassment and captivity by IS. Also, the civilians whose personal suffering was reported like Abu Abdulla, Um Khaled and Ibrahim Al Azzawi (discussed in the preceding section) were shown on the screen, so audiences can see them as well as hear their stories.

The image below [107] shows Abu Abdulla and his family who were reported to have taken a dangerous adventure to leave IS-controlled areas.



Figure 107 Abu Abdulla and his family

In the following image [108] RT's audiences can see Um Khaled, who cried as she recalled that her son, a father of 8 children, was killed by IS. The viewers can hear the voice of the crying mother, who gazes at the camera with a sad facial expression, so they can feel her pain and engage

with her suffering. According to Chouliaraki (2006a), the act of “choosing to capture the sufferers’ gaze with the camera is also one of giving them a voice and humanizing them” (p.89).



Figure 108 Um Khaled, a mother whose son was killed by IS

Additionally, in the image below, Ibrahim Al Azzawy, appears in front of the camera, showing how IS crucified his cousin’s body, so audiences can imagine the tragic memories that he recalls and think of the war on IS as a humanitarian response. For Graber, war images have a strong effect on how audiences respond to conflicts. She maintains that visuals “make audiences care about an issue and the people involved in it” (Graber, 1987, p. 76). On the screen, Al Azzawy remembers the horrible killing of his cousin by IS while he [Al Azzawi] feels safe after the withdrawal of IS. So, audiences can notice how the situation has changed after the US-led intervention and acknowledge the role of the coalition forces and particularly the SDF in saving the lives of this man and other survivors in Manbij.



Figure 109 Ibrahim Al Azzawi, a survivor from Manbij

Another point in this analysis is that RT visuals confirmed the identity of the SDF as liberators and benefactors. The figure [110] shows families who have returned to their homes; also, in the image, a member of the SDF appears in his uniform, next to them. This may lead to mobilise public opinion in the Arab world in favour of the US-led intervention against IS.



Figure 110 A member of the SDF next to returnees in Manbij

The image [111] shows a member of the SDF who is filmed frontally, gazing at audiences, while she explains the efforts taken by the SDF to help the civilians who appear in the background.



Figure 111 A member of the SDF talks about efforts to relieve civilians

The last point in this visual analysis is that the images of destruction resulting from US-led air strikes were often accompanied by texts that reduced their negative connotations. RT framed these losses as collateral damage that occurred when the US-led coalition targeted IS-held positions.



Figure 112 Material damage as result of the US-led war against IS



Figure 113 A building destroyed as a result of US-led air strikes in Manbij

Thus, the visuals showed Syrian sufferers individually as well as in groups. RT focused on the images of vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. The visuals did not show civilian deaths, throughout the sample. The SDF's soldiers were shown in control of the recaptured areas while civilians started to return to their homes. I would emphasise that RT reports can be considered as "witnessing texts" in terms of Frosh (2006) since they enable audiences to witness the suffering inflicted by IS in Syria and evoke the need for a response to help civilians. So, RT invites viewers to bear witness. I recall Tait's argument that "to bear witness describes the act of appealing to an audience to share responsibility for the suffering of others" (2011, p.1233). By emphasising IS brutality and humanising the sufferers, whose portrayals move beyond statistical terms and who blamed IS for their suffering, RT attempted to influence Arab viewers' emotions and invited them to engage with the Syrian sufferers; this "includes hearing the appeal, being

affected by it, and translating that affectedness into emotions that moralize public action” (Tait, 2011, p.1233). In this context, RT suppressed the identity of the US-led coalition as an aggressor. Its news discourse encourages Arab audiences to think of the US-led intervention, as morally needed to help the Syrians who have suffered from IS violence, while the violent actions taken by the coalition in this conflict were represented as unintended. I recall Rentschler’s (2004) argument that bearing witness is never innocent of politics. RT emphasised the positive role led by the US-backed SDF against the common enemy, IS, since their military actions do not conflict with Russia’s agenda as long as they target IS only, although Russia does not support the US war strategy. As noted previously, this positive framing can be also attributed to the fact the both Russia and the US, along with other Western countries, suffered from IS terrorism.

When RT represented the role of the US-backed Syrian opposition factions against IS, it did not frame their efforts as an attempt to end the human suffering inflicted by IS. There is thus variation in the politics of suffering, as well as the representation of military action and governance, which can best be explained in terms of the Russian political context.

7.2 The representation of the Russian military intervention in Syria

As mentioned earlier, Russia launched a military air campaign in Syria with the stated purpose to degrade IS, in cooperation with Al Assad regime, and Putin called for the formation of a global coalition under the auspices of the UN to defeat international terrorism. In what follows, I study how RT covered the military intervention of its country of origin in Syria.

The governance aspect of the Russian intervention

This section addresses the representation of local and international support for Russia's military intervention. So, it looks at what voices are included from the Russian government, how their claims are incorporated in relation to other supportive or critical voices or in relation to the journalists' voices, what messages are selectively promoted, and what implications are involved in this representation.

Throughout the study sample, RT highlighted the legality of the Russian military actions which have been taken upon the request of the Syrian president, and it emphasised the need for global cooperation in order to defeat IS. These messages were echoed by Russian and Syrian official voices. The legitimacy of the Russian involvement is asserted through contrast to the illegitimacy of the US-led air campaign which was launched without the Syrian government's approval, though the US-led military actions were framed positively, as discussed earlier. Also, legitimacy of the Russian campaign is asserted through the voice of Syrian citizens who welcomed Russia's intervention.

The analysis begins with the situation in Russia. RT promoted official voices from the Kremlin such as the Russian President Putin, the minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov, the minister of defence Sergey Shoygu as well as members of the Russian Federation Council. It also quoted political experts who supported Moscow's stance. Oppositional voices were absent, as far as the

sample provides evidence for. That is to say, the reports reflected the consensus among the Russian official institutions regarding the military intervention in Syria, as shown in the following examples:

One report read:

In confirmation with the article NO102, section one, in the constitution of the Russian Federation and upon the request of the Syrian President, the Federation Council has approved the use of armed forces in Syria. President Putin has stressed his will to encounter terrorism through pre-emptive military actions.

Then, Putin was shown saying:

I have been granted the Federation's permission to use military force in Syria. The only and best solution to defeat international terrorism in Syria and the neighbouring countries is to take pre-emptive steps to face the terrorists in the territories where they operate, rather than waiting until they reach our home.

The voiceover commented: "The Russian action is legitimate since it has been taken upon a request made by President Al Assad. This intervention seeks to protect Moscow's national security interests as there are Russian citizens fighting for Daesh." The deputy chairman of the Federation Council of Russia, Ilyas Umakhanov addressed the camera, saying:

The Western countries have conducted air strikes in Syria without the UN Security Council's approval and their actions have been proved ineffective. However, our intervention is legal since it is a response to a request made by the Syrian President, and we will coordinate our actions with the Syrian army. Therefore, the Russian strikes will be definitely effective.

Another member of the Russian Federation Council addressed audiences, saying: "Unlike the Western countries, we do not support one side against the other in Syria. We wish to cooperate with the Syrian opposition or any other party." The reporter commented: "Calling for a broad

coalition to fight terrorism, the Kremlin is resolved to support the Syrian army in the war on Daesh, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy” (RT, 1 October 2015).

Similarly, another report read: “The minister of foreign affairs Lavrov has stressed that Russia seeks to destroy Daesh, Al Nusra Front and their followers; it does not seek to support one side against the other in the Syrian crisis. Russia does not consider the Free Army as a terrorist organisation.” Then, Lavrov was quoted as saying: “We have not designated the members of the Free Syrian Army as terrorists. We target only the armed groups that are designated by the UN as well as the Russian laws as terrorists.” The reporter estimated: “The Russian intervention is legitimate since it is preceded by an official request from the Syrian government, unlike the US-led action.” Lavrov was quoted again as saying: “If the US-led coalition targets terror groups in Syria, we do the same thing.” The reporter commented: “Lavrov said that President Putin’s call for a broad coalition against terrorism has begun to evoke positive responses. He has stressed that it is unacceptable and illegal to exclude the Syrian government from counterterrorism actions” (RT, 2 October 2015).

In these texts, all the reported sources are supportive of the Kremlin’s policy. They were represented uncritically. These patterns emerge clearly in the evaluative language through which sources were framed, and preferred meanings were established. Journalistic evaluations were added to show the adequacy of Russia’s war strategy. Throughout the above texts, Russian officials drew attention to the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the Kremlin’s military involvement in Syria. They represented Russia’s military campaign as a pre-emptive war that was launched to destroy IS. RT reporters made lexical choices that support these official messages. They referred to “Moscow’s national security interests,” noting that “there are Russian citizens, fighting for Daesh.” They described the Russian military campaign as “legitimate”, in contrast to the US-led

action. One reporter estimated: “The Kremlin is resolved to support the Syrian army in the war on Daesh, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy.”

This reporting style is quite authoritarian because it does not leave a distance between the politician’s claim and the journalist’s account of it. By stating consistently that Russia’s strikes are legitimate and pre-emptive, RT reporters leave no room for critical messages or other views. This raises questions about RT reporting style as it seems a deliberate act of propaganda (a mouthpiece for the government).

In the same context, RT reported: “Moscow has intervened in Syria upon the request of the Syrian government, and it seeks to destroy terrorism in cooperation with the Syrian army and other Western partners.” A Russian political expert said: “There is a need to coordinate counterterrorism efforts. A new intelligence centre that has staff from Russia, Syria, Iraq, and Iran has been created and the door is open for those that wish to participate. Russia is ready for information sharing with the US-led coalition.” The reporter commented: “Despite international divisions over counterterrorism policies in Syria, Moscow stresses that it will continue its anti-Daesh operations in coordination with the Syrian army” (RT, 2 November 2015).

It is noticeable that RT accepted without question the Kremlin’s political discourse which promotes the war in Syria as a pre-emptive action. This media-state relationship is clear and unqualified. It should be noted that such a relationship is common in wartime, particularly when governments declare “war on terrorism.” For example, in the coverage of the war in Iraq (2003), the US media supported their country, although they are not owned or funded by the White House. According to Piety and Foley (2006), “the American media accepted without question the Bush administration’s doctrine of ‘pre-emptive war’” (p. 65).

In the above texts and throughout the sample, RT promoted the idea that the Kremlin has acted in parallel with the US campaign against the same enemy but adopted a more effective strategy in contrast to it. This news discourse which compares the US-led intervention with the Russian one reflects the view of the ruling elites. For some critics, Putin seeks to increase Russia's profile in Syria and the whole region to restore it to the status of a great superpower (Dawisha, 2015). According to Plakoudas (2015), "Putin is striving to transform the international system into a multipolar world in which the United States will share power with Russia and other powers" (p.37). Central to the legitimisation process of Russia's military action is promoting the satisfaction of the Syrian regime and people with this move. RT communicated the idea that both the Syrian regime and citizens welcome the Russian support. One of RT's reports read: "The Syrian President Al Assad says that the Western policies towards Syria hinder his government's efforts to fight against terrorism." In contrast, he estimated: "The Russian counterterrorism operations, in cooperation with the Syrian army defend Syria, Iraq and the whole region and seek to protect Russia and Europe." Then, a political advisor to the Syrian president said: "President Al Assad is committed to fighting terrorism. Counterterrorism actions in Syria should be carried out legally in cooperation with the Syrian army." The voiceover commented: "President Al Assad stressed his will to destroy terrorism and praised the Russian support to achieve this goal" (RT, 6 December 2015).

Another report which promoted the Syrian regime approval of Russia's involvement in Syria read: "Russian air strikes have targeted different areas in the north, the middle and the east of Syria. Officials in Damascus are optimistic about the outcomes of Russia's air campaign." RT reporter interviewed a political advisor to the Syrian President who said: "Russia is serious about fighting terrorism; it always deals with the issues that concern Syria credibly and carefully. So, we expect its efforts to succeed. For me, the Russian actions and the US-led operations are incomparable."

She added: “The Russians seek to destroy terrorism in its place of origin in cooperation with the Syrian army; therefore, they are welcome” (RT, 1 October 2015). Similarly, the Syrian minister of foreign affairs, Walid Al Mualim, was shown welcoming the Russian campaign. The voiceover reported:

Addressing the UN General Assembly, the Syrian minister of foreign affairs Al Mualim has asserted that the Syrian government will pursue the war on terrorism. He welcomed the Russian air campaign, which have been launched in coordination with the Syrian army. Al Mualim has stressed that only through cooperation with the Syrian army can counterterrorism actions be effective.

The minister was shown as saying: “He who seeks to encounter terrorism in Syria needs to coordinate with the Syrian government” (RT, 3 October 2015).

So, RT communicated the Syrian-Russian agreement on how international terrorism should be fought. Russia and Syria were always referred to as allies. As shown, RT reports included positive expectations of the outcomes of the Russian intervention. For example, Syrian officials were framed as “optimistic” about the outcomes of the Russian military actions. Russia was described, by Syrian officials, as a “serious” actor whose efforts are expected to succeed. Moreover, RT reporters specified that Syria and Russia have been fighting against terror groups, namely IS and Al Nusra Front. By naming targets, RT participates in the legitimisation of Russia’s military intervention in Syria. This reporting style is a textbook case of television as public diplomacy. Throughout the examples discussed above, RT discourse draws distinctions between Russia’s air campaign and the US-led air campaign and invites audiences to support the Kremlin’s war policy which was justified through contrasting it with the US war policy. This reporting style reflects RT role as an extension of Putin’s foreign policies, which aim at challenging the US hegemony in the Middle East as well as other parts of the world.

RT reports showed that the Syrian people are, like their government, optimistic and satisfied with the Russian move. For example, one report read: “Destroying the infrastructure of the terrorist organisations in Syria and cutting their supply routes are the most important objectives of the Russian air campaign. The Syrians are optimistic about outcomes of this intervention.” Then, an ordinary man was interviewed. He said: “This is a good action taken by Russia. It is a response to a request made by the Syrian government and its people.” Another man said: “This is a positive development; the strikes are precise, and we are optimistic” (RT, 8 October 2015). Similarly, in another report, the voiceover commented: “The residents of Latakia welcomed the Russian military campaign which supports the Syrian army in the war against terrorism.” A woman was interviewed in the report. She said: “Thank God, we hope that the war stops soon so that we can return to our homes.” Also, a young man said: “The Russian involvement is urgently needed. After the Russian intervention, we feel safe, we are happy” (RT, 7 October 2015). The use of collective references to “the Syrians” and “residents” implies that the Syrians are unified, and all the people support Russia’s air campaign, something which is certainly not the case since there is a civil war going on in parallel with the war on IS. Throughout the sample, RT reports suppressed the tensions between the Syrian people and their government, backed by Russia; in other words, the voices that criticise the Russian-Syrian alliance were absent. This can be read in the context of RT’s role as a tool of Russian public diplomacy. The war began in the context of political and religious differences, so Syria cannot be reduced to one view, which supports the Russia-Syria cooperation. RT has given a broad view which reflects its sponsor’s preferred perspective only. So, this news channel is not aiming at credibility which involves reflecting political differences in Syria, but it seeks to put meaning in the service of power. I have shown earlier how AJA operated within the same logic, using the voices of civilians in a way that reinforces the policies of the ruling elites in

Qatar. AJA gave civilians a voice to criticise Russia's intervention and blame it for their suffering. It did not reflect political differences in the Syrian society, as noticed throughout the sample of the study.

In addition to the Syrian regime, RT promoted supportive voices from Egypt that reflected the Russian- Egyptian rapprochement over the war on international terrorism and the need for global counterterrorism policies. For example, one report read: "The Russian military operations have evoked positive responses in Egypt. The Egyptian President Abd al- Fatah al-Sisi has stressed, in a meeting with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, the necessity to intensify international efforts to face transnational terrorist organisations." Then, a key journalist in Al Ahram Newspaper was interviewed in the report. He said: "For Egypt, terrorism should be fought at regional and global levels." The voiceover commented: "The Russian move against the terrorist organisations in Syria is consistent with the Egyptian policies that emphasise the need for global actions to defeat terrorism." (RT, 18 November 2015). Similarly, another piece of footage covered Sergey Shoygu's visit to Cairo, reporting: "The Russian defence minister Shoygu and the Egyptian President al-Sisi have stressed that their countries will continue to hold consultations on counterterrorism issues to prevent terror groups from recruiting new members and dry up their sources of funding." A political expert was interviewed in the report. He said: "Egypt and Russia stand together against transnational terrorism." Then, the reporter commented: "Cairo has shown its full support for the Russian military operations in Syria. Both countries will continue to fight against Daesh" (RT, 24 November 2015). So, the voices of the Russian and Egyptian officials were not quoted directly as calling for global cooperation. Egyptian intellectuals [experts, journalists] were interviewed; they promoted the importance of global unity to defeat terrorism. These intellectuals can be considered as opinion leaders, but they do not represent the official stance of Egypt.

In addition to quoting official voices indirectly, RT used metonymical expressions such as “Cairo” to refer to the Egyptian response, which makes the news language imprecise. This contextualization does not help audiences make informed judgments about what they watch. However, it shows that Russia is not isolated as there are some Arab Sunni regimes and intellectuals supporting its policies, in addition to its Shia allies. The reporters used positive lexical choices, telling viewers about “positive” response from Cairo, and “full support for the Russian military operations in Syria.” The reports have concentrated on the need for global cooperation in the field of counterterrorism, but they exclude any messages that refer to negative effects which can result from the Russian military actions. Other supportive voices from the likes of Hezbollah or Iran are not found in the sample although they could have existed elsewhere in the reporting, so no analysis can be made of how they are represented.

When RT framed responses from Arab and European leaders, who are members of the US-led coalition, it selectively promoted messages that raised the need for global unity and emphasised the common interests between Russia and the West in the fighting against terrorism. For example, RT communicated the disagreement between Russia and the Gulf states over Syria. However, it deemphasised this divergence by promoting the necessity of continuous coordination in the field of counterterrorism, as shown below.

RT reported: “The 4th meeting of the strategic dialogue between Russia and the Gulf Cooperation Council which was held in Moscow focused on Syria. The Russian foreign minister Lavrov has stressed the negotiations about the coordination of military operations with the US coalition have not been finalised.” He was then shown saying:

The effectiveness of the anti-terrorist operation in Syria is still being impeded by the fact that many groups of the so-called “patriotic opposition” are mixed in on the ground with

terrorist groups, primarily Al Nusra Front. Since last February the Americans have promised us in the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and via bilateral channels that they will soon achieve, through representatives loyal to them, the division on the ground of the loyal patriotic opposition from Al Nusra Front. This has not happened for the time being even though the ceasefire declared by the UN Security Council took effect three months ago.

The voiceover continued: “The Saudi foreign minister talked about disagreements over the fate of President Al Assad and the names of opposition factions that are entitled to participate in the negotiations process in Geneva.” The Saudi minister Adil Al Jubeir said: “The Syrian opposition groups that met in Riyadh are entitled to represent the Syrian people.” The reporter commented: “All the participants emphasised the importance of continued cooperation on counterterrorism and the need for the international community to deploy efforts to settle the Syrian crisis” (RT, 26 May 2016). This text reflected the disagreement between Russia and the Gulf over Syria, but the reporter allowed the Russian official to explain the situation in the field, justify the Kremlin’s stance, and blame the US for the slow progress of the military operations against IS and Al Nusra Front in Syria. The Gulf’s critical voice was reported briefly, while the reporter’s evaluative statement deemphasised the tensions between Russia and the Gulf countries.

As was the case when reporting the Egyptian stance, RT promoted European voices that raised the need for the formation of a united front against IS and for cooperation with Russia. In the following texts, European officials were quoted directly, and their statements were contextualised in a way that deemphasised the tensions between Russia and key members of the US-led coalition over Syria. RT reported: “The British prime minister David Cameron evoked the possibility of cooperating with Russia in the context of the international campaign against Daesh.” The British official was quoted as saying: “It is obvious that we should work together to defeat international terrorism which threatens the UK, Russia, and the whole world.” The voiceover added: “Crispin

Blunt, the Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee in the House of Commons welcomed this idea since the goal is to eliminate the global threat posed by Daesh.” Blunt said in front of the camera:

The role of Russia in the international cooperation is very important. Russia is a permanent member in the United Nations Security Council, which facilitates the coordination between us. Since we face a common enemy, we should work with Russia and other international partners.

Then, the voiceover commented: “This recent development in the Russian-British relations may lead to further cooperation in various fields, particularly, terrorism” (RT, 20 November 2015).

Similarly, RT portrayed a convergence between France and Russia in the fight against terrorism.

Covering a visit paid by the French President François Hollande to Moscow, RT reported:

President Putin’s call for a broad coalition against terrorism has evoked positive responses in the light of the significant outcomes of Russia’s air campaign in Syria and after the attacks perpetrated by Daesh in several countries. France and Russia agreed to cooperate and exchange intelligence on terrorist groups in Syria.

Putin said in front of the camera: “We agreed on mechanisms for cooperation with the US-led coalition in the near future.” The voiceover added: “Hollande stressed that the areas held by the Syrian opposition factions should be avoided.” Then, the French official was shown saying: “We agreed on information sharing and the coordination of military operations in the skies of Syria. We should concentrate on the so-called “the Islamic State” (RT, 26 November 2015). Similarly, RT reported: “The German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier has stressed the necessity to unify all efforts to tackle terrorism.” Then, he was quoted directly as saying: “After the latest tragic attacks in Brussels and those which took place in Paris, Tunisia, Istanbul, and other cities, it has become clear that fighting terrorism lies within our common interests. We should take actions to prevent terror groups from carrying out attacks in our countries.” The voiceover commented:

“Destroying terrorism requires international cooperation, a necessity which the Europeans have emphasised after Brussels attacks” (RT, 23 March 2016).

As shown, European voices were promoted as they echoed Russia’s preferred messages in relation to the need for global counterterrorism actions. A UK official was quoted as talking about a “common enemy” and the German foreign minister referred to “common interests” in global counterterrorism actions. So, RT coverage focused on the common interests between European countries and Russia. RT Journalists referred to IS attacks in Europe, which have resulted in a rapprochement between countries like France or Germany and Russia. Since RT reports in a particular Kremlin-centric context, its news discourse is oriented to deemphasise the gap between Russia and other regional or international actors, particularly in relation to Syria. This framing contrasts with AJA’s reporting which promoted criticisms of Russia’s war in Syria by regional and international actors.

In the light of the abovementioned, it is possible to say that RT reflected the Kremlin’s voice. Throughout the sample, the reporting focused on messages that legitimise the Russian intervention. In this context, the Russian air campaign was promoted as a pre-emptive action which aimed at defending Russia’s national security and fighting international terrorism. The voices of the Russian officials were quoted specifically, as they justified the Russian move. As mentioned above, RT reflected a consensus in Russia on the intervention in Syria. Also, this news channel promoted Syrian and Egyptian positive responses to the Russian move. I recall that when RT covered the governance aspect of the US-led war on IS, the White House officials were framed in a defensive position, admitting the limited effect of the US-led air campaign. The voices of the US Administration’s representatives were followed by critical voices which was not the case in the contextualisation of Russian sources since no critical voices were reported. A common message

that recurred in the framing of the governance aspect in relation to the rival interventions is the need for global cooperation in the war against international terrorism. RT quoted Russian, Arab and European voices which emphasised that need. Also, RT's journalists, in their comments, emphasised the need for global counterterrorism actions. This discourse reinforces Putin's call for the formation of a new coalition against terrorism under the auspices of the UN.

In terms of professional practices, RT's reporters did not adhere to professional standards of journalism. They did not leave a distance between their account and the Russian officials' claims. Also, they did not reflect divisions among the people in Syria over Russia's military campaign. It can be said that RT's reporters internalised and reproduced the discourse of the war on terror which was promoted by the Kremlin.

The military aspect of the Russian intervention

This section explores how RT portrayed the Russian and Syrian coordinated military actions, on the verbal and the visual planes.

On the verbal plane

This section looks at how RT portrays Russia's military power in Syria. Also, it covers how the Russian forces and their Syrian allies are represented in terms of action and agency, how their voices are incorporated in relation to other sources or in relation to journalists' voices, and whether non-official voices are used to evaluate the role of the Russian or the Syrian forces. So, the analysis will show whether the military dimension is reported differently to the positively evaluated political one.

The discussion starts with the representation of Russia's air power. Throughout the study sample, RT focused on Russia's air superiority in Syria. It also portrayed the effectiveness of the coordinated Russian-Syrian military operations against IS. In this meaning-making process, RT

provided information about the advanced combat warplanes deployed by Russia in Syria such as the Sukhoi Su-30SM, Su-30, Su-25. It also depicted the missile defence systems S-400 and S-300. RT reporters constructed the identity of Russia in human terms (Russian pilots) and non-human terms (warplanes, fighter jets). Their reporting of the conflict gives the impression that the Russian Air Force has launched a clean air war thanks to its advanced military power, which has facilitated the accurate bombing of IS headquarters, as shown in the examples below.

One report read:

The Sukhoi Su-30 is one of the super-maneuvrable fighters developed by Russia. This warplane can be armed with air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles. It can be deployed in counter-air strikes, counter-land, and counter-sea missions. Also, it can conduct early warning tasks. It is capable of carrying advanced precision weapons, which helps avoid civilian casualties. It is noteworthy that preventing casualties remains a priority for the Russian pilots in this air campaign (RT, 6 October 2015).

In another report, RT portrayed the advanced combat capabilities of S-400 missile defence systems deployed in Syria:

Russia's S-400 anti-aircraft weapon system is very sophisticated in terms of combat capabilities. The system can simultaneously engage 36 targets at the height of 300 kilometres, with a maximum speed of 4,800 meters per second. It is capable of tracking 300 targets at a range of 600 km. The maximum height for the detection of the target is 100 km. Besides, the guided-missile cruiser 'Moskva' has been deployed to defend Russia's aircraft in Syria. This ship is equipped with the S-300 long-range air defence system" (RT, 25 December 2015).

In a third news text, RT reported:

Upon the request of Damascus, Russia sent warplanes to support the Syrian army in the fight against the terrorist organization, Daesh. These military planes include Su-24, Su-25, and the modernized version Su-34. The Russian fighter jets carry out strikes day and night, targeting Daesh's positions.

In the report a Russian soldier was quoted as saying: “We have accomplished all the combat missions assigned to us, and we have not targeted any civilian objects” (RT, 4 October 2015).

Moreover, RT described the bombs used in Syria as “the world's most advanced guided bombs whose margins of error do not exceed 2 meters, to avoid the risk of collateral damage” (RT, 5 October 2015).

By showing made-in-Russia high technology military equipment, RT has contributed to reinforcing the position of Russia as a key superpower in Syria and the region. It also invites Arab viewers to trust Russia’s military capabilities in the fight against IS. This reporting style is common in wartime when news media employ their discourses to legitimise military actions led by their governments. It reminds us of the coverage of the US-led war in Afghanistan by CNN. According to Jaspersen and Kikhia (2003), CNN’s “rhetoric of the war in Afghanistan reflected a focus on the technology of the battle. A focus on military capabilities, precision technology, ‘clean language’ and euphemism by military experts and media allowed Western audiences to remove any idea that lives were being lost in the battles” (p.121).

RT represented the Russian pilots in Syria as responsible agents that take actions against IS, with due regard for the safety of civilians. The framing of Russia’s air power gives the impression that the Kremlin used the Federation’s armed forces in Syria to target IS and Al Nusra Front only, with minimal human cost. To further legitimise the Kremlin’s military involvement in Syria and emphasise Russia’s air superiority, RT promoted details about the Russian aerial activities in the skies over Syria. Its journalists relied on the Russian official story, reporting authoritative sources that provided information about the number of strikes that were conducted, the type of the targets, and their locations. For example, RT reported: “Thanks to the Russian air campaign, the Syrian army managed to recapture areas from Daesh and Al Nusra Front. The Russian Air Force hit the

terrorists' headquarters in Idlib, Latakia, and Deir Ez Zor." Then, the spokesman of the Russian defence ministry, Igor Konashenkov, said: "During the last 24 hours, Russian warplanes conducted precision air strikes against Daesh positions in Syria. Our airmen launched 41 strikes on 40 targets in Aleppo, Idlib, and Latakia." The voiceover commented: "These strikes have led to remarkable results and destroyed Daesh's military equipment near Aleppo. In Idlib, Su-25 bombarded a training centre established by the terrorist organisation" (RT, 15 January 2016). This reporting style shows that Russia has led a legitimate campaign that targets IS headquarters precisely and seriously, with the desired effect. No counterclaims are included. Also, as in the reporting of US and allied forces, IS sources were excluded.

Similarly, another report read: "The Russian air force has continued to carry out strikes against the terrorists, who have sustained losses in Syria. The ministry of defence said that Daesh and Al Nusra Front have withdrawn from several positions." A Russian military official was quoted as saying: "Russian warplanes are continuing to conduct air strikes in Syria against the terrorist organizations, Daesh and Al Nusra Front. They conducted 59 air strikes and destroyed 94 positions in Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Damascus, and Deir Ez-Zor." The reporter commented: "Three training centres run by Daesh and a weapon store owned by Al Nusra Front were destroyed. This information contests claims circulated in Western media that Russia targets civilian infrastructure" (RT, 26 December 2015). This framing shows that RT takes into consideration the other representations of the Russian military campaign in the Western media and seeks to contest them. Also, RT reported: "In the last two days, Russian warplanes hit hundreds of Daesh and Al Nusra Front facilities in different areas. Su-25s targeted weapon stores near Kofor Nbuda and intensified their bombardment of Daesh positions in Mahin." The spokesman of the ministry of defence Konashenkov said:

Russian fighter jets hit 237 positions held by Daesh in Hama, Latakia, Homs, Damascus, Aleppo, and Al Raqqa. In Palmyra, Russian warplanes conducted 131 combat sorties and destroyed Daesh's gun stores, and in Harassta village, Russian air strikes targeted a munition store and a training centre used by Daesh to train its foreign members.

The voiceover commented: "These attacks reflect Russia's commitment to destroy terrorism in Syria" (RT, 11 March 2016). So, RT promoted news stories in which the reported military sources, as well as the reporters use a precise language to depict the military activities conducted by the Russian Air Force in Syria. Such details about the number of air strikes and the type/number of the targeted objects in addition to the use of the term "terrorist" to describe these targets help communicate the idea that Russia has a specific counterterrorism mission in Syria and that the Kremlin is serious about eliminating IS as well as Al Nusra Front. However, this precise language leads to distracting audiences from impacts of Russia's strikes on the humanitarian situation in Syria and helps obscure other goals which this superpower may seek to achieve. All the reports that covered the Russian military actions contribute to the discourse of a clean and justifiable war since they give the impression that all the targeted objects are legitimate [IS and Al Nusra Front]. In the sample, RT did not report strikes against the positions of the Syrian opposition factions or residential areas.

In addition to the portrayal of the military power and actions of the Russian Air Force, another important point in this section is the representation of the military cooperation between Russia and the Syrian regime against IS. In the framing of these joint efforts, RT reporters made lexical choices which carry positive values. They relied on the Syrian official story, using specifically quoted military sources. Also, non-official sources were used to evaluate the situation. The Syrian regime was always portrayed in a powerful position against IS. For example, one report read:

The Syrian army has won a victory in battles against Daesh, in Aleppo, lifting the two-year-long siege which was imposed on Kuweires airbase. Syrian troops have recaptured the airbase and released several soldiers who were detained by Daesh. This operation which was conducted with Russian air support has resulted in hundreds of deaths and injuries among Daesh fighters.

Then, a military expert was interviewed in the report. He said: “After taking control over Kuweires airbase, the Syrian army will continue its military operations in Aleppo.” Another expert commented: “Syrian and Russian forces still have a huge task to accomplish” (RT, 11 November 2015). Similarly, the voiceover reported in another text: “The Syrian army, backed by Russian air cover, managed to recapture Palmyra from the terrorist organisation, Daesh.” Then, a Syrian official commented: “Russian forces have played a central role in removing mines from the city. They have cleared more than 3000 landmines left by Daesh. The liberation of Palmyra would have been impossible without Russia's air support.” The voiceover commented: “The liberation of Palmyra is a victory for Russia and Syrian Arab army as they contributed to saving the city’s historical heritage from the grip of Daesh terror” (RT, 29 September 2016).

Also, RT reported: “The Syrian army stormed Al Qaryatain in the countryside of Homs and drove Daesh members out of the town.” An officer in the Syrian army said in front of the camera: “We managed to enter Al Qaryatain. Now, we are clearing the mines which Daesh left behind.” Another soldier said: “The Syrian army has experience in the fight against terror groups. We liberated Al Qaryatain from Daesh, and we are moving towards Al Nussir, Al Barda, and Deir Ez Zor.” The voiceover commented: “Backed by Russian air support, the Syrian army has launched an operation against Daesh positions in Homs and made remarkable gains. After the liberation of Al Qaryatain, the army managed to clear Daesh fighters from east Qalamoun” (RT, 3 April 2016).

RT framing of Russian and Syrian actions is episodic, as the reporters narrate the immediate events and give no information about context. This reporting style allows a simplified and detached narrative of liberation, free from the complexity of the political situation in Syria. RT reporters framed the recapture of Palmyra and Qaryatain as an action that aimed at liberating these areas. This portrayal gives the impression that the Syrian regime's forces are heroes who protected their people, but this representation might be misleading as the people in the recaptured areas may not be supportive of the Syrian regime. In this case, the pro-regime soldiers would not be acting against IS only but also against those who do not support the Syrian government, that is to say, the Syrian forces would be persecutors, not liberators. But such complexities that relate to the internal conflict were suppressed in all RT reports thorough the sample.

As shown, Syrian military voices were quoted directly, as referring to territorial gains made by Russia and the Syrian regime. Also, non-official voices were used to support the position of the Syrian army. RT reporters contextualised the coordinated Syrian-Russian military operations positively, framing them as victories which have led to the protection of the cultural and historical heritage in Syria. In all reports throughout the sample, the Syrian army was portrayed as an active agent that stormed cities, recaptured lands, liberated people and soldiers, removed mines, and protected historical sites while IS was reported to have lost members and territories.

In addition to using direct quotes, RT journalists used non-identified sources in many news texts to contextualise the progress of the Syrian regime and its allies against IS. For example, one report read: "The Syrian army has managed to recapture Al Suwan and Tal Almohor hills in Homs. In the meantime, Russian warplanes have launched air strikes on Deir Ez Zor, where Daesh has sustained losses, according to local media sources" (RT, 5 July 2016). Another report read: "In Aleppo, the Syrian army managed to push Daesh fighters back and destroyed their booby traps. It

also cut off Daesh supply routes. Observers attribute the success of these military operations to the ability of the Syrian army to stop Daesh fighters' progress." A little later, RT reported: "Russian warplanes conducted strikes on Daesh and Al Nusra headquarters as well as their weapon stores and workshops in the city. Such strikes are expected to be intensified in the future, according to observers" (RT, 1 August 2016).

In this framing, RT uses imprecise news sources when portraying the active agency of Russia and the Syrian regime against Daesh. I recall that the use of collective labels (observers) which refer to unidentified sources are often fused in news texts to imply the truthfulness of the reported information; this strategy helps the reporters background their voices and present the news without having to provide precise sources or claims (Publitz and Bednarek, 2009).

The last point in this analysis is that RT promoted messages about Russia's cooperation with groups from the Syrian opposition, and the SDF in the war against IS. In this context, RT relied on Russian voices only. No sources from the Syrian opposition or the SDF were included to confirm this cooperation. For example, one report read: "The Russian defence ministry revealed that its forces made remarkable progress in the fight against Daesh and Al Nusra Front, after receiving intelligence information from opposition factions that are involved in the war against these two organisations." The spokesman of the ministry was quoted as saying: "We have relied on intelligence reports, provided by the Syrian opposition, concerning Daesh's positions, its infrastructure and oil smuggling." The voiceover commented:

According to the ministry, more than 5000 members, from the Syrian opposition, cooperate with the Syrian army. Russian warplanes provide support to these groups. Thanks to Russia's strikes, these local forces have advanced and retaken strategic positions from Daesh (RT, 17 December 2015).

Another report read: “Russian warplanes have been intensively bombing terrorist targets in Syria. The fighter jets, deployed in Hmeimim airbase, provide support for the Syrian government, and the Free Army.” Then a Russian military official said:

Backed by Russian air cover, a group of the SDF fighters have advanced towards the capital of the Islamic State, Al Raqqa, under the leadership of Ayman Ghanim. They recaptured 29 villages and took control over the strategic area of Tishrin Dam. In the meantime, Syrian forces, including the Free Army, have continued to launch attacks on Daesh positions, with Russian air support.

Then, the voiceover added: “The ministry of defence stressed that its military strategy proved successful in drying up Daesh funding sources and attracting Syrian opposition factions” (RT, 24 January 2016). Similarly, RT reported: “The spokesman of the Russian defence ministry highlighted that the air strikes which targeted Daesh positions in Kuweires airbase were conducted based on intelligence reports provided by Syrian opposition factions.” The spokesman of the ministry Konashenkov was shown on the screen, promoting the cooperation between Russia and the Syrian opposition: “Syrian opposition factions provided our forces with intelligence about Daesh positions.” The voiceover commented: “The successful operation which resulted in lifting the siege imposed on Kuweires is considered as a significant achievement” (RT, 12 February 2016).

The exclusion of voices related to the Syrian opposition as well as the SDF shows that RT coverage focuses on the official story of its country of origin. This news channel promoted the idea that Russia is welcomed by all the Syrians, including opposition factions. However, RT news reports did not include information about the identity and the political stance of these opposition factions, and they did not use various sources to verify or comment on the reported cooperation between

the opposition factions and the Russian-Syrian alliance. So, RT discourse invites viewers to reject the idea that Russia seeks to destroy Al Assad's opponents.

Thus, whereas the anti-IS operations which were conducted by the US-backed opposition factions were put in the context of shared interest between Turkey and these factions, the cooperation between Russia and Syrian opposition forces was framed positively, and this is a clear indication of taking sides by RT. I recall that RT's reporters showed the air superiority of Russia in Syria and emphasised that both Russia and the Syrian regime target IS and Al Nusra Front with the desired effect. So, the political and the military aspects of Russia's military campaign were framed positively and promoted from the Russian and Syrian perspectives only.

On the visual plane

The visual framing of the military aspect of Russia's intervention supported the previously discussed verbal discourse. That is to say, the reporters used narrow patterns of pictorial coverage, showing the advanced military power of Russia, but Russian and Syrian forces were not shown engaged in violent actions. I draw attention that RT relied on embedded reporters who were attached to Russian and Syrian troops and permitted to accompany these forces and/or report from behind their lines. According to Pfau et al. (2005), embedding journalists helps narrow the gap between the news media organisations and the military since journalists will be in close contact with soldiers, which creates a kind of camaraderie relationship. It also helps control the flow of information and motivates journalists to develop more favourable reports regarding military actions. The reporters and camera operators embedded in the Russian air campaign invited Arab viewers to see the war from the Russian-Syrian perspective as shown below.

Concerning the visualisation of Russia's military power, images of warplanes, missiles, naval vessels, electronic targeting devices, and other military equipment were repeatedly shown on RT's

screen. Russian warplanes were portrayed in various positions such as landing, taking off or flying in the skies over Syria in the morning or at night. They were filmed from different distances. The images [114, 115, 116,117, 118, 119] were selected from different reports; the accompanying verbal texts reported ongoing precision air strikes launched by the Russian Air Force on IS targets.



Figure 114 Russian warplanes landing in Hmeimim airbase



Figure 115 A Russian helicopter flying in the Syrian skies (close shot)



Figure 116 A Russian warplane filmed from a long distance



Figure 117 Russian military activities at night



Figure 118 Precise bombing of IS positions by Russian warplanes



Figure 119 Precision air strikes by a Russian fighter jet

By showing the warplanes deployed in Syria from a close distance from the perspective of the Russians, RT invites audiences to relate to the Russian Air Force and to support the Kremlin's military intervention in Syria. Moreover, by showing the planes flying over the skies or landing in Hmeimim airbase in the morning hours or at night, RT reflects the air superiority and the powerful military presence of Russia in Syria. In the images below [120, 121] audiences can see Russian

technicians performing maintenance tasks. Throughout the sample, the reports did not show Russian forces committing violent actions against non-combatants. This distracts audiences from the human suffering which the Russian military campaign has caused in Syria.



Figure 120 Russian technicians at Hmeimim airbase



Figure 121 Russian technicians perform maintenance tasks



Figure 122 S 400 defence system in Syria



Figure 123 A Russian military ship in the Mediterranean Sea near Latakia

In figures [122,123], the images show air and naval defence systems deployed in Syria. Not only did Russia send advanced aircraft and professional aircrews to Hmeimim airbase, but it also used advanced defence systems to protect its warplanes. This emphasises the huge military power of Russia. Throughout the sample, there are no visual or verbal references to military losses, that may have resulted from IS attacks. This reporting style reminds us of US media coverage of the Gulf War in 1990. According to Baudrillard (1995), the Gulf War did not take place, in the sense of fighting or death. He noted that the US media showed the US military power, but the reports did not show American forces engaged in combat with the Iraqi army. Also, audiences had no information about human or material losses, due to the selectivity of media messages. In the same context, Katz argued the US media “mobilised huge audiences for a live television war . . . But the fact is that we didn’t see war at all. . . . We saw portraits of the technology (..), but we rarely, if ever, saw them in action. Indeed, it was as if there was no other side” (Katz, 1992, p. 8).

Regarding the visualisation of the Syrian military activities which were conducted with Russian air support, RT interviewed officers from the Syrian army in the battlefield. Throughout the sample, they appear in their uniform, holding their weapons as members of an official army.



Figure 124 Members of the Syrian army



Figure 125 Syrian soldiers on the front line

In the above images [124,125] the soldiers are filmed from a medium distance. They have eye contact with the camera. That is to say, they are humanised and related to viewers who are invited to admire their military activities against IS. They tell the audiences that they have made territorial gains.



Figure 126 Military activities by the Syrian army near Al Raqqa



Figure 127 Syrian soldiers observe IS activities



Figure 128 Members of the Syrian army in Palmyra



Figure 129 Members of the Syrian army in Aleppo

The images [126, 127,128,129] show members of the Syrian army in the field. Throughout the sample, the Syrian army, like the Russian forces, was not shown in actual combat situations against IS. Moreover, in the reports which covered territorial gains such as the recapture of Palmyra, or Al Qaryatayn, RT did not broadcast images showing deaths from IS or military equipment seized from the organization, unlike the coverage of the territorial gains made by the SDF in the north of Syria where RT reported the military failings of IS verbally and visually. It showed dead bodies of IS members as well as devices seized by the SDF. The absence of images of deaths can be read

in the context of presenting the Russian air war as tidy and clean, or perhaps restrictions by the Russians on what could be filmed.

Thus, RT focused on the Russian and Syrian military sources as the fighting was reported from behind their lines. IS sources and claims were not included. The Syrian army was framed as a liberator that advanced against IS. This portrayal is similar to the framing of the US-backed SDF on RT's screen. These forces were represented as liberators and given a voice. RT war discourse is simple as it is established as a struggle between the good [the Russians, the Syrian regime, some groups from the Syrian opposition, and the SDF] versus the terrorist organisation [IS]. The reports do not include enough information about the cooperation between Russia and the Free Army or the SDF for audiences to understand the complexity of the conflict. It is possible to say that RT coverage presented a virtual war in Syria where Russia and its allies have led military actions with almost no failings or human losses. According to Der Derian (2000), "new technologies (...) have collapsed the geographical distance, chronological duration, the gap itself between the reality and vitality" (p.774). He maintains that television can regulate the dramatic aspect of wars and provide a representation where television wars and video war games blur. So, television can present a virtuous war which promotes "a vision of bloodless, humanitarian, hygienic" military actions (Der Derian, 2000, p. 772). The representation of a bloodless war relieves Russia and Syria of their responsibility in inflicting human suffering as will be shown in the next section.

The humanitarian aspect of the Russian intervention

In the previous section, I showed how Russia's military actions were represented through the language of clean technology, which may lead viewers to evaluate the Russian campaign in terms of precision technologies and distract them from the impact of such military power on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Throughout the sample, Russia and the Syrian regime were not

blamed for killing civilians; though, human rights organisations accused Russian and Syrian forces of causing human suffering in Syria. For example, Amnesty International (2015) reported: “Russian air strikes in Syria have killed hundreds of civilians and caused massive destruction in residential areas - striking homes, a mosque and a busy market, as well as medical facilities.” Also, Syrian and Russian forces were accused by Amnesty (2016) of deliberately targeting hospitals. In what follows I examine the representation of the humanitarian aspect of the Russian intervention, verbally and visually.

On the verbal plane

This section addresses how RT represents the roles of the Russian and Syrian forces when covering the humanitarian situation in Syria, on the verbal plane. This includes how the identities of the military actors involved and the sufferers are constructed and how their voices are incorporated.

In addition to the discourse of clean war, RT contributed to legitimising the Russian and Syrian military actions by showing IS brutality. So, the first point in this analysis is the construction of IS’s identity as a persecutor. In all reports, which covered the humanitarian situation in the areas where Russian and Syrian forces operated, IS members were blamed for human suffering. In many reports, civilians were interviewed and allowed to tell audiences about IS’s violent practices, as was the case in the coverage of the humanitarian aspect of the US-led war in Syria.

For example, RT reported: “Life has stopped in its tracks in Daesh-held territories. Civilians who fled these areas said they felt like living in a grave.” The reporter interviewed a displaced man who said: “Daesh has imposed a very strict dress code for women. Some women were sold as slaves.”

Another woman said: “The organisation has slaughtered many people, including women and children in Al Raqqa. They destroyed many houses as well” (RT, 13 November 2015). Moreover, one report included the testimonies of a mother and her son who were reported to have been forced

to leave their shelter twice because of IS threats. The woman said in front of the camera: “I was not able to leave my home. They [IS members] say women are not allowed to walk in public places without a male accompanying them.” Then, the voiceover commented: “Daesh’s violations of children rights in Syria is the most dangerous question. The organisation has recruited children and trained them to use weapons.” Mohammed, a Syrian child, was interviewed; he said: “Daesh members wanted to send me to their military camps.” The voiceover commented: “In these camps, children are taught Daesh ideology and witness beheadings, or they may be asked to practice such violent actions. Hundreds of children who have been recruited by IS are stripped of their innocence” (RT, 5 January 2016). In Palmyra, one of RT’s correspondents interviewed survivors who accused IS of killing their relatives. An old man said: “They beheaded about 500 people in Palmyra and 50 others in Al Sukhna village.” Another old man said in front of the camera: “I asked my son to seek shelter in a safe place, but he refused to flee Palmyra, then Daesh attacked the house and killed him. They damaged everything they found in the house” (RT, 1 April 2016).

As shown above, men, women, and children were given voice. Through RT’s televisual account, audiences learn about violent practices committed by IS against vulnerable groups. According to Ellis (2000), becoming witnesses “through the media, viewers receive a kind of ‘painful knowledge’, which is accompanied by an aching sense that something must be done to help the misfortunes and alleviate their suffering” (p.11). For Ellis, witnessing is part of the critical role of media as the fourth estate, but in the context of RT coverage of Russia’s intervention, it is not innocent of politics. By promoting the sufferers’ voice, allowing them to identify their persecutor (IS), RT plays a role in reinforcing the position of Russia and its allies as liberators/benefactors that intervened militarily to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people. RT journalists selectively reported the voices of vulnerable women, old people and children and used appellative

language when contextualising the stories of these sufferers. As shown above, the reporters used strong language, saying for example: “Life has stopped” and children are “stripped of their innocence.” Through such contextualisation and testimonies, RT invites viewers to bear witness and share responsibility for the suffering of the Syrians. I recall that to bear witness refers to the attempt to influence viewers and to elicit a response, this includes hearing the appeal and being emotionally and morally engaged (Tait, 2011). RT’s audiences are invited to evaluate Russia’s intervention positively and think about actions to show solidarity with the Syrian people.

Another central point in this section is the representation of Russian and Syrian forces as benefactors. RT showed Russian and Syrian efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the sufferers in Syria. In this context, the reports promoted the voices of Russian and Syrian officers as well as civilians. This framing emphasised the idea that Russia’s war on terror is a humanitarian-oriented action. For example, RT reported: “About 200,000 people live under Daesh’s siege in Deir Ez-Zor. Dozens of deaths have been reported in the city as a result of the miserable living conditions.” The voiceover added: “In cooperation with the Syrian government, Russia has delivered more than 250 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Deir Ez-Zor. The Syrian Air Force conducted the airdrop of aid to the besieged civilians.” A Syrian pilot said: “Thanks to the Russian technical support, we airdropped aid over Deir Ez-Zor. Russia has delivered more than 800 tonnes of humanitarian aid so far.” Another pilot said: “The aid was airdropped successfully.” The reporter commented: “As the war on terrorism continues, Russia will send more humanitarian aid to the Syrian people” (RT, 11 February 2016). A similar report read: “Despite the tensions in Aleppo, the Russian Air Force insisted that humanitarian aid should be sent to the eastern countryside.” A Russian pilot was interviewed. He said: “For the first time, we managed to deliver aid to Aleppo. We wish to support 700 families, including women and children in this area” (RT,

4 April 2016). So, RT promoted the idea that the Russian Air Force used advanced technology not only to avoid civilian casualties but also to airdrop aid to those who are besieged by IS. This reporting style involves a clear contrast between the self or the in-group [Russian and Syrian forces as benefactors] and IS [the persecutor that inflicted the suffering].

Moreover, the voiceover reported in another text: “As the Russian-backed Syrian forces recaptured strategic areas from Daesh in Latakia, Aleppo, Homs and Palmyra, they started to distribute food and other basic needs to the returnees.” Then, an old woman was shown saying: “We returned to our home after the withdrawal of Daesh, thanks to the Russian and Syrian forces.” Another person said: “They offered us bread.” The voiceover commented: “Russia’s military campaign achieved significant results and allowed displaced families to return to their homes” (RT, 4 May 2016). In the same way, when RT covered the situation in Palmyra after the withdrawal of IS, the voiceover reported: “After the liberation of Palmyra by the Syrian regime, the residents started to return to the city.” A young man said: “We returned to Palmyra after the victory declared by the Syrian army, backed by Russia.” Another man said: “We invite all the displaced people to come back.” Then, an official from the Syrian government was quoted as saying: “We made arrangements to help the residents and facilitate their return. We started to reconstruct the electricity and water distribution networks, and we have removed the ruins.” The voiceover commented: “Many residents have returned after basic infrastructure had been partially reconstructed. Russian and Syrian forces cleared the city of landmines” (RT, 11 April 2016). This contextualisation reinforces Russia’s good conduct of war on terror which is fought in cooperation with the Syrian regime.

The last recurring theme is the framing of material damage in Syria. Throughout the sample, IS was blamed for the destruction that took place in the areas recaptured from the organisation. The

Russian and Syrian military actions were not reported to have caused material damage. For example, one report which covered the situation in the countryside of Homs read: “The scenes of destruction are everywhere. Daesh repeated attacks caused enormous damage to civilians’ houses. The residents have called for military actions to destroy Daesh. They have cooperated with the Syrian army to push Daesh fighters back.” In the report, a housewife complained: “shells fired by Daesh hit our pen and killed animals.” An old man said: “I have not accessed my farm [near IS-held territories] for five years. I am afraid. I might be harmed, killed, or kidnapped by Daesh” (RT, 12 July 2016). So, the voice of civilians was employed as a force to legitimise Russia’s role in Syria, showing that IS targeted people, animals, and properties.

In Palmyra, RT showed the material destruction inflicted by IS in contrast to the constructive role of Syrian and Russian troops that contributed to protecting historical sites in the city. For example, the voiceover reported: “The ancient city of Palmyra was massively destroyed. Daesh’s barbaric acts can be seen everywhere. The organisation turned public facilities into torture centres or courts to enforce its laws on the subjects of the so-called the Islamic State.” A Syrian military officer said: “The Red Crescent centre was turned into a torture centre for those who did not respect the dress code imposed by Daesh. It was also used by Daesh to collect the Zakah (Islamic taxes).” The voiceover commented: “A delegation from the UN visited the city and expressed shock over the amount of damage. Some facilities were completely destroyed.” An official from the UN said: “In coordination with the governor of Homs, we entered Palmyra where we visited schools, hospitals, an automatic bakery, and the Red Crescent centre. We are shocked over the damage we have seen across the city.” The reporter concluded: “For life to return to its normal course in Palmyra, international and local efforts should be carried out” (RT, 10 April 2016). Also, RT reported: “IS left mines in Palmyra. Russian forces have removed more than 1000 mines so far.” A Russian

official said: “We will participate in removing the mines left by Daesh, and we will protect the ancient archaeological sites in Syria.” RT showed the damage caused to the temples of Bel and Baal Shamin in addition to the triumphal arch. A Syrian official was quoted as saying: “The temples of Bel and Baal Shamin and the Arch of Triumph have been heavily damaged; we sent experts to Palmyra to assess the damage.” The voiceover commented: “Russian military specialists will continue to remove Daesh’s explosive devices. In the meantime, Russia has started to build a camp for the experts who will participate in the reconstruction of the sites damaged by Daesh” (RT, 8 May 2016). This news discourse involves a binary opposition: [They] IS fighters destroy, damage, terrorise, place mines, versus [We] Russia and the Syrian government liberate, reconstruct, remove ruins/mines and help people. This positive frame is consistent and systematic throughout the sample.

RT showed the ruins of the ancient Christian monastery of Mar Elian, which was destroyed by IS, in the town of Al Qaryatain. The voiceover reported: “Backed by Russian air cover, the Syrian army liberated Al Qaryatain from Daesh fighters who forced about 40 000 residents to flee the town and destroyed their homes. Daesh’s crimes include the destruction of places of worship. Mar Elian Monastery, like mosques and houses, was demolished by this organisation. It was established in the 5th century as a symbol of peace and interfaith coexistence. Daesh gave Christian residents the choice of conversion to Islam or paying the Jizya, (a tax imposed by Islam on non-Muslim subjects). After the withdrawal of Daesh, civilians began returning home. They saw ruins across the town” (RT, 5 April 2016). So, RT portrayed the positive role played by Russia and the Syrian regime in protecting and assisting civilians in Syria. The exclusion of messages that refer to the negative impacts of Russia’s air campaign on the humanitarian situation there is a clear indication of taking sides in RT coverage. By not showing the role of Russia and the Syrian regime in

inflicting the suffering in Syria, RT ultimately suppresses the emotional and moral issues that lie behind their military actions.

Thus, to legitimise Russia's military actions, RT reports included witness statements from civilians who blamed IS for their suffering. These sufferers have what Chouliaraki (2008) termed 'conditional agency.' That is to say, the sufferers are active agents: they identify the source of their suffering, they feel, and they act to improve their situation, but they need external help. On RT's screen, the Syrian people and their government are shown acting together against IS, but they have limited agency. The Syrian government is reported to have taken actions to help the sufferers, but it needs the support of Russia to eliminate the threat of IS and relieve the population. According to Chouliaraki (2006a), showing the limited ability of the sufferers endows them with humanness and invites audiences to engage with them. Moreover, giving voice to the UN official that visited Palmyra in coordination with the Syrian government and allowing him to refer to massive material damage across the city carries moral and political messages. First, it raises the moral demand to take actions to save the city and support its residents. Second, it shows that any visits or humanitarian actions should be carried out in cooperation with the Syrian regime. RT coverage showed how the Russians reacted responsibly through aid delivery as well as reconstruction of material damage. Also, RT showed how "the barbaric acts" of IS targeted both Muslims and Christians. This portrayal invites the international community, not only the Arab or Muslim world, to acknowledge the humanitarian mission of the Russian Air Force that participated in defending the Syrian people against IS. The visuals which accompany the voiceover emphasise Russia's positive role in Syria as I will show below.

On the visual plane

In the visual representation of the humanitarian aspect, RT employed narrow patterns of pictorial coverage. The visuals support the verbal account, showing Russian humanitarian aid delivered to Syria. The scenes include images of displaced women and children who blame IS for their suffering in addition to images of returnees who acknowledge the efforts led by Russia to help them. RT also showed the damage caused to historical and religious places.

The analysis begins with the visualisation of the sufferers. Civilians in Syria are often humanised. The figures [130, 131] show Syrian women, with their children. These sufferers, who are filmed from a medium distance, have an appellative power as they look at the camera. RT's audiences are invited to relate to them. The voiceover that commented on these images described how civilians are persecuted by IS. Similarly, the sufferers in figures [132, 133, 134] have a voice and a gaze which humanises them. Their gaze and voice elicit pity towards them and anger towards IS. So, RT's viewers are invited to support Russia's military intervention and think about more actions to respond to the needs of the vulnerable civilians.



Figure 130 A family displaced from IS-held territories



Figure 131 A family suffered from IS's siege



Figure 132 Mohammed, a child fled IS-held territories

In the figure [132] a displaced child is shown individually. RT's audiences are told that his name is Mohammed. He gazes at the camera as he tells audiences about his personal suffering. His gaze is appellative, and his facial expressions reflect his fears and miserable conditions. By showing Mohammed and others like him in a vulnerable situation, RT contributes to moralising Russia's military intervention which aims at protecting the Syrian children who are persecuted by IS.



Figure 133 An old woman from Homs

In addition to children, old people are filmed individually from a medium distance. They are allowed to have eye contact with audiences. As shown in figures [133, 134], the sufferers have sad

facial expressions. The visual representation of the aged sufferers in addition to children and women communicates the idea that the use of force is urgently needed to put an end to IS's extensive use of violence. Throughout the sample, verbal references to IS fighters lack the power of pictorial presence.



Figure 134 An old man whose son was killed by IS

Another point in this section is the depiction of the airdrop operations and the delivery of humanitarian aid supplies to Syrian cities. By showing images like [135,136], RT contests claims that Russia and its allies caused human suffering in Syria. It showed how Russian and Syrian planes were used to facilitate the airdropping of supplies to civilians in IS-held areas. That is to say, RT selected images that promote its preferred reality. Drawing on the power of images that give us a vivid reality, the reporters made truth claims that push the other critical claims [related to Russia's identity as a persecutor] to the background. Then, RT sought to consolidate the position of its government inside Russia and around the world as it showed that the Kremlin sent air forces to help the Syrians not to kill them.



Figure 135 Humanitarian aid sent to Deir Ez-Zor



Figure 136 Airdropping of humanitarian aid by Russia



Figure 137 The Syrian army distributes aid to People

In figure [137], a Syrian soldier is shown distributing aid to civilians in Palmyra. Audiences can see the image of the Syrian flag on donation bags, which signifies that the Syrian army took control over the city and that the Syrian government practices its duties towards its people. In the image

above, the beneficiaries stand peacefully near the soldier, waiting for him to distribute the aid. This framing shows a good and respectful relationship between the Syrian army and civilians, which reinforces the position of the government forces, and their allies, as liberators rather than aggressors. The verbal texts which anchor this image and the like tell viewers that civilians are happy as they have returned to their homes safely thanks to Russia and the Syrian government.



Figure 138 Russia's flag waving in Syria

Similarly, the figure [138] reflects the liberation of Syrian cities from IS, by Russian and Syrian forces. Showing a Russian flag waving on a civilian building gives the impression that life has returned to normal and suppresses the idea that the Syrians suffered under Russian air strikes. Flag waving is a visual echo of liberation parades, after the end of military operations, and it shows that the Syrians – both the government and the people – acknowledge Russia's role. In the same context, RT showed survivors who were allowed to express their gratitude to Russia in front of the camera. These people also showed their happiness as they returned to their cities after the withdrawal of IS. In the figure [139], audiences can see an open shop while the seller says in front of the camera that the situation is stable in Palmyra, and that Russia has provided aid to all the returnees. His voice and gaze as he thanks Russia, as well as, the availability of food products on the shelves behind him, invite audiences to recognise the positive consequences of Russia's military campaign.



Figure 139 A shop reopened in Palmyra



Figure 140 A woman thanks Russia for fighting against IS

The above image [140] shows a young woman who returned to Palmyra, after driving IS out of the city. She smiles as she acknowledges the military efforts led by Russia to destroy IS. By showing this unveiled woman with her happy facial expressions in front of the camera, RT invites audiences to see how Russia has managed to change the situation on the ground and free the Syrian women from the dress code and other restrictions imposed by IS. This kind of visuals enables viewers to notice how Russia and the Syrian government have managed to restore and protect civil liberties which were violated by IS. Then, on RT's screen, audiences can see the sad facial expressions of those who were persecuted by IS versus the happy facial expressions and the positive response of those who returned to their homes.

The last point in this analysis is the depiction of the material damage caused to historical sites and civilian infrastructure, as shown below.



Figure 141 Ruins in the historical city of Palmyra



Figure 142 Ruins of Mar Elian monastery



Figure 143 Civilian infrastructure destroyed by IS

In figures [141, 142, 143], RT shows material destructions for which IS was blamed. In all reports throughout the sample, Russian warplanes were reported to carry out precision strikes against IS, and this was not contradicted visually. So, they were relieved of their responsibility in causing collateral damage.

By showing the massive damage caused to civilian infrastructure in Syria, while the voiceover tells audiences about Russian and Syrian efforts to assist the sufferers, RT suppresses the identities of Russia and the Syrian regime as persecutors.

Thus, the analysis of RT's coverage of Russia's military intervention in Syria showed that this channel contributed to legitimising the military project of its sponsor. The reporters muted oppositional voices and excluded critical messages. RT news discourse is shaped by Russia's national security concerns and the Kremlin's goal to restore Russia's status as a great power in the region. The reports reflected the huge military arsenal of Russia verbally and visually and emphasised its capability to destroy IS. RT promoted a clean version of war. The negative impacts of the war on civilians were censored. Hence, it can be said that RT operated as an instrument of propaganda, in this crisis.

At the end of this chapter, I would like to draw attention that RT's framing of the multi-sided war on IS is analysed qualitatively to explore how this international TV channel responded to the political context in which it operates and professional standards of journalism when covering the rival military campaigns. I cannot claim that the sample of the study is completely exhaustive; it is a selection from an overall output of news reports that are available on RT Arabic YouTube channel during the period of the study. Since my approach is thematic and comparative, the news stories used for the purpose of this research are helpful to examine the media-state relationship and show evidence of the variation in war coverage in the media outlets under study.

The next chapter covers the findings and the conclusions drawn from the study, comparing AJA and RT.

Chapter 8

Findings and Conclusions

This chapter seeks to pull the strands of the research together and compare AJA and RT coverage of the multi-sided war on IS. It discusses the findings of the study and presents its conclusions.

As mentioned throughout the study, the US and Russia launched separate military campaigns with the stated purpose to destroy international terrorism in Syria. In this context, transnational news media organisations have the power to draw boundaries between the conflicting actors and influence the perception of their audiences regarding the situation in Syria. So, this research is aimed to examine and compare how the multi-sided war against IS is reported by AJA and RT Arabic when their governments are participants in this war but are in disagreement with other leading states on how it should be fought.

The study is based on the premises that a) war coverage operates deeply within Van Dijk's (2006) ideological square, which is based on the positive presentation of the in-group and the negative presentation of the out-group, and b) that the news media support their governments in wartime. The surrounding political environment within which the news media operate have an impact on their practices since journalists tend to react to what happens in the political world, and this is especially true with regard to violent conflicts (Wolfsfeld, 1997). Also, this study is guided by theories of mediated public diplomacy which argue that the coverage of wars that are declared by state actors against terror groups in international media is affected by the degree of cultural and political proximity between the country from which the media operate and the country engaged in the conflict (Sheafer et al., 2014; Yarchi et al., 2013). Whereas previous research on media coverage of the war on terror examined two-sided conflicts, my research addressed the media coverage of a multi-sided war on terror against a common threat. So, this study provided an

opportunity to explore whether the war discourse is driven by the shared global counterterrorism objective, which is to defeat IS, or the media will reflect and support the political divergence between their governments and the other sides of the conflict.

8.1 Findings

The study found that AJA and RT reflected the policies of their countries towards Syria. Like other terror-related conflicts, the reporting of the war on IS draws boundaries between the terror organisation and the actors that have fought against it. However, the framing of this global conflict involves a complex discourse that is not reduced to a binary opposition structure [good vs bad]. That is to say AJA and RT did not frame the conflict in terms of the shared global counterterrorism objective. Instead, their coverage is influenced by the degree of convergence in anti-terrorism approaches between their governments and the actors involved in Syria. The closer the policy proximity between a political actor and their countries, the more likely that actor will be framed positively.

The analysis showed how AJA emphasised the shortcomings of the US war policy, promoting voices that raised the need for more involvement in Syria. However, it used a more critical tone when representing the Russian policy and actions. In this war, AJA reporting gives the impression that there is an ‘antagonist–protagonist’ structuring which effectively sets the ‘out-group’ - Russia and the Syrian government- versus ‘the in-group’ - politicians from around the world. It communicated a wide negative opinion climate about Russia’s role in Syria. Also, AJA promoted non-official critical voices that stood against Russia and its allies. In this way, AJA reporting contributes to reinforcing the US hegemonic position in the Middle East against Russia and invites Arab audiences to identify with a US-dominated worldview. The legitimacy of the US-led intervention was construed through showing the precise bombing of IS positions. AJA’s reporters

emphasised that the US-led campaign targeted IS-held areas and contributed to drying up IS resources but had a limited effect. So, compared with the findings of Jaspersen and Kikhia's study (2003) according to which AJA represented the US-led war in Afghanistan as a war on Muslims, this study found that AJA used positive terms when covering the US-led war in Syria. Then, there is a shift in AJA's discourse towards the US, which can be attributed to Qatar's direct involvement in the US coalition. This supports the abovementioned premises that the news media roles in conflicts vary and that their discourses are reconstructed according to the relationship between their governments and the parties involved in conflicts.

In contrast to the relatively positive portrayal of the US-led military campaign on AJA's screen, the framing of the Russian campaign on the same screen was highly critical. AJA news discourse contributed to delegitimising the Russian military intervention since Arab viewers were told that most Russian air strikes hit targets that had nothing to do with IS. AJA's reporters communicated the idea that some strikes were launched against IS-held territories; however, these strikes targeted empty or non-strategic areas. In this context, the reporters portrayed the advanced military power of Russia but framed this power negatively. They showed that the Russian Air Force used internationally prohibited weapons against civilians. They represented the vulnerability of the Syrian government and Russia showing their human and material losses verbally and visually. US deaths were reported as well, but they were not shown. AJA reporting gave the impression that Russia waged war on the Syrian people. It deemphasised the contribution of the Russian-Syrian alliance to the war on IS.

Furthermore, the taking of sides in this conflict can be noticed in the way the roles of the US-backed SDF and the Syrian opposition factions were represented. AJA framed the role of the SDF critically. AJA's reporters raised the Kurdish-led SDF's nationalistic agenda, presenting them as

an armed group that took a role in this conflict to advance their interests and not to defend their people. In this context, the SDF's connections to other armed groups that are designated internationally as terrorists were emphasised. In this way, AJA takes a role in mobilising the Arab viewers against the US-Kurdish cooperation. This framing reflects Qatar's voice. The SDF adopted the US counterterrorism strategy in Syria and used the military support provided to them to fight against IS only, which is inconsistent with Qatar's preferred approach to the war. Additionally, the negative stance of Qatar towards the Kurdish ambitions for independence shaped the war discourse.

AJA portrayed the intensive military aid provided to the SDF in contrast to the modest support provided to the opposition factions. It framed the Syrian opposition factions positively showing the efforts taken by them to recapture lands from IS, despite the "modest" air support available to them. These factions are Qatar's preferred local ally. They fight against IS, as well as the Syrian regime, so they adopt the Qatari counterterrorism policy.

Again, it should be highlighted that the media under study operate in authoritarian countries where foreign policy and security issues are tightly controlled, and public debate is not allowed. This contrasts with news reporting style in liberal societies, where journalists can operate in different spheres following the elites' debate, as Hallin (1994) noted. Thus, AJA reflected the perspective of the Qatari ruling elites and participated in legitimising their policies towards Syria and normalising their values, which reinforces their hegemonic position in Qatar and contributes to shaping the international public opinion in their favour. The degree of policy proximity between Qatar and the abovementioned actors in Syria affected the way these actors were related to the war on IS.

This logic applies to RT war coverage as well. This channel promoted a positive image of the Kremlin's policies, which helps make the values of Russian ruling elites prominent and enables these elites to maintain power over their country. Also, RT took a role in reinforcing the position of Russia as an influential player in Syria. This can be seen in the way RT construed the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the Russian air campaign. It informed Arab viewers that Russia's strikes targeted IS and Al Nusra Front precisely, upon the request of the Syrian regime. The responses of the Arab, as well as European countries, that belong to the US-led coalition, were contextualised in a way that suppresses the tensions between Russia and the US-led coalition over Syria. It can be said that RT's news discourse is less complex than AJA's discourse. This is to say RT constructed the war on IS as a struggle between the good actors [Russia, the Syrian regime, the US-backed SDF and groups from the Syrian opposition] versus the evil enemy – IS. It only employed its discourse to deemphasise the role of the Syrian opposition factions, that stand against the Russian-backed Syrian regime, in the war against IS.

So, RT showed that both the US-led air strikes and the Russian strikes targeted IS positions precisely, with the desired effect since they used precision bombs. It promoted a one-sided war in which IS was always portrayed in a weak position. As far as the sample provided evidence for, only IS deaths were visualised on RT's screen. Moreover, RT suppressed the SDF's nationalistic agenda. The reporters took viewers inside IS's tunnels, emphasising that the SDF's members managed to clear IS from the areas they attacked. Syrian government forces and the US-backed SDF were framed as liberators. However, the anti-IS operations, which were conducted by opposition factions, that fight against the regime and its allies, were contextualised in terms of the common interests between these factions and Turkey in the North of Syria. RT promoted Russia's cooperation with the SDF and some groups from the Syrian opposition.

The positive framing of the US-led coalition and the SDF as liberators is consistent with Russia's policies since their actions contribute to defeating IS, and they did not fight against Russia or the Syrian regime. Another factor that helps explain the positive coverage of the US-led military campaign by RT in this context is that Russia and some members of the US-led coalition, particularly, the US were targeted by IS. According to Yarchi et al. (2013), when the country in which the media operate is a victim of terrorism, this motivates its media to support the counterterrorism actions taken by another country against armed organisations. This can be applied to RT's coverage of this conflict. Russia's experience with IS motivated RT to support the US-led military actions, although the US war policy was framed negatively. In contrast, Qatar does not have the same experience with terror, and this may explain why AJA coverage is shaped mainly by Qatar's stance towards both campaigns.

As the war discourse in these transnational news media that target the same audiences is driven primarily by their political contexts, this results in significant variations in the war coverage. The way AJA and RT reacted to the actors that disagree with their sponsors over Syria shows that their journalists mainly sought to put their stories into the general political context of their news organisations, rather than telling interesting stories. Arab audiences are exposed to contested versions of truth about the same war. The common enemy was framed as a potent agent by AJA. On RT's screen, IS was unseen. Russia's forces appear on RT's screen as liberators/benefactors that lead a bloodless war, but they appeared on AJA's screen as aggressors that committed "massacres" against civilians. This leads to another point in this discussion which is the construction of human suffering in this multi-sided war.

The study showed that both media outlets contextualised the human suffering in Syria in a way that reinforces the policies of their countries of origin. However, unlike RT, AJA did not operate

as a propaganda machine to relieve Qatar and its allies of their responsibility for the suffering. Instead, AJA represented the bombers on the screen in a way that supports Qatar's stance.

The analysis showed that AJA enabled its audiences to witness the suffering inflicted by Russia from a close position compared to the human suffering caused by the US-led coalition airstrikes. The identity of Russia as a bomber was constructed in human and non-human terms which emphasises the agency and complicity of the Russian forces in killing civilians in Syria. The sufferers were humanised, verbally, as they were represented individually or in groups, with reference to some of their specific characters (name, age, gender, or origins). They were visualised as well. AJA allowed the sufferers to tell their personal stories and blame Russia for their misfortune. The reports showed verbally and visually the impact of the Russian military actions on civilian infrastructure. This includes homes and mosques, hospitals, as well as markets. The coverage of the human aspect of the US-led war was not highly critical. The bomber was represented in non-human terms. AJA blamed the US led-coalition for causing civilian deaths, but these deaths lacked the power of pictorial presence. According to Zelizer (2005), by not showing killed people in wartime, the news organizations can obscure "the more problematic finality of death itself" (p. 14). Also, the displaced people that were interviewed by AJA did not blame the US coalition for their suffering which limits the viewers' identification with them. This is to say the sufferers lacked the appellative power. Thus, AJA framing of the human suffering inflicted by the Russian campaign involved practices of bearing witness against Russia in Syria. By showing the negative impact of Russia's air strikes on civilians in different places across Syria and allowing the sufferers to blame Russia for their miserable conditions, AJA invited its audiences to share responsibility for the suffering of the Syrians and mobilised Arab public opinion against Russia and its allies.

In contrast, RT relieved the US-led coalition as well as Russia and the Syrian government of their responsibility for human suffering. Whereas AJA constructed the roles of the rival air campaigns as bombers in a way that corresponds to its political context, RT constructed the roles of both campaigns through a regime of care that foregrounds the identities of military actors, particularly the US-backed SDF, the Syrian government, and Russia, as liberators and benefactors of the Syrian people. It showed the roles of the abovementioned actors in liberating Syrian cities from IS and providing humanitarian aid to civilians.

By suppressing the roles of the US-led campaign and Russia's campaign in inflicting the suffering in Syria, with focus on their positive outcomes, RT relieved the actors involved in these campaigns of the moral responsibility that lies behind their violent actions. Then, it can be said that RT construed the humanitarian aspect of this conflict through a propagandistic style, showing that 'our forces' and 'those who are like us' fight a clean war on terror.

By focusing on IS's violence against civilians, RT contributed to magnifying IS's threat and legitimising Russia's concerns about the growth of this transnational armed organisation. As mentioned previously, the Kremlin highlighted that IS recruited fighters of Caucasian origins, particularly Chechnya, which therefore justified the military project of Russia in Syria as a pre-emptive war (Souleimanov and Petrylova, 2015). Hence, driven by Russia's national security concerns, RT framed the military actions of both air campaigns positively as humanitarian responses that aim at eliminating the threat posed by IS to Syria and the whole world.

Finally, the analysis shows similarities and variations in AJA and RT Arabic reporting styles.

There are similarities in AJA and RT reporting styles in terms of sourcing and framing practices. This supports previous studies that found shared professional practices among journalists in different countries.

Both channels relied primarily on official sources in their coverage. This is common in political news reporting, particularly in wartime (Bennett, 1990; Gans, 1979). So, official voices from the US, Russia as well as Arab and European countries were promoted by both media outlets. AJA and RT often relied on official quotes when contextualising their sources which gives the news a sense of immediacy. Moreover, both media outlets used non-official sources, particularly the voice of civilians to support the political stance of their sponsors. So, AJA reported civilian protests in Syria and around the world against the Russian -Syrian alliance. Also, AJA promoted the voice of human rights organisations and activists when it reported the use of internationally prohibited weapons by Russia. Supportive non-official voices were not found in the sample. In contrast, RT gave access to civilians who promoted positive evaluations about the Russian air campaign. Critical voices were absent from the sample studied. This confirms Bennett's (1990) conclusion that non-official voices such as experts or civilians are used in news stories in a way that reinforces the rhetoric of officials. This reporting style shows that both AJA and RT aligned with their governments in this war, without regard to basic principles of professionalism since they did not promote various civilian voices.

Both news media used episodic framing when reporting military actions and relied on military sources. This allowed journalists to promote simple and detached stories. So, they did not provide enough information about the context of the reported events and the progress of the war. In both media samples, the sufferers were given voice.

Dissimilarities: AJA and RT were expected to apply very similar reporting styles since both are transnational channels, operating in authoritarian political contexts, and their governments are directly involved in the war against IS. However, the analysis showed that while both media put

the meaning of this multi-sided conflict in the service of power, AJA showed more respect for basic principles of professionalism.

This is to say, AJA reported different sides of the conflict and promoted opposing claims. It gave access to IS sources, the US, the SDF, the opposition factions, Russia, and the pro-regime Syrian army. It distanced itself from the reported information, by using different strategies such as non-identified sources, metatextuality, abstract entity (statistics, indications) or metonymical expressions, which makes the news language imprecise.

AJA operated within the framework of Qatar's policy when it reported dissent in the US regarding the war strategy as well as criticisms by members of the US-led coalition. Promoting critical voices reflects AJA's alignment with Qatar, for these voices echoed Qatar's preferred messages.

Since AJA promoted the voice of the ruling class in Qatar, it can be said that this channel operated within Hallin's (1994) sphere of consensus. However, it should be noted that Qatar is a monarchy, ruled by Al-thani family, so opposition parties are not allowed to operate.

AJA reported messages or voices that did not align with Qatar's policies, but it gave them limited space and legitimacy, so that any sphere for legitimate controversy was narrow.

For instance, AJA reported that several members of the US-led coalition supported the US war strategy, but the reports did not provide further information about these members and their views.

In contrast, AJA quoted US voices that disagree with the White House over the war strategy and that call for military actions against IS as well as the Syrian regime. Also, AJA used metonymical expressions and quoted international voices when it promoted the need for more effective US counterterrorism policies to destroy IS in Syria. Then, the study showed that the messages of the White House officials were balanced by critique, leaving audiences with not much information

about the voices or countries that supported the US war strategy. So, AJA coverage of views that did not align with the Qatari policies was very limited.

This channel gave access to the enemy [IS sources] whose voice can be classified as deviant since IS' views and claims are not accepted by mainstream society. Nonetheless, AJA distanced itself from IS. The reporters referred to the organisation by its full name [تنظيم الدولة الاسلاميه] which means [the Islamic State organisation]. It did not use the terms 'terror or terrorist.' The study found that AJA supported its government, but not through propaganda. That is to say, AJA reported that both campaigns conducted air strikes on IS-held territories, and it showed the negative impacts of these military actions on civilians. However, as mentioned previously, this channel showed that most of Russia's strikes hit targets that have nothing to do with IS.

RT operated within the sphere of consensus as It accepted without question the Kremlin's discourse of a pre-emptive war on terror and emphasised the legitimacy of this war. RT's journalists did not report dissent in Russia, so they did not operate within Hallin's sphere of legitimate controversy. RT deemphasised the disagreements between its government and the US-led coalition's members over Syria. The voice of the deviant group, IS, was absent.

RT relied on non-identified sources to provide information that supports the position of its country, without having to specify the source. Furthermore, RT used the Arabic name [Daesh- داعش] to refer to IS. The reporters used the term 'terrorist' when depicting IS without reporting its voice. On RT screen, audiences heard about IS's violence and tactics, but they did not see this enemy on the front line. They only saw the liberators [Russian forces, US forces, the SDF, and Syrian government forces].

Besides, RT reporters provided details about the types and the high technical specifications of Russian military hardware. They also used precise language when reporting the number of Russian

strikes and their targets. In so doing, RT promoted the Russian military campaign in terms of technical power and suppressed its impact on the humanitarian situation in Syria. It is noticeable that RT's reporting of the Russian military intervention is similar to CNN coverage of the Gulf war in the 1990s. CNN reporters used the language of clean technology which directed viewers to "evaluate the war's success in terms of the technological precision of weapons, rather than in terms of other values, including loss of life, environmental damage, or even U.S. policy objectives" (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jaspersen, and Sullivan, 1994, p. 280). Similarly, in Afghanistan, CNN and other US news networks focused on the advanced capability of the US air power and showed the precise bombing of military targets (Jaspersen and Kikhia, 2003; Samuel-Azran, 2010). In this study, I am not seeking to compare RT and the US media, but I would like to draw attention that when serving the military projects of their countries, news media outlets that operate in different media systems and different countries adopt similar practices, and they support their governments at the expense of journalistic professionalism. In this conflict, RT reporting style is deliberate and strategic aiming at serving the Kremlin's policies. It invited Arab viewers to see a hi-tech virtuous multi-sided war and censored the tragic consequences of this war.

8.2 Conclusion

The study confirms the role of news media outlets in promoting and legitimising the policies of their governments in today's interdependent and crisis-ridden world. Then, it confirms Samuel Azran's (2013) conclusion that AJA is a potent public diplomacy tool for Qatar. The research also supports previous studies that proved the role of RT as a public diplomacy tool for Russia.

Moreover, this thesis supports previous research which argued that human suffering can be staged in different ways, according to the surrounding environment in which the media operate, and that

human suffering is crucial to construe the legitimacy of military actions and influence public opinion.

Drawing on the findings of the study, transnational media outlets that operate in authoritarian countries can adopt significantly different reporting styles and so align with their governments in different ways. For instance, in this conflict, RT operated as an instrument of propaganda, reporting a one-sided clean war. AJA's ability to discuss issues outside the Qatari policy was very limited, but it operated also according to conventions of professional reporting as it used a variety of sources and represented multiple sides of the reported news stories, including the enemy voice. In addition, it showed the suffering inflicted by Russia as well as the US-led coalition, which involves Qatar, on civilians in Syria.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the literature on media, terrorism, and public diplomacy. It studied the coverage of a multi-sided war on terror in transnational media. It concludes that when states that have different counterterrorism approaches fight against a common enemy, their media will reflect and support that political divergence, rather than emphasising the shared counterterrorism goal. The degree of convergence in anti-terrorism approaches between a political actor and the state in which the media operate has an influence on how that actor will be framed and related to the conflict. Then, the closer the policy proximity, the more likely that actor will be framed positively. So, politics comes first, which means that the enemy of my enemy is not always my friend.

Also, the experience with terror in the country from which the media operate can play a role in how a multi-sided war on terrorism can be framed. Inspired by previous research on the factors that influence international media coverage of terror conflicts, this study maintains that if the country from which the media operate, and a rival country are engaged in a multisided war against

a transnational armed organisation and are victims of terror attacks, the media tend to frame the counterterrorism actions of the rival state positively. This can explain why RT framed the US-led military actions positively, in addition to the fact that these actions did not expand beyond IS and Al Nusra Front.

Regarding the methodology of the study, this thesis builds on Jaspersen and Kikhia's study (2003), as it applied qualitative frame analysis, examining the governance, the military, and the humanitarian aspects of the war on IS. However, this research adopted more extensive textual analysis. I looked at news intertextuality, the way in which news sources are structured and contextualised, in addition to other elements that have something to do with language choices and professional journalistic practices. Also, I conducted visual frame analysis of the military and humanitarian aspects and examined how the verbal texts related to the visuals.

Through AJA and RT Arabic, Arab viewers witnessed conflicting truth claims that aimed at shaping their imagination of the war against international terrorism in Syria. Both media outlets have sought to promote the policies of their governments and convince audiences of the effectiveness of such policies to defeat IS. However, RT is expected to have less power to influence public opinion in the Arab world since this channel has construed the legitimacy of the war through a propagandistic style that violates basic principles of professionalism. RT suppressed the negative impacts of the war on civilians. AJA's history of critical humanitarian reporting style in areas of conflicts, particularly in the Middle East serves to enhance its credibility in contrast to RT. Addressing the development of Russia's soft power, Rutland and Kazantsev (2016) argued that Russia "has invested heavily in trying to promote a positive image of the country abroad, for example through the Russia Today television channel," but its "authoritarian turn since 2004, and its use of force in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria, have reinforced negative stereotypes of Russia as

a hard power.” Therefore, the Kremlin “has failed to develop soft power as an effective policy tool” (p. 395).

Finally, the study supports that the ruling elites in rich countries, either small states or superpowers, use global broadcasting to mobilise public support for their policies and reinforce their hegemonic position in their societies. The elites also use international media outlets to promote good images of their policies around the world. As long as news media organisations support their governments in wartime, they contribute to legitimising and normalising the use of violence worldwide rather than operating in the interests of a global public sphere.

8.3 Strengths and limitations of the Study

This study contributes to the literature of media studies since it discusses a recent crisis in Syria, a multi-sided war on an armed organisation, that has been in the centre of media attention. It applies qualitative frame analysis. By providing an extensive textual analysis which looks at language choices and professional journalistic practices as well as visual analysis of the military and humanitarian aspects of the war, the study made deep interpretations about how media respond to their governments’ policies when covering a multi-sided war against a common enemy. Moreover, there are very few research studies in English, by Middle Eastern scholars, on how Arabic audiences are addressed in global conflicts. So, the thesis contributes to the de-westernising of media studies, as mentioned in the introduction. Furthermore, whereas most of the previous research on AJ compared this channel with Arab or Western media outlets such as CNN or the BBC, this study contrasts AJ with RT. It showed how they operated in the context of a global crisis and in an area where there are interests and tensions across the Arab world.

The main limitations of study can be summarised as follows:

One of the limitations is using YouTube as an archive to collect the data of the study. YouTube channels may not include all broadcast videos about the war on IS, so there is a risk that important stories were left out by the broadcaster. Another limitation is that the broadcast reports were put up without the news reader's introduction; this introduction, if available, contributes to better understanding the framing of news stories. For the purpose of this study, news texts were translated from Arabic into English. Since the text is the vehicle through which the meaning is ultimately transferred to the reader, language differences generate additional challenges that might hinder the transfer of meaning. It should be taken into consideration that concepts in one language may be understood differently in another language, and this might result in loss of meaning. Finally, qualitative textual analysis is not fixed in advance and is a matter of interpretation and negotiation. This is very challenging as any text cannot be reduced to one interpretation.

8.4 Recommendations for further studies

Given the crucial role of media in setting public agendas and reshaping our worldviews, there is always a lot of work to do to investigate the factors that affect their roles and discourses, particularly in areas of conflicts, as well as their effects on how political actors and viewers relate to conflicts. Further studies can be done to compare AJA and RT in terms of the organisational structures in newsrooms, which involves investigating the operations that regulate the flow of information and the meaning-making processes and exploring how journalists relate to their news media organisations, when reporting on crises.

Moreover, more studies are needed to examine the coverage of this multi-sided war. For example, further research can be done to explore how this conflict is covered by news media in the countries that are not involved in Syria. Also, research needs to be done to study how IS media sources have reacted to different state-actors in the context of their divisions over Syria, whether the actors

involved in the war on IS are portrayed in the same way and through the same language, and what factors influence these portrayals.

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