

THE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

**A COMPARATIVE FRAMING ANALYSIS OF THE CHEMICAL ATTACK IN DOUMA AND
THE WESTERN MILITARY STRIKES IN SYRIA IN 2018**



CELINA RØSTGÅRD FLATNER

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Dedicated to those who are curious and inquiring, and to those who strive to expand their perspectives on the world we live in.

Abstract

In April 2018, a chemical attack was reported in the city of Douma, which was met with international condemnation. Armed opposition groups and Western governments assigned the Syrian Arab Republic responsibility for the alleged chemical attack. The allegations were rejected by The Syrian government, Russia and Iran. One week after, April 14, 2018, before the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) had investigated the incident, the US, France and UK conducted military strikes against governmental controlled areas in Syria. Thus, from the very moment of awareness about the incident, different subjective and politicized accounts of the event were communicated through the media. This comparative framing analysis studies how private media in Norway (Aftenposten), the US (New York Times), Russia (Moscow Times) and Egypt (Egypt Independent) covered these two events.

Guided by framing theory and a particular focus on enemy images, this study answered six research questions, in addition to testing hypotheses from the literature on media, war and support. To analyze how the chemical attack was presented, 53 articles were scrutinized, following Entman's framing model (2004), supplemented by Van Gorp's (2005) frame matrix. It additionally examines the use of elite sources, while comparing news framing with political statements in the different countries. The newspaper's various presentation of the chemical attack was expressed through five different key frames: retaliation, false flag attack, human suffering, Trump dilemma and Moscow-Washington. The findings illustrate several clear differences, where the variations have proven most valid in three areas: the details and the reporting style; assignment of responsibility and assessment of solutions; and the representation of the roles in the conflict. The strong contrasts clearly show the existence of distinct narratives of this incident. The differences were particularly evident between MT and the Western media outlets - Egypt Independent on the other hand had the most framing variations.

Case two consisted of 40 articles, where the immediate coverage of the succeeding western military strikes was investigated. The analysis was conducted following Yang's (2003) three categories of terms: pro-strike, neutral and anti- strike. The results showed that Western newspapers referred to the military strike as 'limited strikes' and 'prevention of crimes against humanity', while the Moscow Times referred to the attack as 'an aggressive act' and a 'violation of international law'. Egypt Independent was perceived as most diplomatic and stressed 'peaceful solutions'.

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List of abbreviations

EI	Egypt Independent
EU	European Union
CRS	Congressional Research Service
FFM	OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission
FSA	Free Syrian Army
JIM	United Nations Joint Investigation Mechanism
MID	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
MT	Moscow Times
NYT	New York Times
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
R2P	Responsibility to protect
SANA	Syrian Arab News Agency
SCD	Syrian Civil Defense
SNC	Syrian National Coalition
UNSC	United Nation Security Council
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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Chapter one:

Introduction

The Syrian war is referred to as the biggest human disaster in the twentieth century. Simultaneously, the conflict takes place in a time of vast streams of images and information. The war is one of our most tangled conflicts and portrays a range of contesting agendas and interests. Since 2013, Syria has been exposed to several chemical attacks, which have been the object of condemnation from the international community. After the repercussions of a chemical weapons attack in Douma April 7, 2018, global news media turned its eye to the conflict, showing varying perspectives on the incident, while political leaders from all sides of the complex war, weighed in with their perspectives. A blame game arose when opposition groups blamed the Syrian government of carrying out the attack, and the Syrian government accused the White Helmets of planting false information about the alleged use of chlorine and other toxic agents. Thus, from the very moment of awareness about the incident, different politicized versions of the incident were communicated through the news media.

Many Western leaders called for a strong military response in contrast with regional and Eastern allies of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who voiced their continued support for his government. On April 14, 2018, the US, France, and the UK conducted several military strikes against government-controlled areas in Syria that were claimed to be linked to the regime's continued production and use of chemical weapons (Liptak et al., 2018). However, the Western strikes was carried out without a mandate from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and before inspectors from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) gained access to the area, which was not the case before April 21, 2018. Nevertheless, the attack was supported by EU, NATO, Germany, Denmark, Turkey, Israel, Japan, Canada and Saudi Arabia. On the opposite side of the conflict, Russia, Iran and Syria, referred to the Western attack as a violation of international law, an aggressive act that would only lead to further destabilization in Syria.

To keep abreast of this ever-changing, mediated and bloody conflict, people must rely on second-hand information. The reality brought to us are constantly structured by the way the news media presents issues and events. Few people directly witness, or are able to directly

research the nature, causes and consequences of conflicts and wars. Therefore, the amount and quality of media coverage is of the utmost importance. By providing information to the public, the news media holds a crucial role in the discursive construction of public opinion and politics. The concept of framing has in recent years become central in research in political communication and media studies. Framing entails selecting a few elements of the perceived reality and compiling a narrative that emphasizes the connections among them, to promote a specific interpretation (Entman 2007: 164).

The research inquiry is concerned with how the media utilizes frames in the reporting of conflict and intervention, and what the consequence of this may be for projecting certain views of the world. Therefore, of crucial significance is how the media frames a conflict, for instance, what information is presented, language constructions utilized, metaphors or examples employed, that contributes to an overall presentation of events. The thesis analyses news articles in four different countries' online newspapers, located outside the area where the event occurred. The articles are taken from New York Times, Moscow Times, Aftenposten and Egypt Independent's online versions. Case one analyzes the chemical attack in Douma April 7, 2018 and employs Entman's methodology as a foundation for analyzing the news articles, where the four frame functions; defining the problem, assigning responsibility, passing a moral judgement and proposal of a solution (Entman 2004: 6; 2010: 391) are defined. The study adds to the methodology proposed by Entman by employing Van Gorp's concept of frame matrix (Van Gorp 2005: 491; 2007: 64–65) to categorize the framing devices. Additionally, the study analyzes the type of news sources used in the different news articles, with a focus on the use of elite sources. Furthermore, the media coverage will be compared with the countries' political responses to the incident and see if the coverage reflects the stories of their respective government's foreign policy.

The second part of the analysis examines how the respective newspapers immediately covered the western attack on Syria April 14, 2018. Yang's (2003) categories of pro-strike, anti-strike and neutral terms sets a foundation for the analysis. The study does not seek to explain the notion of frame-building, or the journalistic choices of applying particular frames. However, by using an inductive approach, the thesis offers possible perspectives that will be considered when explaining the way, the content is presented, based on the country's political response to the chemical attack, previous research and the data received from the analysis process. The thesis is based on analysis of the interaction between language and context, as well as the tension between competing narratives and interpretive frames.

1.1 Ethical considerations

An important clarification that must be made is an ethical assessment. This study does not aim to relativize the actions of any of the parties to the Syrian conflict, or to comment on the morality of their actions. Rather, it is the framing that the articles use, that is the focus. This is done from the theoretical premise that there is never only one possible way of describing a phenomenon or event, hence each description inevitably excludes some aspects and provides salience to others.

1.2 Words Make Worlds

Andrea Cornwall (2010) states that worlds are created and sustained by words (p. 1). Thus, language has the potential to shape our understanding of questions in ways we don't often recognize or even realize, to define the world around us and enable our subsequent actions (Wetherall et al, 2001: 16). Much of our understanding of the world comes from the news media's presentations of events, so it is not a controversial idea that media is impacting our understanding of war and conflict. As noted by Entman (2004), political actors need to promote their versions of political matters to the news media and the public. To help with the perceived legitimacy and acceptance, there is a written account of excessive risks and dangers, as well as opposite sets of projected realities of good and evil. The problem can be defined within a set of frames. These frames are then repeated to reinforce the unambiguous and emotionally compelling story, and to eliminate other possible interpretations.

1.3 Actors in the Syrian conflict

Accelerated by both endogenous and exogenous factors, the Syrian conflict has developed from a humanitarian crisis to "one of the most complex ideological, socio-political and economic situations today" (Khaldoun, 2014: 18). The Syrian conflict began with protests on 26 January 2011, and quickly escalated into a full uprising on March 15, the same year. The conflict lines in Syria consisted of approximately 5,000 different ethnic and religious groups (Hellestveit, 2017: 70), where numerous of rebelling groups, opposition groups, radical Islamists and government troops have fought each other in a violent and terrible war. In

addition to IS and Nusra Front (renamed Jabat Fateh al-Sham in 2016), several other rebel groups are consistently fighting against the Assad Government. Several of these are gathered in the Free Syrian Army (FSA), created in 2011 by defectors from Assad's army (Hellestveit, 2017: 89-90). When political forces and opposition groups were brought together in the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) in the fall of 2012 as a political representative of the opposition in Syria, the FSA was elected as their military front (Ibid: 129).

Later that year, the SNC was recognized as a representative of the Syrian people by a number of European and Arab states, including the US, France, Turkey and Norway (ibid: 130). By going from supporting to recognizing the opposition, Norway officially chose the side of the Syrian civil war - for the opposition and the rebels, and against the Syrian government (Hellestveit, 2017:125-126). However, in a statement from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry on March 30, 2017, Norway said they recognized Syria as a sovereign state, however, emphasizing that peace will not be achieved with Assad as president (regjeringen, March 30, 2017). Iranian and Lebanese Shia militia, Hezbollah, have supported the Syrian government's fight against the rebels in the country, while the rebels have been supported by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey (Hellestveit, 2017: 245).

In conjunction with the many actors involved in the Syrian civil war, battles were fought for matters that had little or nothing to do with purely Syrian issues. The conflict is compounded by a comprehensive interplay between domestic and regional factors, with rival international and regional actors supporting various 'proxies'. There is a two-part international dimension to the Syrian war. Indirectly, opponents of the regime have waged a campaign for regime change in Syria, and thereby to gain greater influence in the region. Directly, many countries have engaged militarily against the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria from 2014 (Leerand, 2019). The US gained its presence in Syria in 2015 through the US-led *Operation Inherent Resolve* (OIR). In May 2016, Norway also became a part of the US-led military operation. The clearest line in Norwegian foreign and security policy since joining the NATO in establishing the Defense Alliance in 1949 has been loyalty to it, and support for the US as the leading player in the alliance (Ottosen, 2001: 204). However, the attacks on IS in Syria were not based on a request or acceptance by the Syrian government and were therefore considered as a violation of international law. The Syrian government maintains that military presence in the country without its approval is illegal (UN: 6.3.2020).

Several different coalitions with US leadership, opened for a stronger American influence, as they are not subject to, for example, NATO or UN control. The US thus becomes a governing power in the coalitions, by virtue of the status they have towards the

other countries participating - such as Norway, which relies heavily on the US's in its security policy. President Trump has throughout his election campaign and well into his first year in office, claimed that he was "committed" to defeating ISIS, which still had a small presence in Syria at that time (Riley-Smith & Ensor, 2018). Simultaneous, his administration suggested pulling forces out of Syria. Contradictions about US presence in Syria have been ongoing since 2017. On March 31, 2018 President Trump announced that US troops would "be coming out of Syria very soon" (Cohen & Browne, 2018), while the Pentagon reported plans to increase troops (Browne & Starr, 2018). In addition to the military campaign against jihadists through the OIR, Iran and Russia have been directly and legally involved in the war – invited by President Assad – with military support for the Syrian government (Leerand, 2019).

One of the reasons why the war in Syria has become a comprehensive geopolitical conflict, rests on the Russian support of President Assad (Wilhelmsen 2018). US on the other hand, blames Russia, for repeatedly use of the veto in the UN Security Council (UNSC), against resolutions to account for and punish those responsible for the chemical attacks in Syria. Nevertheless, the Russian support for the government in Syria is probably first and foremost about security policy. In a region under US influence, Damascus is of strategic relevance for Russia. This is not just within the framework of the 'partnership of reason' built with Tehran, but has relevance for political influence and military prediction, primarily through the Tartus naval base (Facon 2016, quoted in Didier 2017: 5). The Syrian crisis allowed Russia to restore its former status in international affairs, after losing its global power when the Soviet Union collapsed. Russia's entanglement in the Syrian conflict, can be analyzed as a reaction to what Moscow views as Western-influenced regime changes in the Middle East (Simoni, 2013: 96).

Wilhelmsen (2018) argues that Russia strongly opposes how US and western countries – without UN mandate – removed what they refer to as illegitimate regimes, such as the US intervention in Iraq and the NATO-led intervention in Libya, that removed Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi respectively. The US refers to Russia as an illegitimate regime, with President Putin fearing that he might be removed from power. Russian military participation in Syria from 2015 therefore offered an opportunity for Russia to step up and demonstrate against a 'Western regime change policy', thus preventing Assad from being forcibly removed (Wilhelmsen, 2018).

Both security and economic reasons, as well as concern over the US involvement in the Middle East can explain the bilateral cooperation between Russia and Syria. From the Egyptian standpoint, closer ties to Syria has been reflected in statements by Egyptian

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and in the government press from 2014. Today, Egypt is open to tightening political, economic and cultural ties with the Syrian regime (Mozes, 2016; Kessler, 2017). Egypt is also cooperating with Assad's ally, Russia, in trying to establish scaling zones in Syria, and in expanding the Syrian opposition delegation to the UN-sponsored talks in Geneva, so that in addition to figures near Saudi Arabia, it also opposes oppositionists near Cairo and Moscow. The latter advocates a more "moderate" view of the solution to the Syrian crisis and of Assad's future role, compared to the oppositionists backed by Saudi Arabia (Kessler, 2017).

Furthermore, it's important to clarify the role of the Non-Syrian Human rights organization The White Helmets, because it disseminates much of the information about the conflict to the media. The White Helmets was created in 2013 by British security consultant James Le Mesurier, and is a Syrian humanitarian organization, also known as the Syrian Civil Defense (SCD). The establishment is funded by the UK and it's not the official Syrian rescue service, but a non-governmental organization, led by the Syrian Raed al-Saleh. It has operated particularly in areas controlled by groups fighting President Bashar al-Assad and has been accused of being linked to Jabat Fateh al-Sham. Since the White Helmet has operated in areas controlled by rebel groups, accusations that the organization is a participant in the rebellion against the Syrian government has been made (Pettersen & Leraand, 2018). While the organization has been a source of information on war actions, questions have been raised about the truthfulness of some of the information that has been presented. At the same time as the White Helmets is accused of being an instrument for foreign powers to control the Syrian government, it is renowned for its humanitarian efforts (ibid).

1.4 The use of chemical weapons in Syria

Another reason for the wide international involvement in the Syrian war, are the recurring messages on the use of chemical weapons. This has led to a major political debate about possible international military intervention. Following a chemical attack on civilians in Ghouta August 21, 2013, the US advocated military intervention against the Syrian government – a resolution vetoed by Russia. The chemical attack crossed what is referred to Barack Obama's famous "red line" and instead led to the destruction of Syria's declared stockpile of chemical weapons, implemented and overseen by UN and OPCW. The initial investigations led by the OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), were restricted to

establishing facts – which meant they were not allowed to attribute blame. In August 2015, the UNSC unanimously decided to set up a Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to identify groups or governments who were involved in the use of chemical weapons. By August 2016, the JIM team attributed three of the chemical attacks to Syrian government forces and a fourth one – involving sulfur mustard – to Daesh fighters (UN: 7.11.2017). However, as the JIM’s one-year mandate came to an end, disagreement broke out over an elongation, with Russia demanding that the JIM should not be used as an instrument condemning the Syrian government.

Although it is believed that Syrian chemical weapons stocks were demolished in the fall of 2013, the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian war are persistently reported. Among them a chemical attack that killed more than 80 people in the Syrian city of Khan Shaykhun April 4, 2017. JIM concluded October 26, 2017 that the Syrian Government was responsible for the use of sarin in the attack against Khan Shaykhun (UN: 7.11.2017). The incident led the US President Donald Trump to conduct a retaliate strike, launching nearly sixty missiles at locations in Syria. Trump's actions made precedent for action, cementing the attitudes of the conflict parties to the use of chemical weapons. Russian UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia, said in a UNSC meeting April 4, 2018 that the circumstances around the incident in Khan Shaykhun remained obscure. He said the *“The so-called work done by the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) could not be taken seriously by professionals”*. He further stated that the conclusions drawn by JIM was *“nothing more than a pre-ordained, pre-programmed result aimed at accusing the Syrian authorities”* (UN: 13.4.2018). Russia consistently denies that the Syrian government is behind any of the attacks and has been strongly critical of the investigations that have been carried out. Nebenzia also claimed that the team of investigation had built their assumptions acquired by *“armed groups and dubious structures that supported terrorist groups, including the white helmets”* (UN: 13.4.2018).

1.5 Framing the Syrian conflict

In order to understand the causes of possible differences in the reporting of the chemical attack in Douma, the general framing of the Syrian conflict needs to be looked at more closely. From the outset, the Western media covered the Syrian war with sympathy for the protesters and with condemnation towards the Syrian government’s brutality (Brown

2014:58–59). When the Syrian government used chemical weapons against moderate rebels in Damascus 2013, it was extensively covered and condemned in the Western media (Brown 2015: 237). Brown (2015) perceives that graphic images of dying and suffering non-combatants made Western leaders take urgent measures in providing military support for the rebels (p. 236). Although the Syrian conflict is often framed within the context of humanitarian norms and values, the conflicting geopolitical interests of various actors are another way of framing the war. The Royal United Services Institute's report from 2014, pointed to the geopolitical dimensions of the conflict and the negative effects of the Libya war, which limited foreign policy options such as direct military intervention. Nevertheless, the conflict was framed as 'the inevitability of collision course for intervention' (Simons 2019: 638). In this context, the Western coalition sought to recreate the so-called Libya scenario, which called for the responsibility to protect (R2P), as the framing of the conflict in the early stages had several similarities. However, the American opinion and perception of R2P's use in Libya was controversial and differed greatly from other UNSC members, especially Russia and China. The memory of Libya thus affected the ability from refraining to use R2P in Syria (Simons, 2019: 638). A 2014 report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) framed the Syrian conflict as highly tangled, marked with a contradictory between volatile systems of alliances, the fight against Islamic State, isolating and 'punishing' the Syrian government, and the possibility of volatility spreading out from Syria to a wider area (Blanchard et al., 2014).

When the war report on US strategy in Syria came in March 2017, the frames had not changed from the 2014 CRS report (Cafarella et al., 2017: 25). However, a new threat frame was added, the influence of Iran and Russia, which was characterized as a risk and threat to US interests in Syria and the Middle East, and additionally as a threat to the 'global order' (ibid). The Syrian conflict has major implications for the future boundaries of the Middle East, and for the rise and spread of terrorism, in addition, the new regional and international powers that presents themselves carries new major challenges. Dider (2017) describes that the Syrian conflict gives a sense of a cold war resurgence between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community, including the US, EU and its member states (p. 4). The Euro-Atlantic society consists of a powerful summary of identities, norms and interests, deeply rooted in the presumption that the West has an extraordinary responsibility for maintaining prosperity, stability and global peace (Tocci et.al, 2014: 366).

1.6 Background information on the events used in the study

Case 1 - Chemical attack in Douma

At 16:00 April 7, 2018, The OPCW reported an ‘alleged incident’ in Douma, a district in eastern Ghouta, Damascus, regarding the use of toxic chemicals used as weapons. Casualties from the incident ranged between 40-80 deaths and hundreds of injured, caused by exposure to a toxic substance (OPCW, 2018: 2). The world awoke to images and videos of children being treated by medical workers. The initial media reports were mixed and unclear, some claiming that sarin was used, others reported that the substance was chlorine. Photos and videos of cylinders allegedly used in the two attacks were also publicly addressed by the White Helmets to the international press. A blame-game arose where the opposition groups accused the Syrian government of launching the chemical attack and the Syrian Government blamed the media wing of Jaysh al Islam and The White Helmets for fabricating the incident to incriminate the Syrian Arab army (OPCW, 2018: 3).

Western leaders expressed condemnation, followed by a tense meeting at the UNSC April 10, in which the US and Russia traded harsh words over the incident. At the meeting, Russia and the US each tabled a resolution for an expanded investigation into the alleged chemical attack in Syria, but both states voted down each other's proposals. US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, accused the Syrian government of using banned chemical weapons at least 50 times during Syria's civil war, and UN ambassador to Russia, Vasily Nebenzya, accused the US and its allies of ruthless Middle East warmongering by threatening Syria with military force (Baker & Gladstone, 2018). The OPCW got the message to urgently investigate the attack in Douma, but as before, their mandate didn't include investigating those responsible for the incident.

On April 10, 2018, the clearance and the necessary formalities were concluded between the OPCW and the Syrian government, which permitted a team of investigators to be dispatched. The full team was in place by April 21 (OPCW, 2018: 2). The final report released by the OPCW FFM team March 1, 2019 concluded that there was [... *“reasonable grounds that the use of a toxic chemical as a weapon took place. This toxic chemical contained reactive chlorine. The toxic chemical was likely molecular chlorine”* (OPCW, 2019: 32). The FFM was unable to determine the exact number of injured, and the reporting ranged between 70 and 500. Other sources, however, denied the presence of chemically related casualties (ibid: 26). In the aftermath, there have been some serious allegations by

whistleblowers among the weapons inspectors regarding manipulation of the OPCW's Douma investigation final report. Wikileaks released December 27, 2019, leaked internal documents, showing that some of the OPCW inspectors rejected the official story, complaining that higher-level officials excluded them from the commission process, distorted key evidence and ignored their findings (Maté, 2019). This has been strongly rejected by OPCW.

Case 2 - Western strikes in Syria

On April 14, 2018, the US, France and UK conducted several missiles strikes against multiple government-controlled areas in Syria. (Liptak et al., 2018). It was stated that this was a response to the chemical attack the week before, which they attributed to the Syrian government. Colona (2018) called the attack the biggest Western intervention against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad since the war broke out in 2011, with 103 missiles fired from ships and manned aircraft as part of a coordinated campaign. At this point the OPCW had not investigated the chemical attack and the strikes was carried out without a UNSC mandate, due to disagreements between the US and Russia in the UNSC. The EU, NATO, Germany, Denmark, Turkey, Israel, Japan, Canada and Saudi Arabia supported the attack. Russia, Iran and Syria referred to the Western attack as a violation of international law, that would only lead to further destabilization in Syria.

The former US Defense Secretary James Mattis stated in the Pentagon an hour after President Trump declared the start of missile strikes on Syria, that the goal was to damage the Syrian regime's chemical weapons research and development. He further added: "*Clearly the Assad regime did not get the message last year. This time our allies and we have struck harder. Together we have sent a clear message to Assad and his murderous lieutenants that they should not perpetrate another chemical weapons attack for which they will be held accountable*" (Mattis, 2018). Russian President Vladimir Putin condemned the attack as international aggression and Foreign Ministry in Syria described the missile strikes as a 'barbaric aggression' (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MID) 14.4.2018). The coordinated strikes marked the second time in a year that President Trump launched retaliation strikes against the Syrian government.

1.6.1 Political response of the US

In a press statement from the US department of state April 7, 2018 Heather Nauert condemned the chemical attack in Douma stating: “[T]he Assad regime and its backers must be held accountable and any further attacks prevented immediately” (Neuert, 7.4.2018). The statement was made the same day as the incident was reported, already at this point claiming that the Syrian government was behind the attack. The US gave Russia much of the blame for the repeated chemical attacks in the Syrian war, by giving “unwavering support for the regime” and the tense relationship between Russia and US was discussed by several government figures. As Ambassador Haley said, “Russia could stop this senseless slaughter if it wanted to, but it stands with the Assad regime and supports it without any hesitation” (Haley, 10.4.2018).

President Trump did in the aftermath of the alleged chemical attack, publicly criticized Russia, tweeting “our relationship with Russia is worse now than it has ever been, and that includes the Cold War” (Trump on twitter 11.4.2018). The condemnation was clear early in the development, following the Russian veto of a US-sponsored draft resolution April 10, on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Ambassador Haley explained the situation surrounding the vote:

“When the people of Douma, along with the rest of the international community, looked to this Council to act, one country stood in the way. History will record that. History will record that, on this day, Russia chose protecting a monster over the lives of the Syrian people” (Haley, 10.4.2018).

US’s foreign policy statements attaches great importance to Russia’s role and the main premise holds that Russia bears the responsibility by shielding its ally, Syria, and has breached its commitments to the UN as a framework guarantor.

1.6.2 Political response of Russia

The official Russian response to the Douma incident expressed the opposite from US statements, claiming the attack was staged, and that false information was planted. The reason for this, according to the press statement from MID April 8, 2018, was to protect the terrorists

and the irreconcilable radical opposition who have rejected a political settlement, as well as to justify the possible use of force by external actors.

“We recently warned of the possibility of such dangerous provocations. The goal of these absolutely unsubstantiated lies is to protect the terrorists and the irreconcilable radical opposition that has rejected a political settlement, as well as to justify the possible use of force by external actors” (MID, 8.4.2018).

The Russian statement said that this were the latest fake news and that *“these reports are again referenced to the notorious White Helmets, which have been proved more than once to be working hand in glove with the terrorists, as well as to other pseudo-humanitarian organizations headquartered in the UK and the US”* (ibid). The Russian response highlighted recently warnings of the possibility of such dangerous provocations. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in a press release April 9 that *“we already had the opportunity to comment on what was happening before it became a reality. Our military on the ground in Syria issued repeated warnings that a major provocation was in the making aimed at issuing another accusation of Damascus of using a poisonous chemical agent against civilians”* (Lavrov, 9.4.18). This approach to the incident in Douma has been pervasive in the foreign policy statements of Russia.

1.6.3 Political response of Norway

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs first expressed its views on the chemical attack in Douma after the US, France and the UK took military action against the Syrian government. The press release stated that the world has been united in condemnation of chemical weapons since the atrocities of the First World War, and that this was a clear signal that the use of such weapons has consequences. The Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide expressed understanding of the military action; as any use of chemical weapons is prohibited (Søreide 14.4.2018). The Norwegian statement further points to the limited military operation as a prevention of the production, proliferation and use of chemical weapons. Although the Western military strikes were launched without a UN mandate, the statement nonetheless argues that the ascension must be seen in light of the Security Council's clear message to

Syria in 2013. The statement emphasized that the Syrian government's repeated use of chemical weapons, against its own population, is in direct conflict with the Security Council's clear order. It was additionally stated that the situations pose a threat to international peace and security, and that those behind it must be held accountable. Although Norway expressed support for the military strikes, it is nevertheless specified that all UNSC Member States should be reluctant and refrain from any actions that contributed to escalating the situation or aggravating the Syrian people's suffering (Søreide 14.4.2018).

1.6.4 Political response of Egypt

Like the Norwegian foreign ministry, Egypt did not make a statement regarding the chemical attack in Douma until after the substantial retaliation attack on Syria. Egypt condemned the western countries for attacking Syria and the foreign ministry expressed concern over the military escalation in Syria that threatened the Syrian people. The government and the Egyptian pro-government press expressed support for the Syrian government, calling the Western attack an unwarranted aggression. Egypt expressed its serious concern about the current military escalation in Syria and underlined its full opposition to the use of chemical weapons, but called for a transparent international investigation. Egypt expressed its solidarity with the Syrian people and urged the international community and the superpowers to carry out their responsibilities pressing for a peaceful solution to the Syria crisis (Masr, 2018). Egypt's foreign ministry expressed "deep concern" saying the strikes undermined the "*safety of our brotherly Syrian people, and threatens the understandings reached regarding the de-escalation zones*" (The New Arab, April 14, 2018).

1.7 Research questions

To gain insight into the alleged chemical weapons attack from an American, Russian, Norwegian and Egyptian perspective, this study analyzes online news articles published by The New York Times, The Moscow Times, Aftenposten and Egypt Independent. All the newspapers in the analysis are privately owned, with no direct ties to the government in the country. It will therefore be interesting to see, despite this, whether the government's position is supported or criticized by the newspapers. The research questions about the prevalence of the frames that comes to the fore are:

RQ 1: *How did The New York Times, The Moscow Times, Aftenposten and Egypt Independent framed the chemical attack in Douma in 2018 and what differences (if any) occurs in their online coverage of the incident?*

The analysis was carried out in the period before OPCW investigated the areas of the chemical attack and before any evidence was collected. To date, an investigation has not yet been carried out, that holds anyone responsible for the chemical attack in Douma. Nonetheless, Western governments have stated with reasonable certainty that the Syrian government was responsible, a claim rejected by the opposing party. It is therefore interesting to analyze whether these contradictory opinions also appear in the media.

RQ 2: *What differences (if any) occur in attribution of responsibility for the chemical attack in The New York Times, The Moscow Times, Aftenposten and Egypt Independent?*

Hypothesis 2a: *The New York Times and Aftenposten's news articles will have an overweight of articles blaming the chemical attack on Bashar al-Assad's army (Syrian Governmental forces).*

Hypothesis 2b: *The Moscow Times and Egypt Independents' articles will have an overweight of articles blaming the White Helmets or opposition groups for fabricating the attack.*

If the news framing is influenced by the political environment, it's expected that the solutions presented in The New York Times towards the chemical attack reflects the political statements by US officials – who largely suggested a military means as a response. Studies on the US media coverage of 9/11 has by several scholars revolved around frames centralized around military action (Renolds and Barnett, 2003; Anker, 2005). Research indicates that mainstream media induced a dominant frame of a militaristic hunt for justice and American victimization (Monahan, 2010:64). Ottosen (2001) points out that Norway's clearest foreign and security policy has been loyalty to NATO and support for the US as the leading player in the alliance (p. 204). This is also reinforced by the findings made by Kristoffer Egeberg. In the book 'Peace nation' (2017), Norwegian ministers and heads of defense have been interviewed over the last 20 years. Egeberg (2017) states that the driving force in decisions about Norwegian participation in military operations abroad, is about showing Norwegian relevance to its most important ally, the US.

Findings by Ottosen & Rudsengen (2018) also show that the media is close to politicians' rhetoric and have had problems challenging Norwegian security and foreign policy (p. 16). As US foreign policy positions following the chemical attack largely promoted military measures, it is presumed that this is also expressed in Aftenposten. Based on Russia's alliance with Syria and Egypt's closer ties to President Assad - it is believed that the Moscow Times and Egypt Independent holds opposite solutions and promotes views to prevent further military escalation.

***RQ 3:** What differences (if any) occur in the solutions presented regarding the chemical attack in Douma, in The New York Times, The Moscow Times, Aftenposten and Egypt Independent?*

***Hypothesis 3a:** The news articles published in the New York Times and Aftenposten will have an overweight of military measures as the possible solution to the chemical attack.*

***Hypothesis 3b:** The news articles published in The Moscow Times and Egypt Independent will have an overweight of abandon military measures as the possible solution to the chemical attack.*

News sources is an essential framing device, as they provide evidence, legitimacy and credibility to the story. Although many researchers state that source diversity is important (Entman, 2004; Yang, 2003), previous research has found that news media tend to dedicate their attention to sources in official or authoritative positions (Bennett, 1990; Brown, 2004; Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2011; Cozma & Kozman, 2015). According to Tumber and Palmer (2004), media commonly depend on official sources in conflict reporting, such as government or military sources. These types of sources are referred to as elite sources and this thesis will investigate whether the frequent use of elite sources also applies to this incident.

***RQ 4:** Which type of sources received the greatest salience in *The New York Times*, *The Moscow Times*, *Aftenposten* and *Egypt Independent*, in the coverage of the chemical attack in 2018?*

***Hypothesis 4a:** All the online newspapers under study uses an overweight of elite sources when they cover the incident.*

This study additionally explores the relationship between the news and their respective governments by comparing the online coverage of the news outlets with the political responses by their respective government officials, which leads to the fifth research question:

***RQ 5:** To what extent does the news coverage of the chemical attack in Douma reflect the political responses by their respective government's official statements?*

In case 2, the position towards the western missile strikes in Syria was analyzed. Based on Russia's close relationship with Syria and Egypt's increasing support for the Syrian government, the assumption was that the Russian and Egyptian media would promote strong anti-strike attitudes. Based on previous research, (i.e. Yang, 2003; White, 2017) the hypothesis was that US news articles would show pro-strike attitudes, legitimizing the attack as 'human rights protection' or an American 'security threat'. Previous research has also shown that Norwegian media often support and understand the US military actions and that

Norwegian politicians almost automatically identify with the US perspective and position themselves on the US side militarily (Egeberg, 2017; Ottesen, 2019: 68).

RQ 6: *Did the newspapers present pro-strike, anti-strike or neutral attitudes towards the Western military strike on Syria on April 14, 2018?*

Hypothesis 6a: *The Moscow Times and Egypt Independent uses more anti-strike terms in the immediate coverage of the western strikes compared to The New York Times and Aftenposten.*

Hypothesis 6b: *The New York Times and Aftenposten uses more pro-strike terms in the immediate coverage of the western strikes compared to The Moscow Times and Egypt Independent.*

Chapter Two:

Theory and Review of Related Literature

This chapter is divided into four sections and begins presenting the thesis' scientific tradition constructivism (2.1). The second section reviews the thesis approach to framing theory, frame packages and enemy images (2.2). The third section (2.3) comprises a literature review of recent studies on framing, gives an overview of global media wars (2.3.1) and review how studies have shown a connection between media, sourcing and political elites (2.3.2). The chapter also gives an overview Cold war narrative (2.3.3) and media framing of international conflicts (2.3.4). The point of the literature review is not to present exhaustive research, but to focus on the most seminal findings within the field, which can contribute to answering my research questions. The final section discusses limitations of framing theory (2.4).

2.1 Constructivism

Making the claim that the world is socially constructed is not particularly revolutionary. Hence, constructivism does not have a problem recognizing both physical and social truths. Unless one enters the philosophical discussions of empiricism, one can agree that actual events take place. However, in assessing their significance, the relevance of events and, not least, the causes of events, social science can contribute. The ontological and epistemological foundations of the study are rooted in constructivism, given that the research aims to reveal discursive frames as constructed views of reality.

According to Guzzini (2000), constructivism is perceived as a 'metatheoretical commitment' on the basis of three substantial principles: as an epistemological assertion, knowledge is socially constructed; as an ontological assertion, social reality is constructed; as a reflexive claim, knowledge and reality are mutually constitutive (cited in Pouliot, 2007: 361). The positivist understanding of knowledge as a reflection of actual, concrete events in the world, contrasts with the social constructivist understanding of truth as subjective, and knowledge constructed through language, discourse, and culture (Bergström & Boréus, 2005: 22). In other words, knowledge is in this sense not based on neutral facts, but on social

constructions that is influenced by the context, the participants and the interpreter. This way of looking at knowledge is claimed to allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding and provide new insights into ancient traditions or phenomena one takes for granted (Kvale, 2008). Friis (2007) discusses two important scientific theoretical principles as the foundation for constructivism. The first is that social science is political and that the study object will respond to our findings and theories. Likewise, Morrow and Brown (1994) explains that we perceive reality based on our own impressions of what reality is. Thus, we "cannot really know or represent "reality" directly because our understanding of it is mediated by the constructs of our consciousness" (p. 54). Hence, reality is subjective, relativistic and changeable, not a palpable objective actuality. If one argues theoretically that a military superpower can use its capacity to rebuild war areas in the rest of the world, it doesn't take long before this becomes actual politics (Friis, 2007: 87). The research therefore has an ethical and a political dimension that has traditionally been ignored by those who have viewed science as a neutral observer of the world.

Realism emphasis on military capabilities as a 'natural' part of the 'anarchic' world could illustrate how this understanding contributed intellectually to, for example, the Cold War arms race (Friis, 2007: 87). Research as well as media presentation of the conflict and its solutions will therefore have a political dimension. The second foundation rests on the world as a social construction. In the discussion of the basic structures and processes of the physical world, constructivists claim that it is the social interpretation of the world that determines human action (ibid: 88). The maintenance and development of these structures in society is closely linked to power, where power is the result of processes. An interesting point here is what Friis (2007) refers to as depoliticization; something that is read and adopted without anyone questioning it (p. 89). For example, for many, it is 'accepted' to carry out so-called 'humanitarian interventions' without a UN mandate, because the UNSC fails to protect civilians, due to conflicting interests and the use of the permanent members veto right. Although this is an 'accepted' reality for some, it will still be problematic in many areas. It is therefore essential to study these constructions to gain a closer understanding of how for example frames, can maintain and create these understandings.

Social constructivism points out that news does not necessarily reflect reality, but instead constructs reality images (Allern, 2001: 142). The journalists' choices and assessments of what qualifies as a news item, as well as which elements, thus influence the presentation of the news. Its assumed that the world is constructed through social interactions of actors in each situation. The actors that have been investigated are from mass media and political

decision-making areas. These actors construct the discursive frames conceivable to influence or become 'normative' social conventions (Langdon, 2018: 43). The function of social sciences is thus to study precisely these interpretations and communications: the frames of opinion that lay the foundation for human action. We do not receive raw facts from the one true reality - we are provided with an orderly, constructed narrative completed with plots and actors (Street, 2011: 49). Competing realities - or versions of the truth - can thus be constructed by competing media using 'frames' or 'framing' (ibid).

2.2 Framing theory

Framing theory is based on the social constructivist understanding of reality. It is through the concepts, categories and interpretations that reality gets its meaning (Korsnes, Andersen and Brante, 1997: 289). These notions can further be expressed through frames, which involves selection and salience. The term 'frame' can be defined as a shema of interpretation that makes people perceive, uncover and define occurrences to make sense of the world around us (Goffman, 1974: 21). Frames may be specific elements of communication, connoted by the selection of an image, word or name in a text. Frames have thus the ability to activate the readers' awareness, even without the readers being aware that this is happening (Capella et. al., 1997: 44). Frames, themselves, are often characterized as a:

“central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987: 143).

In other words, framing will turn the facts of the case into a particular type of story by selecting and highlighting attributes that draw attention to the situation and influence the readers to understand an issue in a certain way (Gitlin, 1980 in Crow and Lawlor, 2016: 476). The canonical definition of framing offered by Entman (1993) states that framing involves:

'select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and make[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, a causal interpretation, a moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation' (Entman, 1993: 52).

Entman (2004) eventually elaborated the definition above and clarified the functions of the frames. He gathered and organized other researchers' contributions to the understanding of framing in combination with his own research. According to Entman, frames has four functions, they:

1. Define problems
2. Diagnose causes/responsibility
3. Make moral judgments
4. Suggest remedies/solutions (Entman 2004: 6)

Entman's model (2004) uses substantive frames that usually perform two of the four basic functions. He illustrated the model to analyze 9/11: The problem definition was the death of thousands of civilians, the cause/responsibility were the Taliban government of Afghanistan, the moral condemnation; they are evil, and the remedy was presented as war against Afghanistan (p. 6). Of the four framing functions presented by Entman, he highlights the problem definition and solutions as the most important of the frame functions. The problem definition poses and predetermines the rest of the frame, and the solution sets the premises for support or promote the action taken by the government (ibid: 418).

Framing studies explores the ways news media portray and present reality and are closely linked to justifying behavior at a strategic and comprehensive level. Chong and Druckman (2007) specify that the main premise of framing theory is that a case or problem can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. This is logical and stresses the importance revealing to the public, that issues could be further nuanced than what is presented in a country's media. Frames are used to introduce new ideas, as well as challenging already accepted ideas, or to maintain and stabilize deep-rooted understandings in society. Particularly, frames can emerge as a reference point to the already acknowledged social

context. Accordingly, the use of framing enables its advocates to create resonance with the audience. Even though framing is principally external to the individual, its entrenched in the social interaction. This implies that “media makers interact with their sources [states] and other actors in the public arena, and the receivers interact with media content and with each other” (Van Gorp, 2007: 64). The micro–macro relation amidst the state, journalists and recipients is established in a “dynamic social process where social reality is produced, reproduced, and transformed” (ibid: 73). Tuchman (1978: ix) describes frames as ‘windows of the world’, interpreted by the receiver. Hence, it would be logical that there are many possible windows in the form of different points of view and in the constructivist sense, multiple realities.

Like social constructions that contain subjectivities, frames can also carry latent power, hidden by choice and presentation of information. This can be achieved through the use of language that are "noticeable, understandable, memorable and emotional" to produce a 'cultural resonance', or through repetition of words and themes that enhance presentation (Entman, 2004: 6). By choosing some aspects of war reality, such as *military success*, and ignoring other aspects – like for example *rebuilding war areas*, the media limits interpretations of an issue. As a result, the public in one country can acquire a quite different belief towards an issue compared to the public in another country. Those who perceive war as a military success, rather than focusing on humanitarian losses, could be more supportive of military means of resolving conflict, rather than diplomacy and peaceful processes.

Framing is widely studied in many fields; political communication, political science (Lakoff, 2004) and policy studies (Entman, 1993; 2004), sociology (Goffman, 1974), media studies (Scheufele, 2007) and in linguistics and discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1977). Reese (2007) describes that the value of frames implies its potential to link methodological and conceptual perspectives. Especially those between psychology and sociology, and communication and political studies. Since the mid-nineties, studies of the relationship between political power and framing have increased interest. Both in the elaboration of frames used by politicians, and how these frames influence the media.

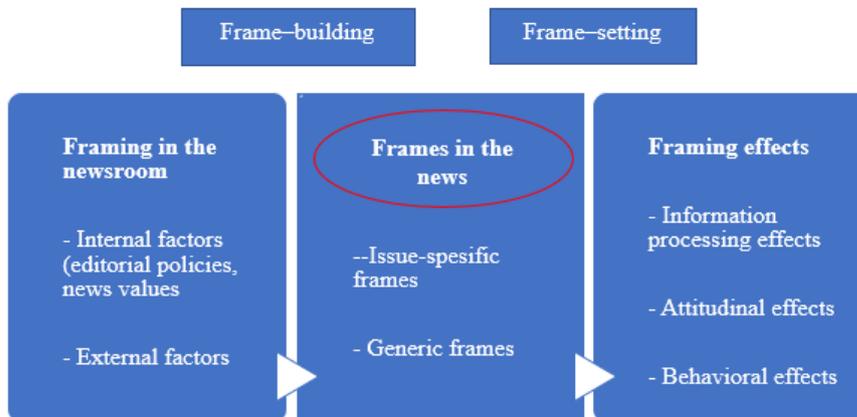
The work of George Lakoff, *Think of an Elephant* (2004), has made framing theory popular as a political communication tool. As framing are closely linked to psychology, it involves how we are influenced and make choices. Lakoff uses "Think of an Elephant" as an example. Lakoff asks his students *not* to think of an elephant. He never experienced that there was a student who couldn't think of an elephant when the word was said. According to Lakoff, this can be explained by the fact that all words - e.g. elephant - provokes a frame.

When a word is said, a notion of something is created, and even if a negation occurs, like the word "not" in a sentence, the focus will still be on the soft words, thus incorporating knowledge of the words: "When we negate the frame, we evoke the frame" (Lakoff, 2004: 3). This phenomenon is also linked to what Entman defines as 'schema'¹ and relates to the cognitive processes of the individual. When individual's response to framing in communication texts, it is often based on existing common schemas in our minds, which may come from past experiences, culture and society (Vladislavljević, 2015: 7). Frames can therefore lead a double life. They are embedded in political discourse and are a matter of interpretation. In parallel, frames will also live inside the mind and are cognitive structures that help the individual to make sense of the issue presented (Kinder and Sanders, 1996: 164). In this context they are rhetorical weapons.

It is important to clarify that frames have several locations, including the communicator, the text, the receiver, and culture (Entman, 1993: 52-53). These elements are integral components of the framing process that consist of distinct stages: (i) frame-building; how frames emerge, (ii) frame-setting; interplay between media frames and audience predispositions and (iii) framing effects; individual or societal level consequences of framing (de Vreese, 2005: 51-52). A clear overview of the frame-process is presented in Figure 1. This thesis is limited to investigate the frames in the news— the outcome of the production or frame-building process. Furthermore, two types of frames should be specified: generic frames and issue-specific frames. According to de Vreese (2012) generic frames are often persistent over time, and general features applicable to a vast variety of topics across countries and cultures. This analysis makes use of issue-specific frames, that is relevant to a certain topics, issues or events (p. 368).

¹ Schema can be defined as: "a form of personal culture—literally, entrenched multimodal (i.e., visual, aural, tactile, olfactory, kinesthetic, etc.) neural associations developed via repeated embodied experience (i.e., perceptual, sensorimotor, interactional) and stored in long-term memory" (Wood et. al., 2018: 246).

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



2.2.1 Frame packages

Frames in culture are difficult to obtain. However, it is possible to reconstruct them. Each frame used in a news article can be represented as a ‘frame/media package’, “a cluster of logically organized entities that act as a frame identity set” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: 3). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) use the term ‘media package’, about the same phenomenon described by Van Gorp (2007: 74) as ‘frame package’. I find the definition of the latter as a better description, as ‘media package’ implies that the package is only a product of the media, and not a broader culture and society. An essential part of framing studies is a reconstruction of these frame packages. The frame package is made up of three parts; the framing devices, the reasoning devices, and an implicit cultural phenomenon that displays the package (Van Gorp, 2007: 64). The frame package consists of all indicators, or framing devices, by which the frame can be identified: metaphors, catchphrases, visual images, selection of sources, graphics, stereotypes, dramatic characters, etc. (Pan and Kosicki, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007: 64). All conceivable framing units that point to the same core idea, make up different parts of a frame package. These units are held together under the heading of a central organizing theme - that is, the actual frame, which gives the frame package a coherent structure.

Van Gorp (2007) focuses on frame packages as a cultural phenomenon's, such as myth, value, stereotype, or shared belief (p. 65). Framing ultimately requires the intervention of an individual to link the frame and reasoning in a text with a frame as a cultural phenomenon. Journalists thus use the frames that are part of the collection of frames that we have in our culture to represent reality (Van Gorp, 2005: 487). However, these cultural phenomena do not equate the frames, because they often lack the quality to define and understand other events, problems and people (Fisher, 1997 in Van Gorp, 2007: 64). Therefore, the reasoning devices are additionally important elements that makes up the frame package. These consists of implicit and explicit statements that entail justifications, causes and consequences and completes the frame package (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). According to Van Gorp (2007), the reasoning devices are related to Entman's four frame functions (p. 64-65). Van Gorp's (2007) approach to frame packages is used in this study and the methodological execution will be reviewed in chapter 3.

2.2.2 Enemy images

Norwegian psychiatrist Nils Johan Lavik states that constructed, or reinforced enemy images, invites black-and-white thinking that can motivate aggression. Part of this picture projects aggression towards others and may result in overestimation of one's own abilities (Lavik, 2001 in Ottosen & Bull, 2016: 12). Enemy images are usually expressed through metaphors or other effects in the language, combined with graphic effects that help create expectations of hostile or inhumane behavior. The dangerous enemy images arise when we expect and generalize certain types of actions, from certain types of actors (Ottosen & Bull, 2016: 12). In times of conflict it is common that moral condemnation of actors enters the news agenda through the rhetoric expressed in official statements. When the media makes use of instruments that appeal to the reader's morality, one can discover language that explicitly distinguishes between good and evil, and consequently legitimize a moral cause for a response (Torwel, 2015: 258). The language thus gains power through presenting one side as virtuous and the other side as the aggressor (Smith, 2002: 2). Domke et. al (2000) similar states that theoretically, moral descriptions and approaches to a conflict will influence the news media audience's 'cognition and judgments' (p.642). If the moral framing of a party in a

conflict is reinforced through the news media, this can give moral force to the supposed 'right' party and provide a justification and legitimate military measures against the supposed 'wrong' party in the conflict. According to this theoretical construction, the rationale for war or military attacks begins with the moral framing of the enemy (Torwel, 2015: 258). By describing the enemy as 'a mad and ravaging tyrant', 'a monster' or 'an animal', the enemy is demonized, consequently providing a rationale to carry out any attack against a potential enemy (Seaton, 1999: 46). The Houla Incident in Syria in May 2015, which killed 116 civilians 'constituted a tipping point' and 'paved the way for sanctions against Syria' and quickly served as a symbol for the Syrian government villainy (Zollmann, 2017: 101). Zollmann (2017) states that the news reports emphasized the villainy of the Syrian government and army, while simultaneously downplaying the activities of the Syrian opposition (p. 115). Simons (2019) states that already from the beginning of the Syrian war, the conflict has been scripted as a way of establishing 'orthodoxy' of accepted knowledge and make other interpretations difficult to communicate. Other interpretations would be rejected or the communicated labelled a 'stooge' of Putin/Iran or an 'Assadist' (Simons, 2019: 637).

Elisabeth Anker analyzed the Fox News channel from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. of September 11 and the coverage disclosed a narrative trajectory of pathos, moral retribution and injury (Anker, 2005: 22). By using the type of framing where America was the victim of an unwarranted attack, Monahan (2010) states that retribution was essential to derive from victimhood to a moral reason for military retaliation (p.65). This type of approach and framing of 9/11 was not synonymous with fox news but was also used by other news media.

According to Renolds and Barnett (2003), the CNN coverage constructed a vigorous verbal and visual frame, by presenting the events of September 11 "as a war so horrific that immediate military retaliation was not only justified but necessary" (p. 86). The retaliation frame is likewise present in other types of media outlets, as online news reporting. Brown (2003) analyzed US news websites and found complementary justifications for war. The retaliation frame could be found in the site's formats, where links in the article pointed to pages which stated military response as the main response to the attacks. The researchers concluding marks is that the news coverage in US online news outlets gradually presents the readers with a 'total narrative', and its indifferent which pathway the reader use because its steadily draws the audience toward a justification for war (Brown, 2003:109 in Monahan, 2010: 65).

2.3 Literature review

2.3.1 Global media wars

“Military operations have been understood in terms of stories they tell as much as their direct impact on the enemy's physical capacity”

Sir Lawrence Freedman (2006: 74)

In contemporary war, the capability to transmit information and disinformation has played a crucial role. Far from the Syrian battlefields, actors are waging a media war - trading videos and statements accusing the other of barbarousness that often are hard to clearly verify. Nonetheless, the mass media is people's main source of information and news. Media's role in the idealized democratic society is to channel the information between policymakers and the public. The media serves as tools for the public to debate, as well as express opinions to the ruling elite. Media has been referred to the ‘fourth estate’, and therein lies the idea that they should put the authorities in charge of their decisions and point out injustices wherever they exist (Roppen & Allern, 2010: 12-13). But in times of war and conflict, the close ties between the media and the political elite, gives the media an active and powerful role in policymaking (Crytzer, 2011: 6). State governments have repeatedly tried to control and influence the media coverage of wars and conflicts. Accordingly, the dominance of the elite is of great importance when it comes to using information as a strategic tool in war and conflict. This is also recognized by Berinsky (2009), who states that elites can be deceptive actors in war cases (p. 214). Perceptions of Iraq's possession of the WMD are an example of elite rule. To impose such inaccurate perceptions and opinions - consciously or not - constitutes a power exercise.

Casula's (2013) analysis of the Syrian war found that the depiction of the Syrian conflict differed significantly from the depiction of Western media. In Russian media, the views of the Russian and Syrian officials were largely represented, and the views of the opposition ignored. As a consequence of unilateral coverage, the uprising was mostly illustrated in Russian newspapers as the Syrian government struggle with terrorism. The findings additionally showed similarities between media coverage and Russian politics (p.4). Godefroidt et.al (2016) framing analysis of European, Russian and US newspapers found that the Syrian conflict was mainly framed in accordance with the geopolitical role these nations plays in the Syrian conflict (p.794). This shows that media angles the reporting, so it matches the ideas of their national politicians and citizens. In situations where issues in the news

agenda are of an international nature, Yang also (2003) recognized that the connection between a country's media and the government contribute to different framing across countries. Ottosen (2004) further elaborates on the close relationship between the state and the media and argues that it is beyond doubt that a country's official security policy places direct and indirect guidance on media coverage (p. 204). In his framing analysis, White (2015) states that the media framed the US intervention in Kosovo as a 'humanitarian mission', while the Iraqi-invasion was framed as a preemptive war against a threatening state, in possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction. This "illustrates the continued dexterity of political elites and how they can influence not only media content, in terms of facts, but also how the public digests that content, in terms of frames" (p.1). Hence, the media frames potentially derive directly from the position by the political actors in power.

2.3.2 Sourcing and political elites

Reporters heavily rely on sources to present information to the readers. Sources therefore plays a significant role, as they provide evidence, legitimacy and credibility to the news story. Accordingly, by analyzing the distribution of sources in news articles, a coverage pattern can be traced, and media bias can be revealed (Yang, 2003: 239). Bennett (1990) states that non-official voices are regularly given little weight and are primarily used in stories to reinforce the rhetoric found in 'official' circles (p.106). According to Bennett (1988): "Even the best journalism in the country is extremely dependent on the political messages from a small range of 'official sources'" (p. 96). Bennett's (1990) indexing theory derives from this notion, where journalists are indexing the news reporting in line with the view of politicians. Meaning, it only takes consensus among elite sources to avert US journalists giving various perspectives on an issue (p. 106). Mhamdi's (2017) findings from the CNN's coverage of the 2003 Iraq invasion, showed a strong tendency to use official government sources over others, especially those of President Bush and White House representatives (p.151). There are, however, different views if the medias role reflects elite discourse, or if it sets the political agenda itself. The thesis avoids making claims about the directional flow of agency. However, it concedes that the media has some capacity to influence audiences, thus affecting potential policies in the form of legitimization or naturalization of policy practices. When news is interpreted,

constructed, and written for an audience, the media can sometimes frame a conflict that, to a greater or lesser extent, favors one side of a conflict. Using the same sources, over time, could potentially lead to bias in news reporting (Entman, 1993: 56-57). Entman (2007) describes this as content bias and describes it as: "Consistent patterns in the design of mediated communication that promote influence from one side in conflicts "(p.166). This is particularly evident in conflict reporting, because each actor will promote its own perspective on the conflict, in order to mobilize political support and understanding of its narrative. (Cozma & Kozman 2015: 674). As foreign news usually portrays realities that readers rarely are able to proclaim at first hand, the lack of source diversity may influence readers' perceptions of war and conflict in remote places.

2.3.3 A new cold war narrative?

Within the geopolitical landscape, nations and regions will be attributed to unified political, economic and military interests, and international relations are a global game in which clashes over these interests are played out. Several researchers state that national and international media are closely involved in the reproduction and normalization of geopolitical narratives (Mamadouh & Dijkink, 2006; Ojala & Pantti, 2017). The media contributes to the daily production of geopolitical awareness, which involves how we perceive 'Us' and 'Others' as well as develop and convey interpretations of security and threat (Ojala & Pantti, 2017: 42). The notion of the Cold War has previously provided a powerful narrative of international relations, that could explain complex military and political events in international news and mainstream political discourse.

However, reporting on international conflicts became increasingly complicated, because one no longer had the cold war as a coherent narrative for mapping world politics. Cold war rhetoric has emerged again in discourses of international politics, especially noticeable during the Georgia war in 2008 and the conflict in Ukraine in 2014 (Monaghan, 2015: 3). Consequently, a 'new cold war' could lead to an increase in militaristic foreign policy decisions. James Brown (2014) conducted a comparative analysis of the civil war in Syria covering Russian and Western quality newspapers in 2011-2012. His findings suggested that the Western media tend to portray Moscow as a cold-blooded defender of their national interests (as Syria's closest allies), which defying the international community (p. 59). On the

other hand, Russian newspapers portrayed Moscow as an "independent arbitrator", seeking to defend a fragile international order from US reckless adventurism (Ibid: 60). His findings further show, that western media presents the conflict from a dramatic perspective, to ensure a high degree of emotional impact (p. 58). In Brown's analysis (2015) of the chemical weapons attacks in Syria in August 2013, he found major differences in Russian and Western narratives about this event. These differences were particularly prominent in the reporting style; the attribution of responsibility and assessment of motivations; and the production of the roles of Western and Russian powers (p.242).

2.3.4 Framing international conflicts

Issue-specific framing analysis are found in in many recent comparative studies focusing on conflicts in the Middle East. Several studies have been analyzing the difference between media in the Middle East and Western countries (Melki, 2014; Dimitrova & Konnolly-Ahern, 2007) and differences between Russian and Western media (Casula, 2013; Brown, 2014; Brown, 2015). In Yang's (2003) comparative framing analysis of Chinese and US media, he examined how the newspapers covered the 1999 NATO air strikes in Yugoslavia. The analysis showed that Chinese newspapers framed the air strikes as an intervention against Yugoslavia's territory, which threatened their sovereignty. In examining US newspapers, the air strikes were framed as a humanistic aid to Albanians, to stop the ethnic cleansing initiated by Serbians (p. 231).

When it comes to key words describing the NATO strikes, the US newspapers used more pro-strike terms and fewer anti-strike terms than the Chinese newspapers, which could be linked to the two governments' general attitude towards state sovereignty. Another comparison showed that the US used NATO or US sources, while Chinese articles used Chinese or Russian sources. The researcher highlights that this limited use of sources, results in limited range of information, opinions and views, and may serve as an explanation for why framing of the same case, in different countries, differs significantly from one another (ibid: 244-245). In this context, it is worthwhile to consider that use of sources, that is exclusively in the same geopolitical spectrum, naturally narrows the scope for the matter to be illuminated from all sides. Yang (2003) concludes that the corresponding reflections of government attitudes in relation to the air strikes in the newspapers, illustrates a substantial influence of national interests projected via the media (ibid: 231).

Looking more broadly at diversity in international media coverage, another study of media coverage from US, UK, Qatar and Egypt, demonstrates the differences relating to the nations' relation to the 2003 Iraq War (Dimitrova & Konnolly-Ahern, 2007). The study showed that "the tale of war" was constructed very differently by the various countries. The findings revealed that the Arab media avoided the 'rebuilding of Iraq' frame almost entirely, compared to the Coalition media (p. 161). Al Jazeera in particular, used more negative moral terms to condemn the war (p.162). By contrast, coalition media focused on freedom and stability for the Iraqi people and highlighted the military success of the troops. (p.163). The results showed that the news media made very different choices framing the war, and that news media consists of presenting locally targeted views (p. 165). These studies show a tendency that different national media to some extent control how a conflict is perceived and presented.

Ottosen and Øvrebø (2016) analyzed *Aftenposten* coverage of the chemical attacks in Syria in 2013, where military intervention was open for discussion. The findings from the analysis showed that *Aftenposten* supported a military intervention, although there wasn't evidence of Assad's government's guilt at the time of reporting. There was conflicting information about the attack, and Ottosen and Øvrebø (2016) emphasized that instead of critically addressing the uncertainty surrounding the gas attack, the enemy images of President Assad and IS were used to make a case for Western intervention in Syria (Ottosen and Øvrebø, 2016 in Ottosen, 2019: 309-310). These studies illustrate the many variations of presented narratives and how they often rely on political elites to frame their coverage of events.

2.4 Criticism to framing studies

It is not difficult to assess literature on framing, what is difficult, is to gain a clear understanding of exactly what framing entails. The critique of framing theory points to the understanding of frames as fragmented. Especially it's theoretical and methodological foundations. Researchers conducts framing studies, with different understandings of it, and often without explaining thoroughly enough how the study was conducted. Matthes (2009) refers to the conceptual complication stating, "scholars are faced with an immense variety of theoretical and operational understandings of frames" (p. 349). Despite methodological challenges, framing has nevertheless become an all-encompassing theoretical paradigm, that can be explored through various inductive and deductive approaches (Kozman, 2017: 778-779).

To avoid committing the same mistakes as critics have disclosed, it is important to review the criticism. Matthes (2009) points to four main challenges for the researcher when conducting a framing analysis: "(1) definitions and how they are used for operationalization, (2) the type of frames, (3) use of theory, and (4) the methods of frame analysis" (p. 350). His first point was that framing definitions was not concrete enough in their operational steps, and that most of the literature lacked transparency. Some of the definitions presented were too general and provided little information on how the frames were operationalized (p. 359). Secondly, he stresses the importance of making a conceptual distinction between the generic and issue-specific frames (ibid: 360).

Thirdly, Matthes argues that most framing studies did not test any hypotheses in relation to framing theory and were merely descriptive. Fourthly, several framing studies had challenges with reliability due to methodological challenges, which could reduce the validity of the results (ibid). These challenges have been considered from the beginning of the thesis and have been a framework to conceptualize the study.

Chapter Three:

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology used for the comparative framing analysis. The first section (3.1) will outline the choice of, and elaborate on, the sampling of newspapers, and present the chosen time periods and searches. The second section (3.2) discusses the qualitative and quantitative approaches used in the analysis. Section three (3.3) will elaborate on the framing method, including framing devices and coding, thus laying the groundwork for the operationalization of the frames and frame matrix. The fourth section (3.4) discusses the study's validity and reliability. The fifth (3.5) section will elucidate the methodological challenges of the study.

3.1 Collection of data

“Newspapers, magazines, television programs, films, and other mass media are potential sources for social scientific analysis” (Bryman, 2012: 552).

3.1.1 Newspapers

The sample selection is an important part of all research projects, whether it is the selection of informants for qualitative research interviews, or the number of films in a historical analysis. But before the selection can be made, the researcher must define the population for the study. Neuendorf (2002) defines the population as “[...] the set of units being studied, the set of units to which the researcher wishes to generalize” (p. 74). In a framing analysis, the units will usually be messages in some form, such as newspaper articles or official documents. In this study, the population is the online newspapers' and the official statements by the respective countries in the period from April 7 to April 15, 2018. The Syrian conflict consists

of key players such as the US, France, the UK and Russia. It is therefore appropriate to select newspapers from the two counterparts of the conflict, Russia and the US. France and the UK were excluded from this research, instead Norway and Egypt were chosen, because they are not major players in the conflict. They have nevertheless expressed support for each of the parties in the conflict.

The online versions of Aftenposten, Egypt Independent (EI), Moscow Times (MT) and the New York Times (NYT) were selected on the basis that they are not state-owned, but private newspapers. They are therefore predicted to be more neutral in their approach because of their autonomous position, than newspapers controlled by the state government. I have not chosen opposition newspapers, as these inherently exert criticism towards the governing authorities. Private newspapers fall under what Hallin and Mancini (2004) has defined as the “Liberal Model”. This model suggests that “political parallelism is low, and internal pluralism predominates” (p. 75). This means that news organizations are more likely to be limited by commercial pressures than by political instrumentalization. In contrast, state funded news organizations are characterized as “instrumentalization” by the government, political parties, and industrialists with political ties (ibid).

The news website MT is the leading English-language newspaper in Russia, with headquarters in Moscow and Amsterdam. It has been published since 1992, distributed free of charge at locations, delivered with subscriptions to emigrants, Russian individuals and business customers. The newspaper regularly publishes articles by prominent Russian journalists such as Ivan Nechepurenko and Yulia Latynina (Luhn, 2015). Russia has free media, but the Kremlin is careful to keep it marginal, and news stories from private media are not broadcasted on the major federal television channels, which are controlled by the Kremlin. Moreover, the strong control means that many journalists carry out some form of self-censorship, because the regime-critical journalism can lead to indirect and direct consequences (Lipman 2013: 136).

NYT was selected because of its position as America’s most eminent elite newspaper. It dictates, to a significant extent, coverage patterns in many other American media outlets (Elmasry & el-Nawawy, 2017: 864). In Egypt, most of the newspapers are state-owned, but several independent and privately-owned newspapers have entered the game, such as EI (Al-Masry Al-Youm). Media freedom is guaranteed in Egypt's constitution, but is challenged under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Journalists are among the groups being persecuted and arrested under the pretext of combating terrorism and contributing to Egypt's extensive human rights violations (Leraand, 2019). EI was picked because of their high circulation numbers,

which may indicate their impact on the readers who consider them as sources to derive news from. Norway's newspaper, Aftenposten is one of the largest national online newspapers and is owned by the media company, Schibsted. Aftenposten has is at the five of the top ten most read web sites in Norway.

The newspapers are chosen because they are influential, well-established publications with large circulations. Quality newspapers has the capacity to both drive and influence political issues. They are also considered media opinion leaders in political coverage, because the articles are characterized by in-depth and complete coverage of issues. In addition, it is acknowledged that the quality journals have at times different political positions and thus cover a certain range of journalistic perspectives (Walgrave et. al., 2008: 827).

3.1.2 My searches

The articles from EI, MT and NYT were extracted from the easy-to-access database LexisNexis and Atekst was used to gather articles from Aftenposten. Opinion pieces were excluded from the sample due to their unavailability in the Egyptian newspaper. My searches resulted in 53 articles covering the Douma incident April 7, 2018 (see table 1). My search in the Norwegian database was: (Syria OR Douma) AND (kjemisk OR angrep OR gassangrep). In LexisNexis I searched for: (Syria OR Douma) AND (chemical OR attack). The sample period was chosen from the day of the alleged chemical attack, April 7, 2018, and up to the western military strike, April 14, 2018. For the western military strike in Syria, the period was chosen from April 13, 2018 to April 15, 2018 and the search resulted in 40 articles. My search in the Atekst was: (Syria) AND (angrep OR bombing). In LexisNexis I searched for: (Syria) AND (strike OR bombing).

Table 1. *The analyzed data (total number of units 93)*

<i>Data collection period</i>	<i>Key events during the period</i>	<i>Number of units of analysis per newspaper</i>
7-14 April 2018	Chemical attack Douma April 7, 2018	New York Times: 16 Moscow Times: 11 Aftenposten: 15 Egypt Independent: 11 Total: 53 articles
13-15 April 2018	Western military strike April 14, 2018	New York Times: 9 Moscow Times: 3 Aftenposten: 17 Egypt Independent: 11 Total: 40 articles

3.2 Qualitative vs. quantitative methods

There are several different methods in the study of social sciences. Research interviews, discourse analysis, framing analysis and content analysis are just a few examples of this. One important difference, however, is the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods. Sigmund Grønmo (2004) points to differences between the two approaches. The first difference is analytical descriptions versus statistical generalizations (Grønmo, 2004: 129-130). Another important difference is that quantitative methods are often structured, while there is greater flexibility with qualitative methods (Grønmo, 2004: 130-131). It has become more common in the research on frames to combine quantitative methods, such as content analysis, with qualitative methods. Bruhn (2002) states that the concepts of framing has begun to bridge the qualitative-quantitative divide (p. 150). In similar Yarnell (2013) argues for a mixed method approach, pointing out that qualitative framing analysis can lose out on important statistical facts, while a pure quantitative framing analysis lacks context and

depth. As the research focus involves an interpretation of texts and message, a hermeneutical methodology is most appropriate, and the frame analysis incorporates both quantitative and qualitative elements with the aim of increased validity through triangulation. The analysis entails a close reading of the articles, since the frames cannot be identified by a purely quantitative analysis. The quantification contained in the thesis intends to map the frequency of the frames in the various newspapers. The quantification was done after the interpretation frames were identified and must be separated from the frame structure.

3.3 Framing method

The process of identifying news frames require that the analysts to know ‘how’ to identify frames, in addition to knowing ‘what’ to look for when researching news articles. This thesis is mainly inductive (bottom-up theory building) and semi-deductive in the way that previous assumptions (theory testing) are included in the research process (Williams and May, 2005: 196). The thesis ontological and epistemological foundations are rooted in constructivism given that the research aims to reveal discursive frames as constructed views of reality. The study identifies issue-specific frames, following a fixed model with eight analysis tools used on each article being analyzed. The tools are based on Entman’s (1993; 2004; 2007) model, where problem, solution, responsibility and moral judgment are defined in the material. Van Gorp’s (2005: 491) frame matrix is used to categorize the analysis elements. The results of the qualitative analysis are presented in quantitative terms – by weighting the presence of frames in the sample – in addition to substantiating the findings by reviewing coverage qualitatively.

3.3.1 Framing devices

As briefly mentioned in the theory chapter, a frame package consists of three parts; the framing devices, the reasoning devices, and an implicit cultural phenomenon that displays the package (Van Gorp, 2007: 64). The framing devices are divided into two subcategories; rhetorical devices and technical devices. In the category of technical devices, Tankard (2001) offers the most comprehensive empirical approach. His review of previous research reveals 11 different framing devices or focal points for identifying and measure frames in news stories;

1. Headlines 2. Subheads 3. Photos 4. Photo captions 5. Leads 6. Source selection 7. Quotes selection 8. Pull quotes 9. Logos 10. Statistics and charts, and 11. Concluding statements and paragraphs (p. 101). This analysis does not use all the technical devices offered by Tankard, but uses headlines, leads, quotes selection and source selection. The type of sources is an important framing device. Pan and Kosicki (1993) emphasize the importance of the sources as framing devices by “quoting experts to claim empirical validity or facticity; by quoting official sources to link certain points of view to authority; and by quoting a social deviant to marginalize certain points of view” (p. 60).

Some of the technical devices are considered to be more important, and van Dijk (1988) ‘macrosyntax’ is a useful tool to apply. He suggests that most news stories are characterized by the inverted pyramid structure and by the rules of source attributions. An inverted pyramid refers to a sequential organization of structural elements (i.e. headline, lead, episodes, background, and closure). The signifying power of these elements varies in the same descending order (p. 26). Following this, the most important part of the story will be presented first. Hence, the headline is referred to as the most salient cue to activate certain semantically related concepts in readers mind; it is thus the most powerful framing device of the syntactical structure (Pan and Kosicki 1999: 59). What the headlines contains can therefore provide a strong indicator of how the articles are framed. A lead is the next most important device to use. A good lead will give a story a newsworthy angle, suggesting a distinct perspective to view the event reported.

The rhetorical devices consist of metaphors, exemplars, key words, visuals and stock phrases (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: 2; Entman, 1993: 52; Tankard, 2001: 101; de Vreese, 2005: 54) and the following rhetorical devices is used in this study:

1. *Metaphors*: a phenomenon that always has two parts – the principle that the metaphor should elucidate the related topic that the metaphor elicits, to enhance the readers understanding.
2. *Exemplars*: real events of the past and present, to increase the salience of a point in a news story. On the contrary, metaphors only depend upon imagined events to frame the main topic.
3. *Cath-Phrases*: theme statement, title, slogan or tagline that intends to capture the readers, designed to suggest a general frame. Catch-phrases are attempted summary statements about the main topic (Gamson and Lasch, 1983: 407-408).

Framing devices can be seen as concepts that are associable to a wide range of items, simultaneously as they are applicable to a distinct set of ideas in our interpretative repertoire. The term “regime” is for instance commonly used in describing governments whose legitimacy is doubted (D’angelo 2018). The term connects to the activities that governments conducts, to a vast range of policies presumed suitable for dealing with such governments, additionally to various abstract considerations relevant to assess the illegitimacy of a government. It is especially common in news reporting that the term ‘regime’ is used in the same wording as it refers to, for example, authoritarian governance, human rights violations and nuclear ambitions (D’angelo 2018). Beside these framing devices, there are reasoning devices that are connected to the four functions of framing: defining the problem, assigning responsibility, passing moral judgement and proposal of a solution (Entman, 2004:6). The reasoning devices is only used in the analysis of case one and is elaborated further in chapter 3.5.

Table 2. *Overview of framing devices used in the analysis*

<i>Technical devices</i>	<i>Rhetorical devices</i>	<i>Reasoning devices</i>
Headlines	Metaphors	Problem definition
Leads	Exemplars	Responsibility
Quotes	Cath-Phrases	Solutions
Source selection		Moral judgement

3.3.2 Case one – operationalization of method and coding

After the article selection was made, the content was analyzed without pre-defined coding categories and consisted of an in-depth examination of the news articles. This is characterized as an inductive approach to framing analysis. Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2008) defines the inductive approach as when the researcher “involves repeated and extensive engagement with a text and looks holistically at the material to identify frames” (p. 369). The close-up readings of the news articles allow the frames to emerge while reading. The reason for choosing an inductive research method is because some frames may be overlooked, when strictly adhering to the pre-defined generic frames defined by Semetko and Valkenburg

(2000). The pre-reading of the articles showed that there was high degree of disagreement between the parties in the Syrian conflict, where much of the focus in the articles was related to assigning responsibility. Hence, my assumption was that most articles would fall in the category of the pre-defined frames, conflict and responsibility. For instance, if the chemical attack was covered as a conflict between two or more parties, the question would still remain how the conflict was interpreted and described.

To uncover the frames, it was important to commute between a micro and macro approach in order not to overlook any frames in my source material. Each article was carefully read and systematically analyzed accordingly to the framing devices presented above. The study used manual coding, which allowed greater flexibility and made it possible to discover new frames that were not identified during the initial reading (Chong & Druckman, 2007: 108). A separate coding of each news article was performed, and an excel sheet was used mapping the reasoning devices (see appendix A–D). The analysis further looked for the articles' core frame by identifying the rhetorical devices (metaphors, examples and catch-phrases) in the news article, by using the technical devices (headline, leads, quotes, source selection) chosen for the study. The salience of quotes and the prominence of opinions were analyzed, to see which opinions were given the most importance in the news texts. Although a quote from President Trump was leading, perhaps the rest of the article focused on President Assad defending himself against accusations. It is important to note that each article was analyzed for the presence of multiple frames and could simultaneously represent the retaliation frame and the human suffering frame (Matthes, 2009: 350). Hence, one or several frames may be coded per single article for the analysis purposes. This approach to frame extraction is not uncommon. Matthes (2009) found that 34% of framing studies extracted more than one frame per unit of analysis. This is only done in cases where it was not possible to decide one clear frame.

The work of Van Gorp (2005: 491) was further used to structure and categorize the reasoning and framing devices. He argues that each identified frame must be presented in the form of a frame package, which consists of framing devices (technical and rhetorical) and reasoning devices (Van Gorp 2010: 91; Van Gorp & Vercruyssen, 2012: 1275). The final product of the inductive phase is a frame matrix (see. Table 4), where each row in the frame matrix symbolize a frame package. Frame packages progressively takes shape in an inductive framing analysis, during the process of collecting, coding and analyzing the texts. Although the frame package model lists several tools one can look for in the texts to find the frames, it presented challenges distinguishing between, for example a metaphor or catch phrase. The

researcher's subjectivity in the interpretation of the material may appear in qualitative research, although the focus is to be as objective as possible.

Kuyper (2010) states that: “Qualitative work incorporates the subjectivity of the researcher into the final product; quantitative work seeks to minimize this subjectivity” (p. 287). However, there are techniques to systematize qualitative analyzes of texts. The first tactic is to discover patterns or themes in the text - noting patterns and themes that are repeated in the texts analyzed (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 245-246). In this case, it was about finding common words and phrases based on the media package model that implied a frame. After breaking down all the texts in this way, the coding sheets for each of the newspapers were analyzed and compared. It was essential to find several examples of the interpretation one does first. This provided a revised interpretation of the frames constructed in the text and made it possible to analyze relationships between different articles, and eventually between different media. During the analysis, some adjustments to the frames had to be done. For example, merging frames that were too similar or too extensive (i.e. Geopolitical frame/Moscow–Washington frame), or removing frames that could be characterized as a theme, hence only addressed in a few articles - such as 'victory over rebels'. Although it was not included as a frame, this theme is discussed in the analysis chapter.

After all the articles were analyzed, the results were quantified by counting the number of articles from each newspaper that contained the various frames. After counting the frames of the articles, the findings were placed in tables. The quantification was done to get an overview of the differences between the newspapers, and to present the results in a clear form. To answer the research questions and test my hypotheses, I coded and quantified responsibility, solution suggestions and sources in separate tables. Miles and Huberman (1994) argues that some quantification can be useful even in qualitative analyzes. Quantification of all, or part of the material, can make it easier for the researcher to confirm or disprove any hypotheses because you get an overview of the material (p. 252-253). It must be mentioned that the sample in the thesis may be too small in order to generalizable into a larger universe than my material. The results nevertheless provide indications that the frames identified in the analysis, can be found in other media coverage regarding similar events - involving Russia and the US.

In this analysis, like many qualitative studies, theoretical generalization is used. The study does not apply statistical calculations, but rather a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon that is the subject of the analysis. The purpose is to formulate hypotheses and theories that one expects to be valid across a broader sample, based on theoretical reasoning.

Developing a comprehensive understanding of the entities being analyzed is an important objective of theoretical generalization. Grønmo (2004) argues that qualitative studies are generally said to be theory-creating studies (p. 88-89). Since this analysis only analyzes 93 articles, it is difficult to achieve statistical generalization. What raises the quality of the analysis on the other hand, is that my reasoning is supported by quotes throughout the analysis, as well as the *frame matrix* detailly conceptualizes the content of the frames.

3.3.2.1 Sources

The source analysis was only conducted in case one. The whole article was examined, and types of sources and their frequency were coded for each article. If Mike Pence, Nikki Haley, Heather Neuert and The White House were paraphrased in an article, they were counted as a 'US government and officials' source each (see. Appendix E). Since my research question specifically looking for the usage of elite sources in the articles, it was necessary to merge all the elite sources. The sources were categorized into the following 13 categories and after the elite sources were merged the categories consisted of eight categories.

Table 3. *Categorization of sources*

<i>Source categories</i>	<i>Elite sources</i>	<i>Elite sources merged</i>
US Government/officials	Elite source	
Syrian Government/officials	Elite source	
Russian Government/officials	Elite source	
Western Government/ officials	Elite source	
Iranian Government/officials	Elite source	
International community	Elite source	Elite sources
Non-Syrian Human rights org.	Non-Syrian Human rights org.	Non-Syrian Human rights org.
Syrian Human rights org.	Syrian Human rights org.	Syrian Human rights org.
Syrian opposition groups	Syrian opposition groups	Syrian opposition groups
Syrian citizen sources	Syrian citizen sources	Syrian citizen sources
Experts	Experts	Experts
Media	Media	Media
Other	Other	Other

3.3.3 Conceptualization of the frames

In this section, I will present the results of the inductive phase and review the frames found in the articles and what characterizes them. The aim has been to create boundaries that clearly distinguishes the different frames, but at some points there has been an overlap according to framing and reasoning devices. Entman (2004) argues that "the substantive frames usually perform at least two of the four framing basic functions"² (p. 57). This also applied for this analysis, as all frame packages could not be defined for all the reasoning devices. The result consisted of the five following frames.

Human suffering frame

Frames focusing on victims has been used by several researchers, i.e. "human interest" (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000) or "human impact" (Neuman et al., 1992). The human-interest frame "brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem" (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000: 95–96). The human suffering frame, defined in this thesis, entails death numbers, detailed description of injuries, stress, fear and misery. The analysis reveals the problem definition as the allegations of repeated attacks against Syria's civilian population, which have no consequences for those responsible. The frame contains strong moral condemnation of Assad's government and Syria's allies, it is especially emphasized that Russia has a responsibility to stop further chemical attacks.³ The moral reasoning, is that the international community are responsible to prevent human rights violations. The frame focuses on the victims' suffering, and the use of adjectives appeal strongly to human empathy: *horrendous, massacre, suffering, choked to death, suffocating* etc.

Retaliation frame

The retaliation frame defined the chemical attack as a violation of international law and the chemical weapons convention. The identified causes/responsible were reported as the assumed actions of the Syrian government and the moral judgement was the assigned

² In the quote, Entman refers to what is referred to as reasoning devices in this analysis.

³ See the frame matrix below (Table 4) for details on all five frames.

collective guilt of the Syrian government and allies. The moral condemnation of the opposing party illustrates the distinction between the ‘good’ and ‘evil’ forces; Assad is described as a dictator and an animal – and the US as someone with the power to stop him. The frame endorsed the solution military means against Assad as the remedy for the chemical attack. Word choices and sentences within this frame are largely focused on *punishing Assad, the attack will be met with forcefully, a big price to be paid and any way, the US will respond*. Like the human suffering frame there are elements that describe the suffering caused by the incident in Douma. The frame lacks focus on investigating who has carried out the attack, but rather discuss detailly how the international community should and must respond to the violation of human rights and the chemical weapon convention.

False- flag attack frame

The problem definition in the false-flag attack frame describe the attack as a staged move to legitimize external use of force. In this frame, the chemical attack is described as something that has never happened (not based on facts), or the blame is put elsewhere. There is skepticism about the West's evidence of the chemical attack, and some arguments indicate that the rebel forces are behind the attack, to falsify blame the Assad government. The solution *check the evidence* is most prominent. The moral condemnation is the western demolition of the Syrian Government with deceitful speculations. Words that are recurring within this frame are *bogus stories, deceitful speculations, fabricated attack, anti-Russian alliance, staged and blame*.

Moscow-Washington frame

The Moscow-Washington frame defines the polarization between Western and Eastern political interests in the Syrian conflict and explores the political motives of the parties. The focus is on the contradictions between the Russian and the US approach to the Syrian conflict. A blame game is revealed; Russia accusing US of a categorical policy to unleash military force against Syria, and the US Believes Russia covers for the Syrian government by calling it fake news. The solutions and responsibility questions are also characterized by the two

contesting approaches to the crisis. The frame addresses conflicts of interest between the US and Russia in the UNSC regarding the Syrian crisis in general, and the chemical attack specifically. Articles with this framing contains accusations and threats against one another.

Trump-dilemma frame

The trump-dilemma frame problematizes the chemical attack in Douma as a question of President Trump's dilemma; withdrawing US troops ('America First') from Syria or fulfill the promise he vowed: to punish some bad actors. This frame puts responsibility on Assad's government and allies and require forceful actions to deal with the incident. The frame has a preponderance of criticism against President Trump, where his conflicting impulses is called into question; he is considering a strike, even if he expressed his desire to pull US troops out of Syria. The focus is mainly on Trump and his actions in response to the incident. There is furthermore a geopolitical dimension in this frame, where the Douma incident is referred to as something that will change Trump's calculus in Syria. Words and themes that are recurring within this frame are; *Confusing allies and enemies, withdrawing from Syria could result in criticism against Trump and squeezed between conflicting impulses.*

<i>Frame</i>	<i>Problem definition</i>	<i>Cause/ responsibility</i>	<i>Solution</i>	<i>Moral judgement</i>	<i>Exemplars</i>	<i>Metaphors</i>	<i>Cathphrases</i>	<i>Visuals</i>
Human suffering	The Syrian people is killed in chemical weapons attacks and there are no consequences for the for those responsible	Assad's government and/or allies	Diplomatic/check the evidence	The international community has a responsibility to prevent human rights violations	Reminiscent of World War II	Bodies of men, women and children sprawled on floors; monster targeting civilians; choking to death	"We cannot tolerate with a war criminal; we cannot tolerate with someone who killed more than half a million of his own people."	Families with children (stress, fear, misery)
Western retaliation	Violation of international law and the chemical weapons convention	Assad's government and/or allies	Military measures	Syrian government, and allies are assigned the collective guilt.	We cannot tolerate with someone that killed half a million of his own people; ref. Holocaust, World war II	'Animal Assad' 'Barbaric Assad'	A big price to be payed; moral obscenity	Visuals of men in high positions
False-flag attack	The report of a chemical attack is not based on facts and is fabricated to legitimize external use of force	Syrian opposition groups /not assigning blame	Check the evidence	Deceitful speculations; fabricated to demolish the Syrian government	Questioning previous investigations conducted by OPCW's; denies any involvement	Anti-Russian alliance, Trumped-up nature	Bogus stories; staged by militants'	Visuals of men in high positions
Moscow-Washington	Russia is accusing US of a categorical policy to unleash military force against Syria and US blames Russia defending attack by calling it fake news to cover for President Assad	Blame-game	Military measures / abandon military measures	Crossing the red-line, diplomatic expulsions, accusations	Western threat of retaliation and Russian warnings of the potential of 'a dangerous escalation'	New cold war; Crossing the red-line	The incident has thrust the conflict back to international stage, pitting Washington and Moscow against each other once again	Visuals from UNSC; men in high positions
Trump-dilemma	Trump facing a dilemma regarding withdrawing US troops ('America First') from Syria versus the promise he vowed: to punish some bad actors	Assad's government and/or allies	Military measures	Rapid withdrawal had emboldened President Bashar al-Assad of Syria to use chemical weapons	Confusing allies and enemies; Withdrawing from Syria could result in criticism against Trump	Trump's squeezed between conflicting impulses	This will change Trump's calculus in Syria	President Trump

Table 4: Based on Van Gorp's (2005) Frame matrix with the representative reasoning and framing devices (p. 491)

3.4 Case two - Operationalization of method and coding

In case 2, the position towards the western missile strikes in Syria was analyzed. The study recorded the appearance of all descriptive or explanatory terms in the newspapers from 13–15 April 2018, with reference to the western missile strike in Syria April 14, 2018. The conceptualization of categories is based on aspects from Yang's framing analysis "Framing the NATO air strikes on Kosovo across countries" from 2003 (p. 238). However, they have been adjusted somewhat to include terms in the analyzed articles.

The **pro-strike** attitudes legitimize the western strike as an inevitable reaction to punish Syria's violation of international law. Examples of pro-strike terms were 'peace protection', 'human rights protection', 'violation of international law'. The strikes were legitimized by stopping a pattern of behavior, protecting the innocent in Syria and preventing the erosion of the international norm that prevents the use of these weapons. This category also contains a justification for the strike as a 'limited' or 'restrained' strike aimed specifically at Syria's chemical weapons facilities. Furthermore, the pro-strike category completely denied asking critical questions of legality or the morality by attacking another country militarily without a UN mandate.

Anti-strike attitudes are naturally critical and refers to the attacks as 'act of aggression', 'invasion', 'violation of sovereignty' or 'undermining Syria's chances of peace'. Anti-strike attitudes highlight that the strikes against Syria is a violation of international law. The **neutral** attitudes show no clear tendency and involves articles that only present facts, and where the sources did not suggest pro or anti attitudes. Articles where arguments for and against the western strikes was discussed, and where several parties with different views are expressed without one party being more dominant than the other, is placed in the neutral category.

3.5 Validity and reliability

The most important concern in all research across disciplines is to ensure that the quality of the data is as high as possible. What varies are the criteria used to measure this. In qualitative and quantitative social research, this is determined by viewing whether the data material is suitable to answer the problem being analyzed (Grønmo, 2004: 217).

The terms reliability and validity are used to measure quality in quantitative research, but the concepts are also relevant to qualitative methods. However, the terms may have somewhat different content in quantitative and qualitative analyzes (Østbye et al. 2013: 25). Reliability is about the accuracy of the analysis, for example, whether the operationalized variables are measured in a precise and consistent way (Bratberg, 2014: 100-101). It can therefore be argued to limit the analysis to easily measurable framing units, e.g. count catch words. Although this type of approach provides high reliability, it does not guarantee valid data. The words counted do not necessarily represent the frames, and reliability can thus stand in the way of validity (Krippendorff, 1982: 130). It is generally argued that quantitative analysis has high reliability, while qualitative analysis usually has high validity (Østbye et al., 2013: 28).

Based on the interpretive aspect of textual analysis, reliability mean whether other analysts will arrive at same conclusions, when analyzing the same texts (Hansen, 2006: 45). An obstacle is that texts can be read and interpreted in several ways with different approaches (ibid), and it is almost impossible to make an interpretation process completely transparent (Bratberg, 2014: 100). The requirement for reliability will therefore imply accuracy, in the form of justifying and explaining choices made during the research process. In this way, the researcher can achieve transparent research (Bergström and Boréus, 2005: 35). In this analysis, interpretations are supported by quotations to strengthen the reliability of the analysis. The texts analyzed in this thesis are available to the public on the newspaper's website and can thus be reconstructed, read and evaluated by others, which is a feature that strengthens the reliability of the analysis. One weakness, however, is that *Aftenposten* only can be read by a Norwegian-speaking audience.

Another weakness related to reliability, is that the coding is done by the researcher alone and the intersubjectivity – whether other researchers will arrive at the same result (Østbye et al., 2013: 208) – has therefore not been tested. In order to test the reliability, every third article has been re-coded by the same person. This tests whether the coder is

stable over time and comes to the same result also at a later date (Hellevik, 1999: 184). A re-coding is only valid if there is enough time between the measurements, so that the researcher does not remember the results of the previous coding (ibid). The reliability test was therefore performed seven months after the first coding. The reliability test was conducted using the following formula: $R = 2M / (N1 + N2)^4$. The reliability test showed a 94 percent compliance in the coding of the articles concerned framing the Douma incident, which is considered a sufficient percentage of reliability. Hellevik (1991) calculates a reliability percentage of 80 % as sufficient (1991: 159). The registration of sources had correspondence of 100 percent. The coding of pro-, anti- or neutral attitudes towards the western military strike was 100 percent.

Validity concerns whether the variables measure what it is intended to measure - for example, whether it uses the right measuring instruments to answer the research question (Østbye et al., 2013: 27). This means whether the choice of units and variables, as well as their operationalization, gives answers to the problem. Validity is also about whether the choices made, and the conclusions drawn in the analysis can be said to be valid (Bratberg 2014: 101). A technique to test the validity is an equivalence test (Hellevik, 1991: 159), where the results are compared to other types of empiricism (Bratberg, 2014: 102), for example previous research. This approach is used regularly throughout the analysis. In qualitative studies, the results can be said to be valid to the extent that they are able to give a precise reproduction of the researcher's interpretation, while the interpretation is rooted in a broader context (Bratberg, 2014: 100). This involves describing, reasoning and arguing openly.

⁴ R = reliability percentage, M = statement coded equally, N1 = statement coded first time, N2 = statement coded second time

3.6 Reflections around 'I'

A challenge associated with all forms of qualitative analysis is the role of the researcher, where analyses based on interpretation can be influenced by the researcher's background and culture (Bryman, 2004: 284). To achieve validity, despite the researcher's subjectivity, the researcher must depend on his or her own position; by increasing the understanding of one's own prejudices, the study gains higher validity (ibid). Even with a researcher's aim for objectivity and with a critical and conscious desire not to reproduce Eurocentrism, it is impossible to escape the historical and contemporary social context in which I perceive reality (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 49). The meaning of concepts, words, ideas and structures is produced through discursive practices and draws on already developed structures. The purpose of analyzing which 'truths' are presented enables a critical look at how something is accepted as the truth at the expense of contesting beliefs. However, as Dunn and Neumann (2016) states, text analysis will not reveal any major Meta "truths". It is simply not possible to get away from interpretation and no objective truth to discover, only competing interpretations to navigate us along the way (p. 129). In order to ensure that the researcher's subjective position and experiences influence the validity and reliability of the study to the minimum extent, transparency and awareness of the researcher's own position has been present throughout the process.

3.7 Methodological challenges

There are several challenges associated with framing studies, and beyond the challenge of having a general agreement on a conceptual definition, the issue of operationalizing frames presents its own set of difficulties. Matthes and Kohring (2008) points to challenges related to reliability and validity in content analytic measures of media frames: "a frame is a quite abstract variable that is hard to identify and hard to code in content analysis" (p. 258). There is no doubt measurement is challenging and the researcher faced several challenges.

Regardless of substantial nuances of contrasting conceptual definitions of framing, all of them see language as central, which makes the tools for analyzing language particularly important. We can examine how violent attacks are framed as a 'terrorist attack' vs. 'hate crimes', for example, but understanding the mechanisms and effects of framing as broader phenomena requires better methods that allow us to trace overarching tropes across a variety of issue debates.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Findings

The point of this thesis is to investigate the media framing of two complex cases in the Syrian war. The first part of the analysis examines the Douma incident from April 7 to April 14, 2018. The second part analyses the immediate coverage of the western military strike April 13 to April 15, 2018.

4.1 Framing analysis of the chemical attack

4.1.1 Analysis of The New York Times News Articles

The Douma incident led to 16 publications in The New York Times (NYT) between April 7 and April 14, 2018. The initial reporting was emotionally based, although indications of uncertainty surrounding the incident was constituted by using linguistics as 'suspected' or 'alleged'.

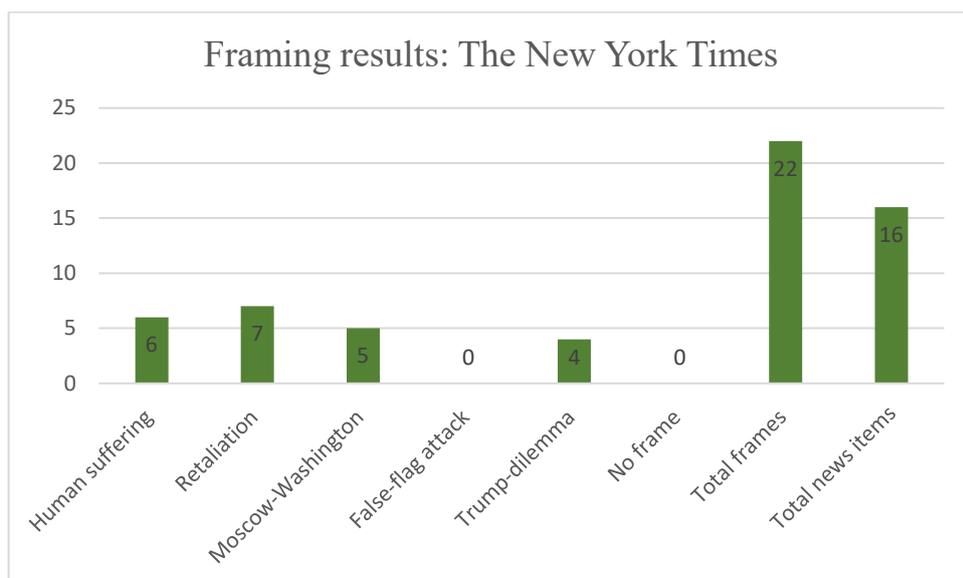


Figure 2: Framing results The New York times. There are 16 related news items that include 22 coding units (frames). An article was coded with two frames when it was not possible to define a clear frame. See Appendix A for details.

The chemical attack was framed as human suffering in 6 of the articles, and NYT published approximately one article each day containing the frame. The first article published April 8, stated that: “dozens of Syrians choked to death after a suspected chemical attack struck the rebel-held suburb of Douma, with aid groups blaming President Bashar al-Assad’s government for the assault and Western governments expressing outrage”. Metaphors and emotive vocabulary were commonly used in the articles (e.g., outside the speaker’s quotes), and expressive catchphrases appeared both in headings and subheadings.

The latest atrocity in Syria’s agonizing seven-year civil war drew immediate condemnation from the United States and the European Union, but Mr. Assad’s allies in Moscow and Tehran dismissed allegations of a chemical attack as “bogus” (Hubbard, April 8, 2018).

The use of quotation marks can be used to cast doubt on a claim and can replace the word "so-called". Placing quotation marks on the word "bogus" indicate that the writer holds a distance to the argument put forward, in this case the claim made by Assad and his allies. Previous actual and alleged chemical attacks conducted by the Syrian Government were made salient in the articles (Joseph and Caron, April 8, 2018), giving the impression that this attack was likely to have been carried out by the Syrian government, as many times before. This gave the readers historical context through examples, predefining the roles of the various actors in the conflict. Examples from articles where the framing devices in the human suffering frame was used to appeal to emotions, are given below:

“Dozens of Syrians choked to death after a suspected chemical attack “[...] women and children sprawled out on floors and in stairwells, many with white foam coming from their mouths and nostrils” (Hubbard, April 8, 2018).

“In a Syrian Town, People Started Shouting: ‘Chemicals! Chemicals!’ [...] Found dozens of men, women and children lying lifeless on the floor” (Hubbard, April 11, 2018).

“Burning Eyes, Foaming Mouths: Years of Suspected Chemical Attacks in Syria”
(Joseph and Caron, April 8, 2018).

Trump: “Many dead, including women and children, in mindless CHEMICAL attack in Syria, [...] Another humanitarian disaster for no reason whatsoever. SICK!” (Davis, April 8, 2018)

While the initial news reports focused on the victims as the leading element, NYT gradually, as international debate increased, fell into the mode of tracing the actions and words of political elites, that were heavily expressed through the context of the retaliation frame. The coverage was largely framed as retaliation and 7 of the 16 articles could be categorized within this frame. Trump’s twitter messages were often cited in NYT, without his vehement rhetoric being widely discussed or commented on.

““Many dead, including women and children, in mindless CHEMICAL attack in Syria,” Mr. Trump wrote. “President Putin, Russia and Iran are responsible for backing Animal Assad.”” (Davis, April 8, 2018).

A recurring description of the Syrian president as "Animal Assad", is considered a rhetorical weapon that sticks in the minds of readers. If this is linked to Lakoff's notion of 'think of an elephant', one can assume that by repeatedly using such morbid condemnations eventually will color the reader's view of the event. Several of the articles published April 8, called for condemnation and a military response towards the alleged attack that occurred the day before. These calls were often made with the use of emotionally based value and norm lobbying – “Trump reacts to “mindless” chemical attack in Syria: “Big price to pay””, “Russia, Iran responsible for backing “Animal Assad””. This kind of moral condemnation was pervasive in the media coverage and used to blame Bashar al-Assad of the crime, urging the world’s responsibility, using strong emotional rhetoric. The heavy use of diametrically opposed sets of values and norms was evident in the coverage. Assad and Putin were portrayed as the super villains, the Syrian people were the victims and the possible saviors

were the US-led alliance. This is an example of character assassination (Simons, 2019: 545), in which the enemy is described as 'a monster' or 'animal' and is consequently demonized (Seaton, 1999: 46).

The second article published April 8, just one day after the attack, and before any evidence had been conducted, the headline read: "*Trump Vows 'Big Price' for Syria Attack, Raising Prospect of Missile Strike*". The reporting raised questions to how Trump was going to respond to the chemical attack and the issue were inclined towards the Trump-dilemma frame. The Trump-dilemma frame was present in 4 articles from April 8 to April 10. Senator John McCain was quoted stating that the president responded decisively to Assad's use of chemical weapons in 2017 and that he should do so again, demonstrating that Assad must pay a price for the war crimes committed. Senator Lindsey Graham further argued that Mr. Trump should make good on what the president appeared to be threatening and stated he should "*show a resolve that Obama never did to get this right*" (Davis, April 8, 2018). This angle puts pressure on Trump, almost imploring Trump to use military action as a response. A confirmed attack would create difficulties for President Trump, because its contradictory to his recent Syria-policy; the 'America first' approach, involving a withdrawal of American soldiers. An article from April 8, stressed how Trump was squeezed between conflicting impulses, which raised the stakes on the US's future in Syria.

"On one hand, he has emphatically expressed his desire to bring American troops home as soon as possible in line with his "America First" approach. On the other, he has vowed to punish some bad actors, and withdrawing from Syria could open him up to criticism at home and abroad" (Hubbard and Davis April 8, 2018).

From April 9, there was an increasing degree of focus towards what kind of military action to be considered. A series of articles discussed the various military options available, ruling nothing out. However, some of the articles were critical to the use of military force. These considered the unknown possible negative consequences of an intervention in one of the most combustible battlegrounds on the planet – which are crawling with Syrian, Russian, Iranian, American, Turkish and Kurdish forces (Baker et al. April 11, 2018). Another article pointed to several new problems that an escalation could create; collapse of the Syrian government and a direct military confrontation with Russia (Victor, April 11, 2018). One of the articles addressed several critical aspects of US' Middle East politics in general and asked why the support for military action still exist, when it has demonstrably failed earlier.

“It sometimes seems as if the United States will be bombing empty runways until the end of time, dead certain that it’s a way to get everything Americans want at no real cost or risk, and that all the past failures only prove that the next time it’ll work for sure” (Fisher, April 10, 2018).

Despite some critical voices, there was little room for discussing peaceful solutions, even before UNSC failed to agree on a resolution April 10, 2018. In the article from April 9, “*After Chemical Weapons Attack in Syria, Trump Weighs Retaliation*”, the 21 first sections were devoted to western elite source scaling for retaliation, before mentioning statements from the Syrian government, Iran or Russia. However, even when supporters of the Syrian or Russian government were mentioned, they were strongly opposed by US sources (Baker, April 9, 2018). Quotes from western leaders and their allies condemning Assad’s government were salient from the beginning of the articles, while Syrian and Russian statements generally were presented further down. Following Van Dijk’s (1988) theory of ‘macrosyntax’ (p.26), the most important part of a news story is presented first in the article and the framing might be inclined to favor the Western policymakers. Although the news articles do not completely dismiss Russian, Syrian or Iranian arguments, the statements were only first included after a criticism list has been overwhelmingly made against them.

The articles were also quickly distributing blame. Saliency was given to different NGOs as The White Helmets and the Syrian American Medical Society, blaming the Syrian government. These NGOs were referred to as ‘independent’ sources, however, the White Helmets are funded by both the US and UK government. The same governments were identified through the content of the Defense Intelligence Agency report (DIA, 2012), as being active participants in the proxy war in Syria (Simons, 2019: 649-650). Follow-up articles maintained the same foundation of the selected news frames and added further information and evidence. Different NGOs and US officials supported the main frame of the human suffering and retaliation. The blame issue was further supported by single sources on site in Syria, as the military spokesman from Jaish al-Islam who was quoted claiming there was no doubt that Assad was behind the attack (Hubbard, April 11, 2018). Several articles reported that a possible motive for the Syrian Government to carry out the chemical attack, were the breakdown of the negotiations to evacuate rebels from the area. The argument put forward stated that Douma is on a strategically important supply road - long controlled by rebel groups - and that government forces have apparently become increasingly desperate to

restore control. NYT thus emphasizes that, after repeated failure to recapture the area by using conventional force, the Syrian government has used chemical weapons to clear the area of rebels.

Since a diplomatic solution failed in the UNSC meeting April 10, the retaliation frame was clearly intensified from April 10, calling for a stronger military response than the one the year before in Idlib. The general tone in the articles from April 10, projected consensus among leaders in France, U.K. and US of the necessity for an expansive military strike in Syria. The American reasoning was that only an escalation of force would look reliable and would act as a deterrent to prevent further chemical attacks.

“President Trump and his advisers on Tuesday weighed a more robust retaliatory strike against Syria than last year’s missile attack, reasoning that only an escalation of force would look credible and possibly serve as a deterrent against further use of chemical weapons on Syrian civilians” (Baker et. al. April 10, 2018).

The articles further quoted military analysts and Pentagon officials discussing military strategies, nitty gritty details of military action, talking about the equipment used, preparation, number of soldiers and aircrafts. Nonetheless, there was no mention of the deception used to initiate the Iraq War in 2003, or the disastrous consequences that followed the Libya intervention in 2011, which was lamented in a House of Commons report (House of Commons, 2016). By April 11, the coverage was characterized by intensified military rhetoric, again supported by President Trump's tweets:

“Missiles fired at Syria will be coming, nice and new and ‘smart!’” [...] telling the Kremlin that it should not partner with a “Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!” (Sullivan and Shear, April 11, 2018).

After the threat, President Trump stated in a separate tweet that the relationship between the US and Russia were ‘worse than ever’. The disagreement between the two states escalated when President Trump reacted to a statement by Russian ambassador to Lebanon, Alexander

Zasypkin, who had warned the US and its allies that any missiles fired at Syria would be shot down. The Moscow-Washington frame (used in 5 out of 15 articles) was first evident in the coverage when the Russian government responded to Trump's threats to attack Syria militarily. The reporting intensified to a clear geopolitical dimension, describing Trump's perception of the decades-long geopolitical and ideological rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union - which now was worse than during the cold war (Sullivan and Shear April 11, 2018).

In the days leading up to the western military strike, the Trump–dilemma frame characterized the coverage. The focus was the pros and cons of a military strike, and the kind of military attack that would best deter the Syrian Government. On the one hand, the coverage problematized that an attack could lead to accidental casualties, that could deepen the conflict with Russia and Iran. On the other hand, it argued that a restrained strike might not inflict enough damage on President Bashar al-Assad's government to change his calculations. Compared to the MT, there were consistently little coverage of the UNSC meeting April 10 in The NYT's coverage. But when the meeting was covered, it dedicated the first six paragraphs to the US ambassador to the UN, Nikki R. Haley's, criticizing Russia:

“We know who did this. Our allies know who did this. Russia can complain all it wants about fake news, but no one is buying its lies and its cover-ups” (Gladstone, April 13, 2018).

This is in line with Brown's (2014) findings, suggesting that Western media tend to portray Moscow as a cold-blooded defender of their national interests (as Syria's closest allies) – defying the international community (p. 59). Interestingly, The NYT didn't have any articles discussing OPCW's role in Syria and the coverage had minimal information about OPCW's investigation, details or timelines. The NYT's coverage was characterized by a predestination of guilt, where retaliation had already been decided without any complete technical investigation by the OPCW. The assigning of blame and the formation of the retaliation frame can create a certain kind of understanding of the incident, hence forming the conventional wisdom and orthodoxy of knowledge (Simons 2019: 637). Other interpretations are thus difficult to communicate.

4.1.2 Analysis of The Moscow Times’s News articles

The Douma incident resulted in 11 publications in The Moscow Times (MT) in the period between April 7 and April 14, 2018. The coverage was largely characterized by US-Russia relations, where 9 out of 11 articles could clearly be placed in the Moscow-Washington frame. This frame suggested that the Douma incident had thrust Syria's conflict back to the forefront of the international stage, pitting Washington and Moscow against each other once again.

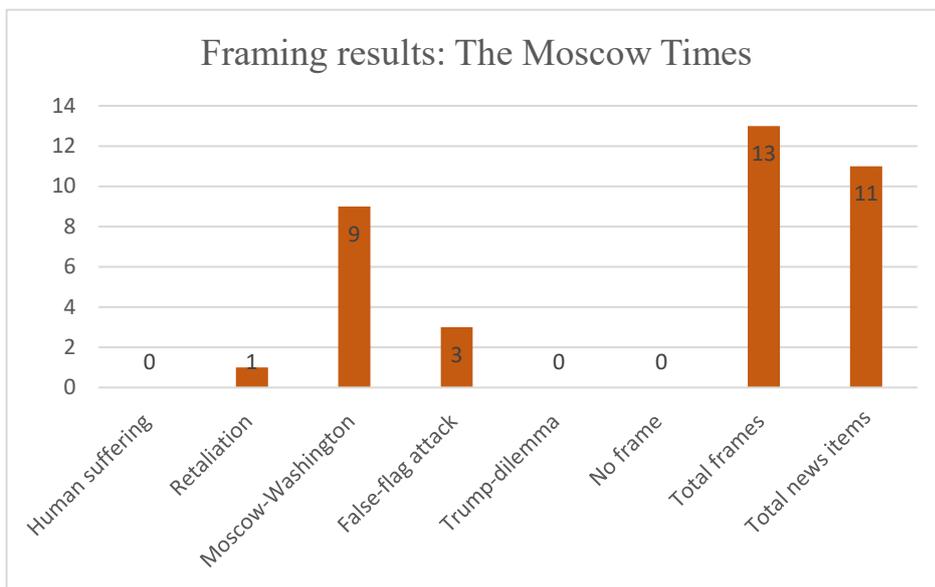


Figure 3: Framing results The Moscow Times. There are 11 related news items that include 13 coding units (frames). An article was coded with two frames when it was not possible to define a clear frame. See Appendix B for details.

The MT gave minimal salience to human suffering, nor did the coverage quoted statements from victims or aid organizations. Notably, the coverage had little focus on the humanitarian consequences, hence never framed as human suffering. MT didn't report on detailed descriptions of symptoms or focused on civilian suffering from the attack. Instead, the Russian coverage was remarkably factual. Basic details of the alleged attack were provided, where accident numbers were reported, but no remarkable attempt was made to leave a lasting impression on the reader. Two of the articles brings up civilian casualties, but the humanitarian losses were downplayed compared to the Syrian war in general:

"Despite the international revulsion over chemical weapons attacks, the death toll from such incidents in Syria is only a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of combatants and civilians killed since the war began in 2011." (MT April 10, 2018; MT April 11, 2018).

One of the most important framing devices is the headline of an article (Pan and Kosicki 1999: 59), how it is angled, which words are used/not used. Given this orientation, The MT rarely used the word 'retaliation' in its coverage. This can be linked to Lakoff's (2004) theory that all words provoke a frame. This may be a conscious or unconscious act; however, the articles often stated how Russia was going to respond if Syria was attacked, and rarely used language that strengthened the US retaliation frame; "*Russia Warns US of 'Grave Consequences' If Syria Is Attacked*" (MT, April 10, 2018); "*Any US Missiles Fired at Syria Will Be Shot Down*" (MT, April 11, 2018).

The first article published, April 9, clearly indicated conflicting opinions between Russia and the US. The subheading of the first section stated, 'animal Assad', which referred to President Trump blaming Iran and Russia for backing 'animal Assad' for the alleged chemical attack. The US State Department described the attack as "*horrifying*", blaming Russia for the "*brutal targeting of countless Syrians with chemical weapons*". Following the accusation, several quotes from the Syrian government which completely denied the involvement were placed to contradict the US allegations.

The two sub-headers showed the disagreement between the two main narratives: 'Animal Assad' and Fabricated attack. In NYT's and Aftenposten's coverage, Russian statements about the attack were often referred to as 'fabricated attack' in quotation marks. In the MT coverage on the other hand, quotation marks were used in the statement 'animal Assad' and not in the subheading: fabricated attack. It is therefore reasonable to assume that it strengthens the Russian and Syrian official narrative; the false-flag attack frame. The official Russian statement is quoted, calling the reports "*invented and fabricated excuses*", previously warned "*to shield terrorists*" (MT April 9, 2018). However, 10 out of 11 articles avoided defining a responsible party for the incident, and MT only blamed the Syrian opposition groups in 1 of the 11 articles.

The article further reinforced the blame-game between US and Russia, citing the Russian government calling the accusations 'trumped-up' (MT April 9, 2018). President

Trump's accusations is metaphorically downplayed— indicating that the charges were untrue and made up in order to punish someone unfairly. Nevertheless, there are surprisingly few articles that clearly suggested that the attack was fabricated and the false-flag attack frame was only evident in 3 articles. These articles were based on a longer explanation, than simply citing that Syria denied the allegations, and were typically questioning why the Syrian government should risk provoking Western leaders, since the Syrian government had regained control over areas in Syria. Furthermore, the coverage was very concerned with the April 10 UNSC meeting, dedicating three full articles to the matter. The articles published April 10, referred to Vassily Nebenzia's statements, criticizing the US, Britain and France of stoking international tensions by engaging in a "*confrontational policy against Russia and Syria*". The coverage often cited Nebenzia who consistently made strong accusations against the Western governments:

"Russia is being unpardonably threatened. The tone with which this is being done has gone beyond the threshold of what is acceptable, even during the Cold War" (MT April 10, 2018)

The follow-up article problematized US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley's statement, who said that Washington would respond to the Douma incident regardless of whether the UNSC acted or not. The Russian media attributed considerable significance to a statement by the UN expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Gowan:

"This is basically a diplomatic set-up. [...] "Russia will inevitably veto the US resolution criticizing Assad, and Washington will use this to justify military strikes. [...] A breakdown at the U.N. will also make it easier for France to justify strikes" (MT April 10, 2018: a).

The quote enhanced the Russian and Syrian narrative of western categorical policy to use military force against Syria. This is also consistent with Brown's (2014) findings, where Russian newspapers tend to portray Moscow as an "independent arbitrator", seeking to defend a fragile international order from US reckless adventurism (p. 60). Quoting experts to claim empirical validity or facticity (Pan and Kosicki, 1993: 60) is an essential framing

device and links certain points of view to authority. Gowan's statement supported the Russian problematization of the incident and undermined the credibility of the US. The view of this expert is not cited in any of the other newspapers in this study, which illustrates the cherry picking of sources inclined to strengthen certain narratives. By stating that this basically is diplomatic set-up, Syria and Russia have thus become victims - and are unpardonably threatened - caught between opposition forces and Western powers. This stands in line with President Putin's earlier famous editorial, calling out America's interventionism and criticizing Obama's comments about American exceptionalism (Putin, 2013).

Throughout the coverage, the MT gave significantly more salience to the words and statements from Syrian authorities, the head of Russia's peace and reconciliation center in Syria, spokesmen from the Russian government and the Russian military. These sources continually rejected the claims of the chemical attack. At the same time, The MT included perspectives of Western leaders. The newspaper presented different aspects of the event, but were simultaneously quick to question the motives of the western sources. Accordingly, the coverage often portrayed US elite sources as warmongers who turns to military means as a first resort in situations of international conflict. The article from April 10, "*To Avert US Retaliation, Russia Proposes Inspection of Syria Attack Site*", highlighted Trump's militaristic statements warning of 'quick and forceful actions'. President Assad's statement which claimed the attack was bogus, was presented as a response, additionally to diplomatic and peaceful solutions suggested by Russia.

Several articles in the days leading up to the western military strike, testified to the intensification of the conflict, where strong military rhetoric characterized the coverage. Several Russian elite sources were quoted warning the US of the consequences of attacking Syria, where the headline from Putin read: "*Any US missile fired at Syria would be shot down and the launch sites targeted*" (April 11, 2018: a). At this point the threat picture increased; going from diplomatic solutions to threatening US with military strikes. In the fourth article from April 11, the threats of war between the US and Russia began emerging: "*Missiles Are 'Coming to Syria,' Trump Warns Russia on Twitter*". Trump's Twitter message came as a response to Russia's threat to shoot down any US missile fired at Syria, as well as targeting the launch sites.

“Russia vows to shoot down any and all missiles fired at Syria. Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and “smart!” You shouldn’t be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!” (MT, April 11, 2018: b).

The response by the Russian Foreign Ministry is quoted, highlighting the moral condemnation of attacking sovereign states.

“Smart missiles should fly towards terrorists, not legal government” (ibid)

The MT highlighted that an attack could lead to further destabilization, now that the Syrian government finally had managed to regain control from the rebel forces.

“The Syrian government has launched a massive effort to restore the civilian infrastructure of Eastern Ghouta,” [...] Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has said Washington is preparing an airstrike against government forces in Syria, in response to the alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma” (MT, April 12, 2018).

The last article leading up to the western military strikes in Syria, emphasized how Nebenzia urged the US and its allies to refrain from military action and said the *"immediate priority is to avert the danger of war"* (MT, April 13, 2018). The problematization was persistently the worries about a confrontation between Russia and the West. While the statements and actions of Western leaders and Syrian opposition groups was followed and reported, these were always presented within the context of the Russian foreign ministry’s or the Syrian government’s perspective. MT refrained from character-assassination and a widespread use of enemy images. Yet, moral descriptions were used to question the real motives behind western use of military force.

4.1.3 Analysis of Aftenposten’s News Articles

Aftenposten’s coverage consisted of 15 articles. Throughout the coverage different key international actors in the conflict were highlighted: the UN, EU, U.S., France and Russia. The views of Norwegian political actors were mentioned in two articles. This was a quote in which Prime Minister Erna Solberg expressed disappointment that the UNSC had not reached a consensus on the situation (Torgersen April 11; Olsen April 12. 2018).

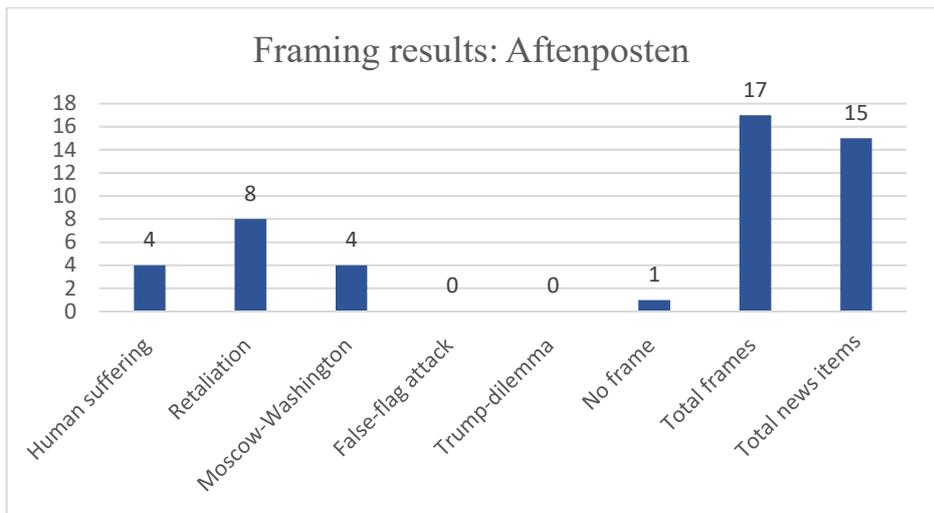


Figure 4: Framing results Aftenposten. There are 15 related news items that include 17 coding units (frames). An article was coded with two frames when it was not possible to define a clear frame. See Appendix C for details.

The first articles set the foundation for telling the story; a considerably attention to graphics and emotionally charged descriptions of the victims; especially children and references to previous cases (exemplars) of alleged chemical attacks. The first article published April 8 “US condemns alleged chemical attack in Syria”, called for condemnation and a military response to the alleged attack that occurred the day before. Although the use of language indicated a certain level of uncertainty regarding the incident, there were simultaneously an accusative tone, quoting a statement from the White House:

“Assad's regime and its supporters must be held accountable and new attacks must be prevented immediately” (Aftenposten, April 8, 2018).

There was a high degree of assertion and assumption in the logic of assigning the blame some 24 hours after a remotely occurring event, within a conflict that is known for the heavy use of propaganda and deception. The article lacked conflicting perspectives on the incident early in the coverage. Assad's government is persistently referred to as the responsible for the attack (in 9 out of 15 articles) and none of the articles discussed other possible perpetrating actors. Actors such as the Syrian radical opposition or ISIS was not mentioned as possible perpetrators, although evidence suggests that these groups have used chemical weapons in the Syrian war at an earlier stage (UN: 30.8.2016).

The Human suffering frame was used in 4 articles, and like the NYT, the coverage consisted of strong adjectives and metaphors: "*Shocking pictures of dead children! "Cruel scenes from Douma. Piles of dead women and children found killed in their hiding places with foam running out of the nose and mouth"*", "*Reminiscent of the 2013 attack*". Vivid details and videos were used to support the frame of human suffering – that of children in particular. Previous actual and alleged chemical attacks were discussed, which provided historical context and strengthened the idea of the Syrian government was responsible for the chemical attack.

"Videos and gruesome pictures of the victims after the attack are now circulating on social media. Here are lifeless bodies lying above each other, after seeking refuge from the attack. Most are young children and babies ⁵" (Knapstad et. al. April 8, 2018).

The framing was compounded by the choice of linguistic descriptors in the statement above. Rather than pictures these were 'gruesome pictures' and these deaths were even more heinous due to the tragic involvement of many children. The Assad regime then, was not only responsible for a large-scale chemical attack, but additionally responsible for the deaths of children, which warranted a serious response from the international community. The relief organization UOSSM⁶ and the White helmets were quoted to support the main frame of human suffering, retaliation and blame questions. However, the White Helmets has been

⁵ All the quotes from Aftenposten has been translated by the author.

⁶ The Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM) was founded in January 2012 in France. It is a coalition of humanitarian, non-governmental and medical organizations from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Turkey (uossm.org, 2019).

criticized for operating in areas controlled by rebel groups, which has led to accusations that the organization is a participant in the rebellion against the Syrian government (Pettersen & Leraand, 2018). In the follow-up article on April 8, the article quoted a spokesman for UOSSM, who reported that chlorine could be smelled in several areas of Douma. Another relief worker was quoted saying that sarin gas was used. Citing anonymous aid workers, using them as sources to claim that sarin gas was used is problematic, as the descriptions should be provided by legitimate, traceable sources. From 9 April, Aftenposten's reporting began to introduce the notion of forceful retaliation as a reaction to the alleged attack. The retaliation frame was used in 8 out of 15 articles. However, two of the articles were critical to western military retaliation, highlighting the unimaginable consequences of a major war between western countries and Syria, Iran and Russia (Hanssen, April 12; Olsen April 12, 2018).

The article from April 9, "*Children are killed in gas attacks. These are the reasons why it has not had some consequences for the regime*" described Syria's well-documented use of chemical weapons against their own population. The article no longer mentioned the attack with uncertainty and reported that Syria has enforced 85 systematic, well-documented chemical attacks against its own population. The article further paints a picture of an unsolvable situation, and indirectly stated that even a military retaliation will not prevent new chemical attacks from being carried out.

"Last time Trump responded to pictures of dying children, in April last year [2017], he ordered an attack on a Syrian airbase. However, it has not prevented the reporting of large numbers of chemical attacks since then" (Andreassen and Aale, April 9, 2018).

Aftenposten was the only newspaper mentioning the actual assessment of evidence from the attack. During the first day after the alleged attack, photos and videos were accessible to everyone on the internet, but as explained earlier, OPCW was the only actor with the mandate to check the authenticity of the evidence. Nevertheless, it was claimed in an Aftenposten article:

"The AP News Agency has reviewed the videos the aid organization has published to authenticate the content. They believe the content of the videos is reliable [...] It is

not confirmed who is behind the attack, but according to the EU, the evidence points in the direction of Assad's regime" (Knapstad et. al. April 8, 2018).

Indeed, according to Aftenposten the case against the Syrian Government was so strong that any suggestions to the contrary were difficult to express. Aftenposten devoted articles to the role of the weapon inspectors and included information of how the Russian government gave OPCW access to Douma, as well as Russian military police guaranteed the security of the inspectors (Aftenposten April 10, 2018: a). This particular aspect was described in all the newspapers, except from the NYT, where it was excluded completely from the coverage.

From April 11, the incident revolved around geopolitical questions, where the Moscow-Washington frame becomes evident. The focus naturally occurred by virtue of Russia and the US disagreements in the UNSC (Aftenposten April 10, 2018: b). The details of what was included in the two resolution proposals was very thoroughly described in Aftenposten's coverage, unlike the coverage in NYT. This gave the reader a better understanding of the forces that prevail in the Syrian conflict, and why it is such a difficult conflict to solve for the international community.

Behind the news coverage, lies journalistic integrity that controls the details included in the articles. At the same time, the salience of certain quotes and information provides insight into the editorial line of the news agency, one that does not stray far from Norway as an ally of the US and the general policy towards the Syrian conflict. Within each article, a more prominent platform was given to rebel groups and to the statements of Western leaders, who have taken a stand against the Syrian government. These quotes and statements were usually placed higher up in the article than quotes from the Syrian government and its allies – Iran and Russia. Throughout the coverage Aftenposten quoted sources that reinforce the narrative that a chemical attack had taken place, even though they briefly mentioned that the information couldn't be confirmed by independent sources. Even within the headlines and leads, Aftenposten's articles generally set the context from a perspective that targets Assad's government as the culprit for the chemical attack. The Syrian government was also repeatedly referred to as 'regime', which could denote a more negative connotation than the word, 'government'.

4.1.4 Analysis of Egypt Independent’s news articles

The Douma incident resulted in 11 publications in Egypt Independent (EI). The newspaper had the most variation in frames compared to the other three newspapers in the analysis. EI framed the Douma incident in the notion of a Moscow-Washington frame 7 out of 11 times and used this frame most frequently after the MT. The problem definition, solution and responsibility bring up several different perspectives of the incident.

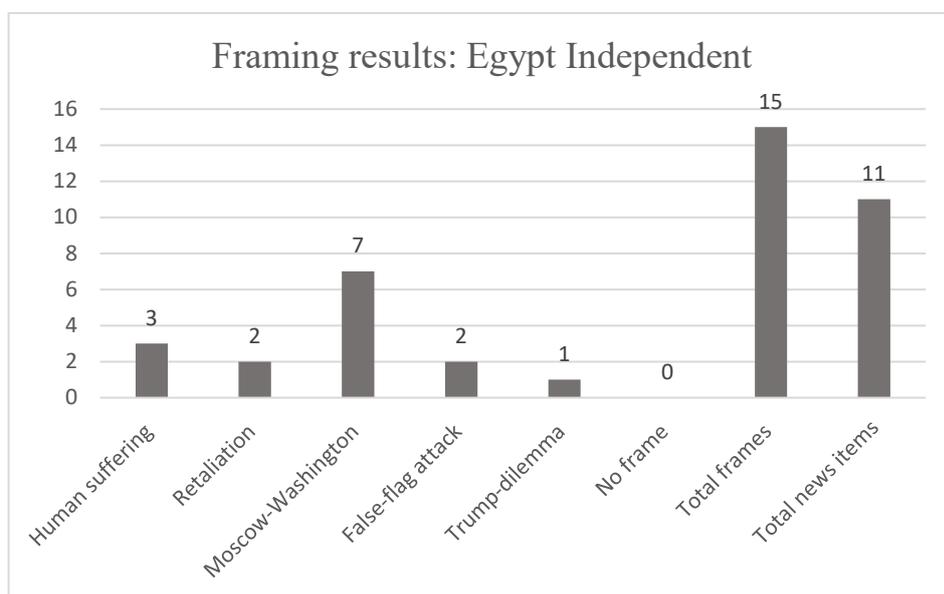


Figure 5: Framing results Egypt Independent. There are 11 related news items that includes 15 coding units (frames). An article was coded with two frames when it was not possible to define a clear frame. See Appendix D for details.

The first article published April 8, 2018, quoted the “*opposition-linked aid workers, known as the White Helmets*” describing the injuries connected to the alleged attack. The use of the phrase ‘opposition-linked’ contributes to delegitimizing the White Helmets, which as a humanitarian organization, is supposed to be neutral. The article further questioned why they reported a smell resembling chlorine, which couldn’t explain the described symptoms, usually associated with sarin gas (EI, April 8, 2018). EI reported early in the article that the allegations were denied by the Syrian government, and that the reports had not been independently verified. The general coverage used to a lesser extent language with strong emotional undertone, compared to the Western news outlets. 3 of 11 articles are framed as

human suffering, but the coverage sticks to presenting facts from various parties and excludes emotionally language or characterizations that that explicitly distinguishes between ‘good’ and ‘evil’. The initial reporting indicates a great deal of uncertainty and included different information related to the number of dead and injured, some sources reporting 40 casualties, others 80. The article, however, pointed to the suffocations as a result of shelters collapsing on the people that stayed there (EI April 8, 2018), indicating an uncertainty about the chemical attack taking place. The coverage gave great salience towards Syrian and Russian rejections to the alleged attack. In Western media however, this is often mentioned briefly and usually towards the end of the articles.

“Allegations denied by the Syrian government.”

“The Syrian government, in a statement posted on the state-run news agency SANA, strongly denied the allegations.”

“The Syrian government and its ally, Russia, denied any involvement in the alleged gas attack.”

“Syria denies ever using chemical weapons during the seven-year civil war, and says it eliminated its chemical arsenal under a 2013 agreement brokered by the US and Russia after the attack in eastern Ghouta” (EI April 8, 2018).

From April 9, the coverage presented the views of the UK, France, the UN, the EU, Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) and various aid organizations describing the incident. The coverage depicts the complexity of the Syrian crisis and stressed peacefully and diplomatic resolutions. On April 8, Pope Francis gave a speech saying that *"nothing can justify"* the use of chemical weapons against defenseless populations and called for negotiations. The Pope’s statement constituted an entire article and was surprisingly not mentioned in any of the other newspapers.

"There is no good or bad war, and nothing can justify such instruments that exterminate defenseless people and populations. Let's pray that responsible politicians and military leaders choose another path: that of negotiations, the only one that can bring peace" (Pope Francis in EI April 9, 2018).

From April 10, the framing was inclined towards the Moscow-Washington frame, where the conflicting views of US and Russia were emphasized, especially the blame game between Nebrenzia and Haley's statements at the April 10, UNSC meeting. EI had an undertone of criticism against President Trump, in the April 10 article. President Trump was quoted describing his relentlessness, and that the decision to bomb another country without evidence or UN mandate, was made with the simplest ease:

“The US leader [President Trump] met with his cabinet and then dined with top generals, telling reporters “we have a lot of options militarily and we’ll be letting you know pretty soon ... probably after the fact”” (EI, April 10, 2018).

The article addressed the consequences of a retaliation strike, due to the risk of an open conflict with Russia, which, like Iran, deployed forces to defend Assad’s government. Nebenzia was quoted, reflecting on earlier warnings from President Vladimir Putin, *“From what we hear now, I am afraid they are looking for a military option, which is very, very dangerous”* (EI, April 10, 2018). Furthermore, the coverage emphasized President Trump's contradicting versions of the US security policy. Various statements were presented to highlight Trumps conflicting messages.

“A day after warning starkly that “missiles will be coming,” [April 11] Trump in another early morning tweet storm wrote: “Never said when an attack on Syria would take place. Could be very soon or not so soon at all!” (EI, April 12, 2018).

The article stated that Trump’s new tweet seemed to backtrack from the previous, bellicose one of Wednesday, in which he attributed to Syria and its ally, Russia.

“That one, which came after a warning from Russia, went like this: “Russia vows to shoot down any and all missiles fired at Syria. Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and “smart!” You shouldn’t be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!”” (ibid).

The coverage focused on the tough talks between Washington and Kremlin. It raised concerns about the Syrian conflict escalating, with Russia on the one side and American and its western allies on the other. The focus of the event was on the major geopolitical consequences and the political game between the great powers, with its eastern and western alliances. In the article from April 12, *“UN chief warns of Syria spiraling out of control”* UN

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stressed a diplomatic solution. Guterres underlined the continuous use of the veto right by the permanent member states - the US, Russia, China, the UK and France - to reiterate his deep concern about the risk of the current impasse. EI described in its April 12 article the situation from a British perspective "*May mulls Syria action despite cautious mood in UK*", stressing Mays view of the "need to take action", despite polls showing the public remains wary of military intervention. The article highlighted a YouGov poll, conducted 11-12 April, which found that 43 % of voters opposed strikes in Syria, with 34 % unsure and only 22 % supportive.

Whether the UK should be part of this coalition was the main theme of the article, however, there were quotes and arguments suggesting that there should be a solution other than military measures. The article addressed the critical and controversial aspects internally in the UK, as the country is still "*haunted by its role in the US-led invasion of Iraq*" (EI April 13, 2018a). This was further emphasized by quoting the leader from the Labour party, Jeremy Corbyn, who said that the handling of the Syrian crisis evoked memories of the Iraq War, whereas lawmakers approved joining the force in the face of a strong public opposition. The coverage in EI consisted of several sources criticizing western involvement, President Trump and a potential military strike in Syria:

Julian Lewis, the chairman of the House of Commons defense committee: "*What we've got here in Syria is a choice between monsters on the one hand and maniacs on the other*" (ibid).

Vince Cable, Opposition Liberal Democrat leader: "*The position is a very dangerous one because of Russian involvement, also because we have an erratic president of the United States*" (ibid).

The last article published, revolved around the OPCW team's physical deployment to investigate the claims of chemical weapons being used. EI described the situation through the lens of a Moscow-Washington frame, stating that Douma incident has brought the war-torn country to the brink of a wider conflict. The reason being, Western threats of retaliation and Russian warnings of potentially a dangerous escalation. The article cited Russian elite sources asking the US and the West to refrain from using military means and reproduced Vassily Nebenzia statement from the UNSC meeting April 10, where he said the top priority had to be to avert a wider war: "*Russia was very concerned with aggressive policies and*

preparations that some governments were making". The article explained that Nebenzia's statement made a clear reference to the Trump administration and its allies (ibid). Like MT, EI referred to the rebellion control of Douma since 2012, as a thorn in the side of Assad's government, threatening his seat of power with missiles and potential advances for years. A pro-Syrian angle became evident in an article from April 8, where the regained control over Douma was described to "mark a major victory for Assad". EI only used civilian Syrians as sources, to the extent that the Syrian government was favorably mentioned:

"This is a victory for Syria and the allies of Syria. [...] Eastern Ghouta was the main source of terrorists who from there spread throughout Syria" (EI April 13, 2018b).

Additionally, the article stated that Damascus residents, who have lived in fear for years, celebrated the news carrying Syrian flags on vehicles that were driving from Damascus into Douma, chanting in support of the government. Metaphors are used to emphasize that the Syrian government regained control of Douma from the rebels, and that it is peaceful in the streets of Syria again:

"The streets of Damascus were packed Thursday with people headed to the city's main market, cafes and restaurants. At Nabil Nafiseh, one of Damascus's most famous sweets shops, men, women and children sat outdoors enjoying the evening breeze and nibbling on Arab sweets" (ibid).

Several Damascus residents who showed clear pro-Assad attitudes were cited:

"I came here to defy the dogs that are threatening Syria. "We don't care about America nor America's strike and we don't care about America's allies. We were not scared in Aleppo and we were not scared in Damascus"

"Syria is a strong country, but our allies Russia and Iran make us stronger" (ibid).

Examining the news coverage, an alignment with Egyptian foreign policy is revealed, while also maintaining journalistic standards of presenting various perspectives and including all the relevant details. However, EI appears to be very careful in the terms it uses when referring to the Syrian parties involved in the conflict. The word 'regime' is avoided completely, which would denote a more negative connotation than the word of choice, 'government'.

4.2 Source analysis

The source analysis scrutinized the sources used most frequently in the various newspapers covering the chemical attack. A total of 52 news articles with a total of 318 individual sources were mapped. MT published 11 articles and used 54 sources in the total coverage of the chemical attack. The Russian newspaper used Russian government/official sources mostly (24 times). They used other media as sources nine times and US government/officials were cited 8 times. The analysis showed that the articles did not contain any articles in which Syrian citizen sources were cited. This can be related to the fact that the coverage never focused on the victims from the incident and thus never from the framed as human suffering.

The 16 articles published in the NYT used 123 sources - most of all the newspapers in the analysis. The sources most commonly used were US government/officials (49 times), followed by Non-Syrian Human rights organizations (14 times), experts (12 times) and Western government /officials (11 times). Western official sources were largely influenced by statements by President of France, Emmanuel Macron and former British Prime Minister Theresa May. Russian Government/officials were cited 8 times and Syrian government sources were used as source three times. When cited, this was often linked to the two states rejecting the allegations that a chemical attack had taken place.

Aftenposten's 15 articles used 77 sources, mostly from the US Government/officials (cited 18 times), followed by other media (cited 11 times.) Aftenposten also used sources from the international community 9 times and had more statements from NATO than the other newspapers. Furthermore, the newspaper used sources from the Russian government/officials, Western government/officials and experts an equal number of times (7 times).

EI used a total of 64 sources in its 11 articles and used most sources from the US Government/officials (13 times) and Western Government / officials sources (11 times). Russian Government / officials were cited six times in coverage and cited Syrian government sources seven times. The newspaper had a wide variety of sources but avoided the perspectives of experts.

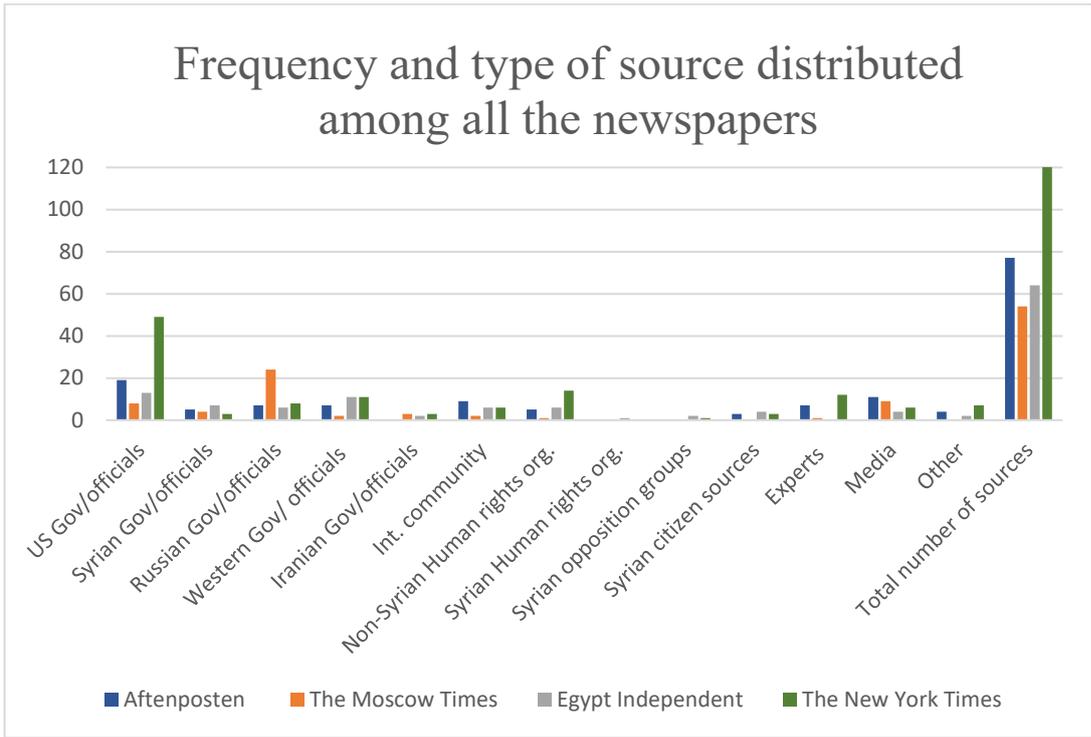


Figure 6: *Distribution of sources across newspapers*

The findings showed that Syrian Human rights organizations and Syrian opposition groups were rarely used as sources in any of the newspapers. However, non-Syrian Human rights organizations were used relatively frequently in all newspapers, except the MT. A plausible explanation for this result is that many of the non-Syrian Human rights organizations are founded by western countries and are thus less trustworthy from a Russian perspective. The non-Syrian Human rights organizations included the UOSSM, The White Helmets, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and The Syria Campaign. Most of the Syrian relief organizations were founded in the UK, as well as having their headquarters there.

There are major challenges to being able to report from war-torn areas in Syria, but today's technology makes it possible to connect with people on digital surfaces, in addition to talking to Syrians living in Norway, US, Russia and Egypt. Nevertheless, Syrian civilian sources were rarely used in the newspaper's coverage. EI interviewed civilian Syrians in Syria (four different sources), all of whom were critical of the US and supportive of the Syrian government's victory over the rebels in Douma. The US used civilian Syrian sources in three occasions, all of them critical to the Syrian government. The use of Syrian civilian sources that support a particular narrative is evident here. It was surprising that MT did not use any Syrian civilian sources to 'contradict' the allegations, to bolster the Russian government's narrative that the incident in Douma was a 'false-flag attack'.

In order to analyze the use of elite sources, all of these were merged based on which of them can be categorized as government representatives or official voices (see method chapter 3.3.2.1). This resulted in 8 source categories and the results are presented in the table below. The result was not surprising, but still startling. First, this preponderance of elite sources implies that it is the official voices that dominate the information given to the population about the incident in Syria. Secondly, there is minimal room in the media for civilians or organizations that are likely to have multiple perspectives on the incident.

<i>Distribution of sources - elite sources merged</i>	<i>Elite sources</i>	<i>Non-Syrian Human rights org.</i>	<i>Syrian Human rights org.</i>	<i>Syrian opposition groups</i>	<i>Syrian citizen sources</i>	<i>Experts</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total number of sources</i>	<i>Percent %</i>
Aftenposten	47	5	0	0	3	7	11	4	77	61
The Moscow Times	43	1	0	0	0	1	9	0	54	80
Egypt Independent	45	6	1	2	4	0	4	2	64	70
The New York Times	80	14	0	1	3	12	6	7	123	65
Total	215	26	1	3	10	20	30	13	318	

<i>Distribution of sources - elite sources merged</i>	<i>Elite sources</i>	<i>Non-Syrian Human rights org.</i>	<i>Syrian Human rights org.</i>	<i>Syrian opposition groups</i>	<i>Syrian citizen sources</i>	<i>Experts</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total number of sources</i>
Aftenposten	47	5	0	0	3	7	11	4	77
The Moscow Times	43	1	0	0	0	1	9	0	54
Egypt Independent	45	6	1	2	4	0	4	2	64
The New York Times	80	14	0	1	3	12	6	7	123
Total	215	26	1	3	10	20	30	13	318

Table 5: *Distribution of elite sources across newspapers*

4.3 Analysis of tendency towards the western military strikes

The thesis main focus is how the different media portrayed the chemical attack in Douma. It was nevertheless interesting to analyze whether the newspapers used pro-strike, anti-strike or neutral terms covering the immediate reaction to western military strikes in Syria April 14, 2018. A minor analysis was therefore carried out in the period 13-15 April. The coverage clearly reflects the polarizations between the US and the West versus Russia, Iran and Syria.

Nine articles were published in the NYT from April 13-15. The initial reports on the military strikes were largely devoted to statements by Trump, Macron and May. The first five articles published from April 13-14 used sources that legitimized the attack as either 'human rights protection', violation of international law' or 'security threat' and fell into the pro-strike category. May was quoted underlining that Syria's use of chemical weapons had to stopped to protect the innocent people in Syria from horrific deaths and casualties. She emphasized that they could not allow the erosion of the international norm that prevents the use of these weapons. The same arguments were made by Macron; trivialization of chemical weapons, creates immediate danger to the Syrian people and the collective security (NYT, April 13, 2018). In President Trump's statement, April 13, the attack was presented as a deterrent against the use of chemical weapons to secure US security interests.

“The purpose of our actions tonight is to establish a strong deterrent against the production, spread, and use of chemical weapons. Establishing this deterrent is a vital national security interest of the United States” (Trump in NYT April 13, 2018).

In most of the articles examined, the NYT presented a link between the Syrian government's accountability and the defense of the military strikes. US ethical responsibility to prevent the use of chemical weapons were linked to humanitarian and international law discourse and the "responsibility to protect" (R2P). The construction provided an opportunity to punish those responsible for the atrocities. The dimension produces authority, because constituting something as ethical, includes the authority to speak of a certain responsibility. Rhetorical devices such as examples and metaphors were traced in Trump's reproduced statement, referring to the atrocities of the First World War. By associating the chemical attack with events everyone remembers with horror, he presents an ethical dilemma to the audience. He implicitly states that if we do not brutally crack down on such actions, this could continue to happen - and the US has the power to stop it. In this way, Trump legitimizes a military attack – meeting brutality with brutality.

“In the last century, we looked straight into the darkest places of the human soul. We saw the anguish that can be unleashed and the evil that can take hold. By the end of World War I, more than one million people had been killed or injured by chemicals weapons. We never want to see that ghastly specter return. So today, the nations of Britain, France, and the United States of America have marshaled their righteous power against barbarism and brutality” (Trump in NYT April 13, 2018).

This corresponds with Tocci et.al (2014) remarks of the Euro-Atlantic of identities, norms and interests, deeply rooted in the presumption that the West has an extraordinary responsibility for maintaining prosperity, stability and global peace (p. 366). The speech further reinforced the image of President Assad as 'evil': *"These are not the actions of a man; they are crimes of a monster instead"* (Trump in NYT April 13, 2018). This resembles Renolds and Barnett's (2003) description of the reaction to 9/11; an action so horrific that immediate military retaliation was not only justified but necessary. The NYT consistently referred to the strikes as 'limited' or 'restrained', intended to punish Assad, but to avoid provoking military response from Russia and Iran (Baker and Gladstone, 2018; Wolgelenter, 2018). The first five articles from April 13-14 used pro-strike terms, but changes were discerned from April 14, where the next four articles were neutral. These articles showed no clear tendency and placed arguments for and against the western strikes. This can partly be explained by an increase in statements from Syrian, Iranian and Russian sources, which illustrated the controversies between the various actors. The American, British and French perspective involved punishing actors violating international law (the Chemical Weapons Convention) and protecting civilians from chemical attacks. From a Syrian, Russian and Iranian perspective, the attack was referred to as a violation of international law under the UN charter and an aggressive assault on Syria's sovereignty.

The MT's coverage only consisted of three articles in the first days after the western military strikes. The newspaper only cited Russian sources in the coverage and anti-strike terms was consistently used to criticize the Western attack. A Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman referred to several different examples illustrating the tragedies Syria have been exposed to recent years.

"First the 'Arab spring' tested the Syrian people, then Islamic State, now smart American rockets. The capital of a sovereign government, trying for years to survive terrorist aggression, has been attacked. You have to be quite abnormal to attack Syria's capital just at the moment when it had a chance for a peaceful future" (MT, April 14, 2018).

Several Russian sources were repeatedly cited referring to the strikes as an 'act of aggression', where the attacks were strongly criticized for exacerbating the situation in Syria, at a time when there was a chance that Syria could have a peaceful future. The chairman of the international affairs committee of Russia's upper house of parliament, Konstantin Kosachev was quoted saying *"the strikes were a violation of international law and probably*

designed to prevent investigators from the global chemical weapons watchdog from doing their job" (MT, April 14, 2018). The statement was not commented further in the article, nor followed up later in the coverage. However, it can be understood as a strengthening of the false-flag attack frame.

In the aftermath of the incidents, The Russian Defense Ministry, accused Britain of staging the chemical attack in Douma. The Russian military claimed they had proof that Britain directly participated in staging a fake chemical weapons attack. This aspect was not mentioned in the coverage of any newspapers in the analysis but appeared in several other international newspapers April 13 and 14, 2018⁷. The official statements by the Russian government was therefore clearly more committed to maintaining the false-flag attack frame and trying to shift the blame over to the UK, than MT's coverage. Instead, MT's focus revolved around the illegitimacy of the Western attack, as a violation of international law. The articles reported in a straightforward manner and MT did not explicitly use enemy images. Although MT did not engage in a clear blame game, they presented arguments that reflected the Russian Foreign Ministry - strongly criticizing the western attack on Syria.

Aftenposten published 17 articles from 14-15 April. The analysis of the media coverage suggests that overall coverage was pondering between "conflicting possibilities" (Mermin, 1999: 19). Aftenposten published six editorials in favor of the strikes, six opposed and five that did not clearly take sides. The first article quoted UK, US and France, stating that the attack sent a clear message to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (Pletten, 2018). Similar to the NYT, the attack was described as 'limited' to punish Assad and prevent him from carrying out chemical attacks. It is reasonable to assume that it was important to point out that the attack was 'restrained', in order to avoid an escalation by bringing Iran and Russia into a military conflict. The use of terms such as 'limited' and 'restrained' is nevertheless a way of downplaying the potential consequences of using military force.

Several articles referred to various sources showing their support for the attack. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (Aftenposten, April 14:a) and the then Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen was quoted supportive of the strikes (Aftenposten, April 14:b) Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide expressed understanding of the western attack, based on Syria's breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention (Aftenposten, April 14:c). This illustrates a broad consensus among Western politicians. Aftenposten also covered the western attack from the counterpart: Iran and Syria. Iran emphasized that they

⁷ I.e. BBC, Daily Mail, The New Arab

strongly opposed that unverified chemical attacks should be used to legitimize military interventions against UN member states (Aftenposten, April 14:d). The two opposing parties both used international law to condemn the other's action. Western officials quoted used clear pro-strike terms when the attack was mentioned. The biggest critical voice against military intervention was the British Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn. Surprisingly, there was not any other articles addressing the consequences of overriding the international system, by constantly exceeding the UN mandate by conducting unauthorized military strikes. The discussion of international law is thus one-sided, with the focus being that only Syria has broken it.

Egypt Independent (EI) published two editorials in favor of the strikes, six opposed and three that did not clearly take sides. The first article described the incident from a Syrian perspective, where Syrian residents gathered in the capital "*in defiance after airstrikes*" The article reported on Syrian support for President Bashar: "*We are your men, Bashar, Oh Trump you are a monkey. Oh Trump you are an animal*" (EI, April 14, 2018). The article specified that the taunts were a clear retort to Trump calling Assad an "animal". Like Aftenposten, EI had several articles describing the event from different perspectives. The article "*Syria strikes an 'important signal' to Iran and Hezbollah: Israeli minister*" clearly portrayed the geopolitical alliances and dividing lines. Yoav Gallant, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet, was quoted clearly in line with Israel's alliance with the US. "*The American attack is an important signal to the axis of evil - Iran, Syria and Hezbollah*" (April 14, 2018). The term 'axis of evil' – introduced by George W. Bush in 2002 – was used to pinpoint the common enemies of the US and rally the American populace in support of the War on Terror (Leraand & Gursli-Berg, 2014).

The next article from April 14, presented the Egyptian standpoint. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed deep concern over the safety of the Syrian people and current military escalation in Syria. Although the statement rendered does not condemned the Western strikes, it was emphasized that Egypt expressed its solidarity with the Syrian people, to "*preserve their national capabilities and territorial integrity through a comprehensive political consensus for all Syrian political bodies away from any attempts to undermine their aspirations*" (Behary, April 14, 2018). While the statement expressed rejection to the use of chemical weapons, it urged the international community to enter a peaceful solution away from polarization. To support an image of the US as a militarist state, the article described that newly installed national security adviser, John Bolton, has a

militaristic and hawkish reputation. This description reinforces the image of criticism the US receives from many countries concerning its militaristic foreign policy. EI highlights that the US has repeatedly preferred to support war, or the continuation or extension of the war (EI, April 15, 2018). Even though the article did not show a clear pro- or anti-strike stance, Trump and his advisers were nonetheless criticized for conducting a militaristic policy. Trump was additionally portrayed as a president who lacks direction and his actions is described as 'chaotic', referring to his "*bellicose and sometimes confusing tweets*" (EI, April 14, 2018). Egypt Independent's articles used mostly anti-strike terms describing the strike. Early coverage referred to Damascus and allies seeing the attack as an illegal act of aggression.

Chapter five:

Answering the research questions and hypothesis

5.1 Answering the research questions and hypothesis

The first research question (**RQ 1**) investigated the prevalence of frames, and frame variations between the newspapers, which led to some interesting findings. There were considerable variations between the newspapers found in both framing and reasoning devices. Firstly, the newspaper's various presentation of the chemical attack was expressed through five different key frames: retaliation, false flag attack, human suffering, Trump dilemma and Moscow-Washington. The differences were particularly evident between MT and the Western media outlets – EI on the other hand – operated somewhere between.

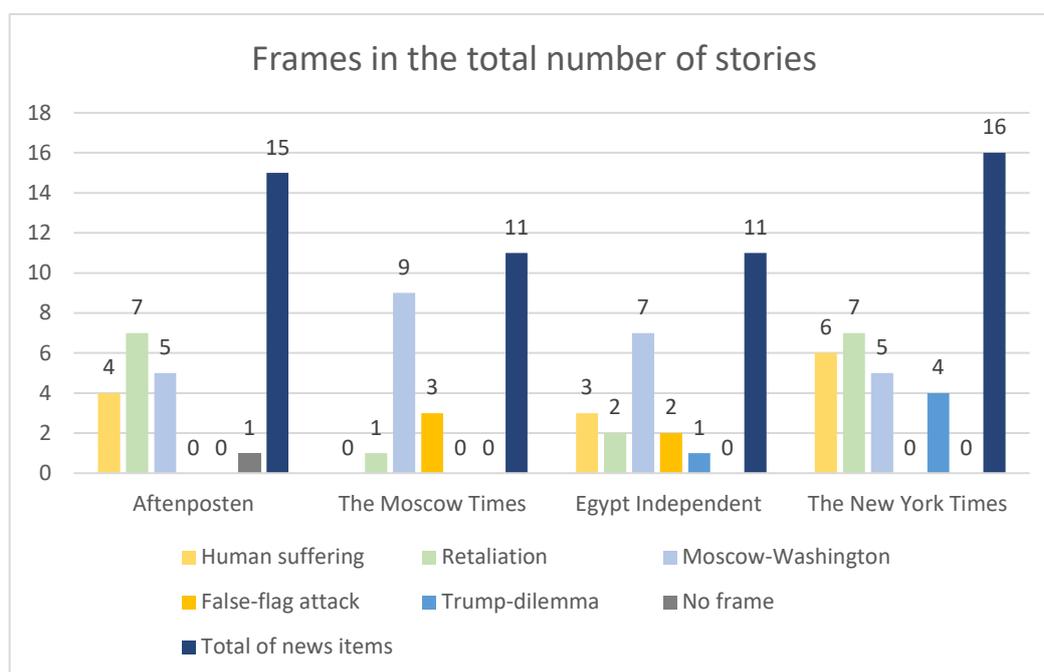


Figure 7: *Distribution of frames across the newspapers.*

The findings showed that NYT and Aftenposten description of the incident gave three clear notions: the severity of the crisis, the position of causality at the regime only, and stereotypical characterizations, including a dichotomy between perpetrator and victim.

Comparable to Zollmans (2017: 115) analysis of the Houla incident, civilian suffering was highlighted in Aftenposten and the NYT. The indignation and moral and ethical judgements were used in order to generate a sense of outrage among the public. News reports emphasized the villainy of the Syrian government and army, while simultaneously downplaying the activities of other demolishing military actions conducted by other parties in the Syrian war.

The NYT and Aftenposten framed the chemical attack mostly within the retaliation frame and the coverage were characterized by omit the injustices on the 'good' side, while emphasizing the wrongdoings of the 'bad' side. Not surprisingly, none of the articles in the NYT were framed as false-flag attack. This perspective was something none of the western newspapers considered as a possible course of events. Aftenposten and the NYT used French, British and American elite sources to cover the incident, which can serve as an explanation for the similar framing. All these actors strongly condemned the attack and discussed from the outset military means to punish the Syrian government. This framing was particularly marked by the international community's responsibility and 'need-to-act'. The media coverage of Douma in NYT and Aftenposten shows that instead of critically addressing the uncertainty surrounding the gas attack, enemy images of President Assad and allies are used to clarify a secure case for Western intervention in Syria. This corresponds to findings made by Øvrebø and Ottesten (2016).

The most immediate striking difference between the Russian and American newspapers was that several of the Russian reports initially were dismissive of the idea that any attack had occurred. From the very start, the Russian coverage was characterized by much deeper skepticism about the true nature of the incident than its Western counterpart, although the articles did not have an overweight of false-flag attack frame. Comparable differences were also found in the reporting style. In Aftenposten and the NYT, the Douma attack was presented in a way designed to shock, to make sure that the readers clearly understands the seriousness of the incident. The contents of the reports were equally striking, with victims depicted in disturbing details. It is perceived as a paradox that NYT and Aftenposten often framed the chemical attack as Human suffering, when the newspapers rarely used Syrian civilians as sources in the reporting. The analysis reveals that the prevalence of empathy framing was deficient in the media reporting, and those that perished in the attack were 'othered'; reduced to 'anonymous bodies' through the representation of their symptoms.

In comparison, the style of the Russian reporting adheres to clear facts. Absent are metaphorical headlines as well as emotional language. There weren't any detailed descriptions of symptoms, no tragic personal stories and no focus on civilian suffering. Instead, the Russian coverage provided details of the chemical attack, but no remarkable attempt was made to leave a lasting impression on the reader. This is in line with Brown's (2014) findings, suggesting that Russian journalists tend to refrain from using "affecting language", while the western media presents the conflict from a dramatic perspective, to ensure a high degree of emotional impact (p. 58).

EI had the most variation in frames compared to the other three newspapers in the analysis. The newspaper framed the incident within the human suffering frame in 3 out of 11 articles, the retaliation frame, the false-flag attack frame and the Trump-dilemma frame were present in 2 out of 11 articles each. However, the articles mainly framed the incident in the notion of a Moscow-Washington frame (in 6 out of 11 articles).

The differences between the online newspapers were found at different levels, and the newspapers used various framing and reasoning devices to represent the event from their national perspective. It would be natural for the media to nationalize news to some extent, but the findings reveal patterns suggesting content bias, meaning coverage that promote influence from one side in conflicts (Entman 2007: 166). Rebuilding of war areas were discussed in EI and MT, but lacked focus in western news coverage. It is important to recognize that these results can have important implications for public understanding and judgments about the Syrian conflict. Will the focus on the Syrian government as the villain change the willingness to use peaceful means and rebuild Syria? Will the frequent use of retaliation frame in western newspapers push the public opinion to one side? These questions do not fall within the scope of this master thesis, but their answers will provide vital information for policy makers.

The second research question (**RQ 2**) asked if there were any differences in attribution of responsibility for the chemical attack in the various newspapers. Entman's (2004) framing model suggests that the substantive frames usually perform two or four basic functions. In this assignment, this meant that the reasoning device – responsibility – could not always be exclusively defined for all frames (see table 4). Considerable differences were identified especially between the western newspapers compared to the Russian and Egyptian news outlets. In response to questions of responsibility, the Western governments were from the beginning strongly convinced that the Syrian government was behind the Douma attack.

This was also reflected in the Western newspapers as they consistently utilized elite sources blaming the Syrian government. While alternative theories flourished, including that the opposition movement tried to provoke Western intervention, the newspapers avoided reporting alternative scenarios. As a burden of proof, the articles often referred to the repetitive brutality of the Syrian government, in combination with shocking online videos.

Aftenposten blamed President Bashar al-Assad and army in 60 % of the articles, President Putin and Russia in 6,6 % of the articles and Bashar al-Assad's army and allies in 13,3 % of the articles. The attribution of responsibility towards the Syrian government, the Russian government or a combination of both were therefore present in 79,9 % of the articles. The remaining articles didn't assign blame (20 %). The NYT articles blamed President Bashar al-Assad and army in 43,75 % of the articles, and Bashar al-Assad's army and allies in 31,25 % of the articles. Attribution of responsibility towards the Syrian government, or the Syrian government together with their allies Russia and Iran, were present in 75 % of the articles. The remaining articles didn't assign any blame (25 %).

Hypothesis 2a postulated that the NYT and Aftenposten's news articles would have an overweight of articles blaming the chemical attack on Bashar al-Assad's army, in accordance with Western politicians. Both newspapers had a preponderance of articles that attributed responsibility to the Syrian government for the chemical attack, thus **hypothesis 2a** is confirmed.

Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation's accused the White Helmets of planting false information about the alleged use of chlorine and other toxic agents, The White Helmets were never designated as guilty by the MT (0 % of the articles). Rather, the newspaper decided to avoid defining the blame issue in 90,9 % of its articles and blamed the opposition groups of fabricating the attack in 9,1 % of the articles. EI avoided defining blame in 54,5 % of the articles, but still indicated that Bashar al-Assad, alone or with allies was responsible for the chemical attack in 36,4 % of the articles. The opposition groups were blamed in 9,1 % of the coverage and similar to MT, none of the articles blamed the White Helmets for staging the chemical attack. **Hypothesis 2b** stipulated that articles in MT and EI would have an overweight of articles blaming the White Helmets or opposition groups for fabricating the attack, thus **hypothesis 2b** was rejected.

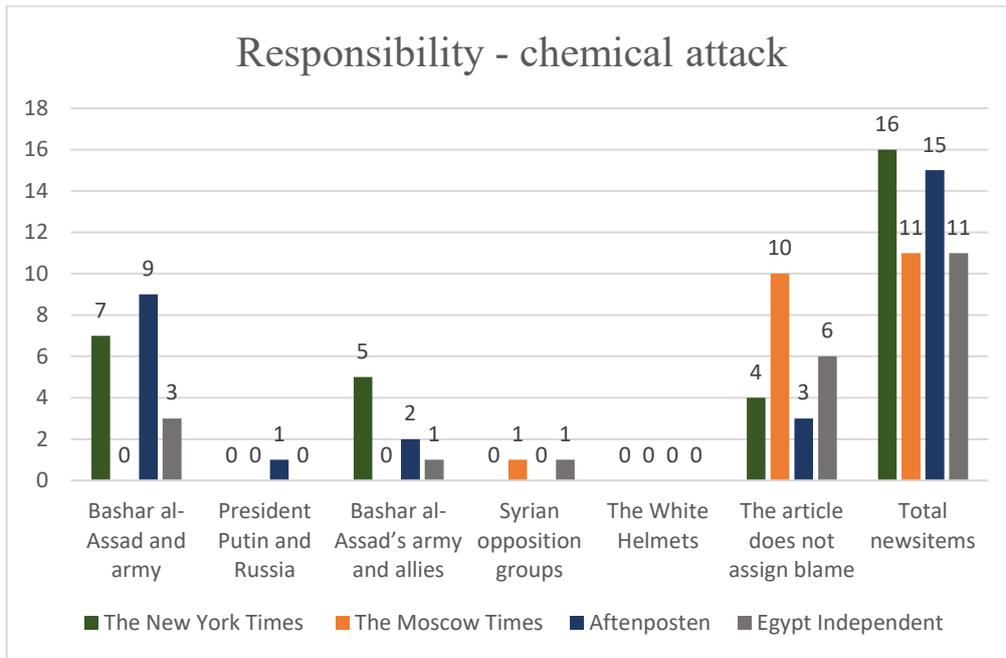


Figure 8: Distribution of responsibility across the newspapers were coded once per article.

Research question three (**RQ 3**) asked if there were any differences between the newspapers in the solutions presented in response to the chemical attack. As with the reasoning device responsibility, it was necessary to conduct a separate examination of the solutions put forward by the newspapers. The most striking difference were that the articles in MT never suggested a military solution to the incident. This was a recurring solution discussed in NYT (in 10 of the 15 articles), and in 7 of the 15 articles published by Aftenposten. It is worth noting that the coverage did not include a discussion on R2P as a possible solution, which can be explained by the massive criticism the doctrine received after the Libya conflict.

Hypothesis 3a assumed that NYT and Aftenposten had an overweight of military measures as solution to the chemical attack, compared to all the other newspapers under study. The findings are consistent with previous research, suggesting that US and Norwegian media largely presents narratives that support US interests and military retaliation as a solution to conflicts (Renolds and Barnett, 2003; Anker 2005; Monahan, 2010; Ottosen and Øvrebø, 2016; Ottosen & Rudsengen, 2018). Thus, **hypothesis 3a** is confirmed.

Since Russia is Syria's closest ally in the Middle East, and Egypt in recent years has proven to be more Assad-friendly than before, the analysis investigated whether this had an impact on the support towards the Syrian government. **Hypothesis 3c** predicted that articles

published in the MT and EI would have an overweight of abandoning military measures, supporting Syrian sovereignty. The MT had a preponderance of checking the evidence of the attack, emphasizing this as a solution in 5 of 11 articles. Diplomacy was discussed as a solution in 2 of 11 articles, while specific initiatives that expressed abandon military measures were explicitly emphasized in 4 of the 11 articles. In the EI articles abandon military measures were discussed 5 times, and the solution mostly emphasized. Thus, **hypothesis 3c** is partially confirmed.

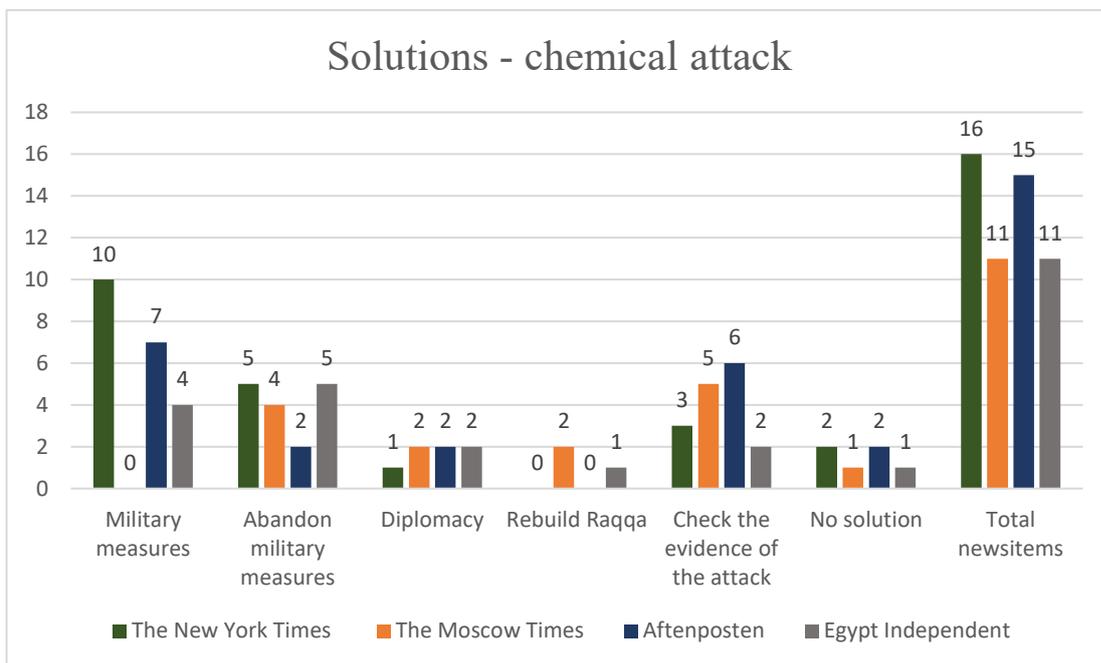


Figure 9: Distribution of solutions across newspapers. The numbers of the solutions variable that were coded separately (see. appendix A–D), are summarized and illustrated in the figure. In the New York Times there were 21 different solutions discussed in 16 news articles, In Aftenposten there were 19 solutions discussed in 15 news articles, in The Moscow Times there were 14 solutions discussed in 11 news articles and In Egypt Independent there were 15 solutions discussed in 11 news articles.

Research question four (**RQ 4**) asked which sources that received the greatest salience in the newspapers. The analysis showed that NYT and MT had the most considerable difference in source usage in their articles. The dominant sources in the NYT were US government/officials (49 times) followed by non-Syrian Human rights organizations (14 times) and the dominant sources in MT were Russian government/officials (24 times) and

other media (9 times). EI used most sources from the US government/officials (13 times), while Russian government/officials' sources were used 6 times. Aftenposten used most sources from the US government/officials (19 times). Western government sources were frequently used in all newspapers, except the MT. Additionally, the findings show that Western newspapers heavily used 'independent' sources as The White Helmets in their coverage, an organization founded by the UK and US governments, which in turn are defined by the DIA report (2012) as active contributors in the proxy war. Voices of local citizens were cited very seldom in all the newspapers and MT was the only newspaper that never cited Syrian citizen sources in the coverage.

Hypothesis 4a presumed that all of the newspapers would have a clear predominance of elite sources covering the chemical attack. The analysis showed that the table of sources seems to indicate a certain diversity of sources, however that diversity is confined to a limited umbrella of public officials. The MT used elite sources in 80 % of their coverage. 70% could be considered elite sources in EI 's coverage, 65% of the NYTs sources were categorized as elite sources and Aftenposten's used elite sources in 61% of the articles. The results are consistent with previous research, where findings show that media coverage often is dominated by elite sources in the form of politicians (Bennett 1990; Berinsky 2009; Cozma & Kozman, 2015; White, 2015; Mhamdi, 2017). Thus, **hypothesis 4a** is confirmed. This way of using sources in news reporting provides a limited range of information, opinions and views and may have resulted in the significant difference in the frames.

Research question five (**RQ 5**) asked to what extent the coverage of the chemical attack in Douma reflected the political stances by their respective government's statements. The research question was answered by comparing the online coverage of the news outlets with the statements from their respective government officials. The NYT strongly emphasized the words and actions of their national leaders, while giving the countries' allies more room than their counterpart. The press statement from the US department of state April 7, 2018 where Heather Nauert condemned the chemical attack in Douma stating: "*[T]he Assad regime and its backers must be held accountable and any further attacks prevented immediately*" (The US state department April 7, 2018), was clearly reflected throughout the coverage in the NYT. Both attribution of responsibility and suggesting solutions reflects US policy statements. In addition, the newspaper gave salience to elite sources who promoted retaliation as the sole response to the incident in 10 of the 15 articles, downplaying critical

voices that promoted a peaceful solution. For example, the Pope's statement was not covered in the NYT.

Nikki Haley's criticism of Russia providing "*unwavering support for the regime*" was given much room in coverage. The coverage repeatedly condemned the Syrian government, additionally giving Russia's role and responsibility much weight. Russia was portrayed in a negative light, as an actor who hinders peace by refusing to support a UNSC resolution that would investigate the responsibility of the incident. Although alternative perspectives were presented, these were generally rendered less prominent, framed from a negative point of view or with a skeptic context. Aftenposten did not promote any statements from Norwegian politician's particularity discussing the chemical attack, but presented the conflict through the words of Western officials. It is only after the Western attack that Norwegian politicians expressed themselves explicitly. The articles were largely marked by statements from the EU, France, the US, the UK, which expressed almost obliquely that the Syrian government, with or without allies, was to blame for the incident in Douma in Aftenposten's coverage. Little criticism was made towards a possible retaliation strike, and the coverage carries a degree of Western security policy and issues related to the protection of human rights.

Egypt Independent (EI) highlighted perspectives that supported the Syrian government and criticized Trump's initial approach to launch a strong international response against the Syrian government. Perspectives and information that support Assad were shared in the articles of the EI, in a way that gave them more credibility than the Western governments. EI only used civilian Syrians as sources, to the extent that the Syrian government was favorably mentioned and where the US was criticized, which may indicate that EI is reporting in line with Egypt's support for the Syrian government. Examining the news coverage, an alignment with Egyptian foreign policy is revealed, while also maintaining journalistic standards of presenting various perspectives and including all the relevant details.

The MT particularly highlighted that an escalation could end up in a bigger conflict between the US and Russia, if the incident was not resolved peacefully. The Western response was given a lot of space, but was presented from a Russian perspective, criticizing Western reactions. Considering the Russian Foreign Ministry statement on April 8, where they claimed that false information had been planted regarding the use of chemical weapons, my assumption was that the chemical attack would be framed as a false-flag attack in the

Russian coverage. This assumption turned out not to be entirely true, although Syrian and Russian sources were cited rejecting the charges.

The findings show that the MT is more restrained in accusing The White Helmets of fabricating a false chemical attack than the official Russian response to the Douma incident. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred to the chemical attack as the latest fake news and that "*these reports are again referenced to the notorious White Helmets*" (MID, April 8, 2018). MT refrained from including this perspective, rather choosing to avoid defining the blame issue. MT never suggested a military solution to the incident and complies with Russian foreign policy statements about resolving the situation diplomatically. While the statements and actions of Western leaders and Syrian opposition groups were followed and reported, these were always presented within the context of the Russian foreign ministry's or the Syrian government's perspective. Although all the newspapers under study exist and operate in different political contexts, the news coverage - to varying degrees - shows compliance with their respective countries' foreign policy stances regarding the chemical attack. Each news organization selects different aspects of reality and makes them more salient, to disclose a specific problem definition, responsibility, moral judgement and solution (Entman 2004: 6).

Research question six (**RQ 6**) asked if the attitudes presented in the newspapers after the western military strike were pro-strike, anti-strike or neutral. The results mainly reflected the viewpoints highlighted in the articles. That is, when Iranian, Russian and Syrian views were covered, the articles were clearly anti-strike and when citing Western sources, the terms were pro-strike. **Hypothesis 6a** proposed that the MT and EI would use more anti-strike terms in the immediate coverage of the western strikes compared to US and Norwegian news outlets. This is supported by the findings presented in Figure 10, which shows that MT and EI used more anti-strike terms than US and Norwegian newspapers and fewer pro-strike terms US and Norwegian newspapers. Hence **hypothesis 6a and 6b** is supported, indicating an association between newspapers and key terms. For example, EI used terms as 'peaceful solutions' and raised concerns over the military attack. The MT used terms as 'an aggressive act', 'violation of international law' and 'illegitimate strikes' to label the western strikes in Syria. The US newspaper tended to label the act as 'limited strikes to prevent atrocities and crimes against humanity', a 'US security threat' and 'to prevent persistent violations of international law'. The Norwegian newspaper labeled the act as 'restrained strikes to punish Assad' and a 'violation of the chemical weapons convention'.

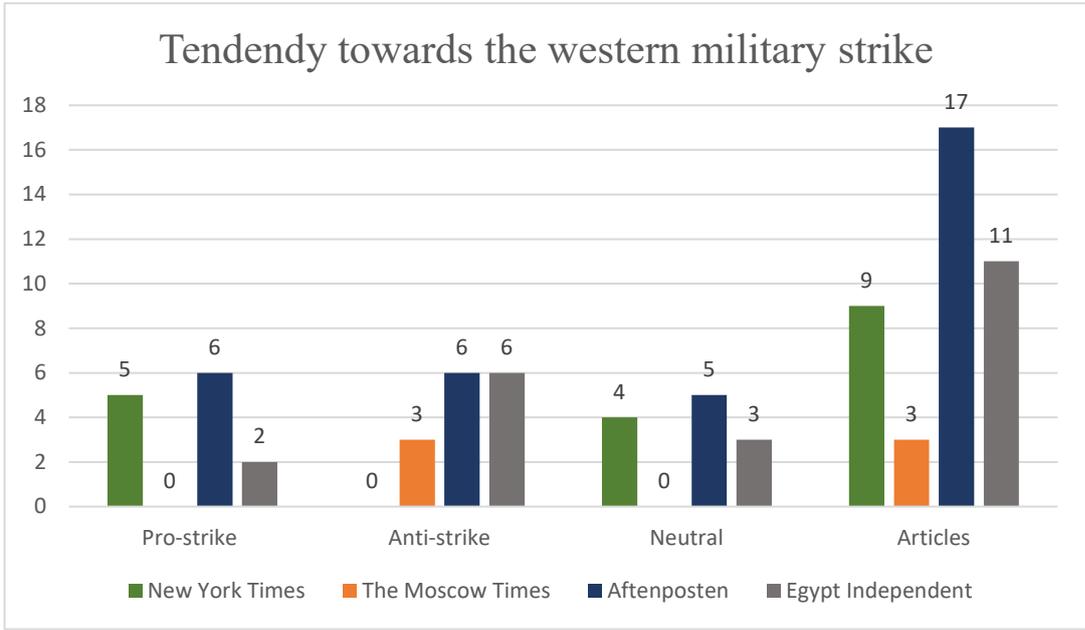


Figure 10: *Distribution of tendency towards the military strikes across the newspapers (see appendix F)*

Chapter six:

Suggestions for further research and Conclusion

6.1 Suggestions for further research

Framing is a dynamic communicative process that involves several different areas: frame-building, frame-setting and framing-effects. This master's thesis has only examined the occurrence of frames in the news, and consequently, there will be many areas that could be explored further in this context. Firstly, research may additionally include newspapers owned by the government, to investigate whether these newspapers support statements by the elite to a greater extent than privately owned newspapers. This could yield interesting results, where a comparison could elucidate on media-government ties. In addition, Syria's story has proved to be a particularly difficult issue to cover for journalists. Challenges will arise, considering the limited access to the ground and as visual information given to the reporters often originates from online activists and social media. Since the Syrian war has been one of history's most socially mediated conflicts, it creates a real risk for the same partial, misleading and motivated narrative in the mass media as in social media (Lynch et al., 2014: 6). Further research could examine the role of social media in this context, as an important news source that must be considered.

This thesis hasn't explored the measure of intended and unintended influence on the meaning and perception of specified target groups. Its nevertheless an importing starting point to discover the different frames used in the news coverage, to understand what effects these frames can produce. Literature reveals contradictory conclusions about the possible influence of news frames on audience attitudes and perceptions. Although some scholars state that framing does not have a clear effect on public perceptions, others argue that framing affects the public agenda's access to information, by attributing some themes more salient than others (d'Haenens, 2005: 425-426). Accordingly, a more experimental study will be able to investigate the effects of 'equivalence' framing on American, Norwegian, Egyptian and Russian recipients, where the impact of the various presentations on human interpretation and attitudes could be assessed (Knudsen, 2016: 9). The goal would be to investigate differences or similarities in attitudes that will correspond with, or deviate from

the frames, uncovered in the analysis. In an experiment with focus groups (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997), one can thoroughly investigate the hypothesis that people will speak differently about the same topic, reading different framed newspapers.

Although framing effects is out of the scope of this thesis, it was interesting to see the results of a 2018 Chicago Council survey of the American public on the situation in Syria. Regardless of how closely they were following the issue, six in ten Americans supported the western strikes (57%). But there were large differences by political affiliation. 43 % of the democrats supported the strikes, while 56% opposed. A preponderance of Republicans (82%) supported the strikes, while only 15% opposed (Smeltz, 2019). It would be interesting to look at party affiliation and attitudes towards the Syrian war, as well as to investigate if those who frequently followed the news of the military strikes across countries, were more likely to support it. A survey of Russian, Norwegian and Egyptian polls compared to articles in the respective countries would probably yield very different results. These results are particularly interesting for further research on the effect that media framing can have on meaning formation.

6.2 Conclusion

This thesis based on the assumption that social and political reality is constructed through the constant and mutually influential interaction between how we see and understand reality. The way a conflict is presented, creates a framework for its perception. As the course of research is never fully reflected in the textual form, reality cannot fit its absolute complexity into a single narrative. The central findings demonstrated by the research is that the media framing was manifested through specific language constructions and with varying degrees of salience towards the various aspects of the two cases studied.

Privately-owned quality newspapers in Norway (Aftenposten), the US (New York Times), Russia (Moscow Times) and Egypt (Egypt Independent) have been closely analyzed. By using a detailed comparison of the reporting, it's been highlighted several variations between the different newspaper's presentation of the chemical attack in Douma. These variations have proved most valid in three areas: the details and the reporting style; assignment of responsibility and assessment of solutions; and the representation of the roles in the conflict. The strong contrasts clearly show the existence of distinct narratives of this incident. The differences were particularly evident between MT and the Western media outlets – EI on the other hand had the most framing variations.

Firstly, the newspaper's various presentation of the chemical attack was expressed through five different key frames: retaliation, false flag attack, human suffering, Trump dilemma and Moscow-Washington. The retaliation frame was largely used to cover the event in Aftenposten and NYT, with three clear notions: the severity of the crisis, the position of causality at the regime only, and stereotypical characterizations, including a dichotomy between perpetrator and victim. On the other and, MT's framing was inclined towards a matter between US and Russia and towards a 'new cold war' narrative, where the ideological and military rivalry between East and West meant positioning one another as the primary threat to international security. Both MT and the NYT depict "the other side" as an enemy that is deceitful – an aggressor or a defender of the aggressor –that bears direct or indirect responsibility for the incidents in Syria.

MT was the only newspaper with a complete absence of human suffering frame. The coverage recognized the occurrence of a tragic event but did not elevate the Douma deaths over the 400,000 who have lost their lives in the conflict since 2011. In the Western media, the chemical attack was presented to shock, while MT refrains from using "affecting

language". One plausible explanation is that MT reflects the political stances by the Russian government, which still claims that the attack was staged. A Russian narrative of a false-flag attack principally means an absence of victims, due to an unproven chemical attack. Other explanations worthy of further research are ideological, strategic or journalistic practice. For further research it would be particularly interesting to investigate whether refraining from 'affecting' language applies only to their 'advantage'.

There were likewise substantial differences between the newspapers when it came to attribution of responsibility. There was absence in MT's coverage in reproducing the Russian foreign political narrative that the White Helmets staged the chemical attack. Instead, the newspaper avoided defining the blame issue, indicating that MT is not just a channel for Russian foreign policy statements. EI operated somewhere in the middle, between defining the Syrian government as guilty or avoiding defining accountability. Since both MT and EI both are English versions, avoiding defining guilt can be a strategy to prevent being perceived as biased for a foreign audience. Analysis of native-language versions can thus potentially give alternative perspectives on the incident and produce other frames. In contrast, Western governments' assurance that the Syrian government was at fault, suggesting a strong military response, was largely reflected in NYT's and Aftenposten's coverage.

Even though media is referred to as the 'Fourth estate', the results have shown that media tends to report conflict in accordance with national policy elites. A limitation to the reliance on this public umbrella of sources, is that the perceivers becomes ill-informed and evolves progressively idiosyncratic perceptions of the issue. Other sources may highlight for example rebuilding war areas, which could have given a different framing outcome. In this context, it is worthwhile to consider that use of sources, that is exclusively in the same geopolitical spectrum, naturally narrows the scope for the matter to be illuminated from all sides. Even though all the newspapers exist and operates in different political contexts, the news coverage - to varying degrees - shows compliance with their respective countries' foreign policy stances regarding the chemical attack.

In the case of the western military strikes, the discursive struggle occurs at all levels and it exhibited strikingly different national interests, also reflected in the news articles. The NYT and Aftenposten referred to the strikes as 'limited' to uphold security and to prevent human rights violations in Syria. By calling it 'limited' strikes, the actions are downplayed, where the consequence may be that it is 'easier' to support war. If 'humanitarian intervention'

dominates and is constantly presented in the news media, it can become the accepted 'truth' that produces politics or contributes to maintain this dominant position. This may in turn lead to depoliticization of war because military intervention is supported by 'most', with only a few opposing or questioning it. MT and EI on the other hand, was staunchly opposed, referring to the attack as a breach of the UN pact and an aggressive act that only means that Syria has less chance of stability and peace.

After analyzing these important differences in the way Douma events were reported, the task remains to explain the divergence and thus draw broader conclusions. Some may suggest that a plausible explanation reflects less media freedom in Russia. Given the usual knowledge of Russia's weaknesses in this area, a credible argument can be made that the Russian media narrative deviates more from the West, because the Kremlin has decided to produce a false impression that aligns with its foreign policy interests. Albeit this argument will provide an adequately explanation, it does not withstand further investigation. There is a lot of legitimate criticism of Russian media, but most of it is directed at television. Russian newspapers also have some level of political control, but the Kremlin is careful that news from independent media is not broadcasted on the major federal television channels, which are controlled by the Russian state (Lipman, 2013: 136).

It turns out that the Russian newspaper's account of the chemical attacks is no more propagandistic than the Western newspapers. For example, the Russian press is probably right to call attention to the details of the April 7 attack, rather than blindly assume that the Syrian government is responsible. Russian and Egyptian commentators are surely right to emphasize the claims of accountability, because rebels and radical Islamists have used chemical weapons in the past. Failure to consider this possibility is a serious shortcoming of Western reporting. The Western media is willing to assume that a dictator from the Middle East will resort to such savage barbarism, without a single thought of the consequences. On the contrary, the Russian newspaper assumes a greater degree of rationality, clearly highlighting the continuing puzzle of why the Syrian government would risks a western military reaction, when Assad had regained power in many previously rebel-controlled areas.

These findings are a useful reminder that we must not always consider Western reporting as more objective and fact-based, than coverage provided by other media. At least when it comes to print. Rather than one being superior to the other, each site has its own peculiar analytical framing techniques used in the reporting of international events. These provide the central framework on which journalists construct their stories. In this way,

reports from different media end up with a central narrative, and journalists can choose facts that fit the established story perfectly, while other things are left out. These distinct frames are probably due to their existence and implies deep-rooted differences in the way international politics are perceived and have their origins in the contrasting norms and values of the countries' political cultures.

Above all, it is this fundamental divergence that provides the best explanation for the differences in reporting of the Douma events. For Western media, the Douma case was framed as the brutal dictator who used barbarous means to massacre his own people, where retaliation was the only solution. Western states have the role of a global moral protector who upholds universal human rights and ensures that the highlighted cruelty has consequences. Even before the evidence is presented, it is considered almost irrational to suggest anything other than that the Syrian government was responsible for the incident in Douma. Contrary to the West's value-based view of international conditions, Russian coverage shows a strong rhetorical commitment to international principles. It's just that these are not the liberal principles of justice and human rights, but the conservative principles of sovereignty, stability and non-interference. These are the conflicting values that appear to be the most prominent cause of the media's conflicting coverage of these two incidents.

Thus, the contradictions that are born in the media framing are not isolated from the environment in global communication but are responsive and dialogic. Like social constructions, it is shown that, frames may carry latent power, to the extent that it provides unequal salience to the provided information. Either by downplaying aspects – as human suffering – or to reinforce the ‘need to act’ through language that is “noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged”, to produce a ‘cultural resonance’, or through the repetition of words and themes which produces ‘magnitude’ (Entman, 2004: 6).

This thesis illustrates that the Syrian conflict is highly scripted along diametrically opposed opposites of separated norms and values, assigned to the various actors engaged in the conflict, which consequently affects the framing when reporting the conflict. Although the intention may be to promote democracy and peace, the actual outcome tends to be conflict, state dissolution and extremism. This thesis support previous research, where Russia is presented as the one state willing to defend the principle of national sovereignty and as an "independent arbitrator", seeking to defend a fragile international order from US reckless adventurism (Brown 2014a: 60). This leads to a rather bleak overall conclusion about the prospect of comprehensive cooperation and a solution for Syria. The entrenched

divergence in international views – with the veto powers of Russia and the US on contrary sides – will thus have major consequences for a comprehensive solution to the conflict in Syria. The lack of mutual understanding and the tendency for demonization of the other party, will make cooperation between Russia and the West extremely difficult, not only in Syria, but regarding a wide range of international issues.

The final point to comment on is what I have personally learned from researching about this complex conflict, where antagonism and differentiation are reinforced through language constructions and narratives. Firstly, I have become vividly enlightened that journalists who covers distant crises have considerable power to shape the way a conflict is presented in their home country. Although journalists portraying a distant conflict may not always lead to unambiguous or linear impact, it is important to be aware that framing of conflicts may prove to be grossly simplified or just plain wrong. The way stories are told is very important in informing people far from the conflict zones. Selecting and framing a conflict also means leaving some things out – rarely giving the stories that are told enough context. Due to the absence of mandate and evidence to identify the culprits behind the chemical attack, this is ultimately about the battle of narratives. It is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a clear distinction between ‘the good’ and ‘the evil’ in the conflict when human rights violations are committed by most of the parties involved. In order not to be exposed to flawed dichotomies, it is of the utmost importance to move outward from this perception. Journalist Scott Libin's (2005) remarks describes this well with the words: “I don't believe there are only two sides to every story [...] Sometimes the best alternative is the third or fourth or fourteenth — if we bother to find it”.

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Chronological listing of Editorials

The New York Times 7–15 April 2018 – 24 editorials

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Coding scheme New York Times – Online articles from April 7–13, 2018

Date	Headline	Frame (s)	Solution (s)	Responsibility	Sources													Total sources
					US Gov/officials	Syrian Gov/officials	Russian Gov/officials	Western officials	Iranian Gov/officials	Int. community	Non-Syrian Human	Syrian Human rights	Syrian opposition groups	Syrian citizen source	Experts	Media	Other	
08.04.2018	Dozens Suffocate in Syria as Government Is Accused of Chemical Attack	Human suffering	Check the evidence	Bashar al-Assad and allies	2		1	1	1			3					Rescue workers/a	
		Retaliation	Military measures															
08.04.2018	Trump Vows 'Big Price' for Syria Attack, Raising Prospect of Missile Strike	Retaliation	Military measures	Bashar al-Assad and army	5	1	1	1									A senior Navy officer	
08.04.2018	Burning Eyes, Foaming Mouths: Years of Suspected Chemical Attacks in Syria	Human suffering	No solution	Bashar al-Assad and army	2					1	2		1		1	2		
08.04.2018	As Trump Seeks Way Out of Syria, New Attack Pulls Him Back In	Trump-dilemma	Military measures	Bashar al-Assad and allies	5		1								3		Kurdish political party leader in Syria	
09.04.2018	After Chemical Weapons Attack in Syria, Trump Weighs Retaliation	Retaliation		Bashar al-Assad and allies	5		1	1		1								
		Trump-dilemma	Military measures															
09.04.2018	Trump Reacts to Cohen Raid, Syria and More: An Annotated Transcript	Retaliation	Military measures	Not assigning blame	1													
10.04.2018	133,000 Flee Besieged Syrian Towns in Eastern Ghouta, U.N. Says	Human suffering	Military measures	Bashar al-Assad and army	1			1	1						1		Groups	
		Moscow-Washington	Check the evidence															
10.04.2018	America's Three Bad Options in Syria	Trump-dilemma	Abandon military measures	Not assigning blame	1										4			
10.04.2018	Trump Weighs More Robust Military Strike Against Syria	Retaliation	Military measures	Bashar al-Assad and army	7			1									Emir Hamad Al-Thani (Qatar)	
		Human suffering	Diplomatic solution															

11.04.2018	Trump Promises Strike on Syria and Warns Russia Against Backing Assad	Retaliation	Military measures		3	1	3		1	1	1			1	1			
11.04.2018	Suspected Chemical Attack in Syria: What We Know and Don't Know	Moscow-Washington	Abandon military measures	Bashar al-Assad and allies														
11.04.2018	In a Syrian Town, People Started Shouting: 'Chemicals! Chemicals!'	Trump-dilemma	Abandon military measures	Not assigning blame	1					1	1			1			Anonym rescue worker	
11.04.2018	Trump Says Missiles 'Will Be Coming' at Syria. Beyond That Lies Uncertainty.	Human suffering	No solution		1						2			2				
11.04.2018	Mattis Tries to Put Brakes on Possible Syria Strike, to 'Keep This From Escalating'	Moscow-Washington	Abandon military measures	Not assigning blame	5			2						2	1			
12.04.2018	How Syria's Death Toll Is Lost in the Fog of War	Retaliation	Abandon military measures/check the evidence	Bashar al-Assad and army	6			2							1			
12.04.2018	U.S. Says Syria Has Used Chemical Weapons at Least 50 Times During War	Human suffering	Military measures	Bashar al-Assad and army	1					1	5							
13.04.2018		Moscow-Washington	Military measures	Bashar al-Assad and army	3	1	1	2		1								
					49	3	8	11	3	6	14	0	1	3	12	6	7	123

Results: The New York Times - The Douma incident April 7 to April 13, 2018					
Frame	Quantity	Solution	Quantity	Responsibility	Quantity
Human suffering	6	Military measures	10	Bashar al-Assad and army	7 / 43,75 %
Retaliation	7	Abandon military measures	5	President Putin and Russia	0
Moscow-Washington	5	Diplomacy	1	Bashar al-Assad's army and allies	5 / 31,25 %
False-flag attack	0	Rebuild Raqqa	0	The White Helmets	0
Trump-dilemma	4	Check the evidence of the attack	3	Syrian opposition groups	0
No frame	0	No solution	2	The article does not assign blame	4 / 25%
Total frames	22	Total solutions discussed	21	Responsibility discussed	16
Total news items	16	Total news items	16	Total news items	16

Appendix B: Coding scheme Moscow Times – Online articles from April 7–13, 2018

Date	Headline	Frame (s)	Solution (s)	Responsibility	Sources													Total sources	
					US Gov/officials	Syrian Gov/officials	Russian Gov/officials	Western officials	Iranian Gov/officials	Int. community	Non-Syrian Human rights org.	Syrian Human rights org.	Syrian opposition groups	Syrian citizen sources	Experts	Media	Other		
09.04.2018	News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend	Moscow-Washington	Check the evidence	Syrian opposition groups	2		2												
10.04.2018	Russia Warns U.S. of 'Grave Consequences' If Syria Is Attacked	Moscow-Washington	Abandon military measures	Not assigning blame	1			1	1		1								
		False-flag attack	Check the evidence																
10.04.2018	To Avert U.S. Retaliation, Russia Proposes Inspection of Syria Attack Site	False-flag attack	Check the evidence	Not assigning blame	1	1		3		1						1	1		
11.04.2018	U.S., Russia Clash at U.N. Over Chemical Weapons Attacks in Syria	Moscow-Washington	Check the evidence	Not assigning blame	1	1		2	1	1	1							2	
11.04.2018	Any U.S. Missiles Fired at Syria Will Be Shot Down, Russian Ambassador Warns	Moscow-Washington	Diplomacy	Not assigning blame				3										1	
11.04.2018	Russian Media Whips Up U.S. War Scare With Bomb Shelter Food Tips	Moscow-Washington	No solution	Not assigning blame				1										1	
11.04.2018	Missiles Are 'Coming to Syria,' Trump Warns Russia on Twitter	Moscow-Washington	Check the evidence/abandon military measures	Not assigning blame	1	1		3		1		1						1	
			Diplomacy																
11.04.2018	Russian Naval Exercises Scheduled Off Syrian Coast Amid Expected U.S. Airstrike	Moscow-Washington	Rebuild Raqqa	Not assigning blame	1	1		3										1	
12.04.2018	Russian Military Announces Syrian Government Victory in the Battle for Eastern Ghouta	False-flag attack	Rebuild Raqqa	Not assigning blame				3										1	
12.04.2018	Russia Seeks Advanced Warning of U.S. Airstrikes in Syria, Media Reports	Moscow-Washington	Abandon military measures	Not assigning blame	1			2										1	
13.04.2018	Russian Ambassador Warns of 'Danger of War' with U.S. Over Syria	Moscow-Washington	Abandon military measures	Not assigning blame				1											
					8	4	24	2	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	9	0	54

Results: The Moscow Times - The Douma incident April 7 to April 13, 2018					
Frame	Quantity	Solution	Quantity	Responsibility	Quantity
Human suffering	0	Military measures	0	Bashar al-Assad and army	0
Retaliation	1	Abandon military measures	4	President Putin and Russia	0
Moscow-Washington	9	Diplomacy	2	Bashar al-Assad's army and allies	0
False-flag attack	3	Rebuild Raqqa	2	Syrian opposition groups	1 /9,1 %
Trump-dilemma	0	Check the evidence of the attack	5	The White Helmets	0
No frame	0	No solution	1	The article does not assign blame	10 / 90,9 %
Total frames	13	Total solutions discussed	14	Responsibility discussed	11
Total news items	11	Total news items	11	Total news items	11

Appendix C: Coding scheme Aftenposten – Online articles from April 7–13, 2018

Date	Headline	Frame (s)	Soutlion (s)	Responsibility	Sources												Total sources		
					US Gov/officials	Syrian Gov/officials	Russian Gov/officials	Western officials	Iranian Gov/officials	Int. community	Non-Syrian Human rights org.	Syrian Human rights org.	oppositi on groups	Syrian citizen sources	Exper ts	Medi a		Other	
08.04.2018	USA fordømmer påstått kjemisk angrep i Syria	Human Suffering	No solution	Bashar al-Assad and army	1						1								
08.04.2018	Syriske opprørere i Øst-Ghouta har inngått evakueringsavtale med Russland	Human Suffering	Diplomacy	Bashar al-Assad and allies	1	1		1			2						1	3	Anonymous sources
		Retaliation	Military measures																
09.04.2018	USA nekter å stå bak luftangrep mot militærbase i Syria	Retaliation	Diplomatic	Bashar al-Assad and army	1			1			2						1	2	
09.04.2018	Barn dreptes i gassangrep. Dette er årsakene til at det ikke får noen konsekvenser for regimet.	Human Suffering	Military measures	Bashar al-Assad and army	2						1	1					1	1	1
		Retaliation																	
10.04.2018	Ordkrigen om Syria fortsatte i FNs sikkerhetsråd	Moscow-Washington	Check the evidence	Bashar al-Assad and army	2			1			1								Diplomatic sources
		Retaliation																	
10.04.2018	OPCW drar til Syria for å granske angivelig kjemiske angrep	No frame	Check the evidence	Bashar al-Assad and army	1	1			1										Local sources
10.04.2018	USA og Russland stanset hverandre i Syria-resolusjoner	Moscow-Washington	Check the evidence	Bashar al-Assad and army	1			1										1	
11.04.2018	WHO: 500 personer har symptomer på kjemisk angrep i Douma	Human Suffering	No Soutlion	Bashar al-Assad and army	1	1						1							Local sources
11.04.2018	Trump truer Russland: - Gjør dere klare	Moscow-Washington	Military measures	Not assigning blame	1	1		1			1	1						1	

11.04.2018	Mattis: Pentagon klar til å tilby militære alternativer i Syria	Retaliation	Check the evidence	Bashar al-Assad and army	1														
11.04.2018	Britisk avis: Britiske ubåter gjør seg klare til mulig angrep i Syria	Retaliation	Military measures	President Putin and Russia	2			1										1	
11.04.2018	FNs generalsekretær advarer mot å la Syria-situasjonen komme ut av kontroll	Retaliation	Abandon military measures/military measures	Not assigning blame	3	1	1	2		1	2							2	
12.04.2018	De vil tilbake til Syria og slåss mot IS	Human suffering	Abandon military measures	Bashar al-Assad and allies	1			1										2	
12.04.2018	Vil Syria-krisen ende i storkrig?	Retaliation	Military measures	Bashar al-Assad and army			1											2	
13.04.2018	Dette er noen av årsakene til at borgerkrigen er inne i sin hittil mest kritiske fase	Moscow-Washington	Check the evidence	Not assigning blame	1		1	1										2	
					19	5	7	7	0	9	5	0	0	3	7	11	4	77	

Results: Aftenposten - The Douma incident April 7 to April 13, 2018					
Frame	Quantity	Solution	Quantity	Responsibility	Quantity
Human suffering	4	Military measures	7	Bashar al-Assad and army	9 / 60 %
Retaliation	8	Abandon military measures	2	President Putin and Russia	1 / 6,6 %
Moscow-Washington	4	Diplomacy	2	Bashar al-Assad's army and allies	2 / 13,3 %
False-flag attack	0	Rebuild Raqqa	0	The White Helmets	0
Trump-dilemma	0	Check the evidence of the attack	6	Syrian opposition groups	0
No frame	1	No solution	2	The article does not assign blame	3/ 20 %
Total frames	17	Total solutions discussed	19	Responsibility discussed	15
Total news items	15	Total news items	15	Total news items	15

Appendix D: Coding scheme Egypt Independent– Online articles from April 7–13, 2018

Date	Headline	Frame (s)	Solution (s)	Responsibility	Sources													Total sources
					US Gov/officials	Syrian Gov/officials	Russian Gov/officials	Western officials	Iranian Gov/officials	Int. community	Non-Syrian Human rights org.	Syrian Human rights org.	Syrian opposition groups	Syrian citizen sources	Experts	Media	Other	
08.04.2018	Syrian rescuers, medics say gas attack near capital kills 40	Human suffering False-flag attack	No solution	Syrian opposition groups		1	1					2	1	1			1	
09.04.2018	Pope: 'Nothing justifies' chemical weapons in Syria	Human suffering	Diplomacy	Not assigning blame														Pope Francis
09.04.2018	EU calls for international response after suspected chemical attack in Syria	Human suffering False-flag attack	Diplomacy Abandon military measures	Bashar al-Assad's army Bashar al-Assad's army and allies	1	1	1	1	1	2	2							Pope Francis
09.04.2018	Trump warns Assad: 'Big price to pay' for fatal Syria attack	Moscow-Washington Retaliation	Military measures	Bashar al-Assad's army and allies	4	1				1		1		1				1
10.04.2018	Trump warns Russia may pay for alleged Syria gas attack	Moscow-Washington	Military measures/check the evidence	Bashar al-Assad's army	2	1	1	2		1	1							1
11.04.2018	Trump says missiles 'will be coming' to Syria	Moscow-Washington	Military measures /abandon military measures	Not assigning blame	1	1	1											
11.04.2018	Security Council deadlocks again on Syria chemical attacks	Moscow-Washington	Check the evidenece	Not assigning blame	1		1	1		1								
12.04.2018	UN chief warns of Syria spiraling out of control	Moscow-Washington Trump-dilemma	Abandon military measures	Not assigning blame						1								
12.04.2018	Trump on Syria attack: 'very soon or not so soon at all!'	Moscow-Washington	Abandon military measures	Not assigning blame	1					1								
13.04.2018	May mulls Syria action despite cautious mood in UK	Retaliation	Military measures/abandon military measures	Bashar al-Assad's army				5										1
13.04.2018	Inspectors head to site of suspected gas attack in Syria	Moscow-Washington	Rebuild Raqqa	Not assigning blame	2	2	1	2									4	
					13	7	6	11	2	6	6	1	2	4		4	2	64

Results: Egypt Independent -The Douma incident April 7 to April 13, 2018					
Frame	Quantity	Solution	Quantity	Responsibility	Quantity
Human suffering	3	Military measures	4	Bashar al-Assad and army	3 / 27,3 %
Retaliation	2	Abandon military measures	5	President Putin and Russia	0
Moscow-Washington	7	Diplomacy	2	Bashar al-Assad's army and allies	1 / 9,1 %
False-flag attack	2	Rebuild Raqqa	1	The White Helmets	0
Trump-dilemma	1	Check the evidence of the attack	2	Syrian opposition groups	1 / 9,1 %
No frame	0	No solution	1	The article does not assign blame	6 / 54,5 %
Total frames	15	Total solutions discussed	15	Responsibility discussed	11
Total news items	11	Total news items	11	Total news items	11

Appendix E – coding sheet sources – from April 7–April 13, 2018

<i>Total sources</i>	<i>US Gov/officials</i>	<i>Syrian Gov/officials</i>	<i>Russian Gov/officials</i>	<i>Western Gov/officials</i>	<i>Iranian Gov/officials</i>	<i>Int. community</i>	<i>Non-Syrian Human rights org.</i>	<i>Syrian Human rights org.</i>	<i>Syrian opposition groups</i>	<i>Syrian citizen sources</i>	<i>Experts</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total number of sources</i>	<i>Nuber of articles</i>
Aftenposten	19	5	7	7	0	9	5	0	0	3	7	11	4	77	15
The Moscow Times	8	4	24	2	3	2	1	0	0	0	1	9	0	54	11
Egypt Independent	13	7	6	11	2	6	6	1	2	4	0	4	2	64	11
The New York Times	49	3	8	11	3	6	14	0	1	3	12	6	7	123	15
Total	89	19	45	31	8	23	26	1	3	10	20	30	13	318	52
<i>Distribution of sources - elite sources merged</i>	<i>Elite sources</i>	<i>Non-Syrian Human rights org.</i>	<i>Syrian Human rights org.</i>	<i>Syrian opposition groups</i>	<i>Syrian citizen sources</i>	<i>Experts</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total number of sources</i>	<i>Percent %</i>					
Aftenposten	47	5	0	0	3	7	11	4	77	61					
The Moscow Times	43	1	0	0	0	1	9	0	54	80					
Egypt Independent	45	6	1	2	4	0	4	2	64	70					
The New York Times	80	14	0	1	3	12	6	7	123	65					
Total	215	26	1	3	10	20	30	13	318						

Appendix F – coding scheme– Online articles from April 13–April 15, 2018

Tendency towards the strike

	Pro-strike	Anti-strike	Neutral	Articles
New York Times	6	1	4	10
The Moscow Times	0	3	0	3
Aftenposten	7	6	7	20
Egypt Independent	2	7	4	13

Tendency towards the military strikes				
	Pro-strike	Anti-strike	Neutral	Articles
New York Times	5	0	4	9
The Moscow Times	0	3	0	3
Aftenposten	6	6	5	17
Egypt Independent	2	6	3	11
				40

New York Times				
Date	Headline	Tendency	Syria has violated international law mentioned	US, France and UK has violated international law mentioned
13.04.2018	President Trump Talked Tough. But His Strike on Syria Was Restrained.	Pro-strike	No	No
13.04.2018	U.S., Britain and France Strike Syria Over Suspected Chemical Weapons Attack	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	Statements by Theresa May and Emmanuel Macron on the Syria Strike	Pro-strike	Yes	No
13.04.2018	President Trump on Syria Strikes: Full Transcript and Video	Pro-strike	Yes	No

14.04.2018	7 Takeaways From the Airstrikes on Syria	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	U.N. Security Council Rejects Russian Resolution Condemning Syrian Strikes	Neutral	Yes	Yes
14.04.2018	Trump to Impose New Sanctions on Russia Over Support for Syria	Neutral	No	No
15.04.2018	After U.S. Strikes, Syria Returns to War as Usual	Neutral	Yes	No
15.04.2018	Trump, Twitter Fingers Flying, Exclaims. Pence, Note Cards in Hand, Explains.	Neutral	No	No
Moscow Times				
Date	Headline	Tendency	Syria has violated international law mentioned	US, France and UK has violated international law mentioned
14.04.2018	Russia Slams Western Attack on Syria as Undermining Peace	Anti-strike	No	Yes
14.04.2018	Kremlin Denies Allegations That Russia Is Blocking Inspectors' Access to Douma	Anti-strike	No	Yes
15.04.2018	Russia Fails in UN Bid to Condemn Western Strikes on Syria	Anti-strike	No	Yes
Aftenposten				
Date	Headline	Tendency	Syria has violated international law mentioned	US, France and UK has violated international law mentioned
14.04.2018	United States, France and the United Kingdom with joint attacks in Syria	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	May confirms British participation in Syria attack	Neutral	No	No
14.04.2018	Stoltenberg supports the Syria attack	Pro-strike	Yes	
14.04.2018	Syria: Western attack should prevent chemical examination attacks	Anti-strike		Yes
14.04.2018	Danmark støtter Syria-angrep	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	Iran condemns US-led attack on Syria	Anti-strike		Yes
14.04.2018	Hundreds of Syrians hailed Assad in Damascus	Anti-strike	No	No
14.04.2018	The night's Syria attack is summarized in four points	Neutral	Yes	Yes

14.04.2018	Søreide: Norway understands the Syria attack	Pro-strike	Yes	
14.04.2018	Russia did not respond to the US attack on Syria	Anti-strike		Yes
14.04.2018	This is how Trump, Macron and May carried out the night's attacks Syria	Neutral	No	No
14.04.2018	One attack - at least three versions of what happened	Pro-strike	No	No
14.04.2018	Four questions and answers about the Syria attack: This means the experts will happen now	Neutral	No	No
15.04.2018	Stoltenberg eases the veil on hectic Syria diplomacy	Pro-strike	Yes	No
15.04.2018	The poison attack that awakened the world: - This is creeping and immoral weapons	Anti-strike	Yes	Yes
15.04.2018	Donald Trump defends his "mission accomplished" -statement	Neutral	No	No
Egypt Independent				
Date	Headline	Tendency	Syria has violated international law mentioned	US, France and UK has violated international law mentioned
14.04.2018	Breaking: US, Britain, France launch air strikes in Syria	Neutral	No	Yes
14.04.2018	'Bombs won't save lives' in Syria, opposition leader Corbyn tells UK PM May	Anti-strike	No	Yes
14.04.2018	Syrians gather in capital in defiance after airstrikes	Anti-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	Syria strikes an 'important signal' to Iran and Hezbollah: Israeli minister	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	Egypt raises concerns over military attack in Syria	Anti-strike	No	Yes
14.04.2018	Turkey's Erdogan welcomes Western attack on Syria, says operation a message to Assad	Pro-strike	No	No
15.04.2018	Chaos, consultation: Inside Trump's decision to strike Syria	Neutral	No	No
15.04.2018	France urges Russia to join peace push after Syria strike	Neutral	No	No
15.04.2018	US says air strikes cripple Syria chemical weapons program	Anti-strike	No	Yes
14.04.2018	Syria's Assad tells Russian lawmakers Western strikes were act of aggression: agencies	Anti-strike	No	No
15.04.2018	Egypt supports national state in Syria, rejects presence of militias: Presidency	Anti-strike	No	No

New York Times				
Date	Headline	Tendency	Syria has violated international law mentioned	US, France and UK have violated international law mentioned
13.04.2018	President Trump Talked Tough. But His Strike on Syria Was Restrained.	Pro-strike	No	No
13.04.2018	U.S., Britain and France Strike Syria Over Suspected Chemical Weapons Attack	Pro-strike	Yes	No
13.04.2018	Statements by Theresa May and Emmanuel Macron on the Syria Strike	Pro-strike	Yes	No
13.04.2018	President Trump on Syria Strikes: Full Transcript and Video	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	7 Takeaways From the Airstrikes on Syria	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	U.N. Security Council Rejects Russian Resolution Condemning Syrian Strikes	Neutral	Yes	Yes
14.04.2018	Trump to Impose New Sanctions on Russia Over Support for Syria	Neutral	No	No
15.04.2018	After U.S. Strikes, Syria Returns to War as Usual	Neutral	Yes	No
15.04.2018	Trump, Twitter Fingers Flying, Exclaims. Pence, Note Cards in Hand, Explains.	Neutral	No	No
Moscow Times				
Date	Headline	Tendency	Syria has violated international law mentioned	US, France and UK have violated international law mentioned
14.04.2018	Russia Slams Western Attack on Syria as Undermining Peace	Anti-strike	No	Yes
14.04.2018	Kremlin Denies Allegations That Russia Is Blocking Inspectors' Access to Douma	Anti-strike	No	Yes
15.04.2018	Russia Fails in UN Bid to Condemn Western Strikes on Syria	Anti-strike	No	Yes

Aftenposten				
Date	Headline	Tendency	Syria has violated international law mentioned	US, France and UK have violated international law mentioned
14.04.2018	USA, Frankrike og Storbritannia med felles angrep i Syria	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	May bekrefter britisk deltakelse i Syria-angrep	Neutral	No	No
14.04.2018	Stoltenberg støtter Syria-angrepet	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	Syria: Vestlig angrep skal hindre granskning av kjemisk angrep	Anti-strike	No	Yes
14.04.2018	Danmark støtter Syria-angrep	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	Russland: Ingen sivile syrere ble rammet av vestlig angrep	Anti-strike	No	Yes
14.04.2018	Hundrevis av syrere hyllet Assad i Damaskus	Anti-strike	No	No
14.04.2018	Nattens Syria-angrep oppsummert i fire punkter	Neutral	Yes	Yes
14.04.2018	Søreide: - Norge forstår Syria-angrepet	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	Russland svarte ikke på det amerikanske angrepet på Syria	Anti-strike	No	Yes
14.04.2018	Iran fordømmer amerikanskledet angrep mot Syria	Anti-strike	Yes	Yes
14.04.2018	Slik gjennomførte Trump, Macron og May nattens angrep i Syria	Neutral	No	No
14.04.2018	Ett angrep - minst tre versjoner av hva som skjedde	Pro-strike	No	No
14.04.2018	Fire spørsmål og svar om Syria-angrepet: Dette mener ekspertene vil skje nå	Neutral	No	No
15.04.2018	Stoltenberg letter på sløret om hektisk Syria-diplomati	Pro-strike	Yes	No
15.04.2018	Hver dag dør 40 sivile i Syria-krigen. Men først da giftangrepet kom, våknet verden.	Anti-strike	Yes	Yes
15.04.2018	Donald Trump forsvaret sin «mission accomplished»-uttalelse	Neutral	No	No
Egypt Independent				
Date	Headline	Tendency	Syria has violated international law mentioned	US, France and UK have violated international law mentioned
14.04.2018	Breaking: US, Britain, France launch air strikes in Syria	Neutral	No	Yes
14.04.2018	'Bombs won't save lives' in Syria, opposition leader Corbyn tells UK PM May	Anti-strike	No	Yes

14.04.2018	Syrians gather in capital in defiance after airstrikes	Anti-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	Syria strikes an 'important signal' to Iran and Hezbollah: Israeli minister	Pro-strike	Yes	No
14.04.2018	Egypt raises concerns over military attack in Syria	Anti-strike	No	Yes
14.04.2018	Turkey's Erdogan welcomes Western attack on Syria, says operation a message to Assad	Pro-strike	No	No
15.04.2018	Chaos, consultation: Inside Trump's decision to strike Syria	Neutral	No	No
15.04.2018	France urges Russia to join peace push after Syria strike	Neutral	No	No
15.04.2018	US says air strikes cripple Syria chemical weapons program	Anti-strike	No	Yes
15.04.2018	Syria's Assad tells Russian lawmakers Western strikes were act of aggression: agencies	Anti-strike	No	No
15.04.2018	Egypt supports national state in Syria, rejects presence of militias: Presidency	Anti-strike	No	No

