

**THE WAR OF WORDS?
THE ROLE OF NEW MEDIA IN STATE PROPAGANDA
AND FOREIGN POLICY: THE CASES OF RUSSIAN, CHINESE,
AND TURKISH MEDIA NEWS COVERAGE**

by

Olga Gerasimenko

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science and International Relations

Spring 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support from inside and outside of academia. First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my advisor and mentor, Dr. Muqtedar Khan, for his profound belief in me and my research, his guidance and encouragement during the past six years, his ability to inspire and willingness to listen to my ideas, and his overall help navigating the process. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to my other committee members – Dr. William Meyer, Dr. Kassra Oskooii, and Dr. Paul Brewer – for their invaluable contribution, insightful suggestions, and helpful advice. I am thankful to the faculty, staff, and other graduate students of the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware, who took part in my education, provided various types of support, and created a positive and friendly environment for all.

I would not have got this far without my parents, Irina and Alexander, who invested boundless time and energy in me and my education. They have been providing their unconditional continuous support, encouragement, and moral guidance for over thirty years now. I would also like to thank my husband Chris, who has been my partner in this journey from the beginning and made it much happier and more comfortable for me. He read all three hundred sixty pages of this dissertation. Finally, I am grateful to all other family and friends who rooted for me.

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ABSTRACT

The central goal of this dissertation is to explain how nondemocratic states use the state-controlled media to influence international public opinion, generate support for and legitimize their policies and actions, and to shape international discourses on critical issues. It is often perceived that the new media reduce the power gap between state and civil society in nondemocratic or authoritarian states. This dissertation challenges this idea of a democratizing effect of the new media and argues that the governments in authoritarian states, in fact, benefit from the use of new media more than any other actors. They learn, adapt, and assert their power, thus becoming even more authoritarian. In order to explore this phenomenon, I study three cases of state-controlled media coverage: Russian RT coverage of Russia's 2015 involvement in the Syrian War, Chinese People's Daily's coverage of 2016 Hague court ruling on the South China Sea, and Turkish Daily Sabah's coverage of the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist.

- Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

1.1 Digital Media as Instruments of Governmental Control

The central question this dissertation is trying to answer is how governments are using digital media to influence and shape international public opinion, manufacture consent, generate support for current and future policies, as well as to legitimize ongoing actions. I will also explore how the use of digital media reduces the power gap between state and civil society in nondemocratic or authoritarian states.

The widely held view of the new media celebrates their democratizing and liberating effect. We often expect that the media provide a variety of additional sources of alternative information that is accessible to a larger population (through the Internet, unlike TV or newspapers, for example). As a result, one may assume that

people can get more accurate information, learn more facts, and develop personal views, which would help them make their judgment. However, what is happening in reality is that governments (especially in authoritarian states) are reasserting their power through adjusting to the new realities and adopting new techniques and new technologies, such as propaganda through digital media. And in fact, propaganda through digital media offers a wide variety of opportunities for the government-controlled media to convey their message and assert control.

Governments use a variety of instruments of control, coercion, and surveillance. This dissertation will look at digital media as one such instrument and a tool used against processes of democratization at the international level. While the governments also use such instruments at the domestic level, in my case studies, I am looking at how governments use the same instruments to shape international public opinion and generate international legitimacy for policies. Governments have learning capacities, which allow them to upgrade and adjust each instrument in a unique way. In the case of digital media, governments adapt to new technologies, and this, in particular, leads to governmental propaganda becoming a much more powerful mechanism used at a mass level. This is important because it suggests that with a more sophisticated use of digital media, the governments can become even more authoritative and exercise more control, both in relation to the internal and external public. Overall, the contribution I hope to make will shed more light on how the governments deploy digital media and technology to shape international public opinion and legitimize policies.

1.2 The Role of Digital Media in State Politics

This dissertation will address issues related to digital media, which can also be referred to as the new media. Nick Couldry (2012), in his book entitled *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*, referred to “media” as “all institutionalized structures, forms, formats and interfaces for disseminating symbolic content.”¹ In today’s world of the omnipresent Internet, in which the borders between “mass media” and “general communication” blur, the emphasis on institutionalization helps focus on the fact that the media, even digital ones, can be “inescapably entangled with power relations.”²

Examples of digital media include online versions of news channels such as CNN and BBC, as well as, for example, their online video channels like “CNN – YouTube.” “Social media” are a type of “digital media” or “new media,” while terms “digital media” and “new media” can be used interchangeably. While there are multiple examples of the use of social media in this dissertation for illustrative purposes, the analysis is entirely focused on the more “traditional” (yet empowered by new technologies) new media – online newspapers. It is online newspapers that provide the platform for discourses created by the governments to be fully developed

¹ Nick. Couldry, *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice* (Cambridge ; Polity, 2012), 9, <http://voyager.falmouth.ac.uk/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=937462>.

² Couldry, *Media, Society, World*.

and presented. Subsequently, elements of those discourses appear and evolve within the social media as well. The “traditional” new media allow us to see the full picture, trace the origins, and conduct a comprehensive assessment of a discourse.

1.2.1 The Role of Modern Technologies in Politics

Modern technologies make it possible for digital media to exist. This means, among other things, that technologies allow for a more informed society, as well as more powerful propaganda, by governments or other actors. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, it will be essential to specify what is most relevant to the discussion. For example, it was technology in the first place that, as it is widely considered, helped the president of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to reverse the military coup against his regime in 2016. When troops attempted to seize control of Ankara and Istanbul, Erdoğan, who was on the Mediterranean coast on vacation, called CNN Turk on his iPhone and was able to address the Turkish society using the FaceTime mobile application. His call for people to go to the streets, as well as the text messages he sent out, resulted in the “first time in Turkey’s history that its citizens rose up to prevent a military coup.”³

While the military was able to announce its intentions on a public channel, it did not account for smaller broadcasting agents. The communications networks,

³ Dion Nissenbaum, Adam Entous, and Emre Peker, “Turkish President Foiled Coup With Luck, Tech Savvy,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 2016, sec. World, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/coup-plotters-targeted-turkish-president-with-daring-helicopter-raid-1468786991>.

private television stations, and social media continued to operate. Uri Friedman of *the Atlantic* even claimed that “Erdoğan won the information battle on two fronts,” citing Cagaptay, an expert at the Washington Institute: “It was a victory of digital over analog, in terms of communications styles.”⁴ This situation demonstrated that digital technologies, in this case, served not only as a tool to *inform* but, more importantly, to *mobilize* the target population. Indeed, this kind of situation would not be possible in the past.

However, it would be wrong to say that technology stayed out of politics until recently. Quite the contrary, technologies were summoned to drive major political events such as revolutions for decades now. At the same time, technologies that allowed for spreading information, and therefore, challenging the dogmas imposed by religious or secular elites were often opposed by the rulers. The first information technologies have been studied quite extensively. For example, it is broadly known about how the printing press played a crucial role in the weakening of the medieval church.⁵ Importantly, attempts to control information, in the form of censorship, trace back much earlier in the history of humankind, but the printing press became an innovation that made control more problematic.⁶ The invention of the printing press

⁴ Uri Friedman, “Erdoğan’s Final Agenda: Where Does Turkey Go from Here?,” *The Atlantic*, July 19, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/07/turkey-erdogan-coup-future/491696/>.

⁵ A comprehensive discussion of the role of printing press is given by Elizabeth Eisenstein in her book *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1980).

⁶ “Gutenberg’s Legacy,” Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, 2016, <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/educator/modules/gutenberg/books/legacy/>.

became one of the first steps toward the reality of the Information Age, in which we live today, associated with technological innovations and the so-called digital revolution.⁷

Another notable example of a technological breakthrough and its effect on the social and political environment is the use of tape recorders during the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Sreberny and Mohammadi (1994) point out that traditional studies of revolutions rarely included a thorough examination of communication processes and their role in those revolutions: “When communicative elements are recognized, it has been primarily as epiphenomena, the detritus of the political process rather than central to it.”⁸ In the case of the Iranian Revolution, however, the conversation about communications was hard to avoid. Tape recorders are often said to be driving the Revolution: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, as well as other religious leaders in Iran, recorded their calls for revolution on audio cassettes; the tapes were widely rerecorded and distributed reaching the smallest and most remote towns.⁹ The recordings, which contained a dramatic style of speaking and repetition of the list of problems with the Shah’s regime, clearly targeted the population with the goal of provoking action.¹⁰

⁷ See, also, "The Information Age and the Printing Press: Looking Backward to See Ahead" (1998) by James Dewar.

⁸ Annabelle Sreberny and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), xix, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10151095>.

⁹ Sreberny and Mohammadi, 121.

¹⁰ Of course, the role of other factors related to the social, cultural, and political environment in Iran by the time of revolution cannot be underestimated.

Thirty years after the Iranian Revolution, the technologies have drastically changed, but their role is even more relevant. The so-called Green Revolution, or post-election protests of 2009 in Iran, became the first major event of its kind in the world to have been entirely shared (constant stream of photos and videos) over social media: Facebook, Twitter, various online blogs and so on. The unrest was even called the Twitter Revolution, even though not everyone agreed that Twitter was critical for organizing the protesters¹¹ (its role in publicizing the issue to the world is hardly challenged).¹² The Pew Research Center analysis of the media coverage from June 15-19, 2009 (the protests began on June 13th), concluded that the protests dominated the conversation in social media much more than they did in the mainstream media: 98% of all links posted on Twitter that week concerned Iran.¹³ The Center found that the use of Twitter was not just about sharing an opinion, but also about “getting actively involved,” and Twitter itself was seen as a symbol of new online activism.¹⁴

Notably, the US Department of State clearly saw the role of Twitter as a critical one, as its officials requested that the social network postponed scheduled

¹¹ Matthew Weaver, “Iran’s ‘Twitter Revolution’ Was Exaggerated, Says Editor,” *The Guardian*, June 9, 2010, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/09/iran-twitter-revolution-protests>.

¹² Jared Keller, “Evaluating Iran’s Twitter Revolution,” *The Atlantic*, June 18, 2010, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2010/06/evaluating-irans-twitter-revolution/58337/>.

¹³ “Iran and the ‘Twitter Revolution,’” *Pew Research Center’s Journalism Project* (blog), June 25, 2009, <https://www.journalism.org/2009/06/25/iran-and-twitter-revolution/>.

¹⁴ “Iran and the ‘Twitter Revolution.’”

maintenance during the first days of the unrest.¹⁵ Then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton acknowledged to Fareed Zakaria that preventing the technical shutdown was a vital action helping “empower the protesters.”¹⁶ Time’s Grossman pointed out that while Twitter was not a magic bullet, by giving voice to virtually everyone, it challenged the “monologue” of a dictatorship, thus challenging its tyranny.¹⁷ Since this dissertation focuses on how the governments, and not the public, use the media, this example demonstrates that the governments take the technologies, the media, and social media rather seriously.

These are some of the examples of technologies being a major, arguably most important, factor in a political development. Couldry (2012), however, pointed out that every situation tends to be the result of “intersections between technological, economic, social and political forces.”¹⁸ Most recent examples, however, demonstrate that the development of technologies allows for those who use them to not only dominate the discourse but to establish control over the political developments. This becomes possible due to new technologies allowing for more effective dissemination of ideas. McKay Coppins of *the Atlantic* in a recent article entitled “The Billion-Dollar Disinformation Campaign to Reelect the President” talked about how Donald Trump’s 2020 campaign uses Facebook ad capabilities and other cutting-edge technologies to

¹⁵ Lev Grossman, “Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement,” *Time*, June 17, 2009, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1905125,00.html>.

¹⁶ “Hillary Clinton Admits the USA Manipulated the Iranian,” *Voltaire Network*, August 11, 2009, <https://www.voltairenet.org/article161573.html>.

¹⁷ Grossman, “Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement.”

¹⁸ Couldry, *Media, Society, World*.

ensure the president's reelection. The campaign strategists employ the effective techniques used in the 2016 campaign but also keep learning and improving upon them.¹⁹

Spreading disinformation – a major strategy of the Trump campaign – is executed though, for example, thousands of micro-targeted Facebook ads (delivering messages crafted to find response among certain communities to those communities). During the several months before the 2016 election, the Trump campaign bought close to six million ads on Facebook, while the Clinton campaign only ran over sixty thousand ads during the same period of time.²⁰ The 2020 campaign is even more extensive: it produces such a massive flow of information containing conspiracy theories and other mixed messages designed to sow confusion that it becomes hard to locate accurate facts and real news.

The Trump campaign also hired social media influencers and, apparently, created fake local online newspapers (or websites that look like official websites of democratic presidential candidates but, in reality, are not²¹) to spread disinformation. Such techniques closely resemble the Russian troll factory, and Coppins agreed that “Trump and his domestic allies were beginning to adopt the same tactics of

¹⁹ McKay Coppins, “The Billion-Dollar Disinformation Campaign to Reelect the President,” *The Atlantic*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/03/the-2020-disinformation-war/605530/>.

²⁰ Coppins.

²¹ Matthew Rosenberg, “Trump Consultant Is Trolling Democrats With Biden Site That Isn't Biden's,” *The New York Times*, June 29, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/29/us/politics/fake-joe-biden-website.html>.

information warfare that have kept the world’s demagogues and strongmen in power.”²² One more example of a technique the Trump campaign uses is smearing and delegitimizing journalists who are critical of the president.²³ This type of suppression of the media, along with the flow of disinformation, promotes growing cynicism among the population – a development that the first case study chapter will help to illustrate. Russia calls it “information war.” Peter Pomerantsev, however, warns that adopting the terminology promoted by Russia carries a risk of “reinforcing a world view the Kremlin wants—that all information is just manipulation.”²⁴

1.2.2 The Role of Digital Media in Politics

The most famous example of the role of social media in political action is, undoubtedly, the Arab Spring in 2011. While social media definitely could not be considered a sole factor responsible for the events,²⁵ at the very least, they became a

²² Coppins, “The Billion-Dollar Disinformation Campaign to Reelect the President.”

²³ Kenneth P. Vogel and Jeremy W. Peters, “Trump Allies Target Journalists Over Coverage Deemed Hostile to White House,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/25/us/politics/trump-allies-news-media.html>.

²⁴ PETER POMERANTSEV, “We Need to Rethink the ‘Information War’ with Russia,” *Time*, November 9, 2019, <https://time.com/5722805/rethink-information-war-russia/>.

²⁵ Habibul Haque Khondker (2011), for example, argued that the role of social media in the Arab Spring should not be overestimated: “the most important underlying factor was the presence of revolutionary conditions and the inability of the state apparatus to contain the revolutionary upsurge... Social network or not, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya,

new intervening variable in the equation and affected the possible outcomes. The media enabled the action: they helped plan, share, and avoid surveillance by the government. Bellin (2012) emphasizes the importance of social media during the Arab Spring combined with satellite television:

Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, cell phones with video feed capacity) and satellite television (al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya) together enabled the *mobilization* of collective action in ways that had been heretofore impossible in repressive settings. Both provided a *platform* for conveying the stories and symbols that fueled participation in protest. Both significantly escaped the control and repression of the authoritarian state—social media through its *anonymity and spontaneity*, satellite television through its foreign provenance. In addition, social media provided the means for *coordinating and synchronizing* thousands of people, making mass gatherings possible even in the absence of formal organizational infrastructure (something the regime would have worked hard to decimate). And when social media failed (for example, when the Egyptian regime temporarily shut down the internet), satellite television filled in the gap...²⁶ (emphases added).

Generally, the Internet not only provided an increasingly larger number of people with information on any topic, it also opened new horizons for discovering new sources of knowledge. It is often believed that the new media, as a source of alternative information, have the capability to challenge the power of information flows coming from power-houses such as governments. I argue that the digital media may, as well, serve as a continuation of tradition to create and impose perceptions and to control public consciousness.

Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain were ready for revolutionary movements due to an assortment of politico-economic conditions" (p. 678).

²⁶ Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics* 44, no. 2 (2012): 138.

1.3 Chapter Overview

This dissertation will first survey the literature related to the research question, after which it will move on to the methodology of this study. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical model and theoretical claims that will be tested in the case studies. Chapters 3 through 5 are the case study chapters. Chapter 3 discusses the way the Russian government-controlled RT covered the beginning of Russia's military involvement in the Syrian War in 2015. This case is significant because it studies the media coverage of Russia's first major military action pursued outside of the former Soviet Union in the post-Cold War period. While Russia has a long history of media control, censorship, and propaganda, the rise of the Internet and the new media arguably became the biggest global challenge of Putin's media control. In order to tackle it, Putin's regime dedicated extensive efforts to create mechanisms allowing the use of the Internet and new media to its advantage. Some of the chapter's findings show how RT framed Russia's Syria campaign largely in terms of fighting against terrorism, presented Russia's endeavors using exclusively the language of success while defining the Western efforts as a failure. Moreover, RT built its legitimization rhetoric around the idea of President Assad's regime as lawful and reliable. The idea of a higher morality of Russia and its victimization provides a strong basis for RT's anti-Western and anti-democratic push. The whole discourse strives to reverse the existing international order that favors freedom, democracy, and human rights.

Chapter 4 is a case study of China's government-controlled People's Daily (Renmin Ribao) newspaper's coverage of the South China Sea conflict immediately after the Hague Court ruling of 2016. The verdict represented a potential watershed moment for China's aspirations in the South China Sea as it was establishing itself as a regional and global power. People's Daily's coverage focused, in the first place, on complete delegitimation of the ruling and the responsible organization. Similar to RT, People's Daily creates a legal/illegal dichotomy to help sort international actors and their actions. The traditional Chinese approach to politics, which includes an emphasis on sovereignty, bilateral relations, and multilateralism, is also prominent throughout the coverage. A significant anti-American sentiment defines different discourses on several actors and relationships, including the discourse on the Philippines as a victim of the US' interference and manipulation. Victimizations of China itself is less salient than in the case of Russia; however, there are mentions of unfairness and China-phobia coming from the outsiders. The legitimation of China's strategy significantly relies on the idea of international reaction to the ruling, which favors China and rejects its opponents and criticizes the lack of support from some actors.

Chapter 5 scrutinizes the coverage of Turkish government-controlled Daily Sabah. Specifically, I investigate the way this online newspaper covered the post-coup attempt situation in Turkey in 2016. Daily Sabah is the youngest media outlet among the ones studied in this dissertation, but its commitment to the goals of condemning the West and pushing for the Turkish government's political agenda appears as strong as with the other two. The rise of Daily Sabah occurred amid the ongoing drift towards

authoritarianism under the Erdoğan regime, and, in particular, the changes of the president's attitude towards the international press – from vocal support of press freedom to attacks and condemnation of the international media for their interference and bias. The central theme of the coverage is Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen movement, which is labeled a terrorist organization. The blame assigned to Gülen is described in a categorical form and without much of an explanation. This approach allows for a dichotomy of “us” vs. “them,” in which everyone who goes against the official rhetoric (or, even, does not explicitly condemn the coup attempt) is simply labeled a terrorist or siding with terrorists. Consequently, the US is portrayed as a supporter of terrorism.

All three case study chapters present their findings in the local context – the context of the existing social structures and the history of the development of mass media and journalism in the respective states. In order to put the coverage by each of the three media into perspective, I provide the analysis and discussion of the coverage of each of the three events by BBC. I do not claim that BBC should be considered a completely neutral news organization, but it should be suitable for the purposes of this research.

The Conclusion chapter runs comparisons between the case studies and discusses potential generalizations and inferences that can be made based on the research.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical basis for my research, articulate my theoretical claims, describe my research design, and present the cases.

As I pointed out earlier, the literature on the role of new technologies mainly focuses on the liberating and democratizing role of the Internet and the new media, their role in political events such as revolutions, and overall the empowering shift of power away from the governments towards individuals. This dissertation is going to explore the other side of the digital media effect and thus will address this gap in the literature. I will discuss the way governments learn new technologies and adapt to them and how they use digital media to assert their power. Therefore, the goals of this chapter are the following:

1. Discuss how propaganda is generated. (It is necessary to look at the relationship between knowledge and power, and how governments seek to influence the production of knowledge.)
2. Review how knowledge is produced. (Propaganda as a communicative practice).
3. Consider the role of technology and new media in the modern political environment.

4. Theorize about propaganda as an element of today's hybrid warfare.

After that, I describe my research design and present my cases.

2.1 Propaganda: The Relationship between Power and Knowledge

Theoretically, I am going to look at propaganda with the help of the lens provided by Foucault, in particular, through his discourses on the nexus between power and truth. While governments are not the original source of power for Foucault, they can be seen as sources of power and parts of structures through which power is disseminated. People, actions, institutions are all instruments of power, its leverage; however, they can become centers of power, form the node of its high intensity. Since individuals are subjected to power, they can be considered its subjects. Power involves individuals in full, connects their minds and bodies.²⁷

For Foucault, the invisible working of power and the patterns of its diffusion are of utmost importance. This is why Foucault employs discourse analysis to study power: there are reasons for the specific co-relation of forces in today's world, there are reasons for the accepted norms, and for what one regards "truth." There is no *Truth* for Foucault, but there are mechanisms that make us believe it exists, and, for example, elites might serve as local centers of power. As Foucault argues in *Society*

²⁷ Michel Foucault et al., "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, 1st edition. (New York: Picador, 2003), <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/hol031/2002074998.html>.

Must Be Defended, “the bourgeoisie is not interested in the mad, but it is interested in power over the mad;²⁸ the bourgeoisie is not interested in the sexuality of children, but it is interested in the system of power that controls the sexuality of children.”²⁹ Power in such situations comes from knowledge that is created within discourses, and knowledge becomes a product of normalization, the effect of power.

For Foucault, educational systems represent the basis for the process of normalization of knowledge, creation of norms, and often establishing the *Truth*. On a personal level, education also represents one of the major mechanisms of disciplining the population. It can be argued that mass media play a role similar to education in the modern world. They create and shape knowledge, cover most of the spheres of people’s lives, are often more accessible to the general public, and possess a wide range of mechanisms to influence personal and public consciousness.

Foucault’s concepts are incredibly relevant today and can be discussed, for example, in the context of smart cities and smart governments. A “smart city” is a place where “ICT-infused infrastructures [ICT stands for information and communications technology] enable the extensive monitoring and steering of city maintenance, mobility, air and water quality, energy usage, visitor movements,

²⁸ “Mad” is one category of “delinquents” for Foucault, which needs to be accounted for, controlled, punished, and ultimately made profit of – what bourgeoisie is interested in.

²⁹ Foucault et al., *Society Must Be Defended*, 33.

neighborhood sentiment, and so on.”³⁰ Such monitoring involves massive personal data collection, and while the data are supposedly collected to improve experiences of the city’s inhabitants and organizations, there are obvious concerns regarding the social effects of data collection and analysis. While highly sensitive personal data can be collected, for example, to enhance everyone’s safety, such practices and methods (e.g., facial recognition software) strengthen governmental control over the population.³¹

The application of Foucault’s concepts by Edward Said can also be useful for studying the notion of knowledge. Said argued that knowledge is power and is used as power. Knowledge is something that allows for certain actions, which also means that knowledge maybe somehow produced to justify certain actions. In particular, Said argues that a more convenient interpretation of some events may become “knowledge,” regardless of the actual facts. Knowledge and power produce each other because “knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge.”³² In this sense, knowledge is “effective” and can be used to advance the interests of the powerful.

³⁰ Liesbet Zoonen, “Privacy Concerns in Smart Cities,” *Government Information Quarterly: An International Journal of Information Technology Management, Policies, and Practices* 33, no. 3 (2016): 472–80.

³¹ Zoonen.

³² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 37, <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy1622/79010497-b.html>.

In *Orientalism*, Said discusses the division between the West and the East as a product of normalization. Orientalism is “a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire,” “a product of political forces and activities.”³³ Quite naturally, the activities related to colonialism play a prominent role in Said’s discussion. Orientalism, however, is not mainly the product of the states’ actions: it permeates the societies in a much deeper way. Overall, the division between the West and the East can also be seen as “us” versus “them” from the Western point of view. It is also closely related to the ideological component in states’ actions, which implies the creating of the identity of the opponent as antagonistic to the self.

Accordingly, Orientalism is a discourse that has been developed in the West, and its themes and ideas were quite successful in its penetration into mass consciousness. Following the ideas of Said, it can be argued that not only for Orientalism, but regarding the creation of knowledge overall, the general public is usually exposed to the created discourse through media, literature, art, and through the process of communication with other “victims” of the productive power, which leaves quite limited possibilities to comprehend the essence hidden behind the veil of official knowledge.

³³ Said, 204.

As Edward Said explains in *Orientalism*, the identity of the East was created by Western societies as the opposite of them. This dichotomy can be seen as often relevant to mass media practices as well. Islam and the Muslim world are the components of the Orient that are, perhaps, most of all, and increasingly opposed to the West in the media coverage. The creation of the image of Muslims in the Western media highly influences the public perceptions of Islamic societies and affects the policy-making process, which, in turn, shapes international relations. It is well-known that the Orient is not the only discourse opposed to the West. Russia, for instance, has arguably built and maintained its modern identity as opposing the West and being repressed by it. Today, “us” versus “them” dichotomies are more effective than ever and are actively employed by authoritarian governments. The dichotomies lay the foundation for governmental propaganda campaigns.

2.2 Propaganda as a communicative practice

Overall, much of the literature on propaganda comes from scholars of communication, public relations, and public opinion. One of the first works on propaganda was written in 1928 by Edward Bernays and is just called *Propaganda*. Unlike the later interpretations of the terms, Bernays’ “propaganda” did not have a negative connotation and represented an optimistic view of public relations. Bernays talked about propaganda in a democracy; and while he admitted that “[w]e are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by

men we have never heard of” and that “[p]ropaganda does exist on all sides of us, and it does change our mental pictures of the world,” he also believed that “[t]he conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society” and that “[t]his invisible, intertwining structure of groupings and associations is the mechanism by which democracy has organized its group mind and simplified its mass thinking.”³⁴

A later work by Jacques Ellul (1965) – *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* – brings a sociological perspective to the study of propaganda. Social differences, according to Ellul, matter more for propaganda than differences in political regimes; thus, for him, USSR, China, and the US represented the brightest examples of propaganda. Ellul pointed out that the multitude and variety of propaganda definitions are due to the breadth and versatility of the phenomenon, which makes one common definition problematic. The definition common for American authors came from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis: “the expression of opinions or actions carried out deliberately by individuals or groups with a view to influencing the opinions or actions of other individuals or groups for predetermined ends and through psychological manipulations.”³⁵

³⁴ Edward L. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: H. Liveright, 1928), 9–26, <https://archive.org/details/BernaysEdwardPropagandaEN1928153P>.

³⁵ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda; the Formation of Men’s Attitudes.*, [1st American ed.]. (New York: Knopf, 1965).

Ellul's contribution is largely in identifying the main characteristics of modern propaganda that I would like to cite here. Firstly, "modern propaganda is based on scientific analyses of psychology and sociology," secondly, "propaganda is scientific in that it tends to establish a set of rules, rigorous, precise, and tested," thirdly, "what is needed nowadays is an exact analysis of both the environment and the individual to be subjected to propaganda," and lastly, the "trait [that] reveals the scientific character of modern propaganda... [is] the increasing attempt to control its use, measure its results, define its effects."³⁶

Even more importantly, however, Ellul rejects certain assumptions about propaganda, and redefines its goals: "Propaganda is very frequently described as a manipulation for the purpose of changing ideas or opinions, of making individuals 'believe' some idea or fact... to put it differently, propaganda is described as dealing with beliefs or ideas... This line of reasoning is completely wrong. To view propaganda as still being what it was in 1850 is to cling to an obsolete concept of man and of the means to influence him... The aim of modern propaganda is no longer to modify ideas, but to provoke action. It is no longer to change adherence to a doctrine, but to make the individual cling irrationally to a process of action. It is no longer to

³⁶ Ellul, 4–5.

lead to a choice, but to loosen the reflexes. It is no longer to transform an opinion, but to arouse an active and mythical belief.”³⁷

Therefore, as a communicative practice, propaganda has been one of the long-standing elements of governance, population organization, and control, which exists across political regimes, social orders, and cultures. With the development of society, the successful implementation of propaganda started requiring a deeper understanding of particular social structures and the psychological make-up of a certain social group. Today’s propaganda is aimed at not just suppressing undesirable ideas, but rather at reshaping or creating an identity of a group, which serves the purpose of reproducing and strengthening the existing social and political structures and advancing the interests of those in power.

2.3 Technology, the New Media, and Their Role in Politics

The liberating and democratizing effect of technological achievements has been discussed extensively for years now. Transformations in communications have been matched with political transformation, and prognoses have been made. Carl Builder, for example, claimed in 1993 that “a fundamental structural change” caused by information technologies is transforming the power relations in the world. While “for the past 200 years, the game of world power has been the game of nations and

³⁷ Ellul, 25.

their leaders,” the spread of technologies has led to a situation in which “the losers of power... are hierarchical organizational structures everywhere which have historically been erected and sustained on the control of limited information.”³⁸ Builder also pointed out that it is not the technology itself that makes the power transition possible, but rather the power of information and its exploitation.³⁹ This is a shift of power between states and individuals, who are now much less constrained by national borders and distances.⁴⁰

Henry Farrell (2012) argued that the Internet is so integrated in our everyday lives today that it is more effective to consider it as “a bundle of mechanisms.” The role of the Internet in society first became a subject of interest of “activists, politicians, and law professors.”⁴¹ American political scientists mostly joined as a second wave in the 2000s. The new debates addressed the role of the Internet in political campaigns, civic engagement and economic development, and the democratization of public debate. This led to a question of how the Internet could influence and shape democracy and politics in general. Importantly, Farrell pointed out that “assum[ing] a

³⁸ Carl H. Builder, “Is It a Transition or a Revolution?,” *Futures* 25, no. 2 (1993): 155–57, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287\(93\)90161-L](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287(93)90161-L).

³⁹ Builder, 159.

⁴⁰ Some theories of Global Governance largely rely on this transformation.

⁴¹ Henry Farrell, “The Consequences of the Internet for Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 15, no. 1 (2012): 36, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-030810-110815>.

simple relationship between new technologies and political outcomes” would be wrong because political regimes (especially nondemocratic ones) realize the risks and work to counteract democratization efforts through, for example, blocking access of the population to the Internet.⁴²

China is, of course, one of the most censored countries, where such websites as Google, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Wikipedia are blocked as of 2020. India, the country with the second-highest number of Internet users in the world, has seen a rise in Internet censorship as well. The government shut down the Internet twenty times in different regions of the country in the first few months of 2019, mostly due to anti-government protests. A 1973 law allows the government to impose such restrictions to prevent a range of situations, including “obstruction, annoyance or injury.”⁴³ Kashmir has especially suffered from the blockages: most recently, the government suspended the Internet, mobile phones, and landline services in the region in August 2019. In January 2020, India’s Supreme Court ordered a review of this Internet shutdown, which has been the longest for the country.⁴⁴ Importantly, even countries like the UK considered banning access to social media and the Internet, such

⁴² Farrell, 38.

⁴³ Rishi Iyengar, “Internet Censorship in India Is on the Rise,” CNNMoney, June 16, 2017, <https://money.cnn.com/2017/06/16/technology/internet-censorship-india-human-rights-watch/index.html>.

⁴⁴ Soutik Biswas, “India Court Criticises Kashmir Internet Shutdown,” *BBC News*, January 10, 2020, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-51058759>.

as during the 2011 England riots, when then-Prime Minister David Cameron called for tighter control over social media. The government later backed down and denied such a plan.⁴⁵

Natalie Fenton (2010) argued that due to the interactive nature of the Internet, the “new journalism,” which may lack editorial control and is transformed by networked audiences, has emerged. Because of that, “the technology of the internet is said to have reinvigorated democracy.”⁴⁶ Importantly, not only the Internet itself but the media and its “multi-channel environment” have changed journalism.⁴⁷ Fenton, however, expressed concerns about the lack of quality control in the news business: the multi-channel environment may also mean the decrease in quality of reporting and analysis, undermined the goal of truth-seeking in journalism, and more obstacles on the way of “challenging the agenda of power.”⁴⁸ Additionally, she maintained that the

⁴⁵ Ravi Somaiya, “In Britain, a Meeting on Limiting Social Media,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 2011, sec. Europe, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/26/world/europe/26social.html>; Josh Halliday, “Government Backs down on Plan to Shut Twitter and Facebook in Crises,” *The Guardian*, August 25, 2011, sec. Media, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/aug/25/government-plan-shut-twitter-facebook>.

⁴⁶ Natalie. Fenton, *New Media, Old News: Journalism & Democracy in the Digital Age* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), 6, <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781849204415>.

⁴⁷ Fenton, 73.

⁴⁸ Fenton, 79.

new media are at least partially responsible for the decline of the public's political engagement and trust in political institutions.⁴⁹ Building on the Fenton's arguments, the new media environment can be beneficial for the flourishing of propaganda and disinformation campaigns.

Larry Diamond (2012) pointed out that information and communication technologies “profoundly transformed politics and civil society.” For example, the number of Facebook users grew from 12 million in 2006 to almost a billion in 2012 (over 1.7 billion in 2016; over 2.41 billion in 2019⁵⁰). While most of the social network users are not political activists, Diamond claimed that their practice of information exchange contributed to a blurring of the borders between “reader and reporter, news and opinion, and information and action.”⁵¹ Social media are now essential for political campaigns, civic advocacy, as well as international relations. Of course, governments and politicians also use digital and social media. One notable example is Barack Obama's presidential campaigns, which used social media

⁴⁹ Fenton, 122.

⁵⁰ “Facebook Users Worldwide 2019,” Statista, accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/>.

⁵¹ Larry Jay. Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *Liberation Technology: Social Media and the Struggle for Democracy*, A Journal of Democracy Book (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), x, <http://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/ecom/MasterServlet/GetItemDetailsHandler?iN=9781421405674&qty=1&source=2&viewMode=3&loggedIN=false&JavaScript=y>.

platforms to an unprecedented extent, and many agree that they largely contributed to his popularity growth and political success.⁵²

Donald Trump's use of social media during and after his presidential campaign is much more unusual and striking. According to Hall (2018), Trump's unpresidential tweeting make scholars of communication to "rethink our understanding of leader communication" due to his "divisive and destructive" comments, and his ability to set the media agenda through his tweets – manifestation of Trump's power.⁵³ Overall, multiple authors attributed Trump's win and continued popularity to his use of social media.⁵⁴ Buncombe (2018) called Trump's tweeting an "effective force," which is "tactical" and controls the news cycle and quoted a professor of communication Richard Perloff who claimed that Trump's "short and

⁵² Gainous and Wagner discuss this in detail in *Tweeting to Power: the Social Media Revolution in American Politics* (2014)

⁵³ Maurice Hall, "President Trump's Use of Social Media and Why We Can't Ignore It (Opinion)," Inside Higher Ed, October 10, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/10/10/president-trumps-use-social-media-and-why-we-cant-ignore-it-opinion>.

⁵⁴ Chase Martinez, "Year One: How Donald Trump Used Social Media to Win (and Maintain) the Presidency," Medium, February 1, 2018, <https://medium.com/rta902/year-one-how-donald-trump-used-social-media-to-win-and-maintain-the-presidency-fef7f7175d2c>; Julia Carrie Wong, "'Way Ahead of the Field': Inside Trump's Unprecedented Social Media Campaign," *The Guardian*, July 3, 2019, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jul/02/way-ahead-of-the-field-inside-the-trump-campaigns-unprecedented-social-media-campaign>.

emotive” tweets “strengthen pre-existing attitudes.”⁵⁵ More than half of Trump’s tweets contain attacks, and using them, Trump managed to build a “parallel political reality” – the reality of “alternative facts.”⁵⁶ Finally, Trump’s 2020 election campaign announced plans to launch a smartphone app to provide his supporters with a new line of communication and “to track ‘the army of Trump’ and keep supporters donating, volunteering and recruiting.”⁵⁷

To sum it up, the existing research on *nondemocratic regimes* has been mostly focusing on the ways the new media have become a tool of civil society, allowing it to confront these regimes in a new way. New media, as put by Fenton, “enhances communicative exchange.”⁵⁸ Diamond called the new communication and information technologies “liberation technology” – which “demonstrated potential to empower citizens to confront, contain, and hold accountable authoritarian regimes –

⁵⁵ Andrew Buncombe, “How Donald Trump’s Use of Twitter Has Changed the US Presidency,” *The Independent*, January 17, 2018, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/the-twitter-president-how-potus-changed-social-media-and-the-presidency-a8164161.html>.

⁵⁶ Michael D. Shear et al., “How Trump Reshaped the Presidency in Over 11,000 Tweets,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/02/us/politics/trump-twitter-presidency.html>.

⁵⁷ Anita Kumar, “A Trump Social Network Readies for Launch,” *POLITICO*, accessed November 13, 2019, <https://politi.co/2A1KOLb>.

⁵⁸ Fenton, *New Media, Old News*, 121.

and even to liberate societies from autocracy.”⁵⁹ Diamond and Plattner’s (2012) edited volume offered a range of perspectives and case studies of the liberating effect of the new media and the Internet in general. The authors tend to fall into two groups: some of them discuss the success of the new technologies as a liberating power; others are more concerned with the reaction of the governments to the media liberalization.

Evgeny Morozov, for example, pointed out that a push to liberalize the Internet within an authoritarian state can lead to a general worsening of the situation with physical freedom of the society: “government might find it harder to censor blogs, but still rather easy to jail bloggers.”⁶⁰ Rebecca MacKinnon (2012), in her discussion of the Chinese bloggers trying to tackle the “Great Firewall of China” (governmental censorship of the Internet through blocking access to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Google countrywide), calls Beijing’s response “networked authoritarianism.” “Networked authoritarianism” is a result of a regime “embrac[ing] and adjust[ing] to the inevitable changes brought by digital communications.”⁶¹

A part of the existing literature addresses the role of social media using the individual level of analysis. For example, when Parmelee and Bichard (2012) explored

⁵⁹ Diamond and Plattner, *Liberation Technology*, xi.

⁶⁰ Evgeny Morozov, “Whither Internet Control?,” *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 2 (2011): 63.

⁶¹ Rebecca MacKinnon, “China’s ‘Networked Authoritarianism’,” *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 2 (2011): 33.

the relationship between political leaders and the public changed by Twitter, they discussed how tweets enable the politicians with a new mechanism to convey their messages to the audience. However, while the authors see tweets as not only delivering information but also as potentially affecting people's actions (whether it is to vote for a specific candidate or to support a certain issue), the politicians are seen as independent actors pursuing their own goals.⁶²

Overall, phrases such as "Twitter revolution" do not surprise most people, and the significance of new communications during political events leaves less and less doubt. A variety of social media offers different opportunities for avoiding more traditional communication channels. Jared Keller pointed out that while Twitter does not provide the best platform for organizing activists, it allowed for the Iranian post-election protests in 2009 to truly go international: "the amount of information publicized real-time through social networks allowed the international community an unprecedented peek into the turmoil afflicting Iran." This illustrates the global significance of social media, as opposed to their mobilizing function. As Keller noted, the Iranian "Green movement [became] the first major world event broadcast worldwide almost entirely via social media."⁶³

⁶² John H. Parmelee and Shannon L. Bichard, *Politics and the Twitter Revolution: How Tweets Influence the Relationship between Political Leaders and the Public*, Lexington Studies in Political Communication (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2012).

⁶³ Keller, "Evaluating Iran's Twitter Revolution."

The idea of a state weakened by the new realities – such as democratization or globalization, is not new. Linda Weiss (1998) called it the phenomenon of “state denial”: a position that tends to ignore or downplay the role of the state in functioning social structures and relations.⁶⁴ Using Weiss’ argument, the state’s capacities cannot be seen as weakening if they are treated as “transformative.”⁶⁵ The constructivist literature also offers some relevant perspectives on how states, organizations, and structures can learn and adapt.⁶⁶

While projects like this provide invaluable insight on the balance of power between governments and civil societies in authoritarian states, they tend to view and focus on the governmental developments mainly as a response to the liberated public. This response is aimed at suppressing any signs of liberalization, blocking access to information, and returning to the status quo. They generally do not look at how governments’ responses may evolve beyond the goal of blocking certain flows of information, and how governments use new technologies and new media to work with these flows of information and turn them in their favor. This dissertation, instead, is looking at how governments go beyond attempts to block information and return to the

⁶⁴ Linda Weiss, *The Myth of the Powerless State: Governing the Economy in a Global Era*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1998), 3, <http://www.gbv.de/dms/sub-hamburg/304830720.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Weiss, 7.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Martha Finnemore, 1993; Jeffrey Checkel, 2005;

status quo: it studies how governments learn, adapt, and excel in using the new media and technologies to advance their goals.

2.4 The Rise of Online Authoritarianism and the New Media as a Tactic of Hybrid Warfare

In this section, I discuss the rise of online authoritarianism in the world and make the case that governments adapt, learn, and use the new media and technologies to reassert their power and control. Even in the liberal democratic states like the US, social media, including Facebook, can become an instrument effectively used by the government for surveillance and control over the population. It is now known that Facebook algorithms created for advertisement purposes put users into categories, or label them according to their characteristics, personal and political. For example, in 2018, Facebook labeled 65,000 users from Russia as “interested in treason” – and later removed the category following the criticism. In the hands of the Russian state, such information could bring grave consequences to those labeled.⁶⁷

As another example, people labeled “homosexual” can face as much as death in countries where homosexuality is a criminal offense. An American Internet entrepreneur and academic Kalev Leetaru wrote that concerns of governmental

⁶⁷ Alex Hern, “Facebook Labels Russian Users as ‘Interested in Treason,’” *The Guardian*, July 11, 2018, sec. Technology, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jul/11/facebook-labels-russian-users-as-interested-in-treason>.

manipulation of the accessible data are very real: publicly available Facebook tools allow for studying demographics and people's interests in particular geographic areas, such as neighborhoods. The information is accessible to foreign intelligence agencies and local law enforcement agencies. In the case of the homosexuality label, Facebook refused even to limit its use in countries where people from this category face real danger.⁶⁸

When asked whether it will or ever has handed over user data to a government entity based on a legal request such as a court order, Facebook referred to its data policy and responded that it would indeed be possible if the company had "a good faith belief that the law requires us to do so," even in the case of foreign governments. This illustrates how social media help any actor in the world to spy over the population while the governments acquire new tools for population control.⁶⁹

Mass surveillance accusations are not new for Facebook: in the course of one of the lawsuits, Facebook admitted to collecting users' call and text data, and it can get access to users' photos, though some of these require consent from the users.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Kalev Leetaru, "Facebook As The Ultimate Government Surveillance Tool?," *Forbes*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kalevleetaru/2018/07/20/facebook-as-the-ultimate-government-surveillance-tool/>.

⁶⁹ Leetaru.

⁷⁰ Carole Cadwalladr and Emma Graham-Harrison, "Facebook Accused of Conducting Mass Surveillance through Its Apps," *The Guardian*, May 24, 2018, sec.

Facebook also faced criticism in the UN report on genocide against the Rohingya minority in Myanmar: the social media was said to be an essential and useful instrument to spread hate online.⁷¹

An example of a non-democratic government successfully utilizing a social media tool is the Philippines under Duterte and its use of Facebook. Lacking social media presence at the start of his campaign, Duterte was quick to learn about its potential (with the help of Facebook training) and launched a very successful social media campaign. His social media apparatus relied on hundreds of volunteers who were organized to distribute messages across target populations.⁷² What started as social media use by Duterte zealous fans, turned into a stream of aggression, threats,

Technology, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/may/24/facebook-accused-of-conducting-mass-surveillance-through-its-apps>.

⁷¹ “OHCHR | Myanmar: Tatmadaw Leaders Must Be Investigated for Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes – UN Report,” United Nations, accessed January 12, 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?LangID=E&NewsID=23475&utm_campaign=The%20Interface&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Revenue%20newsletter; Daniel Arkin, “U.N. Says Facebook Has ‘turned into a Beast’ in Violence-Plagued Myanmar,” NBC News, March 13, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/u-n-investigators-blame-facebook-spreading-hate-against-rohingya-myanmar-n856191>.

⁷² Lauren Etter, “What Happens When the Government Uses Facebook as a Weapon?,” *Bloomberg.Com*, December 7, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2017-12-07/how-rodrido-duterte-turned-facebook-into-a-weapon-with-a-little-help-from-facebook>.

and false information (including a fake endorsement post by the head of the Catholic Church Pope Francis: “Even the Pope Admires Duterte”⁷³).

Dominating the political conversation helped Duterte win the election in 2016. Once in the office, he turned Facebook into a weapon by targeting and jailing opponents, circulating fake news stories to justify the state of emergency implemented after a bombing that killed and injured dozens of people, and producing more and more fake accounts to hunt down and harass opponents.⁷⁴ Maria Ressa, a famous Philippine journalist and Rappler website founder, wrote Duterte’s disinformation campaign is “meant to shape public opinion, tear down reputations, and cripple traditional media institutions” and represents a “strategy of ‘death by a thousand cuts’ [which] uses the strength of the internet and exploits the algorithms that power social media to sow confusion and doubt.”⁷⁵

Freedom House *Freedom on the Net* project has been bringing together Internet freedom analyses from across the world (65 countries in the latest report) and evaluating them as a whole for nearly a decade. The project measures freedom on the Internet by looking at obstacles to access the web, limits on content, and violations of

⁷³ Lauren Etter.

⁷⁴ Lauren Etter.

⁷⁵ Maria A. Ressa, “Propaganda War: Weaponizing the Internet,” Rappler, October 3, 2016, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/148007-propaganda-war-weaponizing-internet>.

user rights.⁷⁶ The last three years of reports give clear concerns about the rise of authoritarianism – both in real life and online. According to the 2017 report, Internet freedom had been declining for seven years, as online manipulation and disinformation became prominent in elections across the world, while an increasing number of governments took measures to restrict or disrupt mobile Internet services.⁷⁷ The 2018 report was marked by a decline of the Internet freedom in the US, while other countries sought to pass laws to restrict online media increased surveillance, and received new media and information management training from China – which basically was training in digital authoritarianism.⁷⁸ Finally, the 2019 report, entitled “The Crisis of Social Media,” found that with the rise of the digital authoritarianism, the social media platforms became “instruments for political distortion and societal control,” while “governments are deploying advanced tools to identify and monitor users on an immense scale.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ “Freedom on the Net,” Freedom House, accessed January 11, 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-net>.

⁷⁷ “Freedom on the Net 2017: Manipulating Social Media to Undermine Democracy” (Freedom House, October 27, 2017), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2017>.

⁷⁸ “Freedom on the Net 2018: The Rise Of Digital Authoritarianism” (Freedom House, October 31, 2018), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2018>.

⁷⁹ ADRIAN SHAHBAZ and ALLIE FUNK, “Freedom on the Net 2019: The Crisis of Social Media” (Freedom House, 2019),

Other reports confirm this reality. The Oxford Internet Institute's Computational Propaganda Research Project prepared nine reports in 2017, which studied the use of social media for public opinion manipulation. The reports found that social media have become critical political platforms for engagement and information dissemination. Such platforms are used for public opinion manipulation and are a major means of control in authoritarian states.⁸⁰ The researchers expressed concerns that social media in question tend to ignore that their platform is abused and provide support for authoritarian trends. They call for action.⁸¹

<https://www.freedomthenet.org/report/freedom-on-the-net/2019/the-crisis-of-social-media>.

⁸⁰ Sam Woolley and Phil Howard, "Computational Propaganda Worldwide: Executive Summary," The Computational Propaganda Project, July 11, 2017, <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/working-papers/computational-propaganda-worldwide-executive-summary/>; Lisa-Maria N Neudert, "Computational Propaganda in Germany: A Cautionary Tale" (University of Oxford, June 19, 2017), <http://blogs.oii.ox.ac.uk/politicalbots/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/06/Comprop-Germany.pdf>; Mariia Zhdanova and Dariya Orlova, "Computational Propaganda in Ukraine: Caught Between External Threats and Internal Challenges" (University of Oxford, June 19, 2017), <http://blogs.oii.ox.ac.uk/politicalbots/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/06/Comprop-Ukraine.pdf>; Samuel C Woolley and Douglas R Guilbeault, "Computational Propaganda in the United States of America: Manufacturing Consensus Online" (University of Oxford, June 19, 2017), <http://blogs.oii.ox.ac.uk/politicalbots/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/06/Comprop-USA.pdf>.

⁸¹ Alex Hern, "Facebook and Twitter Are Being Used to Manipulate Public Opinion – Report," *The Guardian*, June 19, 2017, sec. Technology, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jun/19/social-media-proganda-manipulating-public-opinion-bots-accounts-facebook-twitter>.

The discussion above demonstrates how governments use platforms like Facebook as they adapt, learn, and assert their power. The online authoritarianism is on the rise: the governments have learned of the possibilities that social media offer and are acting in the following ways: first, they strive to suppress the use of the Internet by the opposition and could-be opposition; second, they are learning the ways to use these platforms to their advantage. Facebook's advertisement categories offer tools for surveillance and identification of undesirable elements and sentiments. Social media and governmentally controlled digital media serve as instruments to spread propaganda, including pro-governmental propaganda and hatred against minority groups like in the case with Rohingya in Myanmar.

Politicians successfully use the new media in election campaigns, including Donald Trump and Rodrigo Duterte. Duterte's campaign and time in office represent a great example of how governmental actors, which possess significant resources, succeed in a large scale online operation, which not only allowed the Philippine president to get elected but facilitated the consolidation of Duterte's power by providing the tools to eliminate the opposition. Duterte is far from alone: in a similar fashion, the president of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro also benefited from coordinated misinformation campaigns on social media and cyberattacks against journalists.⁸²

⁸² By Adam Smith, "Social Media Now a Tool for Surveillance, Electoral Manipulation," PCMAG, November 5, 2019, <https://www.pcmag.com/news/371770/social-media-now-a-tool-for-surveillance-electoral-manipula>.

Research also suggests that a stream of false information and doctored images over WhatsApp also significantly contributed to Bolsonaro's election.⁸³

One example of a state-based system developed as a response to the rise of the new technologies is the system of cybersecurity. The language of cyberspace and cyberthreats help explain the incorporation of technologies in politics and governmental response to the use of new technologies against itself, especially when it comes to issues other than democratization and the increased capabilities of individuals. Cybersecurity threats in international affairs are becoming more severe and widespread, and therefore impossible to ignore. Cyberspace represents a new dimension where global interactions occur. This also means that states have to conduct their foreign policies while taking cyberspace into consideration. The US government recognizes the cybersecurity sphere as an important part of US national security.⁸⁴ Cyberthreats related to a state's national security include attacks on governmental computer networks, which are mainly performed with the goal of espionage, attacks on the critical infrastructure computer networks, performed to disrupt functioning,

⁸³ Daniel Avelar, "WhatsApp Fake News during Brazil Election 'Favoured Bolsonaro,'" *The Guardian*, October 30, 2019, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/30/whatsapp-fake-news-brazil-election-favoured-jair-bolsonaro-analysis-suggests>.

⁸⁴ *The National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace* was issued in February 2003 in the US, as a part of broader changes in national security apparatus after the events of September 11, 2001.

coordination, and communication on the national level, as well as attacks on economic objects critical to national security.⁸⁵

According to the official data, the US Department of Defense networks have to deal with thousands of cyberattacks every day, which are coming from not only non-state actors like terrorist organizations, but also from, for example, over 100 foreign intelligence organizations in recent years.⁸⁶ Geographically, most of the international cyberattacks originate in the US, China, Russia, and Turkey.⁸⁷ One of the attacks of recent years – “sophisticated cyber intrusion” by Russia – targeted the Pentagon’s Joint Staff unclassified email system, and “affected some 4,000 military and civilian personnel who work for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.”⁸⁸ The allegedly

⁸⁵ Chris Demchak in *Wars of disruption and resilience: Cybered conflict, power, and national security* (2011) discusses how cyberspace both promotes cooperation and enables conflict while making states' borders and protection measures more elusive and vulnerable. See also “Rise of a cybered Westphalian age” by Demchak & Dombrowski (2011).

⁸⁶ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Armed Services., *U.S. Cyber Command: Organizing for Cyberspace Operations : Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, Second Session, Hearing Held September 23, 2010*. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 2010), 2, <http://books.google.com/books?id=TRdIAQAAMAAJ>.

⁸⁷ Daniel Dimov and Rasa Juzenaite, “The Most Hacker-Active Countries,” Infosec Resources, August 5, 2015, <https://resources.infosecinstitute.com/the-most-hacker-active-countries-part-i/>.

⁸⁸ Courtney Kube and Jim Miklaszewski, “Russia Hacks Pentagon Computers,” NBC News, August 6, 2015, <https://www.cnbc.com/2015/08/06/russia-hacks-pentagon-computers-nbc-citing-sources.html>.

Chinese attack on the office of the Personnel Management was blamed on “a foreign entity or government.”⁸⁹ The scope of both attacks suggested that “state actors” must be involved.⁹⁰

The development of cybersecurity is an example of state learning. The spread of cell phones in Iraq after 2003 partially resulted from people seeking more security. At the same time, however, the ubiquity of the cell phone provided terrorists with a possibility to detonate bombs distantly. It took the US a few years to address this problem and organize the bureaucracy and forces to resist cell phone-enabled operations.⁹¹ Demchak and Dombrowski claimed that states have to prove their functionality through establishing and maintaining their sovereign control over cyberspace.⁹² The most effective response to the threats of the cyberspace came from large scale institutional and legal initiatives, such as the US Cyber Command, which

⁸⁹ Everett Rosenfeld, “US Officials Report Massive Breach of Federal Personnel Data,” CNBC, June 5, 2015, <https://www.cnbc.com/2015/06/04/us-officials-report-massive-breach-of-federal-personnel-data.html>.

⁹⁰ Krysia Lenzo, “A New Global War Front Taking Shape in Cyberspace,” CNBC, September 2, 2015, <https://www.cnbc.com/2015/09/02/the-new-global-cyberwar-without-boundaries-or-winners.html>; Kube and Miklaszewski, “Russia Hacks Pentagon Computers.”

⁹¹ Chris C. Demchak, *Wars of Disruption and Resilience: Cybered Conflict, Power, and National Security*, Studies in Security and International Affairs (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 177.

⁹² Chris C. Demchak and Peter Dombrowski, “Rise of a Cybered Westphalian Age,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (2011): 36.

was launched in 2009. While it was designed to protect the military interactions from cyberattacks, it became a precedent that started the discussion on developing a similar “cyber safety wrapper” around the whole nation. An important feature of the Cyber Command is its ability not only to defend and attack but also to collect information internationally.⁹³

The state may be slower to adopt new technologies due to factors such as budget constraints and overall bureaucratic sluggishness. However, once it adapts and learns, the state’s capabilities usually allow for the achievement of significant results. Like in the Iranian case, the methods have evolved from the use of tape recorders in 1979 to the live stream of events and social media coordination during the Green Revolution thirty years later. In the case of the US, Obama’s use of social media to boost his popularity during the election was a breakthrough. Trump’s use of the media takes it to a new level: his aggressive tweeting alone allowed for not only consolidation of his base, but for setting the agenda in the media in general, building a parallel reality (in which it can even snow on an abnormally warm winter day⁹⁴), and finding the means to advance his interests further and organize his supporters.

⁹³ Demchak and Dombrowski, 49–50.

⁹⁴ Edmund DeMarche, “White House’s ‘first Snow of the Year’ Tweet Confuses Washington, DC, Residents,” Text.Article, Fox News, January 13, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/white-houses-first-snow-of-the-year-tweet-baffles-washington-dc-residents>.

2.5 Preliminary Theory of State Digital Control in the Information Age

As Foucault showed it, power comes from knowledge that is created within discourse, and knowledge then becomes an effect of power. The governments have always strived towards population organization and control, and they have been adapting to new realities and new ways. Discourses, such as those that sow divisions among various social groups, have been effectively used for a long time, but new technologies and the new media allow for their broader use and even more effectiveness. Propaganda has been long employed to manipulate society's opinions and perceived picture of the world. The new media facilitate the development of a new kind of propaganda, which is more sophisticated, more efficient, and has more far-reaching consequences at the international level.

The existing literature on the new media tends to discuss the liberalizing and democratizing effect of the new media and technology. This dissertation focuses on the way governments adapt to new realities, learn to utilize the new media to their maximum advantage, acquire new technologies, investing in capacity, and use them to reassert their power and maintain in control. The empowerment that came from technology is now backfiring: the advantage was temporary because even though states may be slow to adapt, their recourses allow them to make full use of the new potential. While new technologies may come from the civil society and the private sector because their adaption there is faster, once the states begin to catch up, they strive to get a monopoly on information like they have a monopoly on violence.

In my three cases, I will test the following theoretical claims:

- The states are acquiring and learning new technologies and the new media
- The states are adapting to new realities, expanding their capabilities, and investing in new strategies
- The states are developing and using new techniques to exert control

2.6 Research Design

New media play a significant role in today's politics and international relations. According to the dominant position, the new media are transforming politics and changing the balance of power between the state and the civil society towards the latter. The conventional wisdom suggests that digital and social media are shifting the balance of power between the authoritarian state and the civil society in authoritarian states towards the civil society. The Arab Spring of 2011, which was discussed in the introduction, is only one notable example of such an effect of the media. Ralph Berenger, summarizing the results of works published in an edited volume called *Social Media Go to War: Rage, Rebellion and Revolution in the Age of Twitter* (2013), states:

...the use of social media during times of conflict – wars, uprisings, social causes, and political contestations – played a role in mobilization of supporters and setting the agenda for mass media... The reaction of controlling authorities toward these new instruments of connectivity as they grapple with a new communication reality and, for them, a fresh dilemma: How do governments and regimes balance the empowerment of instant, interconnected communication by individuals, special

interest groups, businesses, and with their own need to stay connected to the world while controlling their populations to maintain social order and survive?⁹⁵

Berenger's answer to this question is generally that governments' goals are to resist this liberalization and to minimize the damage it brings on those in power. The governments seem to be clearly slow in their efforts to address the problem. Berenger claims that today's communications are no longer vertical – they are now horizontal.⁹⁶ According to him, the new media are changing the existing hierarchy or balance of power.

The goal of this dissertation is to explore the neglected dimension of the rise of new media. I argue that governments do not lose their power due to the emergence of the new media. Although these systems represent a challenge to the governments, or even to the concept of the state as it is, governments not only manage to resist liberalization in many instances successfully, but they adapt to the new reality and start using modern communication technologies to reassert their power and achieve new goals in both domestic and international context. I argue that the authoritarian state's learning capabilities allow them to adapt and restore their power, thus resisting liberalization – it is mainly the matter of reallocating resources. I assume that civil society still learns faster than the state. However, the emergence of new technologies

⁹⁵ Ralph D. Berenger, *Social Media Go to War: Rage, Rebellion and Revolution in the Age of Twitter* (Spokane, Wash.: Marquette Books, 2013), 511.

⁹⁶ Berenger, 511.

does not decrease the potential of the state to preserve its control. On the contrary, as the new technologies emerge, states adapt and start using them to achieve their goals thus reducing the gap. In terms of state adaptation, it will be useful to see if a state adapted more effectively to the new media and started using them for their purposes faster than that happened with television.

For this research, I conduct a discourse and content analysis of digital media English-language coverage over selected periods of time and with a focus on selected topics to show how propaganda and information control contribute to shaping perceptions and opinions about an authoritarian state in the world arena. Using the Foucauldian lens, I search for the answer to my research question. The three selected media outlets represent three non-democratic regimes – Russia, China, and Turkey. All three states possess considerable potential and resources and are frequently labeled “rising powers,” which challenge the dominance of the current world leader, the US. Russia is trying to restore its lost great power status; after the turn to democratization in the 1990s, Russia’s policies were reversed by Vladimir Putin, who came to power in 2000, and has been virtually staying on until now. China, which is ruled by the Communist Party, is the world’s second-largest economy and a major regional power. Both Russia and China are nuclear powers and permanent members of the United Nations Security Council; Russia is the world’s largest state by territory, and China by population. Turkey is a regional power, which is often called a “Rising Muslim Power.” While being a proclaimed conservative democracy, Turkey caused much international concern in recent years for its authoritarian drift. Similar to Russia,

Turkey's leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been in power as a prime minister and then as president for close to two decades. All three states oppose the “Western hegemony” on multiple levels.

Additionally, all three states spend considerable portions of their budget on the media. “Media warfare” has long been included in China's foreign policy strategy and budget. Following the Olympic Games of 2008 in Beijing, the country's leadership allocated 6.6 billion dollars for global media expansion. In recent years, China has spent dozens of millions of dollars solely on influencing the US.⁹⁷ Importantly, Beijing is investing heavily in foreign-language media.⁹⁸ Russia, which is well-known for its tight control over the media, reportedly spent over a billion dollars on mass media per year in 2015-2017, including around 300 million towards RT

⁹⁷ Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, “Inside China's Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign,” *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018, sec. News, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xi-jinping>.

⁹⁸ “China Is Spending Billions on Its Foreign-Language Media,” *The Economist*, June 14, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/china/2018/06/14/china-is-spending-billions-on-its-foreign-language-media>; “China Profile,” *BBC News*, March 6, 2018, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13017881>.

alone.⁹⁹ The budget for 2020 totaled over 1.25 billion dollars.¹⁰⁰ Turkey's spendings on the media, while often not disclosed, have been attracting attention as well. For example, it was estimated that Turkey's English-language channel TRT-World, which is available in the US, received 77-155 million dollars from the government in 2016.¹⁰¹

The three media outlets to be studied in this dissertation are Russia's RT (formerly Russia Today), China's People's Daily (also known as Renmin Ribao), and Turkey's Daily Sabah. In total, over 1300 articles were collected, and over 1200 articles were analyzed for this dissertation. The following section discusses each of the outlets and their connections to the governments.

⁹⁹ Фарида Рустамова [Farida Rustamova], "Бюджет государственных СМИ в России вырастет на 2,5 млрд рублей [Russia's state media budget to increase by 2.5 bn rubles]," *BBC News Русская служба [BBC News in Russian]*, May 26, 2017, sec. Новости, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-40062877>; Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber, "Looking West, Russia Beefs Up Spending on Global Media Giants," *The Moscow Times*, September 23, 2014, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/09/23/looking-west-russia-beefs-up-spending-on-global-media-giants-a39708>.

¹⁰⁰ "Финансирование СМИ из бюджета предложено увеличить на треть [State media budget proposed increase by a third]," *Interfax.ru*, September 26, 2019, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/678102>.

¹⁰¹ Steven Stalinsky, "Opinion | This Turkish TV Network Is Erdogan's Propaganda Arm. U.S. Experts Should Stop Appearing on It.," *Washington Post*, November 12, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/11/12/how-us-can-send-message-erdogan-free-press/>.

2.7 The Media

2.7.1 What is RT?

RT (formerly known as “Russia Today”) is Russia’s main and most well-known news outlet broadcasting in foreign languages and aimed at the non-Russian-speaking audience. This dissertation focuses on RT’s English-language coverage through its website and its role as the main English-language international propaganda channel of the Russian government. RT, which was launched in 2005, reaches out to hundreds of millions of people across the world. RT itself describes its coverage as an “alternative perspective” and a “Russian viewpoint on major global events.”¹⁰²

While officially, RT is “an autonomous non-profit organization,”¹⁰³ it is funded and protected by the Russian government. More specifically, RT is owned by an organization called TV-Novosti, a branch of RIA Novosti, which is a subsidiary of a Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya, a state-operated news agency. Sputnik is another subsidiary of this organization. Since 2008, RT has been included in the “List of systemically important institutions approved by the Government Commission on Sustainable Development of the Russian Economy” (strategically

¹⁰² “About RT,” RT International, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.rt.com/about-us/>.

¹⁰³ “Management,” RT International, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.rt.com/about-us/management/>.

important organizations), which guaranteed its funding during the economic crisis.¹⁰⁴

Putin banned funding cuts for RT among several other state-run media in 2012.¹⁰⁵

According to Time’s Simon Shuster, RT has been “the Russian government’s main weapon in an intensifying information war with the West” in which the “top editor has a direct phone line to the Kremlin.”¹⁰⁶

When RT was ordered by the US government to register as a foreign agent in 2017, Putin called it an “attack” on Russian media and even on freedom of speech. He stated that a media’s “point of view” can be contested “but not by closing them down or creating conditions in which they cannot continue professional work.”¹⁰⁷ The Russia case study chapter will provide background for the situation with freedom of speech and press in Russia, which will illuminate the hypocrisy in Mr. Putin’s

¹⁰⁴ “ARCHIVE OF THE OFFICIAL SITE OF THE 2008-2012 PRIME MINISTER OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION VLADIMIR PUTIN,” December 25, 2008, <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/messages/2883/>; “Правительство РФ приняло перечень системообразующих организаций,” РБК, December 25, 2008, <http://top.rbc.ru/economics/25/12/2008/271243.shtml>.

¹⁰⁵ “Putin Forbids Funding Cuts to State-Run Media Outlets — Gazeta.Ru | English News Blog,” November 2, 2012, https://web.archive.org/web/20121102072350/http://en.gazeta.ru/news/2012/10/29/a_4828917.shtml.

¹⁰⁶ Simon Shuster, “Inside Putin’s Media Machine,” *TIME.Com*, March 5, 2015, <http://time.com/rt-putin/>.

¹⁰⁷ “Putin Says U.S. Pressure On RT An ‘Attack,’ Will Get ‘Proper Response,’” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, November 9, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-today-rt-justice-department-deadline-register-foreign-agent/28844886.html>.

statement quoted above. As RT registered as a foreign agent, its Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan tweeted that she “congratulates the US [on its] freedom of speech and all those who still believe in it.”¹⁰⁸ As for Russia, a recent law allows the Russian government to label media organizations, individual journalists, bloggers, and social media users “foreign agents” in a move that tightens control in the increasingly authoritarian country.¹⁰⁹

2.7.2 What is People’s Daily?

People’s Daily is the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, and the largest newspaper in the country. Established in 1948 – a year before the foundation of the PRC – the newspaper has since been the mouthpiece of the government and the Party. After coming to power in 1949, the Communist Party took control of all existing publications making People’s Daily its flagship newspaper, which it remains.¹¹⁰ The reported worldwide circulation by the

¹⁰⁸ Bill Chappell, “TV Company Linked To Russia’s RT America Registers As Foreign Agent In U.S.,” NPR.org, November 14, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/11/14/564045159/rt-america-firm-registers-as-foreign-agent-in-u-s-russia-looks-to-retaliate>.

¹⁰⁹ Laurel Wamsley, “Putin Approves Law Labeling Journalists ‘Foreign Agents’ In Russia,” NPR.org, December 2, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/12/02/784220222/putin-approves-law-labeling-journalists-foreign-agents-in-russia>.

¹¹⁰ Qinglian He, *The Fog of Censorship: Media Control in China* (New York: Human Rights in China, 2008).

end of the 20th century was three million copies.¹¹¹ As a newspaper group, People's Daily operates a number of subsidiary newspapers. According to its website description, People's Daily "reflects the views of the Chinese people, expounds on justice and lambasts various forms of malpractice."¹¹²

As a Party-level organization, People's Daily, along with Xinhua News Agency, has political power and a wider range of privileges (e.g., the journalists are equipped by the government: they were provided personal cars in the early 1990s when it was still uncommon¹¹³). They also perform a watchdog function over the local officials.¹¹⁴

The online version of the newspaper, People's Daily Online, has existed since January 1997 and offers coverage in seven ethnic minority languages and nine foreign languages.¹¹⁵ According to its website, as of 2018, People's Daily Online and

¹¹¹ "Introduction to People's Daily," People's Daily Online, accessed January 28, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/90827/90828/>; "Renmin Ribao | Chinese Newspaper," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed January 28, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Renmin-Ribao>.

¹¹² "Introduction to People's Daily."

¹¹³ He, *The Fog of Censorship*, 45.

¹¹⁴ He, 44.

¹¹⁵ "Introduction to People's Daily Online - People's Daily Online," People's Daily Online, July 6, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0706/c90828-9478507.html>.

its social media accounts reach 258 million people per day across 210 countries.¹¹⁶ The website boasts its “credibility, influence and comprehensive disseminating power,” as well as its commitment to “best content.”¹¹⁷ People’s Daily Online has dozens of offices in China, and eleven subsidiaries or representative offices in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and America. Social media presence is a crucial element of the company’s work: while Facebook is blocked in mainland China, People’s Daily Online Facebook page in English has over seventy million followers.

People’s Daily plays a crucial role in the Chinese propaganda machine. Its goals have been to generate alternative narratives and keep the population under control as other sources of information are unavailable to most people due to the Great Firewall of China. For instance, the state media have been portraying mostly peaceful Hong Kong protests as extremely violent and resulting from interference from “foreign hostile forces” like the US.¹¹⁸ Guardian’s Michael Standaert also pointed out that there is a significant difference between Chinese and English coverage of the spread of coronavirus in China at the beginning of 2020: while the English versions of newspapers may admit that China has a hard time containing the outbreak, the Chinese

¹¹⁶ “Introduction to People’s Daily Online - People’s Daily Online.”

¹¹⁷ “Introduction to People’s Daily Online - People’s Daily Online.”

¹¹⁸ Kecheng Fang, “Analysis | What Is China’s Propaganda Machine Saying about the Hong Kong Protests?,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/08/19/what-is-chinas-propaganda-machine-saying-about-hong-kong-protests/>.

versions tend to downplay it and focus on other news instead.¹¹⁹ *Foreign Policy*'s Hilton Yip (2018) expressed skepticism regarding the competitiveness of Chinese propaganda at the global level due to a problematic international image of China and the Communist Party – but not for lack of trying.¹²⁰

2.7.3 What is Daily Sabah?

The English-language version of Daily Sabah website describes itself as an organization that cares about “accurate facts,” is “committed to the democracy, the rule of law, human rights and liberty,” and “abides by the rules of press ethics.”¹²¹

Launched in 2014, Daily Sabah’s commitment to democracy has already faced extensive criticism. The newspaper was banned from the European Parliament in 2017 because its members thought it was “spreading hate.”¹²² *Foreign Policy*'s

¹¹⁹ Michael Standaert, “Chinese State Media Downplays Coronavirus as Xi Strikes Positive Tone,” *The Guardian*, January 24, 2020, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/24/chinese-state-media-downplays-coronavirus-as-xi-strikes-positive-tone>.

¹²⁰ Hilton Yip, “China’s \$6 Billion Propaganda Blitz Is a Snooze,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), April 23, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/23/the-voice-of-china-will-be-a-squeak/>.

¹²¹ “About Us,” DailySabah, accessed July 13, 2017, <http://www.dailysabah.com/static/about-us>.

¹²² “European Parliament President Bans Distribution of Daily Sabah at Parliament - EUROPE,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/european-parliament-president-bans-distribution-of-daily-sabah-at-parliament.aspx?pageID=238&nID=111171&NewsCatID=351>.

Armstrong called Daily Sabah “an English-language window into the AKP’s thinking,” which was established as a response to Gezi Park protests in 2013 and the split between Erdoğan and the Gülen.¹²³ The new propaganda outlet’s purpose was to consolidate Erdoğan’s power, cultivate anti-Western sentiment in the population, and legitimize government’s policies.

Daily Sabah is owned by Turkuvaz Media Group, which is a subsidiary of Calik Holding, an organization founded and chaired by Ahmet Calik, a close friend and an associate of Erdoğan. In 2007, Calik Holding acquired the country’s second largest media company ATV-Sabah in a controversial sale involving two state banks and investment from Qatar allegedly organized by Erdoğan. At that time, Calik Holding was managed by Erdoğan’s son-in-law.¹²⁴ According to Yildiz (2014), that purchase became the first step towards Erdoğan’s “media empire” – a government apparatus summoned to increase Erdoğan’s popularity in Turkey. After the events of 2013, pro-Erdoğan’s media became more critical than ever as criticism was growing in the media.¹²⁵

¹²³ William Armstrong, “Army of Spin,” *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2014, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/09/army-of-spin-turkey-media-erdogan/>.

¹²⁴ “Turk Opposition Wants PM Censured over Media Sale,” *Hürriyet*, May 14, 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/turk-opposition-wants-pm-censured-over-media-sale-8939732>.

¹²⁵ Mert Yildiz, “Erdogan’s Rise to Power through the Media,” *Econoscale* (blog), February 15, 2014, <https://econoscale.wordpress.com/2014/02/15/erdogans-rise-to-power-through-the-media/>.

From the start, Daily Sabah's coverage closely followed the trends in Turkish-American relations. In 2014, the US was still portrayed as Turkey's ally; it later began showing much more anti-Americanism – as the bilateral relations soured. As the Obama administration became increasingly concerned with Erdoğan's authoritarian inclinations in 2016, Turkey demonstrated more discontent with the US support for the Kurds.¹²⁶ Daily Sabah provided criticism for “Obama's irresponsible policies” and announced the impending end of friendly relations.¹²⁷ The anti-American sentiment increased among the Turkish population as well. Since then, Daily Sabah's coverage has been aimed at condemning the West, victimizing Turkey, and promoting Erdoğan's vision for the country. Since around 2013, Erdoğan also stopped declaring his commitment to freedom of the press and launched an offensive on the international media. The disruption of the Western media narratives became an essential task of Daily Sabah.¹²⁸ While it can be argued that Daily Sabah's propaganda is much less

¹²⁶ Jonathan Marcus, “US-Turkey: The Strained Alliance,” *BBC News*, March 29, 2016, sec. Explainers, <http://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-35882201>.

¹²⁷ Serdar Karagöz, “US Support for PKK's Syrian Wing Risks Turkey-US Relations,” *DailySabah*, accessed July 19, 2017, http://www.dailysabah.com/columns/serdar_karagoz/2016/03/29/us-support-for-pkks-syrian-wing-risks-turkey-us-relations.

¹²⁸ Joel Simon, “International Journalists Are in Danger as Never Before,” *The Guardian*, November 4, 2014, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/04/international-journalists-danger-media-reporters-social-media>.

sophisticated than that of RT, the parallels are quite obvious, and Daily Sabah can be an interesting and useful example of how governments learn.

2.8 Cases

As my case studies, I explore media coverage of events by the three news organizations discussed above. All three cases – sets of publications by RT, People’s Daily, and Daily Sabah – work with a different “event” (a political development and a period of time after it) that has significance for each respective government. The events are different because no single event can be considered of the same significance to all the state-controlled media organizations. Limited content and extensive discourse analyses cover all the articles (collected using a keyword or phrase) published on the official English-language websites of each of the three news outlets over a certain period of time. Due to the natural research constraints, the time frame of three months was chosen for this study.

The discourse analysis of the media coverage will help identify major themes and trends of pro-government broadcasting in the three states, as well as smaller and more subtle elements of verbal politics. For comparative purposes, each of the case studies includes a full content and discourse analysis of the coverage of the same event by BBC. I do not claim that BBC is an “unbiased” media organization; however, it should be suitable for my purposes as it is mainly an outsider for conflicts in Syria, South China Sea, and Turkey. The comparison will help illuminate major

distinguishing features of RT, People's Daily, and Daily Sabah as governmental propaganda outlets. I briefly discuss the cases below.

2.8.1 Case I

The first case, RT, is considered in relation to the official launch of Russia's military involvement in the ongoing Syrian War, which came after Russian parliament's formally allowing the president to deploy the Russian air force in Syria on September 30, 2015. Russia's historically close relations with Syria (and overall the support of the Assad government by Putin's regime, as well as Russia having a Navy base in Syria) make its involvement in the conflict a highly visible factor for all other players. While the political crisis has been persistent in the region for a long time now, and while Russia and other states continue developing their strategies and endeavor to discuss cooperation in fighting common enemies, mass media play a large role in these processes. While broadcasting important news and information regarding the Syrian developments to populations, RT's coverage of the events also seeks to convey special messages about the state's unique vision of the situation, the discourse created around the developments by influential actors, as well as the resolve and intentions of those actors regarding their current and future involvement in Syria. I will discuss my findings in the context of official government policies of the studied states, and endeavor to identify evidence that not only is media used as a tool of propaganda by the governments, but also that they have a potential to shape political behavior of targeted actors. I conduct a content and discourse analysis of the period of Russia's military invasion in Syria from its start at the end of September 2015 until the end of December of that year.

2.8.2 Case II

For the second case, People's Daily, I examine the articles published on the official website after the Hague court ruling of July 12, 2016, which delegitimized China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. The Philippines raised the case in 2013, and the decision was finally taken in its favor. The court ruled that the contested waters were "within the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines, because those areas are not overlapped by any possible entitlement of China."¹²⁹ While the case technically involved only the Philippines, its ruling could undoubtedly affect the future development of China's territorial disputes with several other states, including Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei, and Japan. South China Sea disputes have become one of the immediate foreign policy problems for the PRC. Its relations with the US as well were largely influenced by the conflict. I conduct a content and discourse analysis of articles published by People's Daily on the subject between July 12 and October 12, 2016.

2.8.3 Case III

For the third case, Daily Sabah, I explore the media coverage of the post-2016-coup attempt situation in Turkey. The attempt occurred on July 15th, 2016, when the Turkish military endeavored to take over the government. While the military

¹²⁹ Oliver Holmes and Tom Phillips, "South China Sea Dispute: What You Need to Know about The Hague Court Ruling," *The Guardian*, July 12, 2016, sec. News, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/jul/12/south-china-sea-dispute-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-hague-court-ruling>.

announced a curfew and declared their intentions, the coup failed to gain sufficient public support and was defeated. President Erdoğan reasserted his power and since then started conducting extensive purges and arrests that affected the lives of many people not only related to government or the military but also those from the spheres of education and the media. As the author of an opinion article from the New York Times published the day after the coup attempt suggested,

Given the chaotic and bloody events of the last two days, there is little doubt that Mr. Erdoğan will become more vengeful and obsessed with control than ever, exploiting the crisis not just to punish mutinous soldiers but to further quash whatever dissent is left in Turkey. “They will pay a heavy price for this,” he said, chillingly. “This uprising is a gift from God to us because this will be a reason to cleanse our army.”¹³⁰

I conduct a content and discourse analysis of the articles published by Daily Sabah during the time between July 15 and October 15, 2016 – the first three months after the coup attempt.

¹³⁰ The Editorial Board, “Opinion | The Counter-Coup in Turkey,” *The New York Times*, July 16, 2016, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/16/opinion/the-counter-coup-in-turkey.html>.

Chapter 3

CASE STUDY I: RT'S COVERAGE OF RUSSIA'S 2015 INVOLVEMENT IN THE SYRIAN WAR

In this chapter, I explore how the Russian state-controlled media outlet RT covered the first three months of Russia's intervention in the Syrian War in the fall of 2015. First, I review the history of mass media in Russia, starting from before the Soviet Union, which will provide a basis for the understanding of the underlying reasons for the current media environment in the country. After that, I give an overview of what RT is as a media outlet. Then, I discuss the War in Syria and the developments of the last quarter of 2015 when Russia officially launched its military campaign there – the first major military action that Russia pursued outside of the former Soviet Union in the post-Cold War period. The discussion and analysis of the RT coverage follow next: it included 198 articles mentioning “Syria” that were published between September 30 and December 30, 2015, on RT website. The articles were processed with the help of the NVivo 12 Plus software. Finally, I analyze the coverage of the Syrian conflict with an emphasis on Russia by BBC. For this purpose, I use 171 articles found using the keywords “Syria + Russia” during the same period as for the RT search, which I also process with the help of the same software.

3.1 The Mass Media in Russia

The press has historically played a critical role in Russia's political processes and social life. The journalistic work was an instrument used in political combat at the

beginning of the 20th century, including during the 1905 Russian Revolution¹³¹ At that time the press could be divided into three political directions: conservative (pro-governmental propaganda), liberal (intended for the liberal intelligentsia), and socialist/Marxist (published illegally by those in anti-Tsarist movement, including Vladimir Lenin).¹³² The main factors shaping journalism at that time were law censorship, government and law enforcement, political parties, and businesses. The October Manifesto (1905) laid the basis for emerging ideas of fundamental civil rights and development of the legal political press, which helped the socialist revolutionary propaganda gain momentum.¹³³

In 1912, Lenin initiated launching the first mass-produced working-class Bolshevik daily newspaper: the first issue of Pravda came out later that year.¹³⁴ While Lenin is well-known for strongly believing in propaganda and that newspapers must become “organs” of party organizations, Anna Arutunyan (2009) correctly pointed out that the tradition has been much longer: the oldest Russian newspaper, Vedomosti,

¹³¹ Smirnov, S.V. [Смирнов С.В.], *Легальная печать в годы первой русской революции. [Legal Press during the years of the First Russian Revolution]* (Leningrad, 1981). :12

¹³² Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.], *История отечественных средств массовой информации [The History of the Domestic Media]* (Томск: Издательство ТПУ, 2006), <http://ctl.tpu.ru/files/priosmiup.pdf>.

¹³³ Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.]. :71-72

¹³⁴ Prokhorov, Ye.P. [Прохоров, Е.П.], *Введение в журналистику [Introduction to Journalism]* (Moscow: Высшая школа, 1988). :89

launched by Peter the Great, functioned as an “extension of the government,” intended as a government mouthpiece.¹³⁵ During 1909-1913 the press was overall blooming, with over three thousand newspapers in 1913.¹³⁶ By 1917, various periodicals were published in over 180 cities, the Moscow circulated newspapers amounted to 450 million copies, and in Saint Petersburg, there were around 150 newspapers and over 400 magazines.¹³⁷

As World War I started, the government introduced strict censorship while promoting pro-monarchist press. After the February Revolution (1917) and the collapse of the Russian Empire, the Russian Provisional Government passes a press law that banned censorship and legalized all political publications. During the following seven months, the political press diversified, with both liberal and Bolshevik newspapers developing rapidly. The October Revolution (1917) and the following laws put an end to the free and diverse press in Russia. The monopolization of the press by the Bolsheviks followed right after.¹³⁸ The censorship was introduced, the

¹³⁵ Anna Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia* (Maidenhead, Berkshire, England; New York: Open University Press, 2009). :6

¹³⁶ Voroshilov, V.V. [Ворошилов В.В.], *Журналистика [Journalism]*, 2nd ed. (Saint Petersburg: Издательство Михайлова В.А., 2000).

¹³⁷ Voroshilov, V.V. [Ворошилов В.В.].

¹³⁸ John Murray, *The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin: Behind the Paper Curtain* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, Vt., USA: E. Elgar, 1994). :1

liberal press was suppressed, and the Bolshevik press (and increasingly radio¹³⁹) promoted and adapted to the needs of different local and social groups of the population.¹⁴⁰ During the year after the October Revolution, thousands of publications became nonexistent due to either government-forced closure or loss of revenue that followed the introduction of the state monopoly on advertising.¹⁴¹

The Russian Civil War that started after the October Revolution accelerated the demise of information pluralism as Lenin called on public and the army to destroy enemies of the Soviet Government and those with any anti-Soviet sentiment.¹⁴² The “temporary” emergency legislation was passed to outlaw newspapers opposed to the Bolsheviks.¹⁴³ In the early 1920s, after the Civil War, the press was largely in decay due to the overall crisis and shortage of paper. The number of publications increased with the introduction of the paid press and private newspapers as a part of the New

¹³⁹ Gleizer M.S. [Глейзер, Михаил Самойлович], *Радио и телевидение в СССР : Даты и факты (1917-1986)* [*Radio and Television in the USSR: dates and facts (1917-1986)*] (Moscow: Искусство, 1989). :9

¹⁴⁰ Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.], *История отечественных средств массовой информации* [*The History of the Domestic Media*].

¹⁴¹ Brian McNair, *Glasnost, Perestroika and the Soviet Media.*, 2006, <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=179763>.

¹⁴² Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.], *История отечественных средств массовой информации* [*The History of the Domestic Media*]. :81

¹⁴³ Murray, *The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin.*

Economic Policy. As a result, hundreds of new newspapers were launched: there were 589 newspapers with an aggregate circulation of 7.5 million copies in 1925.¹⁴⁴ In the meantime, the Soviet government gradually centralized the printing industry and started to demand ideological purity of it, thus transforming it into an instrument of the new totalitarian regime, which started producing political, economic, and industrial propaganda. As Remington (1981) put it, “the right to publicize [became] a form of the unified political power of the state.”¹⁴⁵

By the end of the 1920s, radio increasingly became the most effective means of communication. The National Radio Broadcasting Committee was established in 1931 to coordinate local and national broadcasting as well as study interests of various groups of the population. In 1933, in addition to Russian, the Soviet radio broadcasted programs in eight foreign languages.¹⁴⁶ In the 1930s, radio became available to residents in Siberia, Central Asia, and the Far East. The first television program in the Soviet Union came out in 1934. Overall, in the 1930s the Soviet media represented

¹⁴⁴ Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.], *История отечественных средств массовой информации [The History of the Domestic Media]*. :88

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Remington, “The Mass Media and Public Communication in the USSR,” *The Journal of Politics* 43, no. 3 (1981): 803–17, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2130638>.

¹⁴⁶ Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.], *История отечественных средств массовой информации [The History of the Domestic Media]*. :94

one-party ideology and was aimed at highlighting advantages of socialism over capitalism and the special role of the party and Stalin in the country's successes.¹⁴⁷

In 1940, there were 8806 newspapers in the USSR with an aggregate circulation of 38.4 million copies.¹⁴⁸ Among the variety of newspapers, the major ones included Pravda and Izvestia. By that time, largely pushed for by Stalin, the newspapers started publishing the communist party documents and classic Marxist-Leninist literature, further increasing the party control over the press, which prepared it for the years of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945). During the war, the media were instructed to explain the war to the population and describe it as emancipatory and fair (Pravda among the newspapers and radio broadcasting played a vital role in that process).¹⁴⁹ The Soviet Information Bureau was founded to facilitate counterpropaganda both domestically and on the occupied territories, and filtering news from the battle-front to conceal the actual destructions and losses.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.]. :96

¹⁴⁸ *Печать СССР за 50 лет (1917-1966). Статистические очерки. [Press in the USSR. Statistical Sketches.]* (Moscow: Книга, 1967). :190

¹⁴⁹ Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.], *История отечественных средств массовой информации [The History of the Domestic Media]*.

¹⁵⁰ “О создании и задачах Советского Информационного Бюро. Постановление ЦК ВКП(б) и СНК СССР 24 июня 1941 г. [On Creation and Objectives of the Soviet Information Bureau. The Decree by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks and Council of People's Commissars of the USSR from June 24, 1941.],” in *КПСС о средствах массовой информации и пропаганды [Communist Party of the Soviet Union on Media and Propaganda]* (Moscow:

In the post-war period, the circulation of the press increased amounting to 10,547 newspapers (68 million copies) in 1959, while radio was broadly and effectively used for propaganda. In the early 1950s, television started playing an essential role in public life and propaganda as well. After Stalin died in 1953, industrial and scientific-technical propaganda took the lead. As a result of the 10th Communist Party Congress in 1956, the new policy of democratization and freer press brought significant changes to the Soviet press, even though most of them were still under party control.¹⁵¹ In the 1970s, along with the economic stagnation, abandonment of the economic reforms, and growth of the bureaucracy and corruption, the Soviet media gave up attempts at any critical analysis, and the situation mostly rolled back to Stalin era-like fully controlled media.¹⁵²

Quantitatively, in 1975, the circulation of Pravda was 10.6 million copies and was circulated to over 120 countries. At the same time, 195 million people had access to television (230 million in 1980). Radio broadcasting was available everywhere in the country in 1985. As the official media reported strictly about successes during the

Политиздат, 1987), 590 :21; Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.], *История отечественных средств массовой информации [The History of the Domestic Media]*.

¹⁵¹ Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.], *История отечественных средств массовой информации [The History of the Domestic Media]*. :113

¹⁵² Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.].

time of crisis, an oppositional movement started to form. However, in the mid-1980s, as Perestroika started, the circulation of newspapers and journals soared. The press spoke with enthusiasm about Perestroika and harshly criticized the past.¹⁵³

Until the period of Glasnost (~1987-1991), the press represented a monolith for decades: the cohesion was achieved not only through the strict media policy and control exercised by the extensive apparatus including the Department of Propaganda, but also through the institutional control and nomenklatura system, which regulated who to appoint to work in the media organizations – meaning that, for example, most journalists in a newspaper would always be the Communist Party members, who may or may not have had the knowledge or experience required for their position.¹⁵⁴

By 1990, there were five thousand local radio stations in the country, and a variety of foreign radio channels, including BBC, Radio Free Europe, and the Voice of America. Television was available virtually nationwide. TASS was the leading information agency in 1991, which shared information with over 600 foreign agencies in 115 countries.¹⁵⁵ (Perhaps, TASS was able to successfully grow partially because it used to “double” as an intelligence mechanism during the Soviet time, as its

¹⁵³ Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.].

¹⁵⁴ Murray, *The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin*. :40-41

¹⁵⁵ Benderski V.V. [Бендерский В.В.] and Khmylev V.L. [Хмылев В.Л.], *История отечественных средств массовой информации [The History of the Domestic Media]*. :121

journalists provided information to the KGB¹⁵⁶). The post-Soviet years became the qualitatively new period in Russian media, as a number of laws and executive orders to protect and defend freedom of press were passed and issued. The system of censorship was formally abolished in 1990.¹⁵⁷ According to John Murray (1994), the language of the press and the methods of reporting have changed after the fall of the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁸ In particular, the press was westernized: it started striving for objectivity and neutrality, began relying on foreign sources to report about foreign events, but also became more commercialized.¹⁵⁹

The new reality, however, also meant the privatization of the media market, state funding cuts, and newly emerged capitalism and competition, for which not every media company was prepared. As few media managed to maintain independence, others were bought, repurposed, reformatted, and often used for personal goals by new owners – the emerging political and business elites, including Russian oligarchs.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia*.

¹⁵⁷ Murray, *The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin*.

¹⁵⁸ Murray.

¹⁵⁹ Murray. :144-145

¹⁶⁰ Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002).

However, as Ferguson (1998) pointed out, despite the laws, de facto media censorship and oppression of journalists continued in the 1990s: in 1992, the government still controlled newsprint allotment, while some opposition newspapers were banned for “fascist propaganda” by the Ministry of Information.¹⁶¹ In 1996, shortly after announcing his reelection campaign, the first Russian president Boris Yeltsin fired the chairman of Russian State Television for “lies and negative programming.”¹⁶² Furthermore, Yeltsin, despite his pledges of support for the free media, virtually destroyed the promise of press freedom in Russia during the First Chechen War (1994-1996): according to the Russian Fund for Freedom of Information, close to a hundred violations of the civil and professional rights of journalists were recorded during the first several weeks of the conflict, while a dozen journalists were killed in the course of several months. In 1996, the Glasnost Defense Foundation reported 267 cases in which journalists were “wounded, beaten, arrested, or had film or videotapes confiscated.”¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Denise P. Ferguson, “From Communist Control to Glasnost and Back?: Media Freedom and Control in the Former Soviet Union,” *Public Relations Review* 24, no. 2 (June 1, 1998): 165–82, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(99\)80049-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(99)80049-6).

¹⁶² Michael R. Gordon, “Yeltsin Ouster Of TV Chief Stirs a Storm,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 1996, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/02/18/world/yeltsin-ouster-of-tv-chief-stirs-a-storm.html>.

¹⁶³ Ferguson, “From Communist Control to Glasnost and Back?”

Elena Vartanova (2011) identified three periods of change in state-media relations in post-Soviet Russia. The first period (the early 1990s) was the time when the state role and visibility was minimal, following the media privatization and the new free-market reality. The second period (the mid-1990s) was characterized by Yeltsin's "polycentric" regime, based on a balance of different "power centers" including oligarchs, industrial-financial groups, and regional administrations. As I mentioned earlier, these new political and business elites used the media for their benefit, such as during election campaigns. Still, overall the state attempts to get the media back under its control did not succeed at the time.

The third period (the 2000s) represented the "monocentric" Putin's regime when the government started the process of taking independence away from other power centers and subordinating them this consolidating the power of the president (oligarchs who would not pledge loyalty to the regime, were forced to sell their media to others). At that time, state agencies controlled 70% of the electronic media, 80% of the regional press, and 20% of the national media. Putin's regime started increasingly using the media for its purposes, including incorporating the media in the process of constructing a new "national idea."¹⁶⁴¹⁶⁵ The state used a variety of financial and

¹⁶⁴ Elena Vartanova, "The Russian Media Model in the Context of Post-Soviet Dynamics," in *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*, ed. Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139005098.008>. :132-134

¹⁶⁵ The Putin's "Russian Idea" was reflected in his 1999 Millennium Message. Hill and Clifford (2015) asserted that the problem with the Message was that it illuminated

administrative tools to keep the media under control, effectively canceling the possibility of a free and independent press.¹⁶⁶ The views on periodization of the Russian media vary (See, for example, Brian McNair (1991, 2006)¹⁶⁷ or Ivan Zassoursky (2004)¹⁶⁸).¹⁶⁹

Discussing access to information in Russia in the 2000s, Hedwig De Smaele (2007) distinguished between de jure situation of a free press and lack of censorship, and de facto reality that the access to information was highly restricted and not free at all: the information was “owned” by elites, and journalists were not allowed into the tight inner circles, despite the abundance of press centers, secretaries, and other visible attributes that are supposed to bring the government closer to the public.¹⁷⁰ The

the national goals but did not outline the methods of their achievement. By using “emotion and... historic and cultural symbolism,” Putin promised to “rebuild the Russian state, protect Russia’s sovereignty, preserve domestic stability and unity, and ensure national security,” but never mentioned how he would go about it (Fiona Hill, Clifford G Gaddy, and Brookings Institution, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, 2015, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4321748>).

¹⁶⁶ Olga Khvostunova, “A Brief History of the Russian Media (Part 1/2),” *Fair Observer*, March 19, 2014, <https://www.fairobserver.com/region/europe/brief-history-russian-media-69813/>.

¹⁶⁷ McNair, *Glasnost, Perestroika and the Soviet Media*.

¹⁶⁸ Ivan Zassoursky, *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia* (M.E. Sharpe, 2004).

¹⁶⁹ For another interesting look on the post-Soviet media in general see Olessia Koltsova, *News Media and Power in Russia* (Routledge, 2006).

¹⁷⁰ Hedwig De Smaele, “Mass Media and the Information Climate in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 8 (2007): 1299–1313, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20451454>.

journalists who managed to obtain the information that could be used to criticize the government put themselves in physical danger: one of the first famous murders during the Putin's regime was that of Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 who fiercely criticized the regime and, specifically, its role in the Chechen War.¹⁷¹

In addition to violence against journalists, self-censorship has persisted as a Soviet legacy, which leads to editors complying with unspoken directives from above to avoid being reprimanded or punished in some way.¹⁷² The fears are not empty: according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 58 journalists were killed in Russia between 1992 and 2019, 32 out of whom were murdered, the rest died on a dangerous assignment, or in a crossfire.¹⁷³

From the beginning of Putin's presidency, the political discourse in Russia deteriorated, the pressure from the government increased, and then, as Olga Khvostunova (2014) put it, "the symbolic culmination of the new elite's war for media control" was Gazprom Media appropriation of MediaMost Holding in 2002.¹⁷⁴ Leonid

¹⁷¹ Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia*.

¹⁷² Arutunyan.

¹⁷³ "58 Journalists Killed in Russia between 1992 and 2019 / Motive Confirmed," Committee to Protect Journalists, accessed February 17, 2019, <https://cpj.org/data/killed/europe/russia/>.

¹⁷⁴ Olga Khvostunova, "A Brief History of the Russian Media (Part 1/2)."

Radzikhovsky called the same event “the destruction of free speech in Russia or at least the beginning of the end for that freedom.”¹⁷⁵

According to the editors of the volume entitled *The Post-Soviet Russian Media: Conflicting Signals* (2011), the rise of the Internet and the new media became the biggest global challenge of Putin’s media control. To approach the problem, Putin has “made a concerted effort to appropriate new technology for his own propaganda ends” and ensuring that the Russian news websites’ information matches his outlook.¹⁷⁶ The image of Putin himself played a role in that process as well. Among other things, Putin’s demonstrated attitude towards the media has been quite cynical. While cynicism has been a part of Russia’s state-media relations for decades, Putin took it to a new level.¹⁷⁷ The result of a cynical attitude towards the state matters and social life, broadcasted through the official media, most likely leads to moral disorientation, cultivation of nonthinking and numbness of the mind, and lack of interest. This idea helps explain the lack of interest in such ideas as freedom of speech among Russians, which I will discuss later.

¹⁷⁵ Leonid Radzikhovsky, “The Destruction of Media-Most,” *The Guardian*, May 3, 2001, sec. Media, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2001/may/03/4>.

¹⁷⁶ Birgit Beumers, Stephen C Hutchings, and Natalia Rulyova, eds., *The Post-Soviet Russian Media: Conflicting Signals* (London: Routledge, 2011). :10

¹⁷⁷ Natalia Roudakova, *Losing Pravda: Ethics and the Press in Post-Truth Russia*, 2017. :168-195

Putin's popularity, created largely with the help of the media, also facilitates the successful promotion of his views to the population. Research suggests that Putin's popularity was primarily conditioned by his "protector" image from the beginning of his presidency. Dale R. Herspring (2003) argued that "opinion soundings conducted in the fall of 1999... underlined that voters were mostly obliged to Putin for accepting responsibility for security of the Russian people. He looked like a leader who was taking charge during an uncertain time and making good on his pledge to provide stability and safety."¹⁷⁸ Rosenholm et al. (2010), who specifically explored the Russian media discourses, found that one of the important and representative elements within media narratives in the 2000s was "the story of Russia in danger. The danger, which was coming from outside of the Russian nation, was supposed to be dealt with through returning to 'the glorious but vanished Russian past.'"¹⁷⁹¹⁸⁰

According to the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) prepared by IREX, which analyses the condition for independent media in different countries and measures them

¹⁷⁸ Dale R Herspring, *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003). :33

¹⁷⁹ Arja Rosenholm, Kaarle Nordenstreng, and Elena Trubina, *Russian Mass Media and Changing Values* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010). :81

¹⁸⁰ For more on Putin as a protector, and for a feminist perspective on Putin's image and its role in Russian power structures, see Valerie Sperling, *Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia*, 2015.

on a scale from 0 (unsustainable) to 4 (sustainable),¹⁸¹ in 2001 (the first year available), Russia's index for "free speech" was 2.15, "professional journalism" – 1.75, "plurality" – 2.28, "business management" – 1.75, "supporting institutions" – 2.15.¹⁸² The report indicated such problems as persecution of opposition journalists, self-censorship, lack of protection for journalists, poor education in journalism, state control through administrative measures and economic pressure, monopolization of the media, deteriorated access to information, lack of professionalism and journalistic ethic, virtual non-existence of media market, and so on.¹⁸³

A similar report from 2008 (overall score 1.78) showed a decrease in "free speech" to 1.62, in "professional journalism" to 1.5, "plurality of news sources" to 1.82, and "supporting institutions" to 1.96. "Business management" increased to 1.99. Some of the comments and concerns included in the report were that "Russian society as a whole, as well as the media community, do not value freedom of speech and are not ready to protect it;" that the quality of journalism further declined, access to information varies throughout the country and access to information on the Internet

¹⁸¹ "Media Sustainability Index (MSI)," IREX, accessed February 17, 2019, <http://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-msi>.

¹⁸² "MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2001: Russia" (Washington, DC: IREX, 2001), <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2001-russia.pdf>.

¹⁸³ "MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2001: Russia."

can often be blocked, that the state media ignore the views of the opposition, and that government pressure on NGOs working in the media sector has increased.¹⁸⁴

Finally, the report from 2018 (overall score 1.72), demonstrated some growth of “free speech” compared to previous years (1.63), “professional journalism” at 1.43, “plurality of news sources” at 1.74, “business management” at 1.76, and “supporting institutions” at 2.02. The findings showed that Russians still had little interest in protecting free speech, the journalism lacked professionalism and the desire to seek truthful information, self-censorship was still widespread, that the most popular sources of information for people are state-controlled media, and that distribution channels for the media were restricted.¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, the list of participants in the IREX studies has been hidden since 2013, due to laws restricting NGO activity and contacts with US-based NGOs.

3.2 About RT

RT is a brand that started as “Russia Today” but later officially changed to the abbreviated version arguably in order not to draw excessive attention to its

¹⁸⁴ “MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2008: Russia” (Washington, DC: IREX, 2008), <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2008-russia.pdf>.

¹⁸⁵ “MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2018: Russia” (Washington, DC: IREX, 2018), <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2018-russia.pdf>.

affiliation and sources. RT represents Russia's main English-language news outlet, and its main propaganda channel. In addition to the English and Russian versions, RT online is available in Spanish, German, French, and Arabic. Specifics of RT broadcasting in each of these may differ and are out of the scope of this project.

RT was launched as a television channel in 2005, offering news coverage in English, Spanish, and Arabic, through broadcasting studios across the world, including those in Washington DC and London. As its official website indicates, today RT reaches out to over 700 million people in over a hundred states with 120 million viewers in Europe, 85 million in the US (watching both in English and Spanish), 5 million watching in Arabic in the Middle East and North Africa, and over 154 million viewers in Asia.¹⁸⁶ The website also claims that the award-winning channel “provides alternative perspectives on current affairs, and acquaints international audiences with a Russian viewpoint on major global events.”¹⁸⁷ In the “Management” section of RT.com, it is stated that RT is “an autonomous non-profit organization.”¹⁸⁸

The governmental affiliation of RT is reflected in its funding. The organization was founded by TV-Novosti, a branch of RIA Novosti – an openly state-operated news agency. While RIA Novosti was reorganized and rebranded in 2013,

¹⁸⁶ “Distribution,” RT International, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.rt.com/about-us/distribution/>.

¹⁸⁷ “About RT.”

¹⁸⁸ “Management.”

TV-Novosti continued to be the owner of RT. In 2008, RT was included in the “List of systemically important institutions approved by the Government Commission on Sustainable Development of the Russian Economy” (strategically important organizations), which guaranteed its funding during the economic crisis.¹⁸⁹ In 2012, Putin banned funding cuts for several state-run media, including RT.¹⁹⁰ A reporter for TIME Simon Shuster characterized RT as “the Russian government's main weapon in an intensifying information war with the West” in which the “top editor has a direct phone line to the Kremlin.”¹⁹¹

Shuster’s exploration of the RT’s dependence on the Russian government resulted in the virtual confirmation of this fact by the editor in chief Margarita Simonyan who admitted that RT’s perspective is “defined by certain principles expressed by the state, by representatives of the Russian state,” examples of former international correspondents of RT who left the network because “it ‘whitewashes’” Putin’s actions,” and the enormity of RT’s budget from the comparative perspective:

Putin founded RT in 2005 with a budget of about \$30 million and gradually ramped it up to more than \$300 million per year by 2010. (By comparison, the BBC World Service Group, which includes TV, radio and online news distribution, has a

¹⁸⁹ “ARCHIVE OF THE OFFICIAL SITE OF THE 2008-2012 PRIME MINISTER OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION VLADIMIR PUTIN”; “Правительство РФ приняло перечень системообразующих организаций.”

¹⁹⁰ “Putin Forbids Funding Cuts to State-Run Media Outlets — Gazeta.Ru | English News Blog.”

¹⁹¹ Simon Shuster, “Inside Putin’s Media Machine.”

budget of \$376 million for 2014–15. The BBC’s International Service is the biggest broadcast newsgathering operation in the world).¹⁹²

In 2017, RT America, the television station, was ordered to register as a “foreign agent” by the US Department of Justice as a result of earlier reports by the US intelligent agencies that it was part of the Kremlin’s effort to interfere with the US presidential election in 2016.¹⁹³ Putin called it an “attack” on Russian media and even on freedom of speech. He stated that a media’s “point of view” can be contested “but not by closing them down or creating conditions in which they cannot continue professional work.”¹⁹⁴ RT’s Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan tweeted that she “congratulates the US [on its] freedom of speech and all those who still believe in it.”¹⁹⁵

Around that time, Twitter announced an advertisement ban for both RT and Sputnik, also due to the election meddling. In a blog post, the Twitter administration explained that according to the US intelligence, RT was “implementing state-sponsored Russian efforts” to disrupt the election and that the ban would become “part

¹⁹² Simon Shuster.

¹⁹³ Jack Stubbs and Ginger Gibson, “Russia’s RT America Registers as ‘foreign Agent’ in U.S.,” *Reuters*, November 13, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-usa-media-restrictions-rt-idUSKBN1DD25B>.

¹⁹⁴ “Putin Says U.S. Pressure On RT An ‘Attack,’ Will Get ‘Proper Response.’”

¹⁹⁵ Bill Chappell, “TV Company Linked To Russia’s RT America Registers As Foreign Agent In U.S.”

of [Twitter's] ongoing commitment to help protect the integrity of the user experience."¹⁹⁶ Maria Zakharova, the spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, claimed that the move was America's "yet another aggressive step" towards Russia.¹⁹⁷ The "consequences" that were threatened by Putin, Simonyan, and others for the US measures, included a recent law passed in Russia that allows the Russian government to label media organizations, individual journalists, bloggers, and social media users "foreign agents."¹⁹⁸ This became one of the Russian government's actions taken "in response" to an external actor, and in reality, it was a move that tightened control in the increasingly authoritarian country.

RT is becoming even more relevant as it becomes clear that state actors were at the center of Russian interference in the US presidential election in 2016. Pursuing a goal of helping Trump win the election, Russia conducted cyber-attacks against the democrats (including obtaining access to the networks of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and the Democratic National Committee and compromising dozens of computers), deployed an army of trolls and bots in the social

¹⁹⁶ Twitter Public Policy, "Announcement: RT and Sputnik Advertising," October 26, 2017, https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2017/Announcement-RT-and-Sputnik-Advertising.html.

¹⁹⁷ Nicholas Confessore, "Twitter Bans Two Kremlin-Backed News Outlets From Advertising," *The New York Times*, October 26, 2017, sec. Technology, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/26/technology/twitter-russia-today-sputnik.html>.

¹⁹⁸ Laurel Wamsley, "Putin Approves Law Labeling Journalists 'Foreign Agents' In Russia."

media in an attempt to suppress voters and sow discord in the US society, targeted voter-registration systems, funneled illegal money through the National Rifle Association, and otherwise tried to undermine the US liberal democratic order. The Special Counsel Mueller probe into the election meddling established that Russia believed its actions would be harmful to the Clinton campaign while benefiting the Trump campaign.¹⁹⁹

Russia's Internet Research Agency, sometimes referred to as Russia's troll factory, was able to reach millions of Americans through its social media accounts and had tens of thousands of followers on Twitter. This extremely successful campaign resulted in millions of social media engagements, including reposts of the troll-created content by US political figures.²⁰⁰ Russia was able to weaponize social media and achieve its goals of creating and intensifying polarization within the US communities. This type of efforts by Russia were neither isolated nor new, as Russia had used similar tactics of sowing discords as long ago as in the beginning of 1980s when KGB embarked on a campaign to discredit Ronald Reagan (which was taken seriously by the Reagan administration and led to some counteractions – unlike Trump

¹⁹⁹ “The Mueller Report, Annotated,” Washington Post, July 23, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/politics/read-the-mueller-report/>; Robert S. Mueller, “Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, March 2019), <https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>.

²⁰⁰ “Highlights From The Mueller Report, Annotated,” NPR.org, April 18, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/18/708965026/highlights-from-the-mueller-report>.

administration)²⁰¹ and as recently as 2014 and after when Russia's propaganda machine flooded the Ukrainian and Baltic states' social media with messages and comments aiming to disseminate anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western sentiment (in Russian).²⁰²

To clarify the US intelligence findings, a bipartisan report issued by the Senate Intelligence Committee in July 2019 found that Russia had been conducting "extensive activity" to interfere with the US elections and undermine the US democracy since at least 2014.²⁰³ The committee also found that the US election infrastructure was not prepared for the Russian attacks.²⁰⁴ The experts agreed that Russia's activities would continue, and the US needed to strengthen its defense

²⁰¹ Tom Vanden Brook and Michael Collins, "Mueller Report: 5 Things to Know about Russian Interference in U.S. Elections," USA TODAY, April 22, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/04/22/mueller-report-what-know-russian-election-interference/3538877002/>.

²⁰² Todd C. Helmus et al., "Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe," RAND Corporation, 2018, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2237.html.

²⁰³ The Select Committee on Intelligence, United States Senate, "Report on Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election. Volume 1: Russian Efforts Against Election Infrastructure with Additional Views" (Washington D.C.: U.S. Senate, July 2019), <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6214293-Report-Volume1.html>.

²⁰⁴ Leigh Ann Caldwell, Heidi Przybyla, and Kyle Stewart, "Senate Intelligence Report Finds 'Extensive' Russian Election Interference," NBC News, July 25, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/senate-intelligence-report-finds-extensive-russian-election-interference-n1034736>.

capabilities. While improving the infrastructure may become an extensive and costly task, the actions that need to be taken are more specific and can be more immediately effective than the task to combat the Russian disinformation campaign (including that conducted by RT), which means that more in-depth research on the subject is necessary.

3.3 Russia's 2015 Syrian Military Campaign

Bashar al-Assad has been the president of Syria since 2000, preceded by his father Hafez al-Assad, who ruled the country for thirty years. The civil war in March 2011 started with the Arab Spring-inspired peaceful anti-government protests that turned into a violent insurgency. As the security forces killed the first protestors, the demonstrations spread further, and the crackdown also intensified.²⁰⁵ Thus, the core of the conflict was between the Assad regime and the anti-government rebels. The Kurdish forces – who became involved in the conflict and started gaining territory with the support of the US – and the Islamic State became the other two main factions

²⁰⁵ “A Timeline of the Syrian Conflict as It Enters Its Eighth Year,” March 15, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-15/timeline-of-the-syrian-conflict-as-it-enters-8th-year>.

of fighting groups.²⁰⁶ Forces loyal to Assad and the rebels later broke into smaller militia groups drawing local and foreign fighters.²⁰⁷

Starting the same month and later on, the US imposed sanctions against the Assad's government and other economic sanctions, and in August 2011, Obama called on Assad to resign.²⁰⁸ The European Union, Turkey, and the Arab League countries imposed economic and financial sanctions on Syria as well.²⁰⁹ Two years later, a chemical attack in the suburbs of Damascus killed hundreds of people. The US blamed Assad's regime for the attack but failed to take significant action.²¹⁰ Even though Syria agreed to dismantle its chemical weapons program, it failed to meet the deadline. Multiple rounds of peace talks did not bring results. In June 2014, Assad was reelected president, while the Islamic State declared a caliphate in controlled areas of Iraq and

²⁰⁶ C. N. N. Library, "Syrian Civil War Fast Facts," CNN, accessed February 9, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/08/27/world/meast/syria-civil-war-fast-facts/index.html>.

²⁰⁷ Max Fisher, "Straightforward Answers to Basic Questions About Syria's War," *The New York Times*, January 20, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/19/world/middleeast/syria-civil-war-bashar-al-assad-refugees-islamic-state.html>.

²⁰⁸ Fisher; "A Timeline of the Syrian Conflict as It Enters Its Eighth Year."

²⁰⁹ Library, "Syrian Civil War Fast Facts."

²¹⁰ "A Timeline of the Syrian Conflict as It Enters Its Eighth Year."

Syria. Nearly three months later, the US launched the first air strikes against the Islamic State in Syria.²¹¹

In mid-September 2015, the US military observed that Russia was setting up a forward operating base near the city of Latakia in Western Syria (Syria later confirmed the receipt of the Russian jets²¹²), while Putin expressed his support for Assad in his fight against ISIS.²¹³ As Putin addressed the 70th session of the United Nations general assembly on September 28th, he called for international cooperation in fighting terrorism in the Middle East. Putin called on the nations to “acknowledge that no one but President Assad’s armed forces and Kurds (ph) militias are truly fighting the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria,” and urged to “develop a comprehensive strategy of political stabilization” bringing the international community into a “similar to the anti-Hitler coalition.”²¹⁴ As the Guardian pointed

²¹¹ “A Timeline of the Syrian Conflict as It Enters Its Eighth Year.”

²¹² Ian Black and Alec Luhn, “Syria Confirms Receipt of Russian Jets to Target Isis,” *The Guardian*, September 22, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/22/syria-confirms-receipt-russian-jets-isis>.

²¹³ Library, “Syrian Civil War Fast Facts.”

²¹⁴ “Read Putin’s U.N. General Assembly Speech,” *Washington Post*, September 28, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/28/read-putins-u-n-general-assembly-speech/>.

out, the speech “covered little new ground but intensified criticism of the US over the rise of the Islamic State and chaos in the Middle East.”²¹⁵

On September 30, 2015, the Russian Parliament granted Putin the right to deploy air force in Syria.²¹⁶ The air strikes started on the same day.²¹⁷ Fox News first reported that Russia requested that the US forces clear air space in northern Syria so that Russia could start air strikes against ISIS on behalf of the Syrian government.²¹⁸ According to a senior Pentagon official, the US did not honor the request and conducted normal strike operations that day.²¹⁹ While Russian officials described the Western military action in Syria as illegal, Putin’s chief of staff Ivanov argued that Russian actions were legitimate because the Syrian government requested them.²²⁰

²¹⁵ Shaun Walker, “Syria? Ukraine? Isis? Blame It All on the West’s Rampant ‘Egotism’, Putin Says,” *The Guardian*, September 28, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/28/putin-un-general-assembly-speech>.

²¹⁶ Shaun Walker, “Russian Parliament Grants Vladimir Putin Right to Deploy Military in Syria,” *The Guardian*, September 30, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/30/russian-parliament-grants-vladimir-putin-right-to-deploy-military-in-syria>.

²¹⁷ “A Timeline of the Syrian Conflict as It Enters Its Eighth Year.”

²¹⁸ Jennifer Griffin and Lucas Tomlinson, “Russia Launches Airstrikes in Northern Syria, Senior Military Official Says,” Text.Article, Fox News, September 30, 2015, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/russia-launches-airstrikes-in-northern-syria-senior-military-official-says>.

²¹⁹ Jennifer Griffin and Lucas Tomlinson.

²²⁰ Walker, “Russian Parliament Grants Vladimir Putin Right to Deploy Military in Syria.”

Since the beginning of the Russian air strikes, the international media and the observers reported that Russia mainly targeted areas in which there were anti-government rebels and civilians and little to no ISIS militants.²²¹ Assad, however, praised and thanked Putin multiple times for help in fighting terrorism, including during his surprise visit to Moscow in October 2015, his first foreign visit since the beginning of the conflict in 2011.²²²

Human Rights Watch, using the information obtained from local activists, first responders, and residents, reported in October 2015 that Russian air strikes in northern Homs caused 17 civilian deaths and targeted “a residential part of town at a distance from any apparent military targets.”²²³ Later that month, the organization reported more victims, including “46 family members, all civilians, including 32

²²¹ Ben Quinn, “Russia’s Military Action in Syria – Timeline,” *The Guardian*, March 14, 2016, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/14/russias-military-action-in-syria-timeline>; Jennifer Griffin and Lucas Tomlinson, “Russia Launches Airstrikes in Northern Syria, Senior Military Official Says”; Raziye Akkoc, “Russia Launches Airstrikes in Syria - as It Happened on Wednesday 30 September,” September 30, 2015, sec. World, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11903681/Russia-launches-airstrikes-in-Syria-as-it-happened-on-Wednesday-30-September.html>.

²²² Kareem Shaheen, Shaun Walker, and Ian Black, “Bashar Al-Assad Thanks Putin for Syria Strikes as Russia Announces US Talks,” *The Guardian*, October 21, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/21/bashar-al-assad-thanks-russia-vladimir-putin-syria-airstrikes>.

²²³ “Syria: Apparent Russian Airstrikes Kill Civilians,” Human Rights Watch, October 9, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/09/syria-apparent-russian-airstrikes-kill-civilians>.

children and 12 women.”²²⁴ The strikes were identified as Russia based on information from the locals, and the Russian news agency reports about an air offensive in the area.²²⁵ In November 2015, Al Jazeera reported that Russian air strikes killed over 400 civilians, including almost a hundred children, according to the information by two monitoring groups, the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) and the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR).²²⁶

In December 2015, Amnesty International released a statement condemning Russia’s failure to acknowledge civilian killings, and called for Russia to “end indiscriminate and other unlawful attacks.”²²⁷ The organization prepared the report after having “interviewed eyewitnesses and survivors of attacks as well as examining video evidence and images showing the aftermath of attacks, aided by analysis by weapons experts.”²²⁸ The confidence in Russia’s responsibility for the attacks came

²²⁴ “Russia/Syria: Possibly Unlawful Russian Air Strikes,” Human Rights Watch, October 25, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/25/russia/syria-possibly-unlawful-russian-air-strikes>.

²²⁵ “Russia/Syria.”

²²⁶ “Russian Air Strikes ‘Killed over 400 Syrian Civilians,’” November 23, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/syria-monitoring-groups-russian-air-strikes-kill-400-civilians-151122063024984.html>.

²²⁷ “Syria: Russia’s Shameful Failure to Acknowledge Civilian Killings,” Amnesty International, December 23, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/12/syria-russias-shameful-failure-to-acknowledge-civilian-killings/>.

²²⁸ “Syria.”

from “cross-referencing details of each attack with statements from the Russian Ministry of Defense announcing ‘terrorist’ targets struck, or from details about the nature of the attack in witness testimony.”²²⁹

On November 24, 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian military jet Su-24 after it reportedly violated the Turkish airspace near the border with Syria. To describe the unfolding situation, CNN reported that “[o]ne of the world’s most complicated geopolitical crises became even more tangled.”²³⁰ According to President Erdoğan (and Turkish military officials²³¹), the jet was downed after ignoring ten warnings, and assured that Turkey’s actions did not “indicate any animosity.”²³² Putin, however, condemned “a stab in the back by the terrorists’ accomplices”²³³ and threatened

²²⁹ “Syria.”

²³⁰ Matthew Chance and Michael Martinez, “5 Things to Know about Russian Jet Shot down by Turkey,” CNN, November 24, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/11/24/middleeast/russia-turkey-jet-downed-syria/index.html>.

²³¹ Adam Withnall, “Turkey Shoots down Military Jet over Syrian Border – Local Media Report Plane Is Russian,” The Independent, November 24, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/turkey-shoots-down-russian-jet-near-syrian-border-and-video-shows-plane-coming-down-a6746206.html>.

²³² Don Melvin, Michael Martinez, and Zeynep Bilginsoy, “Putin Calls Jet’s Downing by Turkey ‘Stab in the Back,’” CNN, November 24, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/11/24/middleeast/warplane-crashes-near-syria-turkey-border/index.html>.

²³³ Matthew Chance and Michael Martinez, “5 Things to Know about Russian Jet Shot down by Turkey.”

“serious consequences for Russia’s relationship with Turkey.”²³⁴ The US and French presidents acknowledged Turkey’s right to defend its borders and called for de-escalation.²³⁵ The Washington Post described the incident as a “serious escalation in the Syrian conflict,” which likely meant a new strain in Russia-NATO relations.²³⁶

Starting from mid-September when it became evident that Russia was setting up a base in Syria, Moscow sent artillery and tanks as a part of ongoing help to the Saad’s regime. While Pentagon reported a “steady flow of Russian personnel and military equipment” with “hundreds” of troops present in September, Russia claimed the personnel are there as advisors.²³⁷ The Syrian ambassador to Moscow said that the claims about Russian ground troops are a “lie spread by western countries, the United

²³⁴ Don Melvin, Michael Martinez, and Zeynep Bilginsoy, “Putin Calls Jet’s Downing by Turkey ‘Stab in the Back.’”

²³⁵ Kareem Shaheen et al., “Putin Condemns Turkey after Russian Warplane Downed near Syria Border,” *The Guardian*, November 24, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/24/turkey-shoots-down-jet-near-border-with-syria>.

²³⁶ Hugh Naylor and Andrew Roth, “NATO Faces New Mideast Crisis after Downing of Russian Jet by Turkey,” *Washington Post*, November 24, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/turkey-downs-russian-military-aircraft-near-syrias-border/2015/11/24/9e8e0c42-9288-11e5-8aa0-5d0946560a97_story.html.

²³⁷ Alec Luhn, “Russia Sends Artillery and Tanks to Syria as Part of Continued Military Buildup,” *The Guardian*, September 14, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/14/russia-sends-artillery-and-tanks-to-syria-as-part-of-continued-military-buildup>.

States.”²³⁸ More reports about the ground troop came in early November,²³⁹ as Victoria Nuland, assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee that Russia is “fielding its own artillery and other ground assets around Hama and Homs” and that “Russian casualties are also reportedly on the rise, although the Kremlin is again working overtime to mask them.”²⁴⁰ Reuters reported the same day that, according to U.S. security officials and independent experts, Russia’s military force in Syria totaled about 4,000 troops.²⁴¹ The reports around that time and in the following years pointed to several Russian private military companies being active participants in Syria.²⁴²

²³⁸ Luhn.

²³⁹ Mike Eckel, “Russia Ground Forces Seen In Syria,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, November 4, 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/syria-russia-us-officials-heavy-artillery/27345610.html>.

²⁴⁰ Victoria Nuland, “U.S. Policy After Russia’s Escalation in Syria,” U.S. Department of State, November 4, 2015, //2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2015/nov/249170.htm.

²⁴¹ Jonathan Landay, Phil Stewart, and Mark Hosenball, “Russia’s Syria Force Grows to 4,000, U.S. Officials Say,” *Reuters*, November 5, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-russia-syria-idUSKCN0ST2G020151105>.

²⁴² “Russian Private Military Companies As Licensed Tool of Terror,” InformNapalm.org (English), November 24, 2015, <https://informnapalm.org/en/russian-private-military-companies-as-licensed-tool-of-terror/>; Cody Roche, “Assad Regime Militias and Shi’ite Jihadis in the Syrian Civil War,” *bellingcat*, November 30, 2016, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2016/11/30/assad-regime-militias-and-shiite-jihadis-in-the-syrian-civil-war/>; Joseph Daher, “Three Years Later: The Evolution of Russia’s Military Intervention in Syria,” Atlantic Council, September 27, 2018,

The Russian involvement in Syria became the first major military action that Russia pursued outside of the former Soviet Union in the post-Cold War period,²⁴³ and also the first Russian military campaign in the Middle East since the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941.²⁴⁴

3.4 RT Data Discussion

The data for this project were collected with the help of the Google search engine. While the official RT website does not allow for a convenient, comprehensive search by a keyword within a certain time frame, and hinders sorting, Google makes it possible to search the RT.com website using a specific time frame and a keyword. Thus, I conducted a search for items published by RT.com, which contained the word “Syria” between September 30 and December 30, 2015. As a result, 198 items were found (any duplicates were filtered out). The articles were processed with the help of the NVivo 12 Plus software. In terms of the distribution of the articles throughout the studied time frame, about a third of the total amount were published during the first, second, and third months, indicating that the articles that, at least, mention Syria were

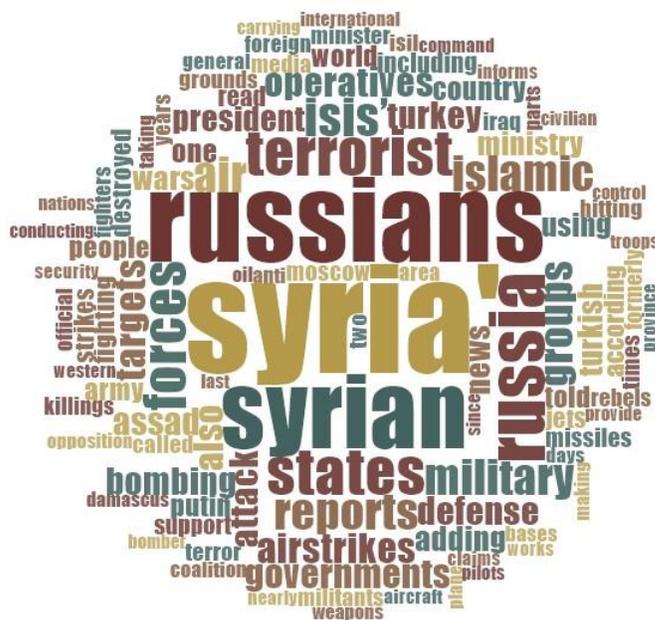
<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/three-years-later-the-evolution-of-russia-s-military-intervention-in-syria>.

²⁴³ Quinn, “Russia’s Military Action in Syria – Timeline.”

²⁴⁴ Akkoc, “Russia Launches Airstrikes in Syria - as It Happened on Wednesday 30 September.”

generally equally distributed, without any significant spikes at the beginning of Russia’s campaign, or later during the first three months. The word frequency query showed that other than “Syria(n)” and Russia (559 count) and Russian(s) (876 count), the most notable frequent words are “terrorist” (445 count) and “isis” (367 count). See the “word cloud” below for a visual of the results.

Figure 1 Case I: RT Data “Word Cloud”



Arguably, the word count query and the cloud do not seem to be particularly useful for identifying the main themes of the coverage. In general, they merely show that Russia is involved in Syria with an emphasis on terrorism (mainly, the Islamic State). The terms used to describe this involvement are “military” (335 count), “airstrikes” (275 count), “attack” (257 count), “defense” (257 count), and “bombing”

(245 count). Notably, it is clear that “Turkey” (246 count, plus 209 for “Turkish”) is one country mentioned often, and “Assad” (239 count) is one political figure that is frequently referred to (for example, “Putin” is mentioned 181 times, and “Obama” 72 times – which, of course, does not provide much insight into the perceived role of the US in the process, but it does indicate a certain lack of interest in pointing to the then-US president himself).

Further study of the articles allows identifying the following broader themes of the coverage:

1. Successes of the Russian military in Syria
 - Describing Russia’s successes
 - “Bragging” about Russian military power
 - Description of Russian strikes
 - Future military plans
2. Legitimation of the Russian involvement in Syria
 - Description of the situation in Syria
 - Attempted delegitimation of the Western powers in Syria
3. Russia’s stance and morality
 - Russia as morally better
 - Russia’s call for international cooperation
4. Victimization of Russia
 - International governments’ and media reaction
 - “Russia under attack”

5. The role of the US and the West in the conflict

- The situation in the West
- The Role of the US
- Civilian and non-military objects

6. Other important actors

- Turkey
- Putin
- Assad

See the theme distribution in the table below.

Table 1 RT: Theme Distribution Across Articles

Theme	Number of articles	Number of references
1. <u>Successes of the Russian military in Syria</u>		
Describing Russia's success	46	59
"Bragging" about Russian military power	23	34
Description of Russian strikes	9	11
Future military plans	7	7
2. <u>Legitimation of the Russian involvement in Syria</u>		
Description of the situation in Syria	34	44
Attempted delegitimation of the Western powers in Syria	17	17
3. <u>Russia's stance and morality</u>		
Russia as morally better	20	27

Russia's call for international cooperation	16	23
4. <u>Victimization of Russia</u>		
International governments' and media reaction	29	54
"Russia under attack"	19	26
5. <u>The role of the US and the West in the conflict</u>		
The situation in the West	20	34
The Role of the US	66	146
Civilian and non-military objects	15	18
6. <u>Other important actors</u>		
Turkey	25	42
Putin	55*	181**
Assad	75*	236**

* Number of articles mentioning Putin or Assad

** Number of times Putin or Assad is mentioned in coverage

These categories, however, overlap, which I will discuss later. Below, I start to analyze the themes above within the RT's coverage of Russia's involvement in the Syrian war.

1. Successes of the Russian military in Syria

The coverage of the Russian military action in Syria, which is almost exclusively defined in terms of success, is a significant part of RT's discussion on everything related to Syria. Such successes, in the first place, are defined in so-called "combat reports" which describe the Russian strikes, detail destroyed objects ("Since the start of the operation, the Russian military have destroyed over a hundred terrorist

targets, including command posts, ammunition depots, training camps and armored vehicles belonging to jihadists;”²⁴⁵ “Six airstrikes hit the base, and the terrorists’ equipment was fully destroyed;”²⁴⁶ “The airstrikes resulted in the elimination of 34 command observation and operational posts of the armed gangs, 16 munitions and fuel storage depots, two workshops producing munitions and homemade explosive devices, three field and training camps, 50 strongholds with military hardware and fire units, 184 fortified localities and defense positions;”²⁴⁷ “fighter jets have attacked a jihadist training center in Idlib province, also destroying a workshop producing suicide belts;”²⁴⁸ “More than 320 terrorists were killed over the past 24 hours”²⁴⁹).²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ “Combat Report: Russian Jets Strike 27 Terrorist Facilities in Syria Overnight,” RT International, October 8, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318013-syria-russia-airstrikes-new/>.

²⁴⁶ “Base with T-55 Tanks among 9 ISIS Facilities Russia Hit in Last 24 Hours - Defense Ministry (VIDEO),” RT International, October 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317649-syria-strikes-isis-russia/>.

²⁴⁷ “Combat Report: Russia Flies 107 Sorties in Syria Eliminating 289 Terror Targets in 2 Days,” RT International, November 13, 2015, 107, <https://www.rt.com/news/321818-russia-syria-terror-strike/>.

²⁴⁸ “Russian Air Force Hit 10 ISIS Targets in Syria in Last 24 Hours – Defense Ministry (VIDEOS),” RT International, October 4, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317590-russian-aviation-isis-targets/>.

²⁴⁹ “Russian Air Force Strikes Large ISIS Base in Syria after Opposition Provides Coordinates - MoD,” RT International, December 16, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/326127-syria-cooperation-opposition-base/>.

²⁵⁰ “Demoralized ISIS Militants Deserting En Masse amid Russian Airstrikes - Defense Ministry,” RT International, October 16, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318861-demoralized-isis-militants-deserting/>; “ISIS HQ,

The picture of a successful campaign suggests that Russia is doing the “right” thing, which supports the idea that the campaign is legitimate. Further evidence of success is represented in the form of approval from the involved actors. For example, under the headline “Syrian Air Force pilots say veteran Soviet fighter jets are effective against jihad,” RT reported that Syrian air force pilots are “in high spirits” because “they feel they are winning the war against ISIS” while using the old Soviet jets²⁵¹ (“increased efficiency of Russia airstrikes” is also reported by the Russian Ministry of Defense²⁵²). Another example would be RT quoting Putin who said that “the actions of the Russian groups deserve high praise,”²⁵³ and reporting that Assad “thanked

Command Point, Ammo Depot Destroyed in Russian Military Syria Night Op,” RT International, October 1, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317180-footage-russian-military-strike-isis/>; “Russia Eliminates Several ISIS Commanders in Syria Air Op, Data Provided by Opposition - MoD,” RT International, December 30, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/327463-russia-syria-airstrikes-isis/>; “Russian Air Force Hits Al-Nusra Front Command Center among 118 Terrorist Targets in Syria,” RT International, October 28, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/319959-combat-report-russia-syria/>; “Russian Air Force in Syria Deploying over 50 Planes & Choppers – Defense Ministry,” RT International, October 1, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317179-russian-airforce-syria-aircraft/>.

²⁵¹ “‘Strong & Safe’: Syrian Air Force Pilots Say Veteran Soviet Fighter Jets Are Effective against Jihad,” RT International, November 7, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/321151-syrian-airforce-hama-base/>.

²⁵² “Combat Report: Russian Air Force Carries out 53 Sorties, Strikes 72 Terrorist Targets in Syria,” RT International, October 22, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/319392-russia-syria-strikes-terrorists/>.

²⁵³ “Any Targets Threatening Russian Forces in Syria Must Be Immediately Destroyed - Putin,” RT International, December 11, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/325583-putin-isis-threat-syria/>.

Russia for the support provided to Syria in fighting for its sovereignty and unity”²⁵⁴ and confirming that “after the participation of the Russian Air Force in fighting terrorism, the situation has improved in a very good way.”²⁵⁵

The military success is also defined by “liberated territories”²⁵⁶ and Syrians who returned home (thanks to the Russian help),²⁵⁷ fleeing militants²⁵⁸ who are

²⁵⁴ “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks: Terrorists Would Seize Larger Areas If Russia Did Not Act,” RT International, October 21, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/319244-assad-putin-talks-moscow/>.

²⁵⁵ “Russian Airstrikes Destroy 472 Terrorist Targets in Syria in 48 Hours, 1,000 Oil Tankers in 5 Days,” RT International, November 23, 2015, 4, <https://www.rt.com/news/323065-syria-airstrikes-terrorists-russia/>; “Syrian Army Making Advances since Russian Airstrikes Began – Assad,” RT International, November 23, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323059-syria-assad-war-terrorism/>.

²⁵⁶ “Russian Strikes Help Syrian Rebels Free 20 Areas from ISIS Control,” RT International, December 29, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/327302-russia-syria-rebels-isis-offensive/>.

²⁵⁷ “1mn Syrians Return Home since Launch of Russian Anti-ISIS Ops - Syria UN Ambassador,” RT International, November 17, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/322401-syria-refugees-return-isis/>; “ISIS Feels ‘Full Force of RAF’: UK Destroys 8 Targets in Second Night of Syria Airstrikes,” RT International, December 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/uk/324871-uk-airstrikes-isis-syria/>.

²⁵⁸ “ISIS Retreating in Syria, Missile System Destroyed, 33 Targets Hit - Russian Military,” RT International, October 15, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318751-syria-russian-air-force-isis/>; “Russian Air Force Hits 50 ISIS Targets in Syria over 3 Days, ‘Significantly’ Damaging Militants,” RT International, October 3, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317505-air-force-terrorists-raqqa/>; “Russian Cruise Missiles Hit ISIS from Mediterranean & Caspian; 600 Killed in One Strike,” RT International, November 20, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/322881-russia-cruise-missiles-isis/>.

“afraid of the Syrian army... and of Russian airstrikes”²⁵⁹ and “were forced to retreat under Russia’s strikes,”²⁶⁰ changes in terrorist behavior and tactics²⁶¹ (“Armed groups aren’t acting as blatantly as they used to...”²⁶²).

Overall, RT’s authors offer strong inferences about the role of Russia in the Syrian war, such as that “the balance of power [or the “tide”²⁶³] on the ground in Syria has started to shift away from militants and terrorist groups since Russia launched its campaign,”²⁶⁴ that “the Russian effort has ‘considerably degraded’²⁶⁵ the strength of

²⁵⁹ “3,000 Terrorists Leave Syria Following Russian Airstrikes – Military Source,” RT International, October 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317720-terrorists-leaving-syria-airstrikes/>.

²⁶⁰ “Demoralized ISIS Militants Deserting En Masse amid Russian Airstrikes - Defense Ministry.”

²⁶¹ “Russian Air Defense Deployed to Syria along with Warplanes – Commander,” RT International, November 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/320909-russian-air-defense-syria/>; “Russian Navy Can Strike ISIS Positions in Syria Anytime – General,” RT International, October 16, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318843-russia-can-strike-isis-ships/>.

²⁶² “Combat Report: Russian Air Force Destroys 448 Terrorist Facilities in Syria over 3 Days (VIDEOS),” RT International, November 9, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/321301-syria-isis-448-targets/>.

²⁶³ “Syrian Army Making Advances since Russian Airstrikes Began – Assad.”

²⁶⁴ “Breaking International Law in Syria,” RT International, November 25, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/323396-unsc-isis-syria-us/>.

²⁶⁵ “US Military in Syria Violate Sovereignty, Not Fighting Terror – Damascus,” RT International, December 18, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/326395-us-military-syria-sovereignty/>.

the terrorist forces in Syria,”²⁶⁶ that “Russian airstrikes in Syria ‘redrawing battlefield lines’”²⁶⁷ and even that (citing Lavrov) “senior officials around the world are coming to realize the truth of Russia’s position on the issue”²⁶⁸ (while Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said that “it has become evident for the international community who is who in fighting global terrorism”²⁶⁹). Those who disagree with the “visible”²⁷⁰ results and express criticism are merely “trying to deflect the public’s attention,”²⁷¹ as Russia’s successes “caused apoplexy” in them.²⁷²

²⁶⁶ “Russian Air Force Destroys 29 ISIS Camps in Syria in 24 Hours,” RT International, October 10, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318193-russian-military-syria-isis/>.

²⁶⁷ “Russian Airstrikes in Syria ‘Redrawing Battlefield Lines’, Sending ISIS Fleeing (VIDEO),” RT International, October 19, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/319054-syria-airstrikes-targets-hit/>.

²⁶⁸ “No Peace Can Come to Syria without Assad – Lavrov,” RT International, November 19, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/322723-lavrov-assad-peace-syria/>.

²⁶⁹ “Russian Military Needs No Second Base in Syria – Defense Ministry,” RT International, December 9, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/325240-russia-syria-airfield-shayrat/>.

²⁷⁰ “US Military in Syria Violate Sovereignty, Not Fighting Terror – Damascus.”

²⁷¹ “Russian Military Needs No Second Base in Syria – Defense Ministry.”

²⁷² “US Special Forces Deployed as ‘Human Shields’ to Salvage Terror Assets in Syria,” RT International, November 1, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/320356-syria-us-troops-shields/>.

Additionally, Russia's actions ("the game-changing military intervention"²⁷³) are characterized as decisive, effective²⁷⁴, transparent,²⁷⁵ and "straight to the point" (bombing the oil truck convoys or oil facilities²⁷⁶),²⁷⁷ which ("according to Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister") means Russia "has produced significant results in several days that greatly surpass those achieved by the [US-led anti-ISIS] coalition in over a

²⁷³ "US Special Forces Deployed as 'Human Shields' to Salvage Terror Assets in Syria."

²⁷⁴ "Russian Cruise Missiles Hit ISIS from Mediterranean & Caspian; 600 Killed in One Strike."

²⁷⁵ "Nobody Can Clearly Define What 'moderate Opposition' in Syria Is - Kremlin Spokesman," RT International, October 4, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317597-syria-moderate-opposition-peskov/>.

²⁷⁶ "Russian Airstrikes Destroy 472 Terrorist Targets in Syria in 48 Hours, 1,000 Oil Tankers in 5 Days"; "Russian Warplanes Disrupt ISIS Oil Sales Channels; Destroy 500 Terrorist Oil Trucks in Syria," RT International, November 18, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/322614-russian-warplanes-isis-oil-trucks/>; "Syrian Opposition Provides Russian Air Force with Coordinates to Target Terrorists – MoD," RT International, December 15, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/326031-syria-russian-military-opposition/>; "Turkey 'Officially Acknowledges' Attack on Su-24 Was a Planned Step - Russian MoD," RT International, December 23, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/326899-russia-turkey-knew-syria/>.

²⁷⁷ "In the Fight against ISIS, Russia Ain't Taking No Prisoners," RT International, November 18, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/322613-russia-isis-anti-terrorism-operation-syria/>.

year”²⁷⁸ (in fact, the US efforts (“criminal involvement”²⁷⁹) are linked to terrorists managing to “capture more Syrian territories and gain[ing] more recruits from all over the world”²⁸⁰). Further legitimizing Russia’s actions, RT cites Russia’s Defense Ministry spokesman, who claimed Russia had “irrefutable intelligence” to guide the military through the campaign.²⁸¹

The description of the Russian successes is supplemented by what can be referred to as “bragging” about Russia’s military power and alleged results of the involvement. Such bragging serves to support the ideas about Russia’s success discussed above. Bragging includes statements about weapons, equipment, and military technology (“Officially the most produced supersonic fighter jet in aviation history... highly-reliable aircraft... It’s a strong tough plane, and safe as well;”²⁸² “These menacing-looking planes are able to carry some of the most advanced high-

²⁷⁸ “Syrian Armed Forces Launch Large-Scale Offensive against ISIS - Syrian General Staff,” RT International, October 8, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317974-syrian-army-offensive-isis/>.

²⁷⁹ “US Special Forces Deployed as ‘Human Shields’ to Salvage Terror Assets in Syria.”

²⁸⁰ “Syrian Army Making Advances since Russian Airstrikes Began – Assad.”

²⁸¹ “Russian Air Force Destroys 20 ISIS Tanks near Palmyra – Defense Ministry (VIDEOS),” RT International, October 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317715-russian-jets-isis-syria/>.

²⁸² “‘Strong & Safe.’”

precision weapons which allow the hitting of targets with pinpoint strikes;”²⁸³ “The S-400 is Russia’s most advanced anti-aircraft defense system,”²⁸⁴ is “cutting-edge,”²⁸⁵ and “capable of shooting down any existing aircraft, helicopter or missile traveling at speeds of up to 4.8 kilometer per second;”²⁸⁶ “Russian ‘smart bombs’;”²⁸⁷ “The airstrip is capable of accepting super-jumbo Antonov An-124 Ruslan and Tupolev Tu-76 transport aircraft;”²⁸⁸ “Known as ‘Improved Kilo’ under a NATO code name, the Rostov-on-Don (B-237) is the first trade-off model of the third generation submarines

²⁸³ “Inside a Russian Airbase in Syria: RT’s Exclusive Close-up (PHOTOS, VIDEO),” RT International, October 2, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317448-russian-airbase-syria-photos/>.

²⁸⁴ “Moscow to Deploy S-400 Defense Missile System to Khmeimim Airbase in Syria,” RT International, November 25, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323379-s400-russia-syria-airbase/>.

²⁸⁵ “Russia Deploys Cutting-Edge S-400 Air Defense System to Syrian Base after Su-24 Downing,” RT International, November 26, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323596-s400-russia-syria-airbase-turkey/>; “Sneak Peek: A Look at Russian Air Shield in Syria, Including Guided S-300 Missile Cruiser and S-400,” RT International, December 18, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/326381-cruiser-moskva-s400-syria/>.

²⁸⁶ “No US Airstrikes in Syria since Russia Deployed S-400 Systems,” RT International, November 28, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323815-syria-s-400-us-airstrikes/>.

²⁸⁷ “RT EXCLUSIVE: First-Hand Look at Russian ‘smart Bombs’ Used in Syria against ISIS,” RT International, October 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317643-russian-precision-weapons-syria/>.

²⁸⁸ “Russian Airbase in Syria: RT Checks out Everyday Life at Latakia Airfield,” RT International, October 3, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317528-latakia-russian-khmeimim-airbase/>.

of the Varshavyanka class (Project 636) subs;”²⁸⁹ “A sophisticated targeting system allows pilots to plant bombs with lethal accuracy;”²⁹⁰ “The two-pilot strike fighter is sometimes referred to as ‘a flying tank’”²⁹¹) – and their numbers (“Moscow has an about 1,720 drones at its disposal;”²⁹² “Russia’s Air Force fleet in Syria includes over 50 warplanes and helicopters”²⁹³), strong epithets to characterize Russia’s campaign and actions (“Russia opened a stunning aerial campaign against Islamic State fighters;”²⁹⁴ “Probably the most impressive airstrikes were delivered by Russian

²⁸⁹ “Russian Submarine with Cruise Missiles off Syria Coast - Reports,” RT International, December 8, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/325060-russian-kilo-submarine-syria/>.

²⁹⁰ “Smart Missiles and Bombs Russia Uses to Take out ISIS in Syria (PHOTOS),” RT International, October 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317662-russian-smart-bombs-syria/>.

²⁹¹ “Sukhoi Warplanes Used by Russia in Syria Anti-Terror Op (PHOTOS),” RT International, October 1, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317277-russia-syria-planes-sukhoi-isis/>.

²⁹² “Any Targets Threatening Russian Forces in Syria Must Be Immediately Destroyed - Putin.”

²⁹³ “Russian Air Force in Syria Deploying over 50 Planes & Choppers – Defense Ministry.”

²⁹⁴ “A Tale of Two Strategies: Russia Destroys ISIS Command, US Hits Afghan Hospital,” RT International, October 4, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/317611-isis-syria-russia-us/>.

strategic bombers;”²⁹⁵), and, finally, statements about Russia itself (“a major global military power, Russia is clearly ‘able’ to thwart ISIS”²⁹⁶).

Overall, a significant portion of coverage is devoted to the description of Russian strikes in Syria and the related military actions. The coverage of the strikes is rather detailed, including numbers of fired missiles,²⁹⁷ conducted sorties,²⁹⁸ flights,²⁹⁹ and targets hit,³⁰⁰ accompanied by more details about those actions. Out of the 198 studied articles, I coded 46 as “describing successes of the Russian military,” within which there were 59 instances of this type of coverage. As a separate (but overlapping category), I coded 34 instances of “bragging about military power” within 23 articles.

²⁹⁵ “Russian Airstrikes Destroy 472 Terrorist Targets in Syria in 48 Hours, 1,000 Oil Tankers in 5 Days.”

²⁹⁶ “Breaking International Law in Syria.”

²⁹⁷ “4 Russian Warships Launch 26 Missiles against ISIS from Caspian Sea,” RT International, October 7, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317864-russian-warships-missiles-launch/>.

²⁹⁸ “4 Russian Warships Launch 26 Missiles against ISIS from Caspian Sea”; “Russian Airstrikes in Syria ‘Redrawing Battlefield Lines’, Sending ISIS Fleeing (VIDEO).”

²⁹⁹ “8 ISIS Targets Hit during 20 Combat Flights in Syria – Russian Military,” RT International, September 30, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317101-russia-isis-strikes-intelligence/>; “Russian Air Force Hits 50 ISIS Targets in Syria over 3 Days, ‘Significantly’ Damaging Militants,” 50.

³⁰⁰ “Russian Air Force in Syria Deploying over 50 Planes & Choppers – Defense Ministry”; “Russian Airstrikes in Syria ‘Redrawing Battlefield Lines’, Sending ISIS Fleeing (VIDEO).”

The last identified category related to Russia’s military action is “future military plans,” and it contains seven articles (and seven instances total) referring to any statements about potential changes or plans in Russia’s Syrian campaign. Most of them state that the Russian government (or Putin personally³⁰¹) insisted that Russia’s military “would not take part in any ground operations in Syria.”³⁰² Additionally, one article quotes Colonel General Andrey Kartapolov who argued that “the Russian military is capable of extending the Syrian operation to Iraq” and that “in the long run Russia may end up having one massive military base in Syria”³⁰³ indicating the existence of future military plans, somewhat contradictory to Putin’s claim that “Russia’s operation in Syria has a definite timeframe and would not last longer than the offensive operation of the Syrian government troops”³⁰⁴ (both articles were published on the same day).

³⁰¹ “Demoralized ISIS Militants Deserting En Masse amid Russian Airstrikes - Defense Ministry”; “Putin: 7,000 People from Ex-Soviet Republics Estimated to Fight alongside ISIS,” RT International, October 16, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318826-putin-isis-soviet-republics-fighters/>; “Russia Has No ‘Growler’ S-400 Systems in Syria – Russian Defense Ministry,” RT International, November 13, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/321863-russia-s400-syria-airstrikes/>.

³⁰² “Combat Report,” November 13, 2015; “Kadyrov Asks Putin to Allow Chechen Infantry to Fight in Syria,” RT International, October 2, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/russia/317393-this-will-be-holiday-kadyrov/>; “Russian Cruise Missiles Hit ISIS from Mediterranean & Caspian; 600 Killed in One Strike.”

³⁰³ “Russian Navy Can Strike ISIS Positions in Syria Anytime – General.”

³⁰⁴ “Putin,” October 16, 2015, 00.

2. Legitimation of the Russian Involvement in Syria

The second set of articles within the studied pool addresses the legitimacy of Russia's involvement in Syria in the most direct fashion. More specifically, the legitimacy rhetoric is twofold: firstly, it portrays the situation in Syria as a factor underlying Russia's right to get involved; secondly, it attempts to undermine the idea that the Western involvement in Syria is lawful. In this section, I discuss three sub-themes: RT on purpose on military involvement, the situation in Syria, and statements most directly undermining the credibility of other actors. In the later section, in which the role of the US and the West will be discussed, I will further illuminate the RT's attempts to undermine the credibility of other actors of the Syrian war.

It is repeatedly stated in the coverage that Russia involved in the conflict "at the request of Assad's government."³⁰⁵ This argument represents one of the pillars of Russian actions' legitimacy. To reinforce this idea, RT quotes Defense Ministry spokesman who claimed that "Russian warplanes have all legal grounds to operate in

³⁰⁵ "Combat Report," October 8, 2015; "Putin: I Don't Get How US Can Criticize Russian Op in Syria If It Refuses Dialogue," RT International, October 15, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318727-putin-us-russia-dialogue/>; "Russia, US Work on Agreement to Coordinate Air Operations in Syria – Moscow," RT International, October 7, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317827-syria-russia-us-isis-airstrikes/>; "Russian Air Force Destroys 20 ISIS Tanks near Palmyra – Defense Ministry (VIDEOS)," 20; "Saudi Clerics Call for Jihad against Russia in Syria – to Back ISIS?," RT International, October 7, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317831-saudi-clerics-jihad-syria-russia/>; "Show Me Your ID: Russian Sukhoi Su-30 Gets near US Jet over Syria for Identification," RT International, October 14, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318654-su-30-incident-us-syria/>.

Syrian airspace, since there was an official request by the Syrian government”³⁰⁶ and in an op-ed piece, the author claims that “Russia is also the only country with a legitimate mandate under international law.”³⁰⁷ Overall, RT defines the purpose of the Russian involvement in Syria (“a country friendly to Russia”³⁰⁸) as to mainly assist the Syrian government in fighting terrorists³⁰⁹ and “destroying Islamic State in the region”³¹⁰ but also to help reach “a peaceful political settlement” of the conflict,³¹¹ while, according to Putin, the Syrian people will have the “decisive word.”³¹² In regards to the goals the Russian air force pursued in its actions, they were to “provide air support for the Syrian Army”³¹³ and to “disorganize control systems and

³⁰⁶ “Show Me Your ID.”

³⁰⁷ “Why the US, France and Britain Are Destroying Syria,” RT International, December 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/324853-us-france-britain-syria/>.

³⁰⁸ “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks.”

³⁰⁹ “8 ISIS Targets Hit during 20 Combat Flights in Syria – Russian Military”; “Russian Air Force in Syria Deploying over 50 Planes & Choppers – Defense Ministry.”

³¹⁰ “Inside a Russian Airbase in Syria”; “Why the US, France and Britain Are Destroying Syria.”

³¹¹ “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks”; “Putin,” October 15, 2015; “Syrian Civilians Helping Russian Airstrikes Target ISIS - Defense Ministry,” RT International, October 17, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318938-russia-airstrikes-hit-isis/>.

³¹² “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks.”

³¹³ “Putin: Free Syrian Army Shares Intel on ISIS Targets, US Reluctant to Cooperate,” RT International, November 13, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/321820-putin-interview-syria-g20/>; “Saudi Clerics Call for Jihad against Russia in Syria – to

deteriorate logistic support systems of the terrorists.”³¹⁴ Additionally, the reasons for intervention were “geopolitical” (apparently, “protecting Russia and her citizens”)³¹⁵ and not “ideological.”³¹⁶

A part of the legitimization rhetoric is the discourse around the situation in Syria, which lays the basis for the argument about why Russia should be involved. The atrocities committed by ISIS in Syria are often described in detail and are presented either through the RT narrative (“the militant group continues to make money from human trafficking and sex slavery;” “children aged one to nine years old are sold for about \$165, while women over 40 go for as little as \$41”)³¹⁷ or through the eyes of the interviewed witnesses. For example, the witnesses are quoted sharing

Back ISIS?”; “Syrian Civilians Helping Russian Airstrikes Target ISIS - Defense Ministry.”

³¹⁴ “Base with T-55 Tanks among 9 ISIS Facilities Russia Hit in Last 24 Hours - Defense Ministry (VIDEO),” 55.

³¹⁵ “Long-Range Bombers to Fly Anti-ISIS Missions from Russia, Putin Orders Navy to Work with France,” RT International, November 17, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/322436-russia-strikes-syria-putin/>; “Russian Air Force Destroys 20 ISIS Tanks near Palmyra – Defense Ministry (VIDEOS).”

³¹⁶ “Kissinger: Let Russia Defeat ISIS, Its Destruction More Important than Overthrow of Assad,” RT International, October 19, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/usa/319115-kissinger-isis-syria-iran/>.

³¹⁷ ““They Cut off Heads”: Syrians Speak to RT about ISIS Atrocities (VIDEO),” RT International, December 1, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/324120-isis-sex-slavery-trafficking/>.

that the militants “cut off heads and kidnapped girls and women,”³¹⁸ “made their slaves strip in order to sell them,”³¹⁹ and “stole property and destroyed churches.”³²⁰

Displacement is one of the problems RT identified throughout the coverage, such as when it reported that “Syria has suffered a mass exodus of millions of people forced to flee their homeland due to the ongoing civil war in the country.”³²¹ Overall, the condition of the country (or its parts) suffering from the war is defined as “apocalyptic,”³²² while specific numbers are reported (“The violence saw over 220,000 people killed, 7.6 million internally displaced and 4 million fleeing the country”³²³). The people’s suffering is heavily emphasized (“healthcare system has been devastated by four years of conflict”³²⁴). Assad’s role in the described setting is

³¹⁸ ““They Cut off Heads”.”

³¹⁹ ““They Cut off Heads”.”

³²⁰ ““They Cut off Heads”.”

³²¹ “1mn Syrians Return Home since Launch of Russian Anti-ISIS Ops - Syria UN Ambassador.”

³²² “Apocalyptic Scenes of Damascus Suburb Obliterated by Violent Clashes (RT EXCLUSIVE DRONE FOOTAGE),” RT International, December 23, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/326837-syria-jobar-obliterated-drone-footage/>.

³²³ “Assad Tour: Russian Company Wants to Start Selling Trips to Syrian Warzone in 2016,” RT International, December 15, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/325932-syria-warzone-assad-tour/>.

³²⁴ “Flesh-Eating Skin Disease Grips ISIS-Controlled Areas in Syria (GRAPHIC),” RT International, December 8, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/325054-flesh-eating-disease-isis-syria/>.

presented as, in a way, ameliorating (“Assad makes surprise Christmas visit to Damascus church”³²⁵). The discourse on Assad will be discussed later.

In some cases, RT sees positive moments in the situation in Syria, such as when reporting “hope in air as Christians, Muslims join to celebrate,”³²⁶ and a “fairy tale ending” to a refugee’s story that had gone viral.³²⁷ The hope and inspiration that is reported by RT seem to be, in many cases, tied to Russia’s participation in Syria’s fate, including the rebuilding of the war-torn regions (“Syrian authorities are hoping Russian companies will develop the country’s offshore oil deposits... Syria is ready to offer Russian companies ‘all possible incentives.’”³²⁸)³²⁹.

An op-ed discusses the legitimacy of the Assad regime, arguing that the legitimacy of any head of state becomes fragile and can be destroyed if someone is

³²⁵ “Assad Makes Surprise Christmas Visit to Damascus Church (PHOTOS),” RT International, December 19, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/326541-assad-visit-church-damascas/>.

³²⁶ “Christmas in Damascus: RT Crew Feels Hope in Air as Christians, Muslims Join to Celebrate,” RT International, December 25, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/327064-christmas-celebrate-syria-damascus/>.

³²⁷ “Crowd-Rescuing: Refugee Who Used to Sell Pens in Lebanon Finds 3 Businesses with Donated \$190,000,” RT International, December 6, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/324920-syrian-refugee-buy-pens/>.

³²⁸ “Damascus Wants Russia to Develop Syrian Oil,” RT International, November 26, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/business/323568-syria-russia-oil-deposit/>.

³²⁹ “Russian Firms to Rebuild War-Torn Syria,” RT International, October 28, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/business/319974-russia-syria-contracts-construction/>.

determined to “vilify a sitting government, shut down multiple embassies, isolate a regime in international forums.”³³⁰ According to the author, the West has such determination, even though the UN sees the Assad’ government as the only legitimate government in Syria.³³¹ To support this idea, another article discusses how Damascus labeled one of the US-led missiles strikes an “act of aggression” after killing three Syrian soldiers.³³²

3. Russia’s stance and morality

While the argument about Russia’s moral supremacy can be identified throughout the coverage within a variety of subtle comments, I coded 20 articles (containing 27 references total) that point to this argument in the most explicit ways. The Russian morality is broadcasted through the ideas that Russia cares deeply about the Syrian population (multiple reports on Russia voicing concerns over and “worrying” about the civilian deaths and the situation in general³³³ and indicating the

³³⁰ “Breaking International Law in Syria.”

³³¹ “Breaking International Law in Syria.”

³³² “Syria Slams US-Led Coalition Deadly Strike against Troops as ‘Act of Aggression,’” RT International, December 7, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/324940-syrian-army-coalition-strike/>.

³³³ “34 Syrian Civilians Reported Killed in Suspected US-Led Coalition Airstrikes,” RT International, December 8, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/325131-syria-bombing-civilians-coalition/>; “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks.”

need for humanitarian assistance³³⁴) but also that Russia's goal is peace in Syria and it is willing to cooperate with the West (and with Assad³³⁵) to achieve this goal.³³⁶ While Russia's willingness to cooperate is presented as almost unconditional, the West agrees "to band together on an anti-terrorist platform only after tragedies."³³⁷ In fact, cooperation with the Syrian government is presented as the main and only legitimate way to solve Syria's problems, and, accordingly, quoting Lavrov, Russia is "probably the only country which supported and will support contacts with all political forces in Syria."³³⁸ After the conflict, Syrians would be able to "choose their own process for how their country should live"³³⁹ and "define the future of their country... including Assad's fate."³⁴⁰

³³⁴ "UN Security Council Unanimously Adopts Syrian Roadmap Resolution," RT International, December 18, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/326466-un-syria-resolution-terror/>.

³³⁵ "Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks"; "Lavrov: Russia Is Ready to Offer Air Support to Syrian Opposition Fighting ISIS," RT International, October 24, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/319584-lavrov-support-syrian-opposition/>.

³³⁶ "A Tale of Two Strategies."

³³⁷ "No Peace Can Come to Syria without Assad – Lavrov."

³³⁸ "Lavrov: Russia Is Ready to Offer Air Support to Syrian Opposition Fighting ISIS."

³³⁹ "Lavrov: Russia Is Ready to Offer Air Support to Syrian Opposition Fighting ISIS."

³⁴⁰ "Le Figaro Poll: Over 70% Want Syria's Assad to Remain in Power," RT International, October 31, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/russia/official-word/320261-assad-france-poll-figaro/>.

Overall, cooperation is one of the themes within the discourse on Syria. It is repeated, for example, that Russia “will coordinate the actions” with France as Putin “ordered... to treat them like allies.”³⁴¹ RT lists multiple Russia’s calls for the US to cooperate.³⁴² Some successes of cooperation with the US are presented, as when reporting that the US and Russia “managed to reach an agreement on some “critical” issues” while Kerry is quoted saying that “the positions of the US and Russia on Syria are ‘fundamentally very similar.’”³⁴³ Additionally, successful steps towards cooperation involved such countries as Saudi Arabia³⁴⁴ and Jordan,³⁴⁵ which RT discussed extensively.

RT also uses any opportunity to quote foreign politicians calling for cooperation with Russia, such as the then-London Mayor Boris Johnson who argued that “Britain must join forces with Syrian President Bashar Assad and Russian

³⁴¹ “‘Avoiding Confrontations’: French, Russian Defense Ministers Agree on Anti-ISIS Coordination,” RT International, December 21, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/326709-russia-france-isis-coordination/>.

³⁴² “No Peace Can Come to Syria without Assad – Lavrov”; “Putin,” November 13, 2015.

³⁴³ “UN Security Council Unanimously Adopts Syrian Roadmap Resolution.”

³⁴⁴ “Putin and Saudi Defense Minister Meet in Russia, Agree on Common Goals in Syria,” RT International, October 11, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318324-putin-saudi-goals-syria/>.

³⁴⁵ “Russia, Jordan to Coordinate Actions on Syria via Amman-Based Center, Others Invited,” RT International, October 23, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/319477-russia-jordan-isis-syria/>.

President Vladimir Putin to defeat Islamic State” and that “It is just not true that whatever is good for Putin must automatically be bad for the West.”³⁴⁶

Furthermore, Russia’s morality is manifested through its self-proclaimed compliance with international law,³⁴⁷ as well as by defining Russian soldiers’ actions in Syria as “heroic.”³⁴⁸ RT covers the heroism, which is a part of morality rhetoric, through, for example, the stories about Russian military members, one of which is quoted claiming he would return to duty after his helicopter was under fire and the other Marine on board was killed because he “must pay back the debt for my commander”³⁴⁹ (the article’s headline starts with “no man left behind”). In another article about a different killed pilot, there are similar claims about following the pilot’s “example of fulfilling his duty” while his body was to be “treated in accordance with

³⁴⁶ “Boris Johnson: ‘Set aside Cold War Mindset, Join Putin & Assad to Defeat ISIS,’” RT International, December 7, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/uk/324959-boris-johnson-syria-allies/>.

³⁴⁷ “Putin,” October 16, 2015, 000; “Putin: Russia Has No Intention of Mounting Syria Ground Operation, Wants to See Political Compromise,” RT International, October 11, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318298-putin-interview-syria-operation/>.

³⁴⁸ “Putin: Downing of Russian Jet over Syria Stab in the Back by Terrorist Accomplices,” RT International, November 24, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323262-putin-downing-plane-syria/>.

³⁴⁹ “No Man Left behind: Dramatic Details Emerge of Downed Su-24 Pilot Rescue,” RT International, November 26, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323527-details-su24-pilot-rescue/>.

the Orthodox Christian tradition.”³⁵⁰ A different example is a paragraph about Russian Air Force pilots “sending emotional messages to their targets, writing ‘For Paris’ and ‘For our people’ on the sides of the high explosive bombs.”³⁵¹

The alleged emphasis on “unifying efforts”³⁵² makes Russia more “moral.” RT also quoted Putin, who argued that the solution to the Syrian conflict should be political and emphasized the necessity of cooperation among all involved actors.³⁵³ Finally, according to Putin’s statement, Russia’s foreign policy, in general, is characterized as “truly peaceful, without any exaggeration.”³⁵⁴

4. Victimization of Russia

A significant portion of RT’s Syria coverage is devoted to “debunking” (or discreditation) of the international media coverage of Russia’s actions in Syria. While

³⁵⁰ “Remains of Su-24 Pilot Killed in Syria Arrive in Russia Escorted by Fighter Jets (VIDEO),” RT International, November 30, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323920-remains-pilot-downed-plane/>.

³⁵¹ “Russian Airstrikes Destroy 472 Terrorist Targets in Syria in 48 Hours, 1,000 Oil Tankers in 5 Days.”

³⁵² “Syrian Opposition Provides Russian Air Force with Coordinates to Target Terrorists – MoD.”

³⁵³ “Moscow Ready to Establish Contacts with FSA, Help It Unite Forces with Assad against ISIS,” RT International, October 7, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317880-putin-syria-settlement-hollande/>.

³⁵⁴ “Putin,” October 11, 2015.

questioning journalistic professionalism and integrity using the comments of governmental spokespersons, RT reported that Russia “condemned”³⁵⁵ or “harshly criticized”³⁵⁶ other media’s “biased and false”³⁵⁷ and “unconfirmed”³⁵⁸ reports, “baseless accusations,”³⁵⁹ the use of “unnamed” and “anonymous” sources,³⁶⁰ and publishing “without a relevant comment from Russian Foreign Ministry,”³⁶¹ and “employing scaremongering tactics.”³⁶² The main refuted topic is the civilian casualties caused by the Russian airstrikes reported by Reuters, BBC, Fox News, Al Jazeera and “numerous other news outlets,”³⁶³ all labeled as an “information war,”

³⁵⁵ “‘Are You Really Journalists?’ Moscow Slams Reuters for Biased Bombshell on Syria,” RT International, November 13, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/321775-russia-slams-reuters-syria/>.

³⁵⁶ “8 ISIS Targets Hit during 20 Combat Flights in Syria – Russian Military.”

³⁵⁷ “A Tale of Two Strategies.”

³⁵⁸ “FSA Proposes Russia to Hold Talks on Syrian Crisis in Cairo – Official,” RT International, October 25, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/319622-fsa-russia-talks-cairo/>; “War of Words: Russian Foreign Ministry Calls out MSM Reports on Hospital Strike in Syria,” RT International, October 23, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/319444-russia-hospital-media-ministry/>; “Why the US, France and Britain Are Destroying Syria.”

³⁵⁹ “War of Words.”

³⁶⁰ “‘Are You Really Journalists?’”

³⁶¹ “‘Are You Really Journalists?’”

³⁶² “War of Words.”

³⁶³ “8 ISIS Targets Hit during 20 Combat Flights in Syria – Russian Military.”

“information attack,”³⁶⁴ the “propaganda war,”³⁶⁵ “disinformation,”³⁶⁶ “the smear campaign,”³⁶⁷ and “anti-Russian campaign.”³⁶⁸

This “information war” represents an “orchestrated campaign to undermine its operations in Syria.”³⁶⁹ Russia’s success is “confirmed” by, for example, Assad, who “told Czech television that the US-led aerial campaign is not hurting the Islamic State positions, while the Russian air operation is.”³⁷⁰ In an op-ed, an author lamented that “there was no applause for Moscow’s actions” in the Western world, even though it took on “the most sadistic band of brutes since the Nazis,” but received only “scorn, skepticism and outright belligerence,” while, in addition to Syria, being “forced to

³⁶⁴ “8 ISIS Targets Hit during 20 Combat Flights in Syria – Russian Military.”

³⁶⁵ “Why the US, France and Britain Are Destroying Syria.”

³⁶⁶ “Combat Report,” November 13, 2015, 107.

³⁶⁷ “No Firsthand Info on Alleged Russian ‘airstrike’ on Hospital in Syria – Red Cross Top Executive,” RT International, October 29, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/320046-stillhart-red-cross-hospital-russia/>.

³⁶⁸ “Saudi Arabia Increasing Weapon Supplies to Syrian Rebels Following Russian Airstrikes – Report,” RT International, October 9, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318123-saudi-weapons-syria-russia/>.

³⁶⁹ “A Tale of Two Strategies”; “Information Warfare? Russia Accused of Killing Civilians in Syria,” RT International, October 1, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317170-russia-accused-civilians-syria/>; “US Special Forces Deployed as ‘Human Shields’ to Salvage Terror Assets in Syria.”

³⁷⁰ “Germany Wants to Send Special Forces to Syria – Reports,” RT International, December 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/324835-germany-deploys-ksk-syria/>.

fight... against the Western media.”³⁷¹ Western criticism, according to the author, is “strange to say the least.”³⁷² Another op-ed piece strives to explain why certain media outlets, especially the “Murdoch-owned press” are “singing the tune” and are “overwhelmingly pro-war in its overall coverage of Syria.” Murdoch is said to have “personal interest in ensuring the West joins this war against the wishes of the Syrian government.”³⁷³

Among the “most striking things” are the Western media’s use of “continuous assumptions, without any evidence” presented as “hard facts”³⁷⁴ and the use of words like “seem” and “appear.”³⁷⁵ Overall, the “narrative” of the Western media, according to RT, fits the “Russia is the villain” rhetoric, and are not new, as Russia “has had its share of accusations in the past that were later proven false.”³⁷⁶

³⁷¹ “A Tale of Two Strategies.”

³⁷² “A Tale of Two Strategies.”

³⁷³ “Cameron vs. Thousands: Will Massive Protests against Syria Campaign Prevail in UK Politics?,” RT International, November 30, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/323897-cameron-thousands-protest-syria/>.

³⁷⁴ “Turkey ‘Officially Acknowledges’ Attack on Su-24 Was a Planned Step - Russian MoD.”

³⁷⁵ “Turkey ‘Officially Acknowledges’ Attack on Su-24 Was a Planned Step - Russian MoD.”

³⁷⁶ “Information Warfare?”

The Western media are said to be “furiously speculating”³⁷⁷ and promoting “hoaxes and deliberate lies.”³⁷⁸ One more op-ed explained “Why West paints Putin as villain & Russian media his evil servants”³⁷⁹ by merely stating that Russia is “guilty” and “wrong” just because it is Russia, which cannot be right by definition.

RT portrays Russia as a victim, mainly of the “anti-Russian bias,”³⁸⁰ but also of actual assault by other states, one example of which would be the downing of Russian military plane by Turkey in November 2015 – labeled a “preplanned provocation” and an “obvious ambush” by Lavrov,³⁸¹ and “a stab in the back” by

³⁷⁷ “Mystery over Who Bombed Turkish Convoy Allegedly Carrying Weapons to Militants in Syria,” RT International, November 26, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323538-turkey-convoy-syria-attack/>.

³⁷⁸ “No Firsthand Info on Alleged Russian ‘airstrike’ on Hospital in Syria – Red Cross Top Executive.”

³⁷⁹ “Why West Paints Putin as Villain & Russian Media His Evil Servants,” RT International, October 3, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/317524-west-syria-ukraine-putin-propaganda/>.

³⁸⁰ “Bellingcat Accuses Russia of Faking Videos Showing Jets Dropping Bombs on ISIS,” RT International, October 8, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317971-bellingcat-russia-syria-videos-geolocation/>.

³⁸¹ “Downing of Russian Su-24 Looks like a Planned Provocation - Lavrov,” RT International, November 25, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323404-lavrov-syria-s24-turkey/>.

Putin.³⁸² To sum it up, RT reports that Russia is constantly “attacked,” either by the Western governments or the Western media.³⁸³

5. The Role of the US and the West in the Conflict

The discourse on the US and the West can be divided into a few themes. First, RT offers various references to the situation in the Western countries, particularly European, but the US as well, and the situation lays the basis for the Russian argument. Second, part of the discourse is the ongoing discussion of civilian and non-military objects in Syria, and assigning blame when those objects are attacked. Finally, the broadest theme is the discourse on the US, its role in the conflict, and its interactions with Russia.

RT extensively covers the migration crisis in Europe, calling it an “overwhelming influx of migrants coming mainly from... regions torn apart by the violence and unrest,”³⁸⁴ and claiming that “politicians in North America and Europe have expressed concern that the flow of refugees and migrants” creates a security

³⁸² “Syria Slams US-Led Coalition Deadly Strike against Troops as ‘Act of Aggression’”; “Russia Deploys Cutting-Edge S-400 Air Defense System to Syrian Base after Su-24 Downing.”

³⁸³ “War of Words.”

³⁸⁴ “1mn Syrians Return Home since Launch of Russian Anti-ISIS Ops - Syria UN Ambassador.”

threat to their countries³⁸⁵ (to support this idea, other articles discuss forged documents used by those involved in Paris attacks in November 2015³⁸⁶).

RT pays significant attention to covering the anti-war movement in Europe, including social media reacting to the British decision to extend airstrikes to Syria as “disgusting decision,”³⁸⁷ humanitarian groups outcry,³⁸⁸ opposition politicians’ criticisms,³⁸⁹ and street protests.³⁹⁰ RT points out British disregard for people’s lives,

³⁸⁵ “Canada to Exclude Single Males from Syria Refugee Program – Report,” RT International, November 24, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323196-canada-syria-male-refugees/>.

³⁸⁶ “ISIS Can Print Authentic Syrian Passports, May Infiltrate US,” RT International, December 11, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/325570-isis-authentic-passports-us/>.

³⁸⁷ “#PrayforSyria: Twitter Reacts to Syria Airstrikes Vote,” RT International, December 3, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/uk/324611-syria-airstrikes-vote-twitter/>; “Mainstream Media React to Syria Airstrikes Vote,” RT International, December 3, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/uk/324630-mainstream-media-syria-vote/>; “Veterans to Join Last-Ditch Protest to Stop Britain Bombing Syria — RT UK News,” December 1, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/uk/324125-stop-war-syria-protest/>.

³⁸⁸ “Britain Must Take More Syrian Refugees Displaced by Airstrikes – NGOs,” RT International, December 4, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/uk/324776-isis-syria-refugees-airstrikes/>.

³⁸⁹ “Cameron Brands Corbyn ‘Terrorist Sympathizer’ for Opposing Syria Airstrikes,” RT International, December 2, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/uk/324231-syria-cameron-corbyn-airstrikes/>.

³⁹⁰ “Cameron vs. Thousands”; “Londoners March on Downing Street to Decry UK Intervention in Syria (VIDEO),” RT International, December 13, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/uk/325758-london-protest-syria-intervention/>.

and blames the British government's actions on "Britain's legacy of imperialism."³⁹¹

The result of this is "the US, France and Britain... destroying Syria."³⁹²

According to RT, the US-led coalition is responsible for destroying non-military objects and killing the civilian population. Unlike Russia, who is "striking only confirmed terrorist targets,"³⁹³ "only targeting IS militants,"³⁹⁴ and are avoiding "civilian infrastructure"³⁹⁵ (opposite claims are "nonsense" and "unsubstantiated fantasies"³⁹⁶), the US and allies "destroy objects of civilian infrastructure"³⁹⁷ causing people's deaths and increased refugee flows.³⁹⁸

³⁹¹ "Cameron vs. Thousands."

³⁹² "Why the US, France and Britain Are Destroying Syria."

³⁹³ "25,000-30,000 Foreigners Fighting for ISIS - Russian Dep. Defense Minister," RT International, November 4, 2015, 000, <https://www.rt.com/news/320705-russia-isis-syria-asean/>; "Demoralized ISIS Militants Deserting En Masse amid Russian Airstrikes - Defense Ministry"; "Russian Warplanes Never Hit Civilian Targets in Syria – Air Force Chief," RT International, December 27, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/327181-russia-denies-hitting-civilian-targets/>; "Syrian Civilians Helping Russian Airstrikes Target ISIS - Defense Ministry."

³⁹⁴ "FSA Proposes Russia to Hold Talks on Syrian Crisis in Cairo – Official."

³⁹⁵ "8 ISIS Targets Hit during 20 Combat Flights in Syria – Russian Military."

³⁹⁶ "Combat Report," October 22, 2015.

³⁹⁷ "Demoralized ISIS Militants Deserting En Masse amid Russian Airstrikes - Defense Ministry."

³⁹⁸ "Syria Statement: Pros & Cons of Britain Launching Airstrikes," RT International, November 26, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/uk/323586-syria-airstrikes-pros-cons/>.

Increased security concerns define the domestic situation in the US,³⁹⁹ Republicans “lashing out” at the Obama administration for “making it easy for ‘terrorists’ to infiltrate the USA,”⁴⁰⁰ and the US not taking enough refugees⁴⁰¹ (which is, quoting Julian Assange, is a “disgrace”⁴⁰²). RT also extensively quoted WikiLeaks’s statements about the US “plotting to overthrow the Syrian government since around 2006” and that “the CIA perceives they have a benefit. They create a problem and then they’re given a greater budget.”⁴⁰³ The result is a “bloody conflict.”⁴⁰⁴ RT has its own death toll of the Syrians killed in the US (and European) airstrikes.⁴⁰⁵

³⁹⁹ “‘Alabama Citizens in Harm’s Way’: Governor Says State Won’t Accept Syrian Refugees,” RT International, November 16, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/usa/322274-alabama-syrian-refugees-refusal/>.

⁴⁰⁰ “‘Alabama Citizens in Harm’s Way.’”

⁴⁰¹ “‘Alabama Citizens in Harm’s Way.’”

⁴⁰² “‘Strategic Depopulation’ of Syria Likely Cause of EU Refugee Crisis – Assange,” RT International, October 27, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/319797-syria-depopulation-refugees-assange/>.

⁴⁰³ “‘Strategic Depopulation’ of Syria Likely Cause of EU Refugee Crisis – Assange.”

⁴⁰⁴ “‘Strategic Depopulation’ of Syria Likely Cause of EU Refugee Crisis – Assange.”

⁴⁰⁵ “34 Syrian Civilians Reported Killed in Suspected US-Led Coalition Airstrikes”; “A Tale of Two Strategies”; “Boris Johnson”; “Saudi Arabia Increasing Weapon Supplies to Syrian Rebels Following Russian Airstrikes – Report”; “Syria Slams US-Led Coalition Deadly Strike against Troops as ‘Act of Aggression’”; “Syria Statement.”

RT discussed John Kerry's visit to Moscow and reported that he called for cooperation between the US and Russia, claimed the US did not seek regime change in Syria and that the US "would like to see a normal relationship with Russia."⁴⁰⁶ At the same time, RT reported that the US "remains focused on Assad and its obsessiveness to have him removed,"⁴⁰⁷ which is "pathetic,"⁴⁰⁸ and is not serious (and not "sincere"⁴⁰⁹) about dealing with the terrorist threat.⁴¹⁰

Part of the discourse is the idea that "moderate rebels," who the US is training in Syria, are "elusive,"⁴¹¹ "only a fable"⁴¹² and "fantasy,"⁴¹³ and add to "the chaos of

⁴⁰⁶ "'US Not after Regime Change in Syria, but Assad Must Go' – Kerry to Russian TV," RT International, December 20, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/326563-kerry-russia-syria-ukraine-libya/>.

⁴⁰⁷ "In the Fight against ISIS, Russia Ain't Taking No Prisoners."

⁴⁰⁸ "Why the Paris Terror Attacks Didn't 'Change Everything,'" RT International, November 23, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/323108-paris-terror-europe-syria/>.

⁴⁰⁹ "US Military in Syria Violate Sovereignty, Not Fighting Terror – Damascus."

⁴¹⁰ "Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks."

⁴¹¹ "Pentagon Funding Bill on Obama's Desk: \$600mn to Syrian Rebels, \$300mn to Kiev," RT International, October 8, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/usa/318054-ndaa-syria-isis-ukraine/>.

⁴¹² "23 Killed, 65 Injured by Shelling in Latakia City, Syria – Reports," RT International, November 10, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/321424-latakia-shelling-killed-university/>.

⁴¹³ "Moderate Rebels in Syria a 'Fantasy' of Western Media," RT International, October 21, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/319309-syria-moderate-rebels-isis/>.

terminology.”⁴¹⁴ The moderate opposition is said to be “not as innocent as portrayed,”⁴¹⁵ and even “US officials have themselves acknowledged it was hard to identify the ‘moderate Syrian opposition.’”⁴¹⁶ RT also reported that the Russian military leaders claimed that Pentagon’s reports of the actions in the region are “not the complete truth.”⁴¹⁷ To characterize the US behavior RT also used words of its employed “geopolitical analysts” who say the US is “throwing temper tantrums,”⁴¹⁸ while it does not have “a clear strategy,”⁴¹⁹ “lack[s] agenda,”⁴²⁰ and offers a “very strange mix of communications” about its plans in Syria.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁴ “Moderate Rebels in Syria a ‘Fantasy’ of Western Media.”

⁴¹⁵ “Captured ISIS Fighter Says ‘Trained in Turkey, ISIS Thinks It’s Safer Here than Syria,’” RT International, December 28, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/327222-isis-fighters-turkey-training/>.

⁴¹⁶ “Nobody Can Clearly Define What ‘moderate Opposition’ in Syria Is - Kremlin Spokesman.”

⁴¹⁷ “4 US-Led Coalition Jets Seen over Deir Ez Zor in Syria Day Govt Troops Attacked - Russian MoD,” RT International, December 9, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/325179-coalition-jets-syrian-army-attack/>.

⁴¹⁸ “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks.”

⁴¹⁹ “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks.”

⁴²⁰ “Putin,” October 15, 2015.

⁴²¹ “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks.”

The Western campaign in Syria is characterized as a “strategic mistake”⁴²² that “will engender total chaos in Syria.”⁴²³ Later decision of Obama administration to send Special Forces to Syria (emphasized to contradict Obama’s 2013 promise “not to put any American boots on the ground in Syria”⁴²⁴) is said to be done “to restrict Russian offensive operations by introducing the risk of bombing American forces,”⁴²⁵ while in fact they “are being sent in to act as human shields against Russian airstrikes.”⁴²⁶ This supports the idea that the US policy in Syria is “a monumental hypocrisy based on lies.”⁴²⁷

⁴²² “65,000 Jihadists in Syria Ready to Replace ISIS If It’s Defeated – Report,” RT International, December 20, 2015, 000, <https://www.rt.com/news/326584-syria-jihadists-is-replacement/>.

⁴²³ “US Military Provided Assad with Intel on Extremists via Russia, Israel & Germany - Report,” RT International, December 22, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/usa/326748-us-syria-intelligence-hersh/>.

⁴²⁴ “US Needs Boots on the Ground to ‘Occupy & Govern’ Syrian Territories – Air Force Secretary,” RT International, November 11, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/usa/321520-troops-ground-syria-isis/>.

⁴²⁵ “US Special Forces Deployed as ‘Human Shields’ to Salvage Terror Assets in Syria.”

⁴²⁶ “US Special Forces Deployed as ‘Human Shields’ to Salvage Terror Assets in Syria.”

⁴²⁷ “Washington Using Turkey as a Tool to Destabilize Russia,” RT International, November 25, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/323430-russian-plane-down-turkey-us-nato/>.

RT blames the US for refusing to coordinate actions with Russia⁴²⁸ (“big mistake”⁴²⁹), being “irritated with the Russian military presence in Syria,”⁴³⁰ calling it “Western hysteria.”⁴³¹ In reality, RT reported that Kissinger claimed: “Russia’s intervention may help re-establish order in the Middle East.”⁴³² Michael Flynn also insisted that Russia and the US (“two great nations”) “have to work together in their fight against Islamic State.”⁴³³ RT explains that, in part, the US refuses to coordinate because of “hurt pride” and being “humiliated” because of a lack of success.⁴³⁴

⁴²⁸ “A Tale of Two Strategies.”

⁴²⁹ “Lavrov: Russia Is Ready to Offer Air Support to Syrian Opposition Fighting ISIS.”

⁴³⁰ “Information Warfare?”

⁴³¹ “Bellingcat Accuses Russia of Faking Videos Showing Jets Dropping Bombs on ISIS.”

⁴³² “Kissinger.”

⁴³³ “Moscow’s Red Lines Were Crossed – Ex US Intel Chief on Russian Military Op in Syria,” RT International, October 5, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317710-russia-red-lines-flynn/>.

⁴³⁴ “Russian Navy Can Strike ISIS Positions in Syria Anytime – General.”

Finally, the US involvement in Syria is repeatedly described by RT as “illegitimate,”⁴³⁵ “illegal,”⁴³⁶ and “criminality”⁴³⁷ due to lack of “official government or UN authorization.”⁴³⁸ To cover up the illegality, the West is using “propaganda to build narratives about Syria” and “stretch[ing] existing law into a shape that supports their objectives.”⁴³⁹ RT discussed in detail that the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov insisted that “the current Middle East crisis was masterminded by the United States and other Western nations to distract public attention from numerous problems in the region and incite hatred toward Muslims all over the world.”⁴⁴⁰

6. Other important actors

⁴³⁵ “A Small Contingent of US Special Forces to Be Deployed to Syria - Reports,” RT International, October 30, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/usa/320161-obama-special-forces-syria/>.

⁴³⁶ “A Small Contingent of US Special Forces to Be Deployed to Syria - Reports”; “Breaking International Law in Syria”; “Syria Slams US-Led Coalition Deadly Strike against Troops as ‘Act of Aggression.’”

⁴³⁷ “Why the US, France and Britain Are Destroying Syria.”

⁴³⁸ “A Small Contingent of US Special Forces to Be Deployed to Syria - Reports.”

⁴³⁹ “Breaking International Law in Syria.”

⁴⁴⁰ “Kadyrov Blames US, Turkey ‘Personal Ambitions’ for Syrian Crisis,” RT International, December 29, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/russia/327325-kadyrov-blames-us-turkey-personal/>.

Turkey

A country other than the US, Britain, or Russia itself that received notable coverage from RT is Turkey. The active coverage starts and is defined by Turkey's downing of Russia's Su-24 fighter jet on November 24, 2015. Until that date, Turkey is mentioned only briefly, including Turkey's refugee acceptance,⁴⁴¹ Moscow-Turkey cooperation,⁴⁴² Turkey being "Assad's long-time enemy,"⁴⁴³ and Turkey being one of the supporters of ISIS,⁴⁴⁴ and how "by doing nothing Turkey is indirectly supporting terrorism."⁴⁴⁵

After the SU-24 incident (before the end of December 2015), RT published 24 articles (including 15 in November) exclusively, or almost exclusively, that covered Turkey. Some articles primarily addressed the incident, calling it (using Lavrov's words) a "preplanned provocation" and "an obvious ambush."⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴¹ "'Strategic Depopulation' of Syria Likely Cause of EU Refugee Crisis – Assange."

⁴⁴² "25,000-30,000 Foreigners Fighting for ISIS - Russian Dep. Defense Minister," 000; "Moscow Ready to Establish Contacts with FSA, Help It Unite Forces with Assad against ISIS."

⁴⁴³ "No Peace Can Come to Syria without Assad – Lavrov."

⁴⁴⁴ "Syrian Army Making Advances since Russian Airstrikes Began – Assad."

⁴⁴⁵ "Why the Paris Terror Attacks Didn't 'Change Everything.'"

⁴⁴⁶ "Downing of Russian Su-24 Looks like a Planned Provocation - Lavrov."

The other articles heavily portrayed Turkey as a supporter of the Islamic State. For example, RT heavily reported that Turkey was “training Islamic State terrorists in a camp disguised as a training ground for the Free Syrian Army.”⁴⁴⁷ According to “first-hand testimony” (ISIS fighters captured by the Kurdish People’s Protection Unit (YPG)), “Turkey is ‘a friend’ of Islamic State,”⁴⁴⁸ who “want[s] NATO to serve the interests of IS.”⁴⁴⁹ An “exclusive” report came out about materials to produce deadly sarin gas being transported to the terrorists in Syria through Turkey.⁴⁵⁰ Furthermore, RT reported that Turkey supplied arms to terrorists,⁴⁵¹ and posted on November 29th that “Turkey boosts arms supplies to Syria terrorists in exchange for oil & antiques” explaining the actions by “ideological reasons, [that Turkey is] thinking that these terrorist groups are successors to the Ottoman

⁴⁴⁷ “Captured ISIS Fighter Says ‘Trained in Turkey, ISIS Thinks It’s Safer Here than Syria.’”

⁴⁴⁸ “Captured ISIS Fighter Says ‘Trained in Turkey, ISIS Thinks It’s Safer Here than Syria.’”

⁴⁴⁹ “Putin,” November 24, 2015.

⁴⁵⁰ “EXCLUSIVE: Sarin Materials Brought via Turkey & Mixed in Syrian ISIS Camps – Turkish MP to RT,” RT International, December 14, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/325825-sarin-gas-syria-turkey/>.

⁴⁵¹ “‘Game of Cards’: Seymour Hersh on Conflicting Interests in Syria,” RT International, December 29, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/usa/327386-hersh-interview-syria-rebels/>.

empire.”⁴⁵² An article published a month later claimed that Turkey “wants to revive Ottoman Empire.”⁴⁵³ Still, in an op-ed written by “a group of experts,” it was suggested that Turkish military action against Russia could only happen with “the consent of the US,” whose “long-term strategy... is to use Turkey as a tool to destabilize Russia.”⁴⁵⁴

Putin

Putin is presented as a strong, decisive leader, who calls for “any targets threatening our [military] group or land infrastructure... [to] be immediately destroyed,”⁴⁵⁵ but who is also claiming to let the Syrian people decide about the fate of their country.⁴⁵⁶ After the Russian passenger jet was destroyed by a bomb after

⁴⁵² “Turkey Boosts Arms Supplies to Syria Terrorists in Exchange for Oil & Antiques – Damascus,” RT International, November 29, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323851-turkey-syria-terrorists-weapons/>; “Turkish Officers Arrested for ‘Treason’ after Intercepting Weapons Destined for Syria,” RT International, November 30, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323899-turkey-officers-treason-arrests/>.

⁴⁵³ “Turkey Supports ISIS, Wants to Revive Ottoman Empire – Syria’s UN Envoy,” RT International, December 30, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/327413-syria-turkey-ottoman-empire/>.

⁴⁵⁴ “Washington Using Turkey as a Tool to Destabilize Russia.”

⁴⁵⁵ “Any Targets Threatening Russian Forces in Syria Must Be Immediately Destroyed - Putin.”

⁴⁵⁶ “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks.”

leaving an Egyptian resort on October 31, 2015, Putin was reported to “search for [those responsible] everywhere - wherever they are hiding. We will find them in any spot on the planet and we will punish them.”⁴⁵⁷ An op-ed author claims Putin’s message “instantly turned heavy metal in the form of a massive, impressive Russian barrage over 140 Caliphate targets.”⁴⁵⁸

Putin is portrayed as supporting international cooperation, even despite the lack of enthusiasm, criticism, and “illegitimacy” of the West.⁴⁵⁹ RT reported that Putin considers it essential to ensure that Russia is “acting in compliance with international law in Syria.”⁴⁶⁰ Putin also reportedly claimed that “Russia seeks neither to wage war nor conflict in any country.”⁴⁶¹ RT also credited Putin with Russia’s military successes in Syria: the intervention is said to be “a masterstroke by Putin, wiping out large swathes of the anti-government mercenaries, stabilizing the Assad government, and winning much popular support both within Syria and across the

⁴⁵⁷ “In the Fight against ISIS, Russia Ain’t Taking No Prisoners.”

⁴⁵⁸ “In the Fight against ISIS, Russia Ain’t Taking No Prisoners.”

⁴⁵⁹ ““Avoiding Confrontations””; “French Aircraft Carrier Charles de Gaulle Launches First Anti-ISIS Missions in Syria & Iraq,” RT International, November 23, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/323120-french-aircraft-anti-isis/>; “Long-Range Bombers to Fly Anti-ISIS Missions from Russia, Putin Orders Navy to Work with France”; “Moscow Ready to Establish Contacts with FSA, Help It Unite Forces with Assad against ISIS.”

⁴⁶⁰ “Putin,” October 16, 2015, 000.

⁴⁶¹ “Putin,” October 11, 2015.

Middle East, and indeed around the world.”⁴⁶² An op-ed author describes Putin as a “superb strategist” (although admitting “exactly what he is strategizing for is not clear yet” (as of December 5th, 2015)).⁴⁶³

However, despite the listed achievements, Putin is portrayed as another victim of Western propaganda. As seen by the West, RT refers to Putin as “the most sinister politician on the planet as far as Washington is concerned”⁴⁶⁴ and a “villain” who is sometimes compared to Hitler.⁴⁶⁵ This type of comparison, according to another op-ed, is approved by the Western governments, who “are not trying to protect the Western viewer from propaganda.”⁴⁶⁶

Assad

As I described earlier, Russia bases the legitimacy of its involvement in Syria (broadcasted via RT) on the idea that Assad “requested” that involvement. RT also widely reported that the US seeks regime change in Syria. Based on this, and using Julian Assange’s comments, an article suggested that the West presents Assad as a

⁴⁶² “US Special Forces Deployed as ‘Human Shields’ to Salvage Terror Assets in Syria.”

⁴⁶³ “Why the US, France and Britain Are Destroying Syria.”

⁴⁶⁴ “A Tale of Two Strategies.”

⁴⁶⁵ “Why West Paints Putin as Villain & Russian Media His Evil Servants.”

⁴⁶⁶ “Why West Paints Putin as Villain & Russian Media His Evil Servants.”

weak leader who is not in control of his own country.⁴⁶⁷ RT, instead, collects ideas to claim the opposite. According to reports it quoted, if Assad stepped down, “it would likely fuel the war in Syria rather than quench it,”⁴⁶⁸ and would be “a gift to fundamentalist extremists.”⁴⁶⁹ According to an op-ed, Assad is “one of the few actors in the region who takes Islamic State very seriously.”⁴⁷⁰

RT also used Assad’s statements to reinforce the idea of Russia’s successes in the region. Multiple articles quote the Syrian leader thanking Russia for help and claiming the situation would have been worse without Russia’s assistance.⁴⁷¹ Some of those articles also add that Pentagon strategy in Syria “isn’t working.”⁴⁷² The coverage contains a multitude of calls for the West to “join forces” with Assad (“whom they have been demonizing for years”⁴⁷³), and Russia,⁴⁷⁴ something the West

⁴⁶⁷ “‘Strategic Depopulation’ of Syria Likely Cause of EU Refugee Crisis – Assange.”

⁴⁶⁸ “65,000 Jihadists in Syria Ready to Replace ISIS If It’s Defeated – Report,” 000.

⁴⁶⁹ “‘Game of Cards.’”

⁴⁷⁰ “A Tale of Two Strategies.”

⁴⁷¹ “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks”; “Syrian Army Making Advances since Russian Airstrikes Began – Assad”; “Why the US, France and Britain Are Destroying Syria.”

⁴⁷² “Assad to Putin at Moscow Talks.”

⁴⁷³ “Russian Navy Can Strike ISIS Positions in Syria Anytime – General.”

⁴⁷⁴ “Boris Johnson.”

is reluctant to do because of “some personal ambitions,”⁴⁷⁵ even though that “makes their strategy against ISIS absolutely untenable.”⁴⁷⁶

An article entitled “Over 70% want Syria’s Assad to remain in power” quotes a poll conducted by the French Le Figaro newspaper online.⁴⁷⁷ Reportedly, over twenty thousand people participated in the survey, with no other information provided. RT also reported that in Syria, Assad “has public support” as well and “represents the interests of a significant part of Syrian society.”⁴⁷⁸

Speaking of the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime, RT tended to argue that there is no evidence to support the claims. Instead, “[l]ogic and sheer common sense also suggests that President Assad was not responsible for the attacks.”⁴⁷⁹ The op-ed offers the reader to “[i]magine you were Bashar al-Assad in August 2013” and then come to the conclusion that Assad is not responsible.⁴⁸⁰ According to another article, “the West purposefully blamed the government of

⁴⁷⁵ “Kadyrov Blames US, Turkey ‘Personal Ambitions’ for Syrian Crisis.”

⁴⁷⁶ “Russia, US Work on Agreement to Coordinate Air Operations in Syria – Moscow.”

⁴⁷⁷ “Le Figaro Poll.”

⁴⁷⁸ “No Peace Can Come to Syria without Assad – Lavrov.”

⁴⁷⁹ “The Ghouta Chemical Attack and the Unraveling of Ankara’s Official Story,” RT International, December 16, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/326111-ghouta-chemical-attack-turkey/>.

⁴⁸⁰ “The Ghouta Chemical Attack and the Unraveling of Ankara’s Official Story.”

Bashar Assad for the August 2013 chemical attack in Ghouta that was used as part of the pretext to make US military intervention in Syria possible.”⁴⁸¹ Additionally, RT reported that Assad “was trying to establish friendly relations with Washington,” and, in particular, “turned over large amounts of information regarding the Muslim Brotherhood’s activities in Syria and German” to the US in the 9/11 aftermath.⁴⁸² However, the US attitude did not change “despite Assad’s generous support.”⁴⁸³

3.5 BBC Coverage Discussion

I gathered the data for this part of the chapter by searching the BBC.com website with the help of the Google search engine. I used the keywords “Syria + Russia” for the same period as for the RT search – between September 30 and December 30, 2015. I discovered 193 results, some of which I had to manually remove due to repetition and complete irrelevance (including one article in a foreign language). I processed the sample of 171 articles with the help of the NVivo 12 Plus software. The article distribution is somewhat even, with over a third of the articles

⁴⁸¹ “Turkish ‘Traitor’ MP’s Revelations on Sarin Transfers Must Be Probed, Reported to UNSC – Moscow,” RT International, December 26, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/327122-syria-sarin-isis-investigation/>.

⁴⁸² “US Military Provided Assad with Intel on Extremists via Russia, Israel & Germany - Report.”

⁴⁸³ “US Military Provided Assad with Intel on Extremists via Russia, Israel & Germany - Report.”

1. The discussion (description) of the war
 - BBC on the war in Syria
 - BBC on Assad
2. Russia and the war in Syria
 - The purpose of the Russian involvement in Syria
 - Russia's military capabilities
 - Russia's domestic situation
 - Russia's relationship with Syria
 - Russia's relationship with the West
 - Russia's relationship with Turkey
3. Syrian's refugee situation
4. The discussion of the US and Europe
5. The media and the Syrian war

See the theme distribution in the table below.

Table 2 BBC (Case I): Theme Distribution Across Articles

Theme	Number of articles	Number of References
1. <u>Discussion of the Syrian War</u>		
Description of the military actions	46	63
The Role of Assad	9	14

<u>2. Russia in the Syrian War</u>		
The purpose of the Russian involvement in Syria	15	20
Russia's military capabilities	3	13
Russia's domestic situation	8	17
Russia's relationship with Syria	8	13
Russia's relationship with the West	45	70
Russia's relationship with Turkey	14	24
<u>3. The Refugee Situation</u>		
Description of the refugee situation in Syria	14	20
<u>4. The US and Europe and the Syrian War</u>		
The role of the US and Europe in the war	11	22
<u>5. The Media and the Syrian War</u>		
The role of the media in the war	13	23

Below I provide an overview of the BBC coverage theme by theme.

1. The discussion of the Syrian war

The articles, and parts of articles, that I coded into this category cannot be completely detached from the other themes – there is considerable overlap. However, this theme is undoubtedly worth isolating to evaluate how BBC paints a broader picture of the Syrian conflict. While this bulk of articles do (inevitably) address topics like Russia, the West, and refugees, there are a few prominent sub-themes within the category that make the coverage into what it is. Overall, the BBC coverage (even considering the emphasis on Russia in the studied set) conveys the idea that there is a variety of actors involved in the Syrian conflict. Looking through the headline alone,

one can see these actors, both governments and groups: Russia, the UK, the US, the government of Assad, Turkey, Iran, the Arab states, the Islamic State, NATO, rebel groups, refugees, Syria Kurds, and more.

The BBC discussion of the war in Syria includes some description and evaluation of the events (“Russia joins war in Syria: five key points”⁴⁸⁴), identification of the actors (“Who are the Turkmen in Syria?”⁴⁸⁵), discussion of the interactions among the actors (“Russia and Iran: an uneasy alliance”⁴⁸⁶), actions⁴⁸⁷, actors’ claims about their actions (“Putin says his country is targeting IS strongholds and other militant fighters;”⁴⁸⁸ Russia “insisted that no civilian infrastructure was targeted”⁴⁸⁹), discussion of the actors’ standpoints, and analysis of those actions, actors, interactions,

⁴⁸⁴ Lyse Doucet, “Russia Joins Syrian War: Key Points,” October 1, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34416519>.

⁴⁸⁵ “Who Are the Turkmen in Syria?,” November 24, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34910389>.

⁴⁸⁶ Mehrdad Farahmand, “Russia and Iran: An Uneasy Alliance,” November 26, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34919237>.

⁴⁸⁷ “Who’s Doing What in Anti-IS Coalition?,” BBC News, December 15, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-35102555/who-s-doing-what-in-us-led-coalition-against-islamic-state>.

⁴⁸⁸ “Islamic State: Where Key Countries Stand,” December 3, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29074514>.

⁴⁸⁹ “Russia in Media Offensive on Syria,” October 1, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34411653>.

and the conflict in general (such as the article entitled “Eight things people get wrong about Syria and air strikes”⁴⁹⁰).

Speaking of the involved actors, BBC takes time to question who they are. For example, concerning the “moderate opposition” (a prominent talking point of RT), an article quotes the UK government that there are “70,000 so-called ‘moderate fighters’ on the ground” and asks, “But who are they? And who are they really loyal to?”⁴⁹¹ The article answers the question, in general: using an example of a specific interviewed fighter, Britain’s “moderate’ criteria” are that a fighter is “prepared [to] renounce terrorism” and that they “will accept a post-conflict Syria that includes all faiths and religions.”⁴⁹² With that said, another article points out that “terminology here is important,” and that “it’s often unclear” what the terms mean.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹⁰ Anna Doble, “Eight Things People Get Wrong about Syria and Air Strikes,” *BBC Newsbeat* (blog), December 3, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/34973901/eight-things-people-get-wrong-about-syria-and-air-strikes>.

⁴⁹¹ Quentin Sommerville, “I’m Fighting Islamic State and Assad,” December 21, 2015, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-35151553>.

⁴⁹² Sommerville.

⁴⁹³ Doble, “Eight Things People Get Wrong about Syria and Air Strikes.”

The discussion of the Islamic State includes the devastation it brought to the region,⁴⁹⁴ questions such as who is to blame for it,⁴⁹⁵ looks into the identities of people who join the terrorist group,⁴⁹⁶ and an overview of “where key countries stand”⁴⁹⁷ (“key countries” include such states as the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain). As part of the analysis of the situation, BBC reported that, according to an anonymous official in attendance of the UN General Assembly in New York, Arab diplomats warned Russia’s Foreign Minister Lavrov that Russia’s actions in Syria were creating “a Frankenstein’s monster,” in response to which Russia only intensified the airstrikes.⁴⁹⁸ The same official, however, also admitted that “neither the West nor the Gulf Arab states had a strategy for resolving” the conflict, but what was needed was a “clearer US leadership” and not the compromise involving Assad’s continued rule.⁴⁹⁹ Using a different perspective – Iranian – BBC reported that the Russian intervention

⁴⁹⁴ Lyse Doucet, “Islamic State ‘Blows up Palmyra Arch,’” October 5, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34440759>.

⁴⁹⁵ “Is Saudi Arabia to Blame for IS?,” December 19, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35101612>.

⁴⁹⁶ “Who Are the Portsmouth IS Fighters?,” November 18, 2015, sec. Hampshire & Isle of Wight, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hampshire-34855717>.

⁴⁹⁷ “Islamic State.”

⁴⁹⁸ Frank Gardner Doucet Lyse, “Gulf ‘steps up’ Arms to Syria Rebels,” October 8, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34479929>.

⁴⁹⁹ Doucet.

was a way to “challenge the US-dominated world order.”⁵⁰⁰ Meanwhile, the differences in where parties stand on Assad aggravate the situation: the “deadlock... will continue to block the formation of a unified command against a common enemy.”⁵⁰¹ The result: “Syrian activists and opposition groups feel bitterly let down that the West did not give them this kind of military support to help remove President Assad.”⁵⁰² Another article, instead, highlighted “a major unifying goal” derived from conversations with Arab and Western officials: “to avoid the collapse of Syria’s security forces and its civilian institutions.”⁵⁰³

The reported Russian claims that no civilian infrastructure was targeted while fighting “all terrorists,” BBC reports that “at least some of its air strikes have reportedly hit civilians and Western-backed rebels.”⁵⁰⁴ According to one witness’s account, a deadly attack represented “Russian airstrikes, and while it’s not possible to

⁵⁰⁰ Mehrdad Farahmand Doucet Lyse, “Russia’s Syrian Bombing Gives Boost to Iran,” October 9, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34479018>.

⁵⁰¹ “Cameron Warns of Long Syria Campaign,” December 4, 2015, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-34998491>.

⁵⁰² “Cameron Warns of Long Syria Campaign.”

⁵⁰³ Lyse Doucet, “Syria: If Not Assad, Then Who?,” October 30, 2015, sec. World, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-34676238>.

⁵⁰⁴ Lyse Doucet, “Russia ‘Hits IS in Syria from Caspian,’” October 7, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34465425>.

independently verify his account, it does tally with other reports.”⁵⁰⁵ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported Russian strikes killed 45 people (including the commander of a Western-backed Free Syrian Army brigade), in another instance, in a region with insignificant ISIS presence.⁵⁰⁶ In relation to the successful incidents (killing IS militants), the same monitoring group reported that the strikes came from the US-led coalition, though “other activists suggested” Russia did it.⁵⁰⁷ BBC reported that Russia denied all accusations of killing civilians calling them “fake,” but also pointed out that “[t]he US has rarely acknowledged civilian deaths in its air bombardment of the so-called Islamic State.”⁵⁰⁸

The Russian military jet downed by Turkey is also discussed in the context of the Syrian conflict: “The shooting down of a Russian Su-24 warplane by Turkish fighters has prompted Moscow to reinforce its contingent in Syria.”⁵⁰⁹ A number of

⁵⁰⁵ Richard Galpin Doucet Lyse, “Syria Activist Describes ‘Frightening Russian Air Strike,’” October 1, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34419768>.

⁵⁰⁶ “Russian Air Strikes ‘Kill 45 in Syria,’” October 20, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34580188>.

⁵⁰⁷ “Strikes on Raqqa ‘Kill 32 IS Militants,’” December 6, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35021261>.

⁵⁰⁸ “Russia ‘Killed 200 Civilians in Syria,’” December 23, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35162523>.

⁵⁰⁹ Jonathan Marcus, “Russia’s Missiles Send Robust Signal,” December 1, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34976537>.

articles are also devoted to coverage of the Russian passenger jet that was allegedly destroyed in a terrorist act by the Islamic State.⁵¹⁰ Following the discussion of the event and the immediate international response, an article suggested that “an attack linked to so-called IS is... problematic” for Russia due to the potential drop of Russian public support for the war.⁵¹¹

The BBC discussion about Assad personally, in addition to identifying his supporters and opponents,⁵¹² primarily involves highlighting his ties to Russia (his visits to Moscow as “a visible symbol of Russia’s confidence”⁵¹³) and quoting him as

⁵¹⁰ “Russian Plane Crash: The Consequences,” November 10, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34764050>; “Russian Plane Crash: What We Know,” November 17, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34687990>; Lyse Doucet, “UK-Egypt Ties Hit after Russian Plane Crash,” November 7, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34758441>.

⁵¹¹ “Russian Plane ‘Had Bomb in Hold,’” November 6, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34742273>.

⁵¹² Kasra Naji, “Iran Now Seen as Part of Solution to Syria Conflict,” October 28, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34662712>; “US to Send Special Forces into Syria,” October 30, 2015, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34681648>; Ghadi Sary, “Who Are the Groups Fighting Assad?,” November 11, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34710635>; “UN Security Council Unanimously Adopts Syrian Roadmap Resolution.”

⁵¹³ “Assad in Surprise Visit to Moscow,” October 21, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34590561>.

he “thanked”⁵¹⁴ Russia and claimed Russian involvement helped with “terrorism.”⁵¹⁵ There is not much in terms of analysis on how he rose to power; however, it was pointed out that unlike his father, his inner circle is “essentially comprises children of the elite,” thus stressing his lack of links to actual constituents.⁵¹⁶

While BBC points out that some European leaders, “from left and right,”⁵¹⁷ “express their admiration” for Putin,⁵¹⁸ the overall analysis of the situation in Syria with Russia present can be considered generally negative. After the start of the Russian involvement, “the conflict looks more dangerous than ever.”⁵¹⁹ Quoting the UN, BBC reported that more people fled from the areas targeted by Russian air attacks and were displaced, yet “the regime’s gains have either been small (advances of several kilometres) or reversed by rebel counter-attacks.”⁵²⁰ While one article concludes that “[t]he net result of all this is likely to be a further prolonging of the

⁵¹⁴ “Assad in Surprise Visit to Moscow.”

⁵¹⁵ “Assad in Surprise Visit to Moscow.”

⁵¹⁶ Neil Quilliam, “The Rise of the Assads,” November 4, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34709235>.

⁵¹⁷ Mark Urban, “A Perfect Storm of Populism,” December 26, 2015, sec. World, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-35152027>.

⁵¹⁸ Urban.

⁵¹⁹ “Kerry Seeks End to Syria War ‘Hell,’” October 29, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34663093>.

⁵²⁰ Mark Urban, “Analysing Russia’s Syria Intervention,” October 29, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34658292>.

stalemate in Syria” and that “peace in Syria is not even on the horizon,”⁵²¹ another one adds that world politics is “less predictable” and “less harmonious” because of the actions of countries led by “ambitious strongmen.”⁵²²

2. Russia and the war in Syria

○ The purpose of the Russian involvement in Syria

The discussion on the purpose of Russia’s military involvement in Syria consists of reporting Russia’s statements on the matter and offering views or analysis of others. BBC reported that, according to Putin, the aim was to “preventatively, to fight and destroy militants and terrorists,”⁵²³ and to “stabilise the legitimate authority” of President Assad⁵²⁴ to eventually “create conditions for a political compromise”⁵²⁵ in Syria. According to Putin’s spokesman Peskov, the goal was to “save Syria from

⁵²¹ Frank Gardner Doucet Lyse, “Russia in Syria: What Will Happen Next?,” October 2, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34422202>.

⁵²² Urban, “A Perfect Storm of Populism.”

⁵²³ Doucet, “Russia Joins Syrian War.”

⁵²⁴ “Cameron Warned against Syria Vote,” November 3, 2015, sec. UK Politics, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-34706279>; “Putin Defends Russia’s Syria Strikes,” October 12, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34502286>.

⁵²⁵ “Putin Defends Russia’s Syria Strikes.”

terrorist and extremist organisations.”⁵²⁶ Additionally, according to Putin’s chief-of-staff Ivanov, the campaign was “about Russia’s national interests” (because “thousands” of Russian citizens joined ISIS) and “not about achieving any foreign-policy goals or satisfying any ambitions,”⁵²⁷ According to foreign ministry spokeswoman Zakharova, “[t]his is truly a matter of national security.”⁵²⁸

As for the analysis, BBC offered a perspective of a US diplomat William Courtney, who argued that “Russia’s actions are motivated by weakness”⁵²⁹ because “the Middle East is the last place where Russia can play a great power role beyond its neighbourhood.”⁵³⁰ Another analyst claimed that Putin desired to make the West see Russia as “an equal partner whose interests must be accommodated” and to “acknowledge Russia’s right to treat its post-Soviet neighbours as part of its sphere of

⁵²⁶ “Russia ‘Attempting to Save Syria,’” BBC News, October 23, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-34621029/peskov-russia-trying-to-save-syria-from-terrorists>.

⁵²⁷ Lyse Doucet, “Russia Approves Military Move in Syria,” September 30, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34400193>.

⁵²⁸ Sarah Rainsford, “Russian Reservations on Syria Strikes,” October 11, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34498862>.

⁵²⁹ “Is Putin Motivated by Russia’s Weakness?,” October 14, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34520670>.

⁵³⁰ “Is Putin Motivated by Russia’s Weakness?”

influence.”⁵³¹ Furthermore, one more analysis contributed that Russia sought to eliminate Assad’s opponents, legitimate “his forces as part of an anti-IS coalition,” and subsequently try to force Europe and the US to accept Assad’s staying in power.⁵³² Another article describes Putin’s behavior as a set of “dramatic step[s] in his increasingly assertive foreign policy.”⁵³³

Part of Russia’s goals discussion is comparing claims to the reports. While Russia “cynically”⁵³⁴ said it targeted terrorists, “the US fears Russia is actually targeting opponents of President Assad,”⁵³⁵ and, according to a US diplomat, “85 to 90% of Russian air strikes... had hit the moderate Syrian opposition and killed civilians in the process.”⁵³⁶ As a result, “Western leaders suspect the primary objective of Russia’s air campaign is to keep Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in

⁵³¹ “Russia Names Nato as Threat to Security,” December 31, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35208636>.

⁵³² Jonathan Marcus, “What Is Russia’s Endgame in Syria?,” October 8, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34474362>.

⁵³³ “Is Putin Motivated by Russia’s Weakness?”

⁵³⁴ “Syrian Army Recaptures Key Aleppo Road,” November 4, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34720597>.

⁵³⁵ “Syria Air Strikes: What You Need to Know,” December 3, 2015, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-34931421>.

⁵³⁶ “Syrian Army Recaptures Key Aleppo Road.”

power, rather than eliminate terrorists.”⁵³⁷ However, BBC also adds that “[t]he criticism from abroad... is dismissed as propaganda” in Russia.⁵³⁸

- Russia’s military capabilities

A few of the BBC articles provide an assessment of Russia’s military capabilities to help understand both what is happening and what can happen in the future of Russia’s campaign. The articles ask questions such as how accurate Russian strikes are,⁵³⁹ and generally “what can Russia’s military do.”⁵⁴⁰ The answer to the first question, according to the US Defense Secretary Carter (also supported by “independent observations of video footage”), is that “more than 80% of the Russian bombs are unguided or ‘dumb’ bombs” with a circular error probable of 50-100 meters (8-12 meters for the US “precision” bombs).⁵⁴¹ This basically makes Russian strikes indiscriminate, and causes civilian deaths at a higher rate: BBC even reported that, according to activists, the strikes by the Syrian regime and its Russian allies killed

⁵³⁷ “Syria Conflict: Russia’s Scars from Afghanistan,” November 1, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34619068>.

⁵³⁸ Rainsford, “Russian Reservations on Syria Strikes.”

⁵³⁹ Urban, “Analysing Russia’s Syria Intervention.”

⁵⁴⁰ Jonathan Marcus Doucet Lyse, “Syria: What Can Russia’s Military Do?,” October 7, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34411477>.

⁵⁴¹ Urban, “Analysing Russia’s Syria Intervention.”

more civilians than the Islamic State.⁵⁴² However, the fact that “Russian strikes are thankfully far from being precise” is to Free Syrian Army’s advantage, as noted by a commander.⁵⁴³

As for the aircraft used in the strikes, an analyst is quoted saying that “Su-25... is quite capable of close support, but rather vulnerable and easy to lose” and “the Su-24M2 is... modernized... but [still] a rather worn and older aircraft.”⁵⁴⁴ Overall, another expert stated that “[t]he Russian air force today lacks the breadth of precision weapons and targeting systems fielded by the most capable of its Western counterparts.”⁵⁴⁵ Furthermore, some of the weapons are mainly for the show. For example, Russia’s use of its “most modern tactical strike aircraft” Su-34 in the Caspian Sea was unnecessary, and therefore intended to demonstrate capability, “to show they have some parity with the US, and of course a publicity coup,” “a large element of bravado,”⁵⁴⁶ to remind everyone that Russia is a “superpower.”⁵⁴⁷ Putin

⁵⁴² Lina Sinjab, “Syria’s Lost Generation of Children,” December 2, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34974400>.

⁵⁴³ Urban, “Analysing Russia’s Syria Intervention.”

⁵⁴⁴ Doucet, “Syria,” October 7, 2015.

⁵⁴⁵ Doucet.

⁵⁴⁶ Marcus, “What Is Russia’s Endgame in Syria?”

⁵⁴⁷ Doucet, “Syria,” October 7, 2015.

himself strives to “play the strong man and reassert Russia on the global power map.”⁵⁴⁸

- Russia’s domestic situation

Of course, understanding the domestic situation in a country is crucial for understanding its behavior in the world. BBC posted several articles addressing (not exclusively) Russia’s problems and sentiment. More general characterizations include an overall assessment of Russia: for example, a former Russian journalist suggested that while Russia is “quite strong” as a country “with very big resources,” it is also “extremely weak” due to “declining living standards, weaker economic growth” and other social problems.⁵⁴⁹ According to him, Putin offered the people “some kind of social contract” – the “greatness of Russia” in the form of Crimea, and other international achievements such as in Syria, - “in exchange for freedoms.”⁵⁵⁰

The lack of freedoms and the increase of authoritarianism in Russia are highlighted in other articles too, such as when discussing how under Putin, “Russian officials have tended to downplay Stalin’s crimes,” instead focusing on the victory over the Nazis.⁵⁵¹ Nevertheless, BBC admits that Putin is trusted, “adored and

⁵⁴⁸ Rainsford, “Russian Reservations on Syria Strikes.”

⁵⁴⁹ “Is Putin Motivated by Russia’s Weakness?”

⁵⁵⁰ “Is Putin Motivated by Russia’s Weakness?”

⁵⁵¹ “Gulag Museum Recreates Soviet Terror,” October 30, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34675413>.

admired by many at home,”⁵⁵² and that “[f]or now, most Russians” support Russia’s campaign in Syria – though, “partly because of the way Russian television has been reporting it.”⁵⁵³ BBC stressed that “before the military and media campaigns began,” most were opposed to the involvement.⁵⁵⁴

- Russia’s relationship with Syria

As BBC reported that Russia was fighting on the side of the Assad’s regime, the result is that “[i]n contrast to Western inconsistency and incoherence [Putin] has appeared to be dictating the agenda on Syria.”⁵⁵⁵ The “strategic and military alliance” between the two states goes back to Assad’s father and the former USSR.⁵⁵⁶ The Russian “imprint” in Syria is seen even through the Damascus architecture, and BBC reported that some of the locals welcome Russia’s involvement.⁵⁵⁷ As a result, being Assad’s “strong” or “key” ally, Putin sent “strong messages” about “whom the

⁵⁵² “Putin’s Winter Fairy Tale,” December 8, 2015, sec. Magazine, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34972707>.

⁵⁵³ “Syria Conflict.”

⁵⁵⁴ Rainsford, “Russian Reservations on Syria Strikes.”

⁵⁵⁵ Fergal Keane, “International System Has Failed Syria,” December 21, 2015, sec. World, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-35150037>.

⁵⁵⁶ Lina Sinjab Doucet Lyse, “Syria Conflict: The Close Ties behind Russia’s Intervention,” October 5, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34422209>.

⁵⁵⁷ Doucet.

Russians and the Syrian government are willing to sit at the negotiating table with” by killing the opposition and its leaders.⁵⁵⁸ For the Syrian regime, the arrival of Russian forces was a “lifeline.”⁵⁵⁹

- Russia’s relationship with the West

The relationship between Russia and the West in the context of the Syrian conflict in BBC coverage is defined through the difference in interpreting the term “terrorist.” As I mentioned before, “Russia brands as terrorists all rebels opposing” Assad (included those supported by the US) “terrorists.”⁵⁶⁰ According to BBC, Russia’s involvement and the indiscriminate bombing “will complicate and undermine the international effort to defeat IS,”⁵⁶¹ while the “prospect of a negotiated settlement [became] more remote.”⁵⁶² BBC reported that Russian officials have also been “inconsistent” with the terminology, at times suggesting that some of the rebels “could join in peace talks.”⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁸ “Syrian Rebel Leaders Die in Air Strike,” December 26, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35178684>.

⁵⁵⁹ Doucet, “Russia in Syria.”

⁵⁶⁰ Doucet, “Gulf ‘steps up’ Arms to Syria Rebels.”

⁵⁶¹ Doucet, “Russia in Syria.”

⁵⁶² Doucet, “Russia Joins Syrian War.”

⁵⁶³ Urban, “Analysing Russia’s Syria Intervention.”

Concerning Russia's desires of relationships with the West, BBC reported, for example, that Russia would like to "lure the French out of the American-Western orbit" because "[i]n the geopolitics departments of Russian universities - and some French ones too - this is regarded as a historically-determined necessity."⁵⁶⁴ However, due to France's distrust of Putin and the difference of views, "there is no new alliance."⁵⁶⁵ More broadly, though, the idea actively promoted in Russia's political circles – and broadcasted outside through forums such as the UN – is that Russia and the West should "forge a World War Two-style alliance" against ISIS, an alliance "just like the one against Hitler"⁵⁶⁶ (Lavrov also called for cooperation between the US and Russia⁵⁶⁷). The "ulterior motive" behind this idea is the same mentioned before – to accept Russia as a superpower.⁵⁶⁸ One of the BBC articles asks directly:

⁵⁶⁴ Hugh Schofield, "Hollande in Moscow: A New Era in Russian-French Relations?," November 26, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34931378>.

⁵⁶⁵ Schofield.

⁵⁶⁶ Steve Rosenberg, "'Invincible Unity' (or the Lack of It)," December 10, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35026254>.

⁵⁶⁷ "Russia Warns of 'proxy War' in Syria," October 31, 2015, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34685183>; "US Air Drop for Syria Anti-ISIS Forces," October 13, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34509793>.

⁵⁶⁸ Rosenberg, "'Invincible Unity' (or the Lack of It)."

“Is Russia still a key world power?”⁵⁶⁹ The article lists Russia’s strengths (the largest oil producer, UN Security Council seat, nuclear arsenal, etc.), and weaknesses (declining economy, corruption, poor infrastructure). It points out that China has long surpassed Russia, but argues that Russia “still measures itself against the West, and America in particular.”⁵⁷⁰ The author added that “Russia’s mission beyond the quest for influence is hard to discern” and that Russia is “the world’s most ostentatious foe of democracy promotion.”⁵⁷¹

Despite the aggravation, BBC reported certain rhetorical steps taken by the US to improve the relationship with Russia, such as quoting Kerry’s speech in which he claimed the US and Russia shared “common ground” by wanting “a united, secular Syria.”⁵⁷² But even though after the Paris attacks, “there had been hints of a rapprochement between Russia and the West - uniting against a common threat,”⁵⁷³ there seems to be little hope for improvement.

⁵⁶⁹ James Nixey, “Is Russia Still a Key World Power?,” December 21, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34857908>.

⁵⁷⁰ Nixey.

⁵⁷¹ Nixey.

⁵⁷² “Kerry Seeks End to Syria War ‘Hell.’”

⁵⁷³ “Putin Fury after Turkey Downs Warplane,” November 24, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34913173>.

NATO has long been an issue in Russia-West relations. As Russia's involvement in Syria started, NATO officials admitted that the possibility of Russia being accepted as part of Europe does not currently exist; instead, there is a need to deter Russia.⁵⁷⁴ In turn, Russia updated security papers describing NATO as a threat to the country.⁵⁷⁵ Overall, it is repeated throughout the coverage that Russia's intervention made the situation in Syria worse: cause many civilian deaths, "ramped up the war,"⁵⁷⁶ "further complicated the establishment of any form of no-fly zone,"⁵⁷⁷ and overall was "fundamentally flawed."⁵⁷⁸

- Russia's relationship with Turkey

Turkey is mainly present (and somewhat prominent) in the coverage of that period due to the downing of the Russian military plane. BBC covered the incident roughly as "Turkey says the plane violated its airspace - charges Russia denies,"⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁴ Jonathan Beale, "Nato War Games Keep Syria and Russia in Mind," October 23, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34603504>.

⁵⁷⁵ "Russia Names Nato as Threat to Security."

⁵⁷⁶ Urban, "Analysing Russia's Syria Intervention."

⁵⁷⁷ Tim Eaton, "Why a No-Fly Zone over Syria Is Unlikely," October 12, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34485827>.

⁵⁷⁸ Lyse Doucet, "US to Abandon Training New Syria Rebels," October 9, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34486572>.

⁵⁷⁹ "Russia Plans Sanctions against Turkey," November 26, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34933608>.

adding that “Russia and Turkey had some harsh words for each other.”⁵⁸⁰ The coverage included a detailed description of Russia’s reaction to the incident (“Clearly furious, [Putin] has threatened ‘serious consequences’”⁵⁸¹), including the immediately following accusations for Turkey of buying oil from the Islamic State⁵⁸² and trying to please the US.⁵⁸³ BBC reported that Turkey, in response, accused Russia of purchasing oil from the IS as well.⁵⁸⁴ Additionally, by accusing Turkey, Putin strived to “gain propaganda points in his tussle with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and in some way legitimise recent Russian attacks on targets in parts of Syria that are held by non-IS rebel forces backed by Turkey.”⁵⁸⁵ As for the Western reaction, NATO’s Secretary General “called the Russian violation ‘unacceptable,’ saying Nato was taking it ‘very seriously.’”⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁰ “Downed Plane Pilot Denies Turkey Warning,” November 25, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34925229>.

⁵⁸¹ Sarah Rainsford, “Russia to Turkey: Don’t Try It Again,” November 25, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34925823>.

⁵⁸² David Butter, “Does Turkey Really Get Its Oil from Islamic State?,” December 1, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34973181>.

⁵⁸³ “Putin Pours Fresh Scorn on Turkey,” December 17, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35118927>.

⁵⁸⁴ “In Detail: Russia and Turkey Tit-for-Tat,” December 16, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35094172>.

⁵⁸⁵ Butter, “Does Turkey Really Get Its Oil from Islamic State?”

⁵⁸⁶ “Russia Airspace Incursion ‘No Accident,’” October 6, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34453739>.

3. Syrian's refugee situation

BBC coverage of the refugee situation consists of both official reports and personal stories (including interviews in which some refugees describe their journeys as “torture.”⁵⁸⁷) About a dozen articles are mainly devoted to the issue. The articles cover the scope of the problem (“The number of Syrian refugees who are reaching Europe is only a fraction of the staggering number of those affected by the war there”⁵⁸⁸), offering insight on people's paths to safety (“How a Syrian refugee gets to the US,”⁵⁸⁹ “Seeking asylum on children's bicycles”⁵⁹⁰), and echoing concerns about and sharing stories of “desperate” refugees who had to return to the war zone (“In recent months, the United Nations says it has seen a worrying rise in returnees;”⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁷ Yolande Knell, “Desperate Refugees Return to Syria,” October 12, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34504418>.

⁵⁸⁸ Sinjab, “Syria's Lost Generation of Children.”

⁵⁸⁹ Ashley Gold and Paul Blake, “How a Syrian Refugee Gets to the US,” November 19, 2015, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34848248>.

⁵⁹⁰ Nick Holland, “Seeking Asylum on Children's Bicycles,” October 23, 2015, sec. Magazine, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34602208>.

⁵⁹¹ Knell, “Desperate Refugees Return to Syria.”

“Almost 4,000 refugees returned to Syria in August, double the number for the previous month”⁵⁹²).

Most of these and other articles also cover the various ways the refugees, and people in Syria in general, have had to suffer. In five years of “bloody armed conflict,” “[m]ore than 250,000 Syrians have been killed, and 11 million made homeless.”⁵⁹³ One article told a story about how Syrian child refugees (“as young as three years old”) were “being exploited illegally... as child labour by farmers and companies in Jordan” – “modern slave labour.”⁵⁹⁴ Another article shared a story about a Syrian family being stuck at the Moscow airport after being refused asylum.⁵⁹⁵ BBC reported that only three Syrians receive refugee status in Russia, and under 1,600 other people were granted temporary asylum for a year.⁵⁹⁶ Highlighting the disparity between

⁵⁹² Lyse Doucet, “Refugees in Jordan ‘Return to Syria,’” October 7, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34464011>.

⁵⁹³ “Syria Air Strikes.”

⁵⁹⁴ Andrew Hosken, “Syrian Child Refugees ‘Being Exploited in Jordan,’” November 4, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34714021>.

⁵⁹⁵ Sarah Rainsford, “Syrian Family in Russian Airport Limbo,” October 28, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34657582>.

⁵⁹⁶ Rainsford.

Russia's willingness to fight and to help people, BBC reported that Turkey predicted an increase in refugee numbers "due to Russian and Iranian involvement."⁵⁹⁷

4. The discussion of the US and Europe

Eleven articles represent the sub-theme of the role of the US and Europe in the war. The US and Europe are present in the BBC coverage, and I have discussed them earlier as a part of other sub-sections. Here I provide a brief review of how the West was covered outside of the discussion on the Russian-Western relations or other themes. This part of the coverage includes some evaluation of the US and European successes in Syria. The majority of the articles seem to fall under the "what went wrong" discussion, and the coverage can be defined as a criticism of the US policy in Syria.

One article provided an extensive analysis of the failure of the Obama administration train-and-equip rebels program and suggested that it resulted from the split in the administration over how exactly the US should support the rebels. Because of these disagreements, the support was not exactly "serious" and did not improve the situation. The author, however, pointed out that it was impossible to know what the

⁵⁹⁷ "EU Offers Turkey Aid in Migrant Plan," October 6, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34451660>.

situation would have become if the support had been more “serious.”⁵⁹⁸ Other articles called the train-and-equip program “ill-conceived and ill-fated”⁵⁹⁹ and pointed out that it “suffered embarrassing setbacks,”⁶⁰⁰ which led to negative consequences, such as increased Russia’s influence. Other articles reported the end of the program and the weak position of the US on the ground in Syria as a result of the policy.⁶⁰¹

5. The media and the Syrian war

The mass media of other countries are sometimes mentioned in BBC coverage, and among those, the Russian state-controlled media are referred to the most often. BBC credits the Russian state-controlled media with the popularity of Putin himself as it was mentioned earlier: “Russian television which heaps praise on

⁵⁹⁸ Tara McKelvey, “Obama and the Syria Training Fiasco,” October 10, 2015, sec. Magazine, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33997408>.

⁵⁹⁹ Jim Muir Doucet Lyse, “Russia’s Intervention Lifts Syria Crisis to New Level,” October 1, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34418849>.

⁶⁰⁰ “Syria Crisis: Where Key Countries Stand,” October 30, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23849587>.

⁶⁰¹ Doucet, “Syria,” October 7, 2015; Doucet, “US to Abandon Training New Syria Rebels.”

Vladimir Putin from morning till night.”⁶⁰² Putin’s comments, even in situations such as the downed military plane, are “for domestic consumption.”⁶⁰³

On the second day of the start of the Russian campaign, BBC reported that “Russia launch[ed] media offensive on Syria bombing.”⁶⁰⁴ Reporting that the Syrian events were leading news bulletins and newspapers “screaming” about the air force bombing, BBC stressed that the Russian media were calling most targets “terrorists” or “IS.”⁶⁰⁵ More interestingly, however, BBC pointed out that “the wide Russian coverage contrasts markedly with the secrecy that Russia clamped on military operations in Soviet times” – the television actually showed a video of air strikes – “a major new departure” and “quite new for Russians.”⁶⁰⁶ The reports, similar to official statements, stressed the legitimacy of the Russian strikes, highlighted the potential threat Islamists could pose to the country and denied civilians casualties.⁶⁰⁷

BBC suggested that some coverage would have “great propaganda value” for Russia, albeit can also be high-risk.⁶⁰⁸ BBC also discussed that “public opinion in

⁶⁰² “Putin’s Winter Fairy Tale.”

⁶⁰³ “Putin Fury after Turkey Downs Warplane.”

⁶⁰⁴ “Russia in Media Offensive on Syria.”

⁶⁰⁵ “Russia in Media Offensive on Syria.”

⁶⁰⁶ “Russia in Media Offensive on Syria.”

⁶⁰⁷ “Russia in Media Offensive on Syria.”

⁶⁰⁸ “Russia in Media Offensive on Syria.”

Russia is very pliable and responds well to the line taken by state-sponsored TV” and that “[t]here is little concern over the complete lack of public or parliamentary discussion.”⁶⁰⁹ BBC called the Russian state media a “powerful media machine,” which is designed to send the message about how the Western policy in Syria failed and that “Putin has stepped in to the rescue.”⁶¹⁰

Besides the Russian media, some Middle Eastern media are mentioned as well. For example, the Syrian newspapers are mentioned to be featuring an interview with Assad, who claimed that Russia was targeting jihadists, “while US strikes were not effective.”⁶¹¹ Additionally, conservative Iranian media reported “all-out assault against Moscow” by the Western media, which started after Russia’s involvement.⁶¹² In turn, Saudi-funded Al-Arabiya described the Russian and Assad regime’s actions as “military escalation against non-Islamist opposition strongholds.”⁶¹³ An official Syrian newspaper condemned the Saudi government in response. Finally, the US media reaction is briefly mentioned as well, mainly in their criticism of Obama’s

⁶⁰⁹ “Russian Plane Crash,” November 10, 2015.

⁶¹⁰ Rainsford, “Russian Reservations on Syria Strikes.”

⁶¹¹ “Syria Air Strikes.”

⁶¹² “Russian Missiles ‘Fell in Iran,’” October 8, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34479873>.

⁶¹³ “Syria War: Arab Media See Hope, Obstacles after Riyadh Talks,” December 11, 2015, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35070467>.

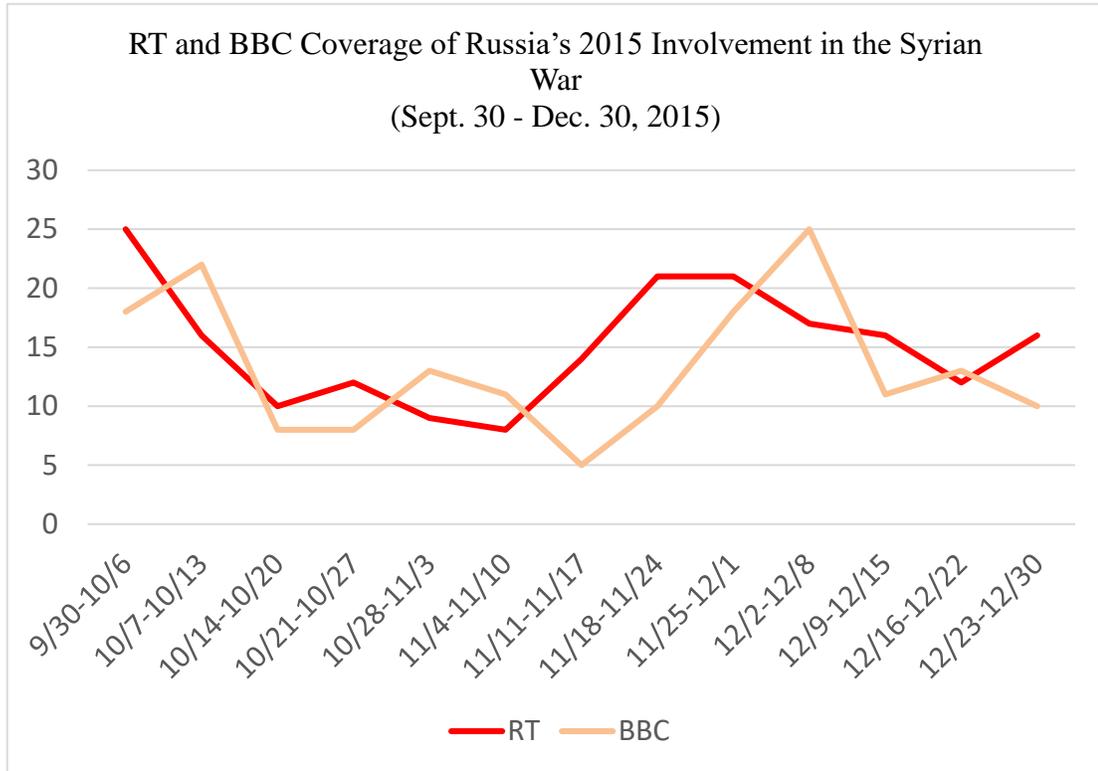
refugee policy: “Rush Limbaugh said last month that the Syrian refugees might be IS ‘sleepers.’”⁶¹⁴

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored the way Russia’s state-controlled media RT covered the first three months of Russia’s military involvement in the Syrian war after the Russian parliament granted President Putin the authority to deploy the air force in Syria on September 30, 2015. In order to meaningfully analyze the coverage, I discussed the history and development of the Russian mass media and provided an overview of the Syrian conflict. After the discussion of the findings, I offered an analysis of BBC’s coverage of the same subject during the same period for comparative purposes. In both cases, the data were processed with the help of NVivo software, which was used as a tool to organize and code the data. See below for the distribution of the articles by RT and BBC week by week during the studied period.

⁶¹⁴ Anthony Zurcher, “The Viral Roots of Trump’s Syria Refugee ‘Solution,’” October 1, 2015, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34397348>.

Figure 3 RT and BBC Coverage Article Distribution



Russia has a long history of censorship and propaganda. The press has been historically used to promote the agenda and serve the interests of those in power. Even during the 1990s, the freest period of Russian history, the oppression by the government continued and then intensified, while the media struggled to overcome economic and systemic obstacles. From the beginning of Putin’s presidency, the government set the goal to place the mass media entirely under its control so it could work to advance a new “national idea.” The emergence of the new media became a challenge for Putin’s regime. It became much harder to restrict the population’s access

to the information online, and the regime started focusing even more on the media content.

The propaganda at the domestic level was successful but ineffective for Russia's international image. RT became a pioneer of Russia's global propaganda campaign. In the case of the start of Russia's involvement in the Syrian war in 2015, RT served as Russia's government mouthpiece summoned not only to legitimize Russia's actions and delegitimize the actions of the West but to create a discourse and reality alternative to that existing in the West. The coverage offers Russia's government proposed views on the power of Russia and its place in the international political arena, Russia's position as a moral leader and a victim, as well as Russia's take on the role of the US and the West in general in the world affairs.

Strengthening the mass media and using it internationally to convey Russia's positions has been a defined foreign policy goal of Russia for years now. The 2008 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation mentioned "media" once – posing that Russia would strive to "strengthen the role of the Russian mass media in the international information environment providing them with essential state support."⁶¹⁵ The 2016 (most recent) Concept, however, mentioned the media four times and more extensively. In that case, "to bolster the standing of Russian mass media and communication tools in the global information space and convey Russia's perspective

⁶¹⁵ "THE FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION," President of Russia, January 12, 2008, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116>.

on international process to a wider international community” is one of eleven “main objectives,” which Russia’s foreign policy activities must aim to accomplish to “[uphold] the national interests of the Russian Federation and [achieve] its strategic national priorities.”⁶¹⁶

The 2016 Concept also discussed the need to “strengthen Russia’s role in international culture.” It painted a picture of the world in which the dominance of the West is waning, increased multipolarity allows for “dueling values,” and Western attempts to impose their values and preserve their positions threaten to result in xenophobia, “chaos,” and “greater instability.”⁶¹⁷ Non-interference in domestic affairs was identified as one of Russia’s priorities; however, Russia’s commitment to “universal democratic values, including human rights and freedoms” was set as a reason to “firmly counter... attempts to rewrite history and use it to stir up confrontation and revanchism,” which signaled a lack of acceptance of non-Russian views on past events. Finally, according to the concept, Russia “seeks to ensure that the world has an objective image of the country,” “takes necessary steps to counter

⁶¹⁶ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016),” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, December 1, 2016, https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_CptICkB6BZ29&_101_INSTANCE_CptICkB6BZ29_languageId=en_GB.

⁶¹⁷ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016).”

threats to its information security” with the help of new information and communication technologies, and “asserts the right of every person to access unbiased information about global developments and various points of view.”⁶¹⁸

Therefore, Russia’s strategy claims to support democracy and human rights, acknowledges differences (and suggests navigating them through non-interference), emphasizes legality and the rule of law, celebrates different viewpoints, and disapproves of “bias.” RT serves the purpose of conveying Russia’s message internationally. RT’s coverage reflects Russia’s rhetoric of democracy and freedoms, the policy of non-interference, and repeatedly emphasizes legality or illegality of participants’ actions. Regarding the variety of points of view, RT mainly works to provide one – the one of the Russian government, which is supplemented by opinions of those who, in some ways, support it. In general, RT’s coverage strives to create a reality that is alternative to the one that can be seen through the coverage of many international mainstream news organizations.

A comparative analysis of the coverage of the beginning of Russia’s involvement in the Syrian war by RT and BBC allows us to highlight the way RT works. In other words, these differences can be defined in terms of the tactics that RT uses in its reporting. Those tactics are:

⁶¹⁸ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016).”

1. Generation of a massive stream of information and storytelling
2. Simplification of processes, lack of different views and self-criticism
3. Lack of discussion of motives and reasoning
4. Delegitimation of other media and watchdog organizations

The tactics and differences are discussed below.

1. Generation of a massive stream of information and storytelling

As it was discussed earlier in the chapter, RT's stories on, for example, Russia's military success in Syria, are extensive and vivid and are aimed to impress the reader. There are numbers, including numbers of military strikes, numbers of terrorists killed, and numbers representing speed at which Russian missiles fly. There are also pompous expressions such as "the game-changing military intervention,"⁶¹⁹ "flying tank,"⁶²⁰ and "stunning aerial campaign."⁶²¹ Some of the descriptions resemble rather a literary work than a piece of reporting. All the comments (by Russian and Syrian officials, European leaders, or fighter pilots) are selected to

⁶¹⁹ "US Special Forces Deployed as 'Human Shields' to Salvage Terror Assets in Syria."

⁶²⁰ "Sukhoi Warplanes Used by Russia in Syria Anti-Terror Op (PHOTOS)."

⁶²¹ "A Tale of Two Strategies."

support the idea that Russia is indeed a “major global military power”⁶²² that has the capacity to “win” against the terrorists, and is doing it well.

BBC, on the other hand, offers a drier coverage of the events and is more careful with labels. The coverage raises questions regarding Russia’s military capabilities, provides experts’ opinions, and does not generally evaluate Russian involvement or other related events as successful. In general, BBC articles ask more questions in relation to various aspects of Russia’s involvement in the Syrian war.

2. Simplification of processes, lack of different views and self-criticism

BBC coverage, as a whole, provides a more comprehensive picture of the events and is more structured. Unlike RT, it acknowledges the existence of multiple participants, multiple angles to look at the situation, numerous driving factors behind actors’ actions, and a range of ways to evaluate the actors or actions as opposed to the RT’s binary of right versus wrong. As it was discussed earlier in the chapter, BBC mentions a variety of state and non-state actors involved in the war and profiles them in the coverage. BBC questions actors’ motives and reasoning: it provides discussions of official statements, comments of opponents and supporters, and analysis. BBC also questions definitions or assumptions about actors or motives, such as in the case of the “moderate opposition” in Syria (“terminology... is important”⁶²³). While some articles

⁶²² “Breaking International Law in Syria.”

⁶²³ Doble, “Eight Things People Get Wrong about Syria and Air Strikes.”

include the history of the conflict and big picture analysis, other articles present information in the concise format (such a “key” things to know) intended to give readers a general idea of the ongoing event and answers to the questions of “who,” “how,” and “why.” While discussing different viewpoints, BBC coverage criticizes not only Russia’s actions, but also the actions of other countries (such as a lack of leadership), and acknowledges mistakes made by the West. RT coverage does not include a variety of actors, it evaluates Russia’s actions consistently in a positive light and the actions of the West in a negative light.

3. Lack of discussion of motives and reasoning

RT portrays Russia’s campaign as highly successful, and because of it, it rejects any criticism. Russia’s legitimacy in Syria is based on the fact that Assad’s government requested it. The main purpose of the involvement in the fight against terrorists. Additional reasoning of the participation includes the worsening situation in Syria, as well as briefly mentioned geopolitical reasons (protecting Russia and Russians). Russia’s involvement serves national interests and is described as a matter of national security due to large reported numbers of Russian citizens joining ISIS. Finally, the rhetoric of higher morality of Russia suggests that Russia is dedicated to restoring peace in the world. Based on these arguments, RT proclaims Russia’s compliance with international law and condemns any involvement by the West due to it being “illegal.”

As RT's coverage provides justification for Russia's involvement in Syria, BBC rather covers Russia's motivation. BBC lists all main official reasons provided by Moscow, but also offers different takes on the situation. For example, some of the analysis articles discuss Russia's involvement as an attempt to undermine the leadership of the US in the world and its role in the region and a sign of Russia's weakness. Other articles refer to domestic issues Russia faces, and increased authoritarianism in the country.

4. Delegitimation of other media and watchdog organizations

In its coverage of the events, BBC mentions the Russian propaganda in state-controlled media and estimates its "value" for the country's domestic situation, public opinion, and support for the military campaign. BBC also mentions some of the regional media, including Syrian newspapers, which praised Russian involvement. RT, on the other hand, discussed the other international media much more extensively. The section on the victimization of Russia included examples of the ways RT criticized "bias" and "information war" by some American, European, and Middle Eastern media outlets. Moreover, analysis and op-ed pieces are devoted to scrutinizing international media coverage and finding underlying motives behind their perceived goal to smear Russia. RT questions the quality of Western journalism (e.g., blaming it for "baseless accusations"⁶²⁴) and claims the Western media use assumptions instead

⁶²⁴ "War of Words."

of facts. Such harsh criticism is clearly aimed at delegitimizing other sources of information to promote the rhetoric employed by RT.

As I pointed out earlier, in its coverage, RT makes references to the official sources in the Russian and Syrian governments, as well as isolated international politicians and analysts, to support its arguments. BBC turns to various international officials, and international organizations such as the UN, NATO, and human rights and humanitarian organizations for the data and analysis. RT dismisses the information provided by such organizations if it is critical of Russia.

To sum it up, this chapter demonstrates that RT is focused on image management while BBC works on news analysis.

Chapter 4

CASE STUDY II: PEOPLE’S DAILY’S (RENMIN RIBAO) COVERAGE OF 2016 HAGUE COURT RULING ON SOUTH CHINA SEA

In this chapter, I discuss the way the English-language version of the Chinese media outlet People’s Daily, also known as Renmin Ribao and later referred here as RMRB, covered the 2016 Hague court ruling, which rejected China’s claims in the South China Sea. First, I write about the history of the Chinese media, followed by the introduction of the studied media outlet – People’s Daily. Then, I review the course of the events related to the case brought by the Philippines and the court ruling. After that, I offer my analysis of People’s Daily’s coverage of the issue using the articles published by this newspaper between July 12 and October 12, 2016 – during the three months after the ruling. For the analysis, I used 306 articles published by People’s Daily within the indicated period that contained “South China Sea” keywords. I processed the articles with the help of the NVivo Software. Finally, I analyze the thirty articles BBC published to cover the issue during the same period (identified using the exact keywords), which were processed using the same method.

4.1 The Mass Media in China

Mechanisms of communication between Chinese political elites and ordinary citizens originated in ancient China, when emperors sent their messengers into communities to collect folklore, rumors, and thoughts – basically, public opinion. By the Song Dynasty (at the turn of the second millennium), “official newspapers” were

disseminated by the central government.⁶²⁵ Modern journalism in China started developing in the 19th century, most prominently at the time of the Opium Wars, when the West forced China to be more open. Then, Western missionaries and businessmen brought their newspapers and established new ones in China (including religious, commercial, and private newspapers), as well as introduced their journalistic traditions to China – as a part of China’s colonization.⁶²⁶

English, among other languages, became widespread in newspaper publishing in the early nineteenth century as a result of the increased opium trade with the British businessmen. The first modern newspaper, which was founded by Chinese people, - Zhaowen Xinbao – was established in 1873 in Hubei province. It was closed within a year due to low quality and lack of success.⁶²⁷ The rise of the revolutionary press characterized the beginning of the 20th century – by then, newspapers became essential tools of the political struggle against foreign oppression. Sun Yat-sen was one of the prominent revolutionaries who founded China Daily (Zhongguo Ribao) in 1900: the newspaper promoted the democratic-republican system and criticized the government of China’s last imperial dynasty Qing.⁶²⁸

New Youth (established in 1915) became one of the newspapers that laid the foundation for the Communist press. Initially, the newspaper was intended to speak to

⁶²⁵ Yunze Zhao and Ping Sun, *A History of Journalism and Communication in China* (Georgetown, CANADA: Routledge, 2018), 10, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/udel-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5391393>.

⁶²⁶ Zhao and Sun, *A History of Journalism and Communication in China*.

⁶²⁷ Zhao and Sun, 44.

⁶²⁸ Zhao and Sun, 73.

the younger generation and promote independence, progress, science, global thinking, as well as democracy, freedom, and equality. In 1918, the newspaper published some articles celebrating the October Revolution, then started promoting Marxism, and eventually became an important voice of the proletariat.⁶²⁹ In the 1920s, a number of Marxist-inspired popular journals, including Labor Circle in Shanghai, Labor's Voice in Beijing, and Labor in Guangzhou, were founded targeting workers. The Sino-Russian News Agency (established as the China Russia News Agency in 1920 in Shanghai) became China's first proletarian news agency. The agency strived to strengthen Chinese-Russian mutual understanding and promote the sharing of ideology and experience.⁶³⁰

In 1931, the Communist Party of China established its first official news agency – the Red China News Agency (RCNA). The following month, it set up its first official newspaper – the Red China. In 1937, the RCNA became Xinhua News Agency, while the Red China became New China.⁶³¹ Red Star was another newspaper published in 1931: it became the first official newspaper of the People's Army of China, and for several years it was led by Deng Xiaoping who worked to improve its overall quality and helped create a better understanding and a bond between the Army and the people.

By the founding of the PRC in 1949, there was a variety of party and non-party, public and private newspapers. Starting in 1949, however, the government

⁶²⁹ Zhao and Sun, *A History of Journalism and Communication in China*.

⁶³⁰ Zhao and Sun, 85.

⁶³¹ Zhao and Sun, *A History of Journalism and Communication in China*.

began the process of centralizing the media space, carrying out the reform of private journalism, and creating conditions that would make private and non-party newspapers' functioning difficult and basically impossible. Xinhua News Agency became the dominating news agency of the country, while People's Daily became the main public newspaper. In the 1950s, the Chinese governmental press extensively studied and strived to emulate the Soviet media system. People's Daily, for example, looked up to Pravda in terms of writing style and selection of news, such as publishing good news from the socialist countries, and bad news from the capitalist ones.⁶³² The CPC also borrowed the Soviet "report the truth" model of journalism: reporting what the government ordered regardless of the facts, market demand, or public opinion.⁶³³

The Cultural Revolution years (1966-1976) hit the newspaper industry especially hard. In 1967 the provincial newspapers were ordered to cease their work in favor of revolutionary activities. As a result, hundreds of newspapers were closed; the same happened to radio stations. Instead, the newly emerged poor-quality Cultural Revolution tabloids were circulated to public institutions. According to the China State Statistic Bureau,⁶³⁴ there were between 273 and 382 newspaper titles in 1950-1965, with total printed sheets growing from 650 million to over 4 billion. The number

⁶³² Zhao and Sun, 99.

⁶³³ He, *The Fog of Censorship*, 2.

⁶³⁴ The data from China State Statistic Bureau may not be entirely correct, especially in regard to non-state-owned publishers, due to their reluctance to report the numbers to the government.

of titles fell to 42 in 1970, with over 5 billion printed sheets published.⁶³⁵ Mao Zedong's regime cultivated "activists" who would report any instance of non-conforming thinking so the government could prosecute the violator. Many people were brutally murdered, including those for "thought crimes," based on tips (a part of the "informer culture") – even in years after Mao Zedong's death.⁶³⁶ Mao's press control strategy entailed the rule to report only "good news" and to praise the party.⁶³⁷ By the time Deng Xiaoping started Chinese Economic Reforms and opened China up in 1978, all newspaper publishing was tightly controlled by the party. Government control over the media continued, even though the government had to adapt to the new social, political, and economic context.

To put newspaper publishing into context, radio and television significantly grew in the 1980s with about 24 radio receivers per one hundred people in 1986-1987 (compared to about 12 in 1980), and over 16 television receivers per one hundred people by 1990 (compared to less than one television receiver in 1980).⁶³⁸ The number of television stations also grew from 38 in 1980 to 202 in 1985 to 541 in 1991. However, according to Lee (1994), the publishing industry did not lose its importance in the face of growing radio and television broadcasting by the early 1990s.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁵ Paul Siu-nam Lee, "Mass Communication and National Development in China: Media Roles Reconsidered," *Journal of Communication* 44, no. 3 (1994): 22–37, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1994.tb00686.x>.

⁶³⁶ He, *The Fog of Censorship*, 7.

⁶³⁷ He, 8–9.

⁶³⁸ Lee, "Mass Communication and National Development in China."

⁶³⁹ Lee.

After the Tiananmen events of 1989, when the Chinese government brutally suppressed youth democratic protests resulting in the death of thousands of people, the government control and management of the media continued, however, the prosecutions started to happen covertly instead of openly and officially.⁶⁴⁰ With the rise of the Internet, the Chinese government developed a firewall that would allow the continuation and even strengthening of the system of total censorship and surveillance.⁶⁴¹

As it was mentioned earlier, the Xinhua News Agency has been the official press service of China since 1931: even before the establishment of the PRC itself, the agency became subordinated to the Chinese Communist Party and functioned as a news agency and a newspaper. The online resource was officially established in November 1997.⁶⁴² In 2000, the Xinhua News Website was officially renamed into Xinhuanet.com. In the Xinhua News introduction section, Xinhuanet is called “an important central news service-oriented website, an important information organ of the central government, and an important platform for building up China’s online international communication capacity.”⁶⁴³

⁶⁴⁰ He, *The Fog of Censorship*, 13.

⁶⁴¹ He, 15.

⁶⁴² Xu Wu, *Chinese Cyber Nationalism: Evolution, Characteristics, and Implications*, Online Ressource (xi, 267 Seiten) vols. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlbk&AN=553517>.

⁶⁴³ “Brief Introduction to Xinhuanet,” Xinhuanet.com, 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/special/2011-11/28/c_131274495.htm.

From the beginning of its work, Xinhua News Agency was authorized by the government to broadcast such major political events as meetings of heads of states, the work of Chinese parliament, and international business meetings. By the end of 2002, Xinhua News broadcasted news in five languages: Chinese, English, French, Spanish, and Russian.⁶⁴⁴ By 2016, the Xinhua News website reported that it released content (“by using multimedia communication means, such as texts, photos, graphics, audio messages, video, blogs, podcast, microblog, short messages, and cell phone news”) in over ten languages to “reach directly and instantly its audiences at home and abroad at crucial moments of major news coverage and breaking events.”⁶⁴⁵ Xinhua News mission is quite clearly described: to “publicize China and report the world.” The official news output is 15,000 stories a day, most of which – 12,000 –are about China. According to the mission, the agency “pursues timely, accurate, credible and fair news coverage.”⁶⁴⁶

As was pointed out earlier, Xinhua’s governmental affiliation was never a secret. After the establishment of the PRC, the government needed a media outlet to “legitimize its political status through the media” and was considered a tool of propaganda.⁶⁴⁷ Even though it was established as the only legitimate source of information, it later had to compete with emerging newspapers, including other Party

⁶⁴⁴ “Development History,” Xinhua News Agency, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/aboutus_e1.htm.

⁶⁴⁵ “Brief Introduction to Xinhuanet.”

⁶⁴⁶ “Brief Introduction to Xinhuanet.”

⁶⁴⁷ Xin Xin, “A Developing Market in News: Xinhua News Agency and Chinese Newspapers.,” *Media, Culture & Society* 28, no. 1 (2006): 49.

newspapers. It led to Xinhua News ownership of a variety of smaller brands, as well as a new economic orientation of the agency: revenue was now coming from advertisement and sometimes subscription services.⁶⁴⁸

Globalization brought new realities into China, including booming news services, international television, and the Internet. Around 2000, Xinhua News Agency was self-funded by roughly 60% and supported by the government by 40%.⁶⁴⁹ Starting from the 1980s, the agency was actively trying to move away from the propaganda channel image and establish a different reputation. Xin Xin (2006) claimed that by mid-2000s, Xinhua News Agency's relationship with the Chinese government became "an agency–client relationship, controlled by a mixture of Party logic and market logic."⁶⁵⁰ By 2000s, the agency had also firmly established itself as the virtually sole source of news for China's two thousand newspapers and nine thousand magazines.⁶⁵¹

China is the only one among the three case studies in this dissertation that made it to the Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) list of the ten most censored countries in 2019. Like the other countries ranked four through ten, China (#5) uses "a combination of blunt tactics like harassment and arbitrary detention as well as

⁶⁴⁸ Xin Xin, 52.

⁶⁴⁹ Xin Xin, 53.

⁶⁵⁰ Xin Xin, "A Developing Market in News."

⁶⁵¹ He, *The Fog of Censorship*, 17.

sophisticated surveillance and targeted hacking to silence the independent press.”⁶⁵²

The country’s censorship system uses the world’s most far-reaching and sophisticated methods: the news on the Internet is controlled with the help of the Cyberspace Administration of China, most major foreign servers and websites are blocked or banned, and the citizens who defy the system face severe consequences and prosecution. China is one of the world’s top jailers of journalists (47 journalists imprisoned as of 2019), who have to deal with constant surveillance and personal risks.⁶⁵³

Freedom House rated China’s press freedom status as “not free” in 2017⁶⁵⁴ with a total score of 87/100 (100=Least Free). According to the report, the government adopted new laws and introduced further restrictions to tighten control over news channels, online publications, and social media. The strict Internet censorship was identified as one of the top priorities of the country’s leadership. From the legal point of view, the press is completely not free, as there are no press laws that would protect journalists or work to ensure their safety. The courts enjoy vast freedom of interpretation and are designed to side with the government. Politically, certain topics are banned while others are promoted by the government, which also dictates the way information is to be framed. Finally, from the economic perspective, the Chinese government has been tightening control as well: by controlling the means of

⁶⁵² “10 Most Censored Countries,” Committee to Protect Journalists, September 10, 2019, <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/09/10-most-censored-eritrea-north-korea-turkmenistan-journalist.php>.

⁶⁵³ “10 Most Censored Countries.”

⁶⁵⁴ 2017 is the most recent year report available as of December 2019.

production, regulating Internet service providers, and setting rules for phone applications, such as forcing their owners to audit the content as required by the government.⁶⁵⁵

China's press freedom index by Reporters Without Borders has stayed stable and low in the recent years: the country was #173 in 2013 (the first year ranked),⁶⁵⁶ stayed #176 from 2015 through 2018,⁶⁵⁷ and is currently ranked 177 for 2019 with over 120 journalists and bloggers detained and endangered as of December 2019.⁶⁵⁸ Reporters Without Borders portfolio on China underscores the role of president Xi in controlling the news and keeping Chinese citizens under surveillance, but also in trying to promote a "new world media order" abroad.⁶⁵⁹ The organization also reported that starting at the end of 2019, journalists would have to pass a compulsory Party and President loyalty exam, or otherwise would be banned and will lose their

⁶⁵⁵ "China Profile. Freedom of the Press 2017," Freedom House, April 18, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/china>.

⁶⁵⁶ "China : Even Tighter Control | Reporters without Borders," RSF, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://rsf.org/en/china>.

⁶⁵⁷ "China : Even Tighter Control"; "2017 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders," RSF, accessed June 21, 2017, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2017>; "2018 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders," RSF, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2018>.

⁶⁵⁸ "2019 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders," RSF, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2019>.

⁶⁵⁹ "China : Even Tighter Control."

credentials.⁶⁶⁰ In the meantime, by the 70th anniversary of the PRC, the government released a white paper praising the country for becoming a “true democracy and a champion of human rights” – a “smokescreen” designed to divert the world’s attention from the fact that the country is “the biggest prison in the world for journalists.”⁶⁶¹

Overall, despite the occasional lip-service by the Chinese officials, the Chinese media do not perform a watchdog role and are forced to be the “Party’s Mouthpiece” through the requirement to register and be approved by the government.⁶⁶² As He (2008) pointed out, the long-term consequences of such a system, aimed at portraying the government and the party in the best possible light, include the distortion of the nation’s collective memory and cultivation of resistance to ideas of human rights, democracy, and freedom.⁶⁶³ He also claimed that the party never, in fact, desired to give up control over the media, and any media reform was a myth.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶⁰ “China to Ban Journalists Who Fail Communist Party Loyalty Test | Reporters without Borders,” RSF, September 24, 2019, <https://rsf.org/en/news/china-ban-journalists-who-fail-communist-party-loyalty-test>.

⁶⁶¹ “For Its 70th Anniversary, the Chinese Regime Masquerades as a Champion of Human Rights | Reporters without Borders,” RSF, September 26, 2019, <https://rsf.org/en/news/its-70th-anniversary-chinese-regime-masquerades-champion-human-rights>.

⁶⁶² He, *The Fog of Censorship*, xiv, xviii, 4.

⁶⁶³ He, xviii, 1.

⁶⁶⁴ He, 42–43.

4.2 About People's Daily

People's Daily, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the largest newspaper in the country, was established in 1948 and has since preserved its position as the mouthpiece of the government and the Communist Party ("Party's mouthpiece" is a quite official definition of mass media in China⁶⁶⁵). As the party came to power in 1949 and took charge of all existing newspapers and periodicals, it made People's Daily its flagship newspaper, which it remains.⁶⁶⁶ With the reported worldwide circulation of three million copies,⁶⁶⁷ People's Daily newspaper group operates a number of subsidiary newspapers. According to its website description, People's Daily "reflects the views of the Chinese people, expounds on justice and lambasts various forms of malpractice."⁶⁶⁸

As an organization under the Communist Party of China, both People's Daily and Xinhua News Agency have strong political power and a wide range of privileges. He (2008) wrote that, for example, People's Daily enjoyed a personal car fleet for its journalists in the early 1990s when having a private car was still uncommon in

⁶⁶⁵ He, xiv.

⁶⁶⁶ He, *The Fog of Censorship*.

⁶⁶⁷ "Introduction to People's Daily"; "Renmin Ribao | Chinese Newspaper."

⁶⁶⁸ "Introduction to People's Daily."

China.⁶⁶⁹ Additionally, the journalists of party-level organizations have “the authority to act as public watchdogs over local governments.” The government provides them with all the resources to do so, and the local officials have the incentive to appease them and cultivate good relations with them as well, which may include bribes for journalists and other various ways to make their life more comfortable.⁶⁷⁰ High-ranking officials appoint the heads of top level media organizations like People’s Daily.⁶⁷¹

Having a point of view has traditionally been strictly prohibited for People’s Daily editors. As all the information came from the party as a “command,” the process of creating news is called “command communication.” Wu (1994) explained that the model of command communication emerged in China as a result of Leninist organizational principles and the militarization of the Communist Party.⁶⁷² Command communication also entails multiple stages of censorship and approval, which eliminates the possibility of diverging interpretation and creativity. While Wu predicted more resistance to political control and diversity of alternative sources of

⁶⁶⁹ He, *The Fog of Censorship*, 45.

⁶⁷⁰ He, 44.

⁶⁷¹ He, 43.

⁶⁷² Guoguang Wu, “Command Communication: The Politics of Editorial Formulation in the People’s Daily,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 137 (1994): 194–211, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/655694>.

information, it can only be suggested that the Communist Party succeeded in preserving the original model.

The online version of the newspaper, People’s Daily Online, was launched on January 1, 1997. According to its website, it offers coverage in seven ethnic minority languages and nine foreign languages.⁶⁷³ As of 2018, People’s Daily Online and its social media accounts claimed to reach 258 million people per day across 210 countries.⁶⁷⁴ The website boasts its “credibility, influence and comprehensive disseminating power,” as well as its commitment to “best content.”⁶⁷⁵ People’s Daily Online has 31 branches in China, and eleven subsidiaries or representative offices in South Korea, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Russia, the UK, and the US.

Social media presence is a crucial element of the company’s work. While Facebook is blocked in mainland China, People’s Daily Online Facebook page in English had 74 million followers as of January 2020. However, it is unclear how well this information reflects the reality: a 2015 Financial Times article, referring to the Committee to Protect Journalists, revealed that “more than half the 1.17m Twitter users following the English-language account of the flagship paper are virtually

⁶⁷³ “Introduction to People’s Daily Online - People’s Daily Online.”

⁶⁷⁴ “Introduction to People’s Daily Online - People’s Daily Online.”

⁶⁷⁵ “Introduction to People’s Daily Online - People’s Daily Online.”

inactive and likely to be fake.”⁶⁷⁶ People’s Daily Twitter followers as of January 2020 accounted for seven million. The Financial Times article mentioned the rapid growth of the social media followers as well (People’s Daily had only 13 million followers on Facebook in 2015), and explained it by the media’s attempt to boost its significance.⁶⁷⁷

The steps the Chinese government has been taking to control the media are very deliberate. From the point of view of the leadership of People’s Daily, “losing control over the online conversation could have dire consequences,” more specifically, according to the chief editor, “to lose speech is to lose power,” which would be a “historic mistake.”⁶⁷⁸ In other words, the media, including social media, exist in China for the sole purpose of shaping public opinion and helping the government maintain control. In instances when the public is feeling pessimistic, such as what seems to be the case during the ongoing US-China trade war, the outlets like People’s Daily are summoned to persuade people not to “lose faith in the country’s prospects,” such as the way they did in an “opinion” piece that claimed that “China’s economic resilience

⁶⁷⁶ Christian Shepherd, “Twitter Tally at People’s Daily Does Not Add up, Say Researchers,” *Financial Times*, November 23, 2015, <https://www.ft.com/content/43319c90-919a-11e5-bd82-c1fb87bef7af>.

⁶⁷⁷ Shepherd.

⁶⁷⁸ Eva Dou and Josh Chin, “People’s Daily Chief Warns of ‘Historic Mistake’ If China Loses Grip on New Media,” *WSJ* (blog), March 21, 2016, <https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2016/03/21/peoples-daily-chief-warns-of-historic-mistake-if-china-loses-grip-on-new-media/>.

and huge market provide powerful ammunition for China to make a counterstrike in this trade war.”⁶⁷⁹

The role of People’s Daily within the Chinese propaganda machine cannot be overestimated. This media’s goals have been to generate alternative narratives and keep the popular opinion under control. Because other sources of information are unavailable to most people due to the Great Firewall of China (and overall strict censorship), the rhetoric that is set up by People’s Daily is highly influential. For instance, the state media have been portraying mostly peaceful Hong Kong protests as extremely violent and resulting from interference from “foreign hostile forces” like the US.⁶⁸⁰ People’s Daily also strives to delegitimize other media, especially those from the West. One article, for example, discusses how “biased” and “unscrupulous” media work to “tarnish the image of Hong Kong police... – the heroes protecting the city’s security and stability” while “underestimating the severity and truth of the mobs’ violence”; this “attitude” is “encouraging the opposition in Hong Kong.”⁶⁸¹ Another

⁶⁷⁹ Zhou Xin, “People’s Daily Argues Pessimism about Trade War Impact Unwarranted,” *South China Morning Post*, October 17, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/2168933/chinese-communist-party-paper-counters-pessimistic-views-trade>.

⁶⁸⁰ Fang, “Analysis | What Is China’s Propaganda Machine Saying about the Hong Kong Protests?”

⁶⁸¹ “Hong Kong Protests: The Unseen Truth Ignored by Biased Media - People’s Daily Online,” *People’s Daily Online*, August 26, 2019, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/0826/c90000-9609257.html>.

article condemned Apple’s “incomprehensible” decision to allow a “poisonous” app for tracking police activity in Hong Kong, and threatened Apple with “a lot of trouble” for that “betrayal of Chinese people’s feelings.”⁶⁸²

Guardian’s Michael Standaert described a striking difference between Chinese-language and English-language coverage of the COVID-19 situation in China at the beginning of 2020. The English versions of newspapers reported that China had struggled containing the outbreak. The Chinese versions preferred to downplay it and focus on other news instead.⁶⁸³ In an article for *Foreign Policy*, Hilton Yip (2018) argued that Chinese English-language propaganda cannot and is unlikely to succeed to complete at the global level due to the strongly problematic image of China and the strict party coverage guidelines – but not for lack of trying.⁶⁸⁴

Finally, such People’s Daily effort concerns not only the domestic situation in China. In the past, the newspaper has been criticized for purposefully negative coverage of, for example, the US and Americans. In 2013, a series of articles, both in Chinese and in English, published a “more objective picture” of how Americans are,

⁶⁸² “Chinese State Newspaper People’s Daily Criticises Apple over Hong Kong App, Protesters’ Song,” *The Straits Times*, October 9, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/chinese-state-newspaper-peoples-daily-criticises-apple-for-app-use-by-hong-kong>.

⁶⁸³ Standaert, “Chinese State Media Downplays Coronavirus as Xi Strikes Positive Tone.”

⁶⁸⁴ Yip, “China’s \$6 Billion Propaganda Blitz Is a Snooze.”

which reveals that Americans are, in fact, “immoral and dishonest.”⁶⁸⁵ Coordinated smear campaigns like this have been part of Chinese state-controlled media for years now.

4.3 Hague Court’s Ruling on the South China Sea

The South China Sea is a sea located in the western Pacific Ocean. It is bordered by China on the north, Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia on the west, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei on the south, and Taiwan and the Philippines on the east. The sea has strategic and economic importance for the states of the region, many of which have been using the sea for centuries. A number of territorial disputes and claims over the sea and the hundreds of islands located in it have existed among the neighboring countries. China, who claimed most of the South China Sea, had territorial disputes with several states, including Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei, and Japan, and those disputes became one of the immediate foreign policy problems for the PRC. Japan and South Korea, who do not have territorial claims over the waters with China, are interested in shipping lanes that go through the waters and connect them to the Indian Ocean. China and Japan are, however, also engaged in a dispute over Senkaku (or Diaoyu in Chinese) Islands in the sea. China’s relations with the US as well were influenced by the conflict. Overall, the economic

⁶⁸⁵ Adam Taylor, “Chinese State Newspaper Faces Backlash Over ‘Dishonest Americans’ Articles,” Business Insider, May 30, 2013, <https://www.businessinsider.com/peoples-daily-runs-dishonest-americans-series-2013-5>.

and geopolitical significance of the South China Sea cannot be overestimated.

According to Forbes, five trillion dollars of global trade “flow annually through waters deep with oil, natural gas, hydrocarbon and fish stocks.”⁶⁸⁶

In 2013, the Philippines (under president Benigno Aquino) brought the case against China to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague, arguing that China’s claim over most of the South China Sea (80-90%) demarcated through the imaginary nine-dash line contradicts the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which was signed in 1982 and defined the rights, responsibilities, and rules for using ocean and the resources within them by the nations. In particular, the dispute between China and the Philippines involved the Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands.

In 2014, the Chinese government issued its “position paper,” which was “intended to demonstrate that the arbitral tribunal... does not have jurisdiction” over the Philippines’ case. According to the statement, the court does not have any jurisdiction over the issues of sovereignty, as the Convention (UNCLOS) does not apply to such matters.⁶⁸⁷ At the end of October 2015, the court issued the Award on Jurisdiction and Admissibility – a response to “China’s Position Paper.” The award pointed out that the Philippines had neither requested the court to rule over the issues

⁶⁸⁶ William Pesek, “Making Sense Of The South China Sea Dispute,” Forbes, August 22, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/outofasia/2017/08/22/making-sense-of-the-south-china-sea-dispute/>.

⁶⁸⁷ “Position Paper of the Government of the People’s Republic of China on the Matter of Jurisdiction in the South China Sea Arbitration Initiated by the Republic of the Philippines,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, December 7, 2014, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1217147.shtml.

of sovereignty in the region, nor asked to delineate borders. Upon consideration, the court concluded that it had the jurisdiction to decide on the ongoing matter and rejected China's calls to resolve the issues solely through negotiations.⁶⁸⁸

On June 12, 2016, the five judges and legal experts on the court ruled unanimously that the contested waters were "within the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines, because those areas are not overlapped by any possible entitlement of China."⁶⁸⁹ The tribunal ruled that China's claim that it had "historic rights" to the regional waters, which led it to pursue the construction of artificial islands in the sea, have no legal basis.⁶⁹⁰ According to the court, China's behavior constituted a violation of international law and caused harm to the marine environment. Additionally, the tribunal ruled that fishermen from both countries had fishing right over the disputed area.⁶⁹¹ The ruling was binding, but the court lacks mechanisms of enforcement. Nevertheless, the decision was welcomed in the Philippines at that time, as the chief

⁶⁸⁸ "ARBITRATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA," PRESS RELEASE (The Hague: Permanent Court of Arbitration, October 29, 2015), <https://www.pcacases.com/web/sendAttach/1503>.

⁶⁸⁹ Oliver Holmes and Tom Phillips, "South China Sea Dispute."

⁶⁹⁰ "Hague Announces Decision on South China Sea," *The New York Times*, July 12, 2016, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/07/12/world/asia/hague-south-china-sea.html>, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/07/12/world/asia/hague-south-china-sea.html>.

⁶⁹¹ "Philippines Wins South China Sea Case," July 12, 2016, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36771749>.

counsel in the case and the foreign secretary called it “significant.”⁶⁹² The US and other countries urged China to comply.⁶⁹³ Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued remarks welcoming the fact of the ruling and expressing strong support for “the settlement of disputes in the East Sea by peaceful means, including legal and diplomatic processes, ... maintenance of regional peace and stability, security, safety and freedoms of navigation and over-flight in the East Sea, and respect for the rule of law in the oceans and seas.”⁶⁹⁴

In reaction to the ruling, China reasserted its claims in the region, called the ruling “null and void,” contended that the panel had no jurisdiction over the case, and overall signaled that it would ignore the decision. China’s President Xi Jinping said that China would not accept the decision, which would not affect China’s territorial sovereignty. Instead, Xi advocated for “maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea... [through] directly negotiating for a peaceful resolution on relevant disputes with states that are directly involved, based on the respect of history and in accordance with international laws.”⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹² Jane Perlez, “Tribunal Rejects Beijing’s Claims in South China Sea,” *The New York Times*, July 12, 2016, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/world/asia/south-china-sea-hague-ruling-philippines.html>.

⁶⁹³ “Philippines Wins South China Sea Case.”

⁶⁹⁴ “Remarks of the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam on Viet Nam’s Reaction to the Issuance of the Award by the Tribunal Constituted under Annex VII to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in the Arbitration between the Philippines and China,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, July 12, 2016, http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt_baochi/pbnfn/ns160712211059.

⁶⁹⁵ Shi Jiangtao and Jun Mai, “China’s Xi Jinping Rejects Any Action Based on International Court’s South China Sea Ruling,” *South China Morning Post*, July 12,

The Chinese Society of International Law issued a statement two days prior to the court ruling strongly supporting the position of the Chinese government. The statement proclaimed China's "indisputable sovereignty" over the South China Sea and used other terminology usually employed by the Chinese government's official statements, such as calling the use of some islands by the Philippines an "illegal seizure."⁶⁹⁶ In regards to the court's Award on Jurisdiction and Admissibility, the organization provided a lengthy denial of the decision arguing that Philippines' claims did not constitute a dispute with China, that the claims were "issues of sovereignty" and could not be in the court's jurisdiction, and that the court's procedures were inconsistent with the UNCLOS adopted mechanisms.⁶⁹⁷

As *New York Times*' Perlez wrote at the time of the ruling, the court's decision was "the first time the Chinese government had been summoned before the international justice system," and the risk of "being labeled an international outlaw" could "force Beijing to reconsider its assertive tactics."⁶⁹⁸ The article also quoted a senior adviser for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington who claimed that "Xi Jinping has lost face" and argued that China would

2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1988990/chinas-xi-jinping-rejects-any-action-based>.

⁶⁹⁶ "The Tribunal's Award in the 'South China Sea Arbitration' Initiated by the Philippines Is Null and Void," Chinese Society of International Law, June 10, 2016, <http://www.csil.cn/News/Detail.aspx?Aid=201>.

⁶⁹⁷ "The Tribunal's Award in the 'South China Sea Arbitration' Initiated by the Philippines Is Null and Void."

⁶⁹⁸ Perlez, "Tribunal Rejects Beijing's Claims in South China Sea."

not be able to ignore the ruling.⁶⁹⁹ However, the new president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, who took office about two weeks before the verdict, signaled his openness for negotiation.

Roughly two years after the ruling, China had been continuing aggressive construction and militarization of the artificial islands in the sea. According to the United States Indo-Pacific Command Admiral Philip S. Davidson, Beijing had become “capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States.”⁷⁰⁰ Despite the continued tensions between the Philippines and China, in September 2019, Duterte announced that he would ignore the arbitration in exchange for a controlling stake in an energy deal with Chinese companies promised by Xi Jinping.⁷⁰¹

4.4 People’s Daily Data Discussion

The data for this part of the project were collected from the English-language version of the People’s Daily website, which allows for searching articles by keywords within a date range. I searched for articles containing “South China Sea” during the period between July 12 and October 12, 2016, and received 393 results. Some of the

⁶⁹⁹ Perlez.

⁷⁰⁰ Hannah Beech, “China’s Sea Control Is a Done Deal, ‘Short of War With the U.S.’” *The New York Times*, September 20, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/world/asia/south-china-sea-navy.html>.

⁷⁰¹ Helen Regan, “Duterte Says Xi Jinping Offered Him an Oil and Gas Deal to Ignore South China Sea Ruling,” CNN, September 12, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/12/asia/duterte-xi-south-china-sea-deal-intl-hnk/index.html>.

articles had to be filtered out manually due to being wrongly included (no “South China Sea” mentions), lack of text (photo articles), or being a duplicate (articles with no updates republished a day or more after the original article with the exact same or almost the same headline and a new date). Most of the remaining 306 articles identified Xinhua News as the source, about a quarter were labeled as People’s Daily or People’s Daily Online’s originals, about 13% came from China Daily, under 10% from Global Times, 4% from CRI Online, and a few from CNTV, China.org.cn, and Mail Online. All 306 articles were processed with the help of the NVivo 12 Plus software. Over 70% of the articles were published during the first month after the court ruling with 40% of all articles published during the first week after the event.

The word frequency query showed that other than other than the search words themselves and their derivatives (“Chinese”), the most frequently used words are “arbitration” (714 count), “international” (681 count), “Philippines” (629 count), “countries” (608 count), “disputes” (554 count), and “law” (531 count). The most frequently mentioned country other than China and the Philippines is Japan (431 count), while the United States (or “US”) is mentioned 365 times, Vietnam 146 times, and Russia 89 times. ASEAN is the most frequently mentioned organization (404 count), while the United Nations (or “UN”) is mentioned 169 times. The most frequently used relevant abstract concepts are “cooperation” (401 count), “sovereignty” (370 count), “peace” (300 count), “bilateral” (277 count), and “stability” (256 count). See the “word cloud” below for a visual of the results.

3. The role of the US
 - The Western media
4. International reaction to the arbitration
5. The role of Japan
6. Other actors in the coverage
 - The Philippines (and China-Philippines relationship)
 - ASEAN
 - Vietnam, Russia, Taiwan, Korea, and others

See the theme distribution in the table below.

Table 3 People’s Daily: Theme Distribution Across Articles

Theme	Number of articles	Number of References
1. <u>The legality of the arbitration and the related actions</u>	62	120
2. <u>China’s stance and identity</u>		
China’s stance and goals	63	92
The “right” way to resolve the conflict	16	25
SCS in Chinese people’s lives	16	22
Truth and myths about SCS	9	13
China as a victim	2	2
SCS unrelated to court ruling + China domestic situation	20	25
3. <u>The role of the US and the West</u>		
The role of the US	63	142
The Western media	8	8

4. <u>International reaction to the arbitration</u>	52	78
5. <u>The role of Japan</u>	38	79
6. <u>Other actors in the coverage</u>		
The Philippines (and China-Philippines relationship)	36	57
ASEAN	23	34
Vietnam, Russia, Taiwan, Korea, and others	24	41

The following is the discussion of the People’s Daily’s coverage of the South China Sea court ruling.

1. The legality of the arbitration and the related actions

This section discusses the way People’s Daily (later also referred to as RMRB) covered the fact of the Hague court ruling on SCS, and how China, through the outlet, defined this event and its consequences. The question of “legality” of all the actions is central to the discussion. Thus, according to RMRB, the decision was “one sided and extremely biased,”⁷⁰² “farcical,”⁷⁰³ “ill-grounded,”⁷⁰⁴ “ill-founded,”⁷⁰⁵ a “piece of

⁷⁰² Makhdoom Babar, “A Farcical Arbitration by Dubious Arbitrators - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90780-9085478.html>.

⁷⁰³ Makhdoom Babar.

⁷⁰⁴ “Backgrounder: International Court of Justice Totally Distinct from Permanent Court of Arbitration - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90883-9086626.html>.

⁷⁰⁵ “China Opposes Outside Intervention in Regional Affairs: Vice FM - People’s Daily Online,” July 24, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0724/c90000-9090282.html>.

waste paper,”⁷⁰⁶ an “illegal verdict,”⁷⁰⁷ which “sets a dangerous precedent,”⁷⁰⁸ “lacked common sense and indicates poor professionalism.”⁷⁰⁹ The arbitrators are called “dubious,”⁷¹⁰ “rogue,”⁷¹¹ “ignorant” due to allowing to be “manipulated as puppets... [so they had] no choice but to play dumb.”⁷¹² The tribunal is characterized as a “self-claimed legal body”⁷¹³ that had “no historic title” and “no jurisdiction over

⁷⁰⁶ “Commentary: Rice’s China Visit Sends Positive Sign - People’s Daily Online,” July 29, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0729/c90000-9092448.html>.

⁷⁰⁷ “Unlawful Arbitration Cannot Negate China’s Sovereignty over South China Sea: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c98649-9084635.html>.

⁷⁰⁸ “Don’t Distort Justice with a False Arbitration Award - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90000-9086225.html>.

⁷⁰⁹ “Don’t Distort Justice with a False Arbitration Award - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷¹⁰ Makhdoom Babar, “A Farcical Arbitration by Dubious Arbitrators - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷¹¹ “South China Sea Arbitration Decided by Biased Arbitrators - People’s Daily Online,” July 20, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0720/c90000-9088371.html>.

⁷¹² Hu Zexi, “Op-Ed: South China Sea Arbitration Turned a Blind Eye to UNCLOS, Exceeded Own Competence and Exposed Tribunal’s Ignorance - People’s Daily Online,” July 22, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0722/c90000-9089824.html>.

⁷¹³ “China Calls on US, Japan to Stop Twisting the Facts - People’s Daily Online,” July 14, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0714/c90883-9085889.html>.

sovereignty issues,”⁷¹⁴ which “degenerated into a political tool of external powers,”⁷¹⁵ and acted “in defiance of basic facts”⁷¹⁶ while being “driven by a hidden agenda.”⁷¹⁷

Additionally, the “so-called”⁷¹⁸ arbitration is said to be a “mockery of justice”⁷¹⁹ of “illegal nature,” which makes it “null and void,”⁷²⁰ with “no binding

⁷¹⁴ “Air Defense Zone Called Option - People’s Daily Online,” July 14, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0714/c90883-9086097.html>.

⁷¹⁵ “People’s Daily Slams South China Sea Arbitration Tribunal for Being Political Tool - People’s Daily Online,” July 14, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0714/c90000-9085753.html>.

⁷¹⁶ “China Resolved to Defend Territorial Sovereignty, Maritime Interests: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085094.html>.

⁷¹⁷ “Full Text: Chinese State Councilor’s Interview on so-Called Award by Arbitral Tribunal for South China Sea Arbitration - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90000-9086226.html>.

⁷¹⁸ Makhdoom Babar, “A Farcical Arbitration by Dubious Arbitrators - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷¹⁹ “U.S. Urged to Reimburse Philippines over South China Sea Arbitration Case - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90883-9086681.html>.

⁷²⁰ “Backgrounder: A Brief Look at the South China Sea Arbitration Case - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90000-9085053.html>; “China Says ADIZ in South China Sea Depends on Threat - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90883-9085545.html>.

force,”⁷²¹ a “wrongful exercise,”⁷²² “drama,”⁷²³ a “politically manipulated case,”⁷²⁴ a “political farce made under the pretext of law,”⁷²⁵ a “trap set by the US and the Philippines,”⁷²⁶ “illegal and invalid in every sense,”⁷²⁷ a “political provocation,”⁷²⁸ “a

⁷²¹ “Biased Award in South China Sea Arbitration Has No Binding Force: Expert - People’s Daily Online,” July 19, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0719/c90000-9087788.html>.

⁷²² “Biased Award in South China Sea Arbitration Has No Binding Force: Expert - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷²³ “China Resolved to Defend Territorial Sovereignty, Maritime Interests: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷²⁴ “Chinese FM Reiterates China’s Stance on South China Sea Arbitration - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90000-9086228.html>.

⁷²⁵ “Chinese Foreign Minister Says South China Sea Arbitration a Political Farce - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90883-9085067.html>.

⁷²⁶ “Unlawful Arbitration Cannot Negate China’s Sovereignty over South China Sea: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷²⁷ “Full Text: Chinese State Councilor’s Interview on so-Called Award by Arbitral Tribunal for South China Sea Arbitration - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷²⁸ “People’s Daily Slams South China Sea Arbitration Tribunal for Being Political Tool - People’s Daily Online.”

breach of international law,”⁷²⁹ “the distortion of right and wrong,”⁷³⁰ which “has no impact on China’s actions.”⁷³¹

As a background, RBRB also published an article entitled “Long history of illegal land reclamation at sea by Philippines, Vietnam,” which discussed the “illegal occupation” of the islands by the Southeast Asian states.⁷³²

Accordingly, China’s claims to the SCS are “legal and lawful,”⁷³³ and its stance is “completely in line with international law,”⁷³⁴ while not participating in the

⁷²⁹ “Interview: Award of South China Sea Arbitration Result of U.S. Manipulation - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90883-9086747.html>.

⁷³⁰ “People’s Daily Calls for Return to Negotiating Table to Resolve South China Sea Dispute - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90000-9086532.html>.

⁷³¹ “New Nansha Airports Enable China to Better Serve Public Good in South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90883-9085682.html>.

⁷³² “Spotlight: Long History of Illegal Land Reclamation at Sea by Philippines, Vietnam - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90000-9084872.html>.

⁷³³ Makhdoom Babar, “A Farcical Arbitration by Dubious Arbitrators - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷³⁴ “Chinese Premier Wins Backing over South China Sea at ASEM Summit - People’s Daily Online,” July 17, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0717/c90000-9087190.html>.

arbitration is “entirely legal”⁷³⁵ and “lawfully reasonable,”⁷³⁶ and is, in fact, a way to “[uphold] the authority and dignity of international law.”⁷³⁷ China’s sovereignty over the SCS and the islands is “irrefutable”⁷³⁸ and “widely recognized by the international community.”⁷³⁹

2. China’s stance and goals (regarding the SCS issue and overall)

This section discusses the way RMRB presents China as a country, including China’s identity and ideology (usually citing China’s officials), as well as China’s position on the issue of the SCS, and China’s goals for the future in the context of the issue. Thus, according to RMRB, China is “a peace-loving nation”⁷⁴⁰ (“China will

⁷³⁵ “Quotable Quotes on S. China Sea Arbitration: Tribunal’s Arbitration Is Unlawful - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90000-9084493.html>.

⁷³⁶ “Unlawful Arbitration Cannot Negate China’s Sovereignty over South China Sea: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷³⁷ “South China Sea Arbitration Is a Political Farce: Ambassador - People’s Daily Online,” July 25, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0725/c90883-9090320.html>.

⁷³⁸ “China’s Historic Rights over South China Sea Islands Irrefutable: Experts - People’s Daily Online,” July 20, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0720/c90000-9088762.html>.

⁷³⁹ “China’s Historic Rights over South China Sea Islands Irrefutable: Experts - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁴⁰ Zhong Sheng, “Editorial: China Stays Resolute in Safeguarding Peace and Stability in the South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 23, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0723/c90000-9090020.html>.

never bully any state”⁷⁴¹), “a great rising power in the global community,”⁷⁴² “a responsible member of the international community,”⁷⁴³ an “important advocate [or “guardian”⁷⁴⁴] and loyal implementer of the UN’s cause to push forward the international rule of law,”⁷⁴⁵ which “all countries, big or small, rich or poor, strong or weak” should follow⁷⁴⁶ (but it is implied that some Western countries do not support

⁷⁴¹ “Op-Ed: Double Standards Applied in South China Sea Arbitration Profane International Law - People’s Daily Online,” July 16, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0716/c90000-9086844.html>.

⁷⁴² “Op-Ed: Anti-US Protests at KFC Outlets Are Anything But Patriotism - People’s Daily Online,” July 21, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0721/c90000-9088923.html>.

⁷⁴³ “Arbitral Court Not a UN Agency - People’s Daily Online,” July 14, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0714/c90883-9085923.html>.

⁷⁴⁴ “Chinese Leaders Reject S. China Sea Arbitration Award - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085116.html>; Zhong Sheng, “Editorial: China Stays Resolute in Safeguarding Peace and Stability in the South China Sea - People’s Daily Online”; “History Will Tell the True Guardian of South China Sea Peace: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90000-9086529.html>.

⁷⁴⁵ “Arbitral Court Not a UN Agency - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁴⁶ “China Condemns Terrorist Attack in Nice, Stresses Trade Cooperation at ASEM Summit - People’s Daily Online,” July 16, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0716/c90883-9086919.html>.

international law enough,⁷⁴⁷ or practice double standards⁷⁴⁸ and selective use⁷⁴⁹).

International law⁷⁵⁰ overall is heavily emphasized throughout the coverage along with “historical facts”⁷⁵¹ – the two are at the foundation of China’s perceived rights in the SCS.⁷⁵² The behavior of the Philippines and its supporters is characterized as a “danger” to the “legitimacy of the international legal system, international rule of law and the world order,”⁷⁵³ while China is “an important force for maintaining peace and

⁷⁴⁷ “Op-Ed: Double Standards Applied in South China Sea Arbitration Profane International Law - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁴⁸ “Op-Ed: Double Standards Applied in South China Sea Arbitration Profane International Law - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁴⁹ Hu Zexi, “Op-Ed: South China Sea Arbitration Turned a Blind Eye to UNCLOS, Exceeded Own Competence and Exposed Tribunal’s Ignorance - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁵⁰ “Backgrounder: A Brief Look at the South China Sea Arbitration Case - People’s Daily Online”; “China Issues Statement, Reaffirming Territorial Sovereignty and Maritime Rights and Interests in the South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90000-9085054.html>; “China Urges Australia to Take International Law Seriously - People’s Daily Online,” July 14, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0714/c90883-9086210.html>.

⁷⁵¹ “Backgrounder: A Brief Look at the South China Sea Arbitration Case - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁵² “Chinese Foreign Minister Says South China Sea Arbitration a Political Farce - People’s Daily Online”; “China Refuses South China Sea Arbitration Award - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90883-9085064.html>.

⁷⁵³ “Biased Award in South China Sea Arbitration Has No Binding Force: Expert - People’s Daily Online.”

stability in the South China Sea.”⁷⁵⁴ As a rare elaboration of how exactly the international law applies, one article suggests that “each country has the right to choose on its own will the means of dispute settlement”⁷⁵⁵

RMRB reports that China (“government and people”⁷⁵⁶) will “neither accept nor recognize” the court’s decision,⁷⁵⁷ and that position “will never change.”⁷⁵⁸ The arbitration is called “a political farce”⁷⁵⁹ An op-ed reported that the “farce” has

⁷⁵⁴ “China Is an Important Force for Maintaining Peace, Stability in South China Sea: White Paper - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085431.html>.

⁷⁵⁵ “Chinese Foreign Minister Says South China Sea Arbitration a Political Farce - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁵⁶ “China Resolved to Defend Territorial Sovereignty, Maritime Interests: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online”; “Full Text: Chinese State Councilor’s Interview on so-Called Award by Arbitral Tribunal for South China Sea Arbitration - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁵⁷ “China Resolved to Defend Territorial Sovereignty, Maritime Interests: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁵⁸ Ruan Zongze, “Commentary: China, Philippines Should Join Hands to Rekindle Bilateral Ties - People’s Daily Online,” August 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0812/c90000-9099575.html>.

⁷⁵⁹ “Chinese Foreign Minister Says South China Sea Arbitration a Political Farce - People’s Daily Online”; “Remarks by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the Award of the So-Called Arbitral Tribunal in the South China Sea Arbitration - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085481.html>.

uplifted “the spirits of patriotism” in the country.⁷⁶⁰ China restrained the patriotic demonstrations “with reason”⁷⁶¹ to maintain the social order.⁷⁶²

RMRB published in full the statements and the white paper that the Chinese government issue in response to the arbitration, and discussed them in detail in additional multiple articles. The statements discuss China historical rights going back to the founding of the PRC in 1949⁷⁶³ (though the SCS islands belonged to China “since ancient times”⁷⁶⁴) reiterate China’s commitment to making an effort to

⁷⁶⁰ “Op-Ed: Anti-US Protests at KFC Outlets Are Anything But Patriotism - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁶¹ “Op-Ed: Anti-US Protests at KFC Outlets Are Anything But Patriotism - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁶² Jiang Jie, “Protests against KFC, Apple iPhones Slammed as Irrational and Disruptive - People’s Daily Online,” July 20, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0720/c90000-9088731.html>.

⁷⁶³ “China Issues Statement, Reaffirming Territorial Sovereignty and Maritime Rights and Interests in the South China Sea - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁶⁴ “Chinese Leaders Reject S. China Sea Arbitration Award - People’s Daily Online”; “Unlawful Arbitration Cannot Negate China’s Sovereignty over South China Sea: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online.”

maintain “peace and stability”⁷⁶⁵ (the phrase is found 206 times in the coverage) and achieve prosperity⁷⁶⁶ and “win-win” results.⁷⁶⁷

Sovereignty is “a bottom line for China,”⁷⁶⁸ hence China cannot “sacrifice”⁷⁶⁹ it and “give away a single inch of territory that our ancestors have left to us.”⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁵ “China Issues Statement, Reaffirming Territorial Sovereignty and Maritime Rights and Interests in the South China Sea - People’s Daily Online”; “Chinese Foreign Minister Says South China Sea Arbitration a Political Farce - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁶⁶ “China Voice: Dialogue, Consultation Are ‘Golden Rule’ in South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” September 9, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0909/c90000-9113278.html>.

⁷⁶⁷ “China Issues Statement, Reaffirming Territorial Sovereignty and Maritime Rights and Interests in the South China Sea - People’s Daily Online”; “Diplomatic Efforts to Solve South China Sea Disputes Not to Be Blocked: Official - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90883-9085610.html>.

⁷⁶⁸ “Full Text: Chinese State Councilor’s Interview on so-Called Award by Arbitral Tribunal for South China Sea Arbitration - People’s Daily Online”; “Sovereignty of China Is ‘bottom Line’ - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90000-9086266.html>.

⁷⁶⁹ “PLA Navy Chief Urges China-U.S. Co-Op in Handling S. China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 19, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0719/c90000-9087782.html>.

⁷⁷⁰ “Full Text: Chinese State Councilor’s Interview on so-Called Award by Arbitral Tribunal for South China Sea Arbitration - People’s Daily Online”; “South China Sea Arbitration Not to Waver China’s Determination to Safeguard Sovereignty: Chinese State Councilor - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c98649-9086827.html>.

China's commitment and determination are "unshakable,"⁷⁷¹ "unwavering."⁷⁷² To the question of the solution, China is said to be open to "peacefully resolve disputes"⁷⁷³ through negotiations,⁷⁷⁴ even "despite negative factors."⁷⁷⁵ China pushes for bilateral negotiations with the Philippines⁷⁷⁶ (which is said to remain China's neighbor⁷⁷⁷). Overall, RMRS reports that bilateral negotiations ("dialogue and consultation"⁷⁷⁸) are "the best way"⁷⁷⁹ to resolve the conflict. Citing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) signed in 2002 by China and ASEAN, only

⁷⁷¹ "China Slams Japanese Defense Chief's Remarks on South China Sea - People's Daily Online," September 19, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0919/c90000-9116822.html>.

⁷⁷² "China's Determination to Safeguard Territorial Sovereignty and Maritime Rights Unwavering: People's Daily - People's Daily Online," July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085312.html>.

⁷⁷³ "Beijing 'will Never' Halt Island Work - People's Daily Online," July 19, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0719/c90000-9087812.html>.

⁷⁷⁴ "Diplomatic Efforts to Solve South China Sea Disputes Not to Be Blocked: Official - People's Daily Online."

⁷⁷⁵ "Beijing 'will Never' Halt Island Work - People's Daily Online."

⁷⁷⁶ "China Welcomes Duterte's Readiness for Talks - People's Daily Online," July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90883-9086836.html>.

⁷⁷⁷ Ruan Zongze, "Commentary: China, Philippines Should Join Hands to Rekindle Bilateral Ties - People's Daily Online."

⁷⁷⁸ "China Voice: Dialogue, Consultation Are 'Golden Rule' in South China Sea - People's Daily Online"; "Chinese FM Reiterates China's Stance on South China Sea Arbitration - People's Daily Online."

⁷⁷⁹ "'Lots of Geopolitical Considerations' behind Illegal South China Sea Arbitration: Chinese Ambassador - People's Daily Online," July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90883-9085684.html>.

“sovereign states directly concerned” should participate in the process,⁷⁸⁰ while “history and facts” support this idea.⁷⁸¹ Moreover, bilateral negotiations are the “only” way, and “other measures including the third-party mechanism are all excluded.”⁷⁸² However, the “dual-track approach” allows for ASEAN to be involved in general terms of maintaining peace and stability in the region.⁷⁸³

China is also promoting multilateralism⁷⁸⁴ (it “will never seek hegemony”⁷⁸⁵) and advocating for increased international cooperation, which is said to be beneficial

⁷⁸⁰ “China Sticks to Two-Way Talks by Relevant Parties in Solving South China Sea Disputes - People’s Daily Online,” July 14, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0714/c90883-9086202.html>.

⁷⁸¹ “China Voice: Dialogue, Consultation Are ‘Golden Rule’ in South China Sea - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁸² “People’s Daily Calls for ‘Dual-Track Approach’ in Addressing the South China Sea Issue - People’s Daily Online,” July 20, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0720/c90000-9088763.html>.

⁷⁸³ “People’s Daily Calls for ‘Dual-Track Approach’ in Addressing the South China Sea Issue - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁸⁴ “China Promotes Multilateralism at Xiangshan Forum amid Regional Tensions - People’s Daily Online,” October 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/1012/c90883-9125693.html>.

⁷⁸⁵ “Xi Calls on China, U.S. to Respect Each Other’s Core Interests - People’s Daily Online,” July 26, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0726/c90883-9090888.html>.

not just to China but for “well-being” of other countries, such as Cambodia.⁷⁸⁶ A “Cold War mentality”⁷⁸⁷ is not the answer.

A sub-theme traced throughout the coverage is the role SCS has played in Chinese people’s lives. Over a dozen articles discuss the “clear historical record”⁷⁸⁸ of the settlement of the Chinese fishermen on the SCS islands⁷⁸⁹ (“the masters of the islands”⁷⁹⁰), the financial investment in the islands’ environmental protection,⁷⁹¹ and the facilities China has built.⁷⁹² One article cites an older fisherman who claims his

⁷⁸⁶ “Cambodia Supports Settlement of South China Sea Disputes via Dialogue, Consultation: PM - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90883-9086679.html>.

⁷⁸⁷ “Diplomatic Efforts to Solve South China Sea Disputes Not to Be Blocked: Official - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁸⁸ Hu Zexi, “Tribunal’s Ruling on Taiping Island Is Absurd - People’s Daily Online,” July 25, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0725/c90000-9090315.html>.

⁷⁸⁹ “China Focus: Japanese Archives Confirm Chinese Settled on South China Sea Islands - People’s Daily Online,” July 14, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0714/c90883-9086003.html>; Hu Zexi, “South China Sea Arbitration Comes to ‘Groundless’ Conclusion Concerning Taiping Island - People’s Daily Online,” July 25, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0725/c90000-9090314.html>.

⁷⁹⁰ “People’s Daily Calls for Return to Negotiating Table to Resolve South China Sea Dispute - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁹¹ “China Focus: Government, Fishermen Protect Environment of Islands and Sea - People’s Daily Online,” August 1, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0801/c90882-9093774.html>.

⁷⁹² “First Nuclear Plant to Take to the Seas - People’s Daily Online,” July 26, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0726/c202936-9091057.html>; “New Memorial Park Completed to Honor Martyrs of the Battle of the Xisha Islands - People’s Daily Online,” August 2, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0802/c90000-9094275.html>.

right to the territory arguing, “his voice filled with emotion,” that the fishermen “inherited this sea from our ancestors.”⁷⁹³

China is rarely discussed explicitly as a victim in the coverage; however, there are a couple of examples of that, which express discontent with “China-phobia” propagated by the outsiders,⁷⁹⁴ and lament that China is not “getting a fair shake.”⁷⁹⁵ More often, China is discussed as a wise and strong power that is willing to work towards a greater good. The coverage demonstrates that, despite the court ruling, life goes on in the SCS: regular air patrols and drills are conducted,⁷⁹⁶ new airports on the islands are tested,⁷⁹⁷ and a website containing information about the SCS is launched.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹³ “South China Sea Where Chinese Fishermen Live and Die - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90000-9084506.html>.

⁷⁹⁴ “Commentary: East Asia Needs Partners, Not Meddlers - People’s Daily Online,” July 24, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0724/c90000-9090280.html>.

⁷⁹⁵ Li Xiaokun and Mo Jingxi, “Tribunal Has Handled Arbitration Case Irresponsibly, Law Experts Say - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90000-9084529.html>.

⁷⁹⁶ “Air Force to Conduct Regular Patrols over Islands - People’s Daily Online,” September 23, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0923/c90000-9119009.html>; “Chinese Military Aircraft in West Pacific for Combat Simulation Drill - People’s Daily Online,” September 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0913/c90786-9114401.html>.

⁷⁹⁷ “New Nansha Airports Enable China to Better Serve Public Good in South China Sea - People’s Daily Online.”

⁷⁹⁸ “China Opens S China Sea Website - People’s Daily Online,” August 4, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0804/c90785-9094991.html>.

In the end, China sees the outcome of the SCS arbitration and the aftermath as a “win,”⁷⁹⁹ a “diplomatic victory,”⁸⁰⁰ which also became an experience of “games between great powers.”⁸⁰¹

3. The role of the US (and the Western media)

The US plays a prominent role in the RMRB’s coverage of the court ruling. Within the coverage, the US is sometimes paired with Japan but is mainly discussed on its own. For example, RMRB writes that the US and Japan “have engaged in some petty tricks”: the US – because of “its hegemonic ambitions” (and “imperialist mindset”⁸⁰² or “hegemonic anxiety,”⁸⁰³ or “deep-rooted “imperialistic mentality”⁸⁰⁴) and Japan – because it “can’t accept a rising China”⁸⁰⁵ (despite the fact that “China is

⁷⁹⁹ “ASEAN Wise to Leave Sea Arbitration Alone - People’s Daily Online,” September 8, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0908/c90780-9112349.html>.

⁸⁰⁰ “East Asian Leaders’ Meetings Not Sidetracked by South China Sea Disputes - People’s Daily Online,” September 10, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0910/c90000-9113441.html>.

⁸⁰¹ “ASEAN Wise to Leave Sea Arbitration Alone - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁰² “Chinese Envoy Urges End to Political Farce Regarding South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 20, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0720/c90883-9088914.html>.

⁸⁰³ “People’s Daily Criticizes U.S. as ‘Source of Turmoil’ - People’s Daily Online,” September 19, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0919/c90780-9116349.html>.

⁸⁰⁴ “Unlawful Arbitration Cannot Negate China’s Sovereignty over South China Sea: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁰⁵ “Arbitration Creates Little More than Noise - People’s Daily Online,” July 21, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0721/c90000-9089027.html>.

sincere in its desire to rise peacefully”⁸⁰⁶). Starting with “instigating and manipulating the Philippines”⁸⁰⁷ (or “pull[ing] the strings behind the Philippines”⁸⁰⁸), the US has “played a negative role in” and “aggravated” the conflict,⁸⁰⁹ “encroached”⁸¹⁰ on and broke “the original regional balance,”⁸¹¹ leaving “no stone unturned.”⁸¹²

The US involvement is described as “interference” in “China’s backyard,”⁸¹³ a “geopolitical game,”⁸¹⁴ and a “total conspiracy of the United States for its own agenda.”⁸¹⁵ The US is said to have “poke[d] its nose”⁸¹⁶ in the region and “turned a

⁸⁰⁶ “ASEAN Wise to Leave Sea Arbitration Alone - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁰⁷ “South China Sea Arbitration Decided by Biased Arbitrators - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁰⁸ “US Pulled the Strings behind the Philippines, Observers Say - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085103.html>.

⁸⁰⁹ “Beijing ‘will Never’ Halt Island Work - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸¹⁰ “China, Russia ‘Semi-Alliance’ to Launch Drills in S.China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 29, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0729/c90000-9092514.html>.

⁸¹¹ “China Voice: Dialogue, Consultation Are ‘Golden Rule’ in South China Sea - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸¹² “Commentary: East Asia Needs Partners, Not Meddlers - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸¹³ “China Boosts Syria Support - People’s Daily Online,” August 18, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0818/c90883-9102008.html>.

⁸¹⁴ Ding Zi et al., “Dialogue and Cooperation Vital to Handling of South China Sea Issue: Experts - People’s Daily Online,” July 20, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0720/c90000-9088766.html>.

⁸¹⁵ “Chinese Envoy Urges End to Political Farce Regarding South China Sea - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸¹⁶ “ASEAN Wise to Leave Sea Arbitration Alone - People’s Daily Online.”

blind eye” to the fact that the arbitration was “illegal.”⁸¹⁷ The US’ “flexing of military muscles” has “deeply hurt the Chinese people.”⁸¹⁸ Through the arbitration, the US sought to “smear and ‘isolate’ China”⁸¹⁹ and to “peddle the China threat.”⁸²⁰

RMRB pointed out that the US is “always selective when it comes to the application of international law”⁸²¹ and has, together with countries like Japan and Australia, been “adopting a double standard” towards international law according to their needs.⁸²² The US has “violated fundamental morals” through its actions,⁸²³ and is the “source of turmoil in the world” as it is “keen to make messes in the world.”⁸²⁴

⁸¹⁷ “China Opposes U.S. Statement on South China Sea Arbitration Award - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085480.html>.

⁸¹⁸ “China-U.S. Ties Should Not Be Marred by South China Sea Issue: Experts - People’s Daily Online,” July 18, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0718/c90780-9087713.html>.

⁸¹⁹ “Chinese Envoy Urges End to Political Farce Regarding South China Sea - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸²⁰ Yi Fan, “Xi-Obama Meeting Chance to Set Right Course - People’s Daily Online,” August 30, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0830/c90000-9107551.html>.

⁸²¹ “China Opposes U.S. Statement on South China Sea Arbitration Award - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸²² “China Urges Japan, U.S., Australia to Do Right Things for Peace in Asia-Pacific - People’s Daily Online,” July 28, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0728/c90883-9091982.html>.

⁸²³ “Commentary: US Has No Grounds to Act as Judge on North Korea Nuclear Issue - People’s Daily Online,” September 14, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0914/c90000-9115255.html>.

⁸²⁴ “People’s Daily Criticizes U.S. as ‘Source of Turmoil’ - People’s Daily Online.”

The US is seen as the main outside power (and “the major strategic rival” of China⁸²⁵) whose “conspiracy” is “behind the “farce.”⁸²⁶ It is the US who “created enormous risks for peace and stability in the South China Sea by abducting and damaging the international rule of law as well as violating China’s rights and interest.”⁸²⁷ The US has also worked to “woo” Japan and Australia⁸²⁸ because “without Washington’s backing and high-profile policy of ‘returning to Asia,’ regional states would not be so eager to challenge China’s interests.”⁸²⁹

The US-China relationship is described as “the most consequential bilateral relations in the world.”⁸³⁰ Despite “structural and ideological differences”⁸³¹ and the assumption that the “U.S. foreign policy to China will not fundamentally change,”⁸³²

⁸²⁵ “China, Russia ‘Semi-Alliance’ to Launch Drills in S.China Sea - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸²⁶ Wang Xiaohui, “S. China Sea Arbitration: A US-Led Conspiracy behind the Farce - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90000-9085051.html>.

⁸²⁷ “History Will Tell the True Guardian of South China Sea Peace: People’s Daily - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸²⁸ “China, ASEAN Must Cooperate on Sea Issue - People’s Daily Online,” August 1, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0801/c90780-9093538.html>.

⁸²⁹ “Many Myths about China Should Be Debunked for Continued Peace in S. China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90000-9084508.html>.

⁸³⁰ “Commentary: Rice’s China Visit Sends Positive Sign - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸³¹ “China-U.S. Ties in Better Shape amid Shadows - People’s Daily Online,” September 4, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0904/c90883-9110034.html>.

⁸³² “Commentary: Rice’s China Visit Sends Positive Sign - People’s Daily Online.”

RMRB demonstrates a certain degree of optimism about the future of the relationship, such as pointing out “positive signs,” claiming that “common interests outweigh their differences”⁸³³ and that business is the “bridge” between them.⁸³⁴ Additionally, the US is believed to be able to “abide by the bottom line of rationality.”⁸³⁵ A Chinese expert is cited claiming the situation is “under control” because both the US and China are “promoting regional peace and stability,”⁸³⁶ while another article recognized that Obama “hope[d] for steady ties with Beijing in long run.”⁸³⁷ Overall, there is a noticeable wish for “reason,” “rationality,” and making the “right decision” or do the “right thing” for the US expressed by RMRB.⁸³⁸ Thus, even though the US experts “hold an overall negative view of future Sino-U.S. relations” mostly due to the US’ “problematic strategy,” “President Xi really wants is to build a stronger Sino-U.S. relationship that benefits both nations”⁸³⁹

⁸³³ “Commentary: Rice’s China Visit Sends Positive Sign - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸³⁴ “China-U.S. Ties in Better Shape amid Shadows - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸³⁵ “Arbitration Creates Little More than Noise - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸³⁶ “Experts Propose China and U.S. Set up Crisis Management Mechanism for South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” October 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/1012/c90000-9126093.html>.

⁸³⁷ “Obama Hopes for Steady Ties with Beijing in Long Run - People’s Daily Online,” July 28, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0728/c90883-9092086.html>.

⁸³⁸ “South China Sea Issue Should Not Come between China and US: Chinese Ambassador - People’s Daily Online,” July 17, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0717/c90000-9087244.html>.

⁸³⁹ Yuan Can, “Experts Dissatisfied with Obama’s Policy toward China - People’s Daily Online,” July 18, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0718/c98649-9087692.html>.

Nevertheless, RMRB warns to “stay vigilant about” the US⁸⁴⁰ and against the external interference claiming that “Western countries incited the military-dominated Arab Spring,”⁸⁴¹ led “the disgraceful Iraqi war and the following bloody interference in Libya and Syria that have turned almost the entire Middle East upside down.”⁸⁴² The “North Korea nuclear issue” is also the result of the US’s “habit of causing trouble in the international community.”⁸⁴³ An article discussing a viral video posted by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China cited its address to the US, which read “If you want to turn China into a place like [Iraq and Syria], you will have to do it over my dead body.”⁸⁴⁴ The US is also blamed for “selling its ideology, which has brainwashed the elite in some non-Western countries,” and has led to worsening of the lives of people in the countries that followed the American ideas.⁸⁴⁵

Additionally, “it’s difficult to say” Washington can “still be counted on to stay reasonable and rational” in the international arena not only because it “failed to

⁸⁴⁰ “Commentary: East Asia Needs Partners, Not Meddlers - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁴¹ Ruan Zongze, “Commentary: China, Philippines Should Join Hands to Rekindle Bilateral Ties - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁴² “Commentary: East Asia Needs Partners, Not Meddlers - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁴³ “Commentary: US Has No Grounds to Act as Judge on North Korea Nuclear Issue - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁴⁴ “Party Warns of Attempts to Foment Revolution after Rights Lawyer Trial - People’s Daily Online,” August 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0812/c90000-9099143.html>.

⁸⁴⁵ “People’s Daily Criticizes U.S. as ‘Source of Turmoil’ - People’s Daily Online.”

maintain stability in their own country” (implying mass protests, as well as existing society’s disagreements) but also because “the country’s ability to defend and maintain that position in the world is weakening.”⁸⁴⁶ Its “chaos obsession” dictates the US foreign policy:⁸⁴⁷ the country is a “troublemaker.”⁸⁴⁸

The US “habitually makes rules for others,”⁸⁴⁹ “play[s] the role of ‘referee’”⁸⁵⁰ and “global policeman”⁸⁵¹ even though it “can hardly qualify as a ‘teacher’ to China” due to the history of “hegemony, egoism, hypocrisy and double standard.”⁸⁵² RMRB also claims that the US’s perception of China’s rise “is based on its own experiences”

⁸⁴⁶ Zhong Sheng, “Editorial: Chaos Obsession of the US Should Come to an End - People’s Daily Online,” July 20, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0720/c90000-9088692.html>.

⁸⁴⁷ Zhong Sheng.

⁸⁴⁸ Jiang Jie, “Experts Slam U.S. Accusation That China Drove over 100 People to Join ISIS - People’s Daily Online,” July 21, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0721/c90000-9089425.html>.

⁸⁴⁹ Zhong Sheng, “Editorial: Chaos Obsession of the US Should Come to an End - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁵⁰ “Interview: Award of South China Sea Arbitration Result of U.S. Manipulation - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁵¹ “South China Sea Arbitration Decided by Biased Arbitrators - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁵² “Op-Ed: Double Standards Applied in South China Sea Arbitration Profane International Law - People’s Daily Online.”

(“thinking and acting as a hegemonic power”⁸⁵³) and is, therefore, wrong.⁸⁵⁴ The future US policy, according to another article, “should be based on the right reading of China’s intentions and policies.”⁸⁵⁵ In any case, a Chinese researcher claimed: “China will definitely not accept accusations by the US.”⁸⁵⁶

RMRB mentions the Western media several times throughout the coverage, though they are not perceived as a significant threat. Still, one article claims that the Western media have “hyped up the South China Sea issue for a long time, with reports full of prejudice and distortion” and “purposely created rumors, smeared China and deliberately overlooked voices of justice.”⁸⁵⁷ It is also pointed out that the media incorrectly called the Permanent Court of Arbitration a “UN tribunal” or “UN-backed tribunal,”⁸⁵⁸ which “caus[ed] confusion among the public.”⁸⁵⁹ In general, the new

⁸⁵³ “THAAD Will Destroy Regional Balance - People’s Daily Online,” August 1, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0801/c90883-9093447.html>.

⁸⁵⁴ “South China Sea Issue Is ‘Product of Contemporary Geopolitics’: Singapore Expert - People’s Daily Online,” July 18, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0718/c90883-9087605.html>.

⁸⁵⁵ Yi Fan, “Xi-Obama Meeting Chance to Set Right Course - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁵⁶ MO JINGXI and AN BAIJIE, “Xi, Obama Will Meet next Month - People’s Daily Online,” August 20, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0820/c90000-9103047.html>.

⁸⁵⁷ “Quotable Quotes on S. China Sea Arbitration: Tribunal’s Arbitration Is Unlawful - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁵⁸ “Arbitral Court Not a UN Agency - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁵⁹ “UN Court Denies Involvement in South China Sea Arbitration - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90883-9086744.html>.

media, “especially those that are controlled by capital,” tend to “spread Western values and attack the Chinese government and political system.”⁸⁶⁰

4. International reaction to the arbitration

The central theme of RMRB’s coverage of the international reaction to the arbitration is the idea that the world at large supports China’s vision of the illegality of the ruling. The reaction, in general, represents a “wide-range of criticism”⁸⁶¹ and “condemnation”⁸⁶² of the verdict. The identified supporters include: “many foreign experts”⁸⁶³ and scholars,⁸⁶⁴ “many Latin American experts,”⁸⁶⁵ British experts,⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶⁰ “Party Warns of Attempts to Foment Revolution after Rights Lawyer Trial - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁶¹ “Arbitration Tribunal’s Award on South China Sea Sets Dangerous Precedent of Abusing Arbitration System - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90883-9085680.html>.

⁸⁶² “Spotlight: Ill-Founded Award on South China Sea Arbitration Draws Worldwide Criticism - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085092.html>.

⁸⁶³ Hu Zexi and Zhang Mengxu, “China’s Historic Rights Improperly Denied in South China Sea Ruling - People’s Daily Online,” July 23, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0723/c98649-9090200.html>.

⁸⁶⁴ “Spotlight: Ill-Founded Award on South China Sea Arbitration Draws Worldwide Criticism - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁶⁵ “Arbitral Tribunal’s Decision against China Illegal: LatAm Experts - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90883-9085611.html>.

⁸⁶⁶ “British Experts Urge Arbitral Tribunal to Review Position to Avoid Being ‘Joke in Legal History’ - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90777-9085483.html>.

Malagasy experts,⁸⁶⁷ Bangladeshi experts,⁸⁶⁸ a Dutch law expert,⁸⁶⁹ a Russian expert,⁸⁷⁰ a Thai expert,⁸⁷¹ a British Member of the European Parliament,⁸⁷² “at least 35 African states,”⁸⁷³ members of ASEAN,⁸⁷⁴ “peace-loving countries both in and

⁸⁶⁷ “China Is Right to Reject International Court’s South China Sea Decision: Malagasy Experts - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90883-9085669.html>.

⁸⁶⁸ “No Reason for China to Accept South China Sea Arbitration Award: Bangladeshi Experts - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085091.html>.

⁸⁶⁹ “Interview: S. China Sea Arbitral Tribunal Not to Solve Disputes, nor Should Accept Jurisdiction, Dutch Expert - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085090.html>.

⁸⁷⁰ “Interview: South China Sea Dispute Should Not Bring Harm to China-ASEAN Interests: Russian Expert - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085426.html>.

⁸⁷¹ “South China Sea Issue Has to Be Solved by Creative Dialogue: Thai Expert - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90000-9086221.html>.

⁸⁷² “South China Sea Arbitration Award Solves Nothing: Senior European Parliamentarian - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90883-9085628.html>.

⁸⁷³ Taddeo Bwambale, “China Lauds Africa on South China Sea Backing - People’s Daily Online,” August 8, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0808/c90000-9096764.html>.

⁸⁷⁴ “China Not Alone in South China Sea Issue - People’s Daily Online,” July 19, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0719/c90780-9088356.html>.

outside the region,”⁸⁷⁵ “at least 70 countries and 230 political parties or organizations,”⁸⁷⁶ and later “more than 80 countries.”⁸⁷⁷

In addition to the general statements about the international community, RMRB discusses how various countries support China’s position on the court decision. For example, the representatives of the Czech Republic⁸⁷⁸ argued China is right because it did not agree to this type of dispute resolution. Similarly,

⁸⁷⁵ “People’s Daily Calls for Return to Negotiating Table to Resolve South China Sea Dispute - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁷⁶ “China Condemns Terrorist Attack in Nice, Stresses Trade Cooperation at ASEM Summit - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁷⁷ “Japan Risks Being More Isolated on South China Sea: China - People’s Daily Online,” July 29, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0729/c90000-9092494.html>.

⁸⁷⁸ “All Disputes Should Be Solved Peacefully by Negotiation: Czech Official - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90000-9086222.html>.

Cambodia,⁸⁷⁹ Peru,⁸⁸⁰ Palestine,⁸⁸¹ Saudi Arabia,⁸⁸² Pakistan,⁸⁸³ Russia,⁸⁸⁴ and Syria⁸⁸⁵ expressed their support for China and peaceful negotiations. The opponents, other than the US, Japan, and Australia, are rarely mentioned. One exception is Singapore: one article discusses that it did not side with and received criticism from China.⁸⁸⁶

⁸⁷⁹ “Cambodia Reiterates China-Philippines Dispute over South China Sea Not Related with ASEAN - People’s Daily Online,” July 29, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0729/c90883-9092920.html>.

⁸⁸⁰ “China to Support Peru in Hosting APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting: Xi - People’s Daily Online,” September 14, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0914/c90000-9114672.html>.

⁸⁸¹ “China, Palestine to Promote Traditional Friendship - People’s Daily Online,” September 23, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0923/c90000-9119108.html>.

⁸⁸² “China, Saudi Arabia Ink Cooperation Deals - People’s Daily Online,” August 30, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0830/c90883-9107758.html>.

⁸⁸³ “Pakistan Reiterates Support to China over South China Sea Issue - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90883-9085079.html>.

⁸⁸⁴ “Russia Opposes Internationalizing South China Sea Issue: Medvedev - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90883-9086842.html>.

⁸⁸⁵ “Senior PLA Official Pays Visit to War-Devastated Syria - People’s Daily Online,” August 17, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0817/c90000-9101047.html>.

⁸⁸⁶ Leng Shumei, “FM Calls on Singapore to Respect China’s Sea Stance - People’s Daily Online,” September 28, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0928/c90000-9120855.html>.

5. The role of Japan

RMRB reported that Japan “was the most aggressive country in pushing ASEAN countries and external forces to implement the award.”⁸⁸⁷ Some of the Japan own background is mentioned within the coverage, including its “illegal claim for the ownership of the China-owned Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea”⁸⁸⁸ (“Japan’s territorial claims are acts of theft”⁸⁸⁹) and “the crimes it committed in World War II,”⁸⁹⁰ for which it “should be held accountable.”⁸⁹¹ The reasons for Japan’s behavior are its hopes related to the Diaoyu Islands,⁸⁹² its desire to weaken ASEAN-China cooperation, “undermine regional stability,”⁸⁹³ to “become a political power” and

⁸⁸⁷ “ASEAN Wise to Leave Sea Arbitration Alone - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁸⁸ “Commentary: China, Japan, S. Korea Should Work to Make Differences Controllable - People’s Daily Online,” August 24, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0824/c90000-9104809.html>.

⁸⁸⁹ “Mainland Urges Taiwan to Safeguard Diaoyu Islands, South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” September 28, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0928/c90000-9121206.html>.

⁸⁹⁰ “Commentary: China, Japan, S. Korea Should Work to Make Differences Controllable - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁹¹ “Japan’s Intervention in South China Sea Perverse, Vicious: Expert - People’s Daily Online,” August 16, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0816/c90000-9101046.html>.

⁸⁹² Su Xiaohui, “Op-Ed: Japan Should Stop Overreacting to China’s Activities in the East China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” August 9, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0809/c90000-9097676.html>.

⁸⁹³ Zhong Sheng, “Op-Ed: Japan’s Attempts to Instigate Conflict Undermine Regional Stability - People’s Daily Online,” September 19, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0919/c90000-9116250.html>.

“control the security of Asia”⁸⁹⁴ as well as Japan’s wishing to “buddy up to the US” is another reason for “perverse, vicious” intervention.⁸⁹⁵

China criticized Japan’s new defense paper’s “confrontational tone”⁸⁹⁶ and urged Japan to “behave,”⁸⁹⁷ to “learn from history,”⁸⁹⁸ “stop interfering,”⁸⁹⁹ “exercise caution,”⁹⁰⁰ “stop going against the consensus of countries in the region,”⁹⁰¹ “adopt a correct understanding of China,”⁹⁰² “stop making groundless claims,”⁹⁰³ and to

⁸⁹⁴ Zhong Sheng.

⁸⁹⁵ “Japan’s Intervention in South China Sea Perverse, Vicious: Expert - People’s Daily Online.”

⁸⁹⁶ “Stay Vigilant to Japan’s ‘China Threat’ - People’s Daily Online,” August 6, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0806/c90000-9096346.html>.

⁸⁹⁷ Gao Hong, “Can Japan Be a Good Guest at Hangzhou Summit? - People’s Daily Online,” August 30, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0830/c90000-9107307.html>.

⁸⁹⁸ “China ‘Strongly Dissatisfied’ with Japan’s Defense White Paper: Foreign Ministry - People’s Daily Online,” August 3, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0803/c90000-9094785.html>.

⁸⁹⁹ “China Calls on US, Japan to Stop Twisting the Facts - People’s Daily Online”; “China Urges Japan to Stop Interfering in South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085479.html>.

⁹⁰⁰ “China Condemns Terrorist Attack in Nice, Stresses Trade Cooperation at ASEM Summit - People’s Daily Online.”

⁹⁰¹ “China Slams Japanese Defense Chief’s Remarks on South China Sea - People’s Daily Online.”

⁹⁰² “China, Japan Hold High-Level Dialogue Ahead of G20 Summit - People’s Daily Online,” August 26, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0826/c90000-9105855.html>.

⁹⁰³ “Seoul, Beijing Blast Japan’s Defense Paper as Tokyo Seeks Stronger Military Role in Asia-Pacific - People’s Daily Online,” August 4, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0804/c90883-9095533.html>.

“spend time reflecting on its history of militaristic aggression.”⁹⁰⁴ It is worth pointing out that Japan is frequently reminded of its aggression during World War II throughout the coverage.⁹⁰⁵ Still, even though China-Japan relations “seem to be a boat sailing against the current,”⁹⁰⁶ RMRB found “bright spots” and optimism for the future,⁹⁰⁷ and reported that “Xi expects China-Japan ties back on normal track.”⁹⁰⁸

6. Other actors in the coverage

- The Philippines (and China-Philippines relationship)

The coverage of the Philippines consists of harsh criticism of the Aquino administration, followed by approval of Duterte, and increased praise and optimism. RMRM accused the former government of lying, concealing intentions, and

⁹⁰⁴ “Op-Ed: Japan’s Denial of Past Military Aggression Undermines World Peace - People’s Daily Online,” August 16, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0816/c90000-9101045.html>.

⁹⁰⁵ “Tokyo Threat to Block Miyako Unacceptable - People’s Daily Online,” August 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0815/c90000-9099985.html>.

⁹⁰⁶ Gao Hong, “Can Japan Be a Good Guest at Hangzhou Summit? - People’s Daily Online.”

⁹⁰⁷ Gao Hong.

⁹⁰⁸ “Xi Expects China-Japan Ties Back on Normal Track - People’s Daily Online,” September 5, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0905/c90000-9111013.html>.

circumventing laws.⁹⁰⁹ The initiation of the arbitration is said to be a “mistake”⁹¹⁰ “misjudgment”⁹¹¹ and to have happened “out of bad faith.”⁹¹²

Duterte is praised for his willingness to “get along” with China and do business, for the rejection of the conflict over the court ruling,⁹¹³ “positive attitude,”⁹¹⁴ and sending a special envoy, China’s “old friend” former president Ramos, to China.⁹¹⁵ The following optimism included claims that “there are no difficulties that can not be overcome,”⁹¹⁶ that both countries “as friendly neighbors,

⁹⁰⁹ “Backgrounder: Lies of Philippines’ Aquino Administration on South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90883-9085007.html>; “Philippines Repeatedly Take Moves That Complicate Disputes in South China Sea: White Paper - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085432.html>.

⁹¹⁰ “China-Philippine Economic Ties Damaged by US Interference - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90000-9084713.html>.

⁹¹¹ “Quotable Quotes on S. China Sea Arbitration: Tribunal’s Arbitration Is Unlawful - People’s Daily Online.”

⁹¹² “China Refuses South China Sea Arbitration Award - People’s Daily Online.”

⁹¹³ “China Expects Early Visit by Philippine President - People’s Daily Online,” September 24, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0924/c90000-9119276.html>.

⁹¹⁴ Zhong Sheng, “Editorial: Negotiation and Consultation Vital for South China Sea Dispute Settlement - People’s Daily Online,” July 22, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0722/c90000-9089455.html>.

⁹¹⁵ “Ramos and ‘old Friends’ Seek Trust-Building Talks on South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” August 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0813/c90000-9099593.html>.

⁹¹⁶ “China Expects Philippine President’s Early Visit: Foreign Ministry - People’s Daily Online,” September 23, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0923/c90000-9119263.html>.

have the ability and wisdom to settle the issue,”⁹¹⁷ and that China is “open to contact with the Philippines.”⁹¹⁸ An opinion suggested that “repairing its relationship with Beijing is without doubt an optimal choice” for the Philippines.⁹¹⁹ The cooperation between the two has “great potential.”⁹²⁰ Overall, the long-standing friendship is emphasized, while the US is blamed for “damaging” it.⁹²¹

- ASEAN

The discourse on ASEAN is driven by the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC),⁹²² and the following joint statements reaffirming the commitment to the document issued in July and September.⁹²³

⁹¹⁷ “China Hopes for Early Talks with Philippines on Sea Issue - People’s Daily Online,” August 24, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0824/c90883-9105072.html>.

⁹¹⁸ “China Open to Contact with Philippines: Foreign Ministry - People’s Daily Online,” August 10, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0810/c90000-9098218.html>.

⁹¹⁹ An Jun, “Talks with Manila Welcomed without Arbitration Attached - People’s Daily Online,” August 25, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0825/c90000-9105210.html>.

⁹²⁰ “China-Philippine Economic Ties Damaged by US Interference - People’s Daily Online.”

⁹²¹ “Full Text: Chinese State Councilor’s Interview on so-Called Award by Arbitral Tribunal for South China Sea Arbitration - People’s Daily Online”; “Will the Philippines Now Walk the Talk? - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90780-9085685.html>.

⁹²² “ASEAN FMs Stress Full, Effective Implementation of DOC - People’s Daily Online,” July 25, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0725/c90000-9090695.html>.

⁹²³ “ASEAN, China Agree on Code for Unplanned Encounters in South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” September 7, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0907/c90000-9112108.html>; “ASEAN-China Statement Calls for Effective Implementation of DOC on South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” September 7, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0907/c90000-9112124.html>; “China, ASEAN Vow to

ASEAN (“a diplomatic priority for China”⁹²⁴) is labeled “wise” for “leaving the arbitration alone.”⁹²⁵ The organization is deemed crucial for regional cooperation in the face of the external threats⁹²⁶ and “common destiny of the China-ASEAN community.”⁹²⁷

- Vietnam, Russia, Taiwan, Korea, and others

While Europe is hardly mentioned in the coverage, some of the regional states receive some attention from RMRB. Vietnam, one of the ASEAN states, is described as “respecting” China’s stance, supporting bilateral negotiations and peace.⁹²⁸ It is implied that there are “differences” between the two states (“Vietnam has illegally occupied 29 of about 50 islands and reefs in the South China Sea”⁹²⁹) and that the

Promote Peace, Stability in South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 25, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0725/c90883-9090774.html>.

⁹²⁴ Ding Zi et al., “South China Sea Verdict Will Never Be Accepted by the World: Experts - People’s Daily Online,” July 21, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0721/c90000-9089187.html>.

⁹²⁵ “ASEAN Wise to Leave Sea Arbitration Alone - People’s Daily Online.”

⁹²⁶ “China Opposes Outside Intervention in Regional Affairs: Vice FM - People’s Daily Online.”

⁹²⁷ Ding Zi et al., “Dialogue and Cooperation Vital to Handling of South China Sea Issue: Experts - People’s Daily Online.”

⁹²⁸ “China, Mongolia Forge Closer Ties - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c90000-9086215.html>.

⁹²⁹ “Hanoi Artillery Report Brings Beijing Reproval - People’s Daily Online,” August 11, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0811/c90000-9098351.html>.

court ruling had a negative impact on the relationship,⁹³⁰ but stressed that they agree on working them out peacefully.⁹³¹ A couple of articles accuse Vietnam of provocations⁹³² and “childish practice.”⁹³³ An opinion article urges Vietnam to “join China in preserving that hard-won consensus to avoid their differences over the South China Sea from taking their relationship hostage.”⁹³⁴

While rarely mentioned in coverage, it is worth pointing out that there can be seen signs of disapproval of South Korea, due to its lack of support for China, relationship with the US, and not having priorities straight.⁹³⁵ Taiwan, on the other hand, is mentioned to report that the island’s authorities and political parties

⁹³⁰ “China-Vietnam Grass-Roots Ties Unaffected by Sea Tensions - People’s Daily Online,” August 11, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0811/c90000-9098352.html>.

⁹³¹ “China, Vietnam Vow to Properly Manage Maritime Differences - People’s Daily Online,” September 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0913/c90883-9114205.html>.

⁹³² “Experts Downplay Vietnam’s Motion Not to Stamp Chinese Passports with 9-Dash Line - People’s Daily Online,” July 20, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0720/c90000-9088897.html>.

⁹³³ “Hanoi to Name Several Roads with Aim to Advertize ‘sovereignty’ over South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” July 15, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0715/c98649-9086730.html>.

⁹³⁴ “Commentary: New Era for Beijing-Hanoi Ties in Sight as Vietnamese PM Visit China - People’s Daily Online,” September 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0913/c90000-9114639.html>.

⁹³⁵ “THAAD Deployment Decision Will Only Bring Trouble to Seoul - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90000-9084766.html>.

“absolutely” refused to accept the court ruling considering it “not legally binding”⁹³⁶ and “shameful.”⁹³⁷

The final state to be discussed here in the context of the court ruling and RMBR coverage is Russia. The newspaper reported that Putin expressed support for China and opposition to “third-party interference,” which earned China’s approval for the position, which is “objective and fair.”⁹³⁸ Several articles also cover joint military exercises conducted by China and Russia in the South China Sea,⁹³⁹ which is explained as Russia’s interest in strengthening ties with China.⁹⁴⁰ China and Russia

⁹³⁶ “Taiwan Authorities Refuse South China Sea Arbitration Award - People’s Daily Online,” July 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0712/c90883-9085078.html>.

⁹³⁷ “Taiwan Political Parties Refuse South China Sea Arbitration Award - People’s Daily Online,” July 13, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085095.html>.

⁹³⁸ “China Appreciates Putin’s Position on South China Sea Issue - People’s Daily Online,” September 8, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0908/c90000-9112687.html>; “FM Comments on ASEAN and Putin Regarding South China Sea - People’s Daily Online,” September 9, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0909/c90883-9112889.html>.

⁹³⁹ “China, Russia Navies to Hold Drill in South China Sea: Spokesperson - People’s Daily Online,” July 28, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0728/c90786-9092397.html>; AN BAIJIE, “China-Russia Naval Drill Ends with Island-Seizing Mission - People’s Daily Online,” September 20, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0920/c90000-9116831.html>.

⁹⁴⁰ “China-Russia Navy Drill in South China Sea Highlights Strong Ties - People’s Daily Online,” September 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0912/c90786-9113821.html>.

are describes as “both key players in global affairs”⁹⁴¹ who “agreed... to be vigilant to outside forces.”⁹⁴²

4.5 BBC Coverage Discussion

I collected the data for this part of the chapter using the Google search engine. The results are the articles from BBC.com website that contain the key phrase “South China Sea” and were published between July 12 and October 12, 2016. The search came up with 33 articles, and 30 of them were processed with the help of NVivo software after filtering out the other three. About a third of the articles were published in July, with five of them published on the day of the court ruling. After that, roughly 4-5 articles were published every two-week period for the rest of the studied period. Other than the keywords, the most frequently used relevant words are “Philippines” (87 count), “islands” (70 count), “Duterte” (66 count), “tribunal” (56 count), and “ASEAN” (52 count). See the “word cloud” below for a visual of the results.

⁹⁴¹ “Commentary: Routine China-Russia Joint Naval Drill No Reason for Fear Mongering - People’s Daily Online,” September 12, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0912/c90000-9114077.html>.

⁹⁴² “Chinese, Russian FMs Agree to Be Vigilant to Outside Forces Stoking Regional Tension - People’s Daily Online,” July 26, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0726/c90883-9091243.html>.

See the theme distribution in the table below.

Table 4 BBC (Case II): Theme Distribution Across Articles

Theme	Number of articles	Number of References
1. <u>The SCS Dispute and the court decision</u>		
The court decision and analysis	5	12
The dispute in the SCS	4	8
The question of legality	2	3
2. <u>China's reaction and analysis</u>		
China's official reaction	11	22
The Chinese state media	7	20
3. <u>The Philippines</u>	10	12
4. <u>The role of the US, and some other actors</u>	8	12
5. <u>ASEAN</u>	3	8
6. <u>The aftermath</u>	17	37

The following is the discussion of the People's Daily's coverage of the South China Sea court ruling.

1. The court decision and analysis

Providing some background on the issue, BBC included short overviews of the territorial dispute in some articles, while one article entitled "Why is the South China

Sea contentious?” focused on the subject. In the article, BBC listed all the states which have territorial claims in the SCS, discussed what the claims are, and pointed out that the disputes are longstanding but have aggravated in recent years.⁹⁴³ There is an analysis of the reasons why the rivalry developed, which emphasizes natural resources and shipping routes as the most significant factors.⁹⁴⁴ China’s claims are called “expansive,” after which BBC lists other regional states’ claims.⁹⁴⁵ The article also lays out the “recent flashpoints” that happened from the mid-70s and after, mostly between China and Vietnam and China and the Philippines. The discussion included numbers of victims, mutual accusations (“China and the Philippines ... accusing each other of intrusions”), and arguments (“Vietnam hotly disputes China’s historical account, saying China had never claimed sovereignty over the islands before the 1940s”).⁹⁴⁶ to the question of resolution attempts, BBC reports that while “China prefers bilateral negotiations,” the other states may consider such a method unfair due to China’s relative power.⁹⁴⁷

BBC reported that the court ruled that “there was no evidence for China's claim of historic rights to the waters or resources within its ‘nine-dash line,’ and that it

⁹⁴³ “Why Is the South China Sea Contentious?,” July 12, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13748349>.

⁹⁴⁴ “China Defiant at South China Sea Ruling,” July 12, 2016, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36777348>.

⁹⁴⁵ “Why Is the South China Sea Contentious?”

⁹⁴⁶ “Why Is the South China Sea Contentious?”

⁹⁴⁷ “Why Is the South China Sea Contentious?”

was violating the Philippines' sovereign rights with its operations there."⁹⁴⁸ Other phrasing says, "there was no evidence that China had historically exercised exclusive control over the waters or resources."⁹⁴⁹ To further clarify this, "fishermen from the Philippines and China both had fishing rights around the disputed Scarborough Shoal area."⁹⁵⁰ Therefore, according to the ruling, China has "violat[ed] the Philippines' sovereign rights" to operate in the SCS,⁹⁵¹ even though "there were no rulings on sovereignty over land territory or delimiting any national boundaries."⁹⁵² The tribunal ruled that China "caused severe harm" to the marine environment and failed to fulfill its obligations to prevent it. Additionally, it established that "the Spratly Islands are not capable of generating extended maritime zones" and that "certain sea areas are within the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines."⁹⁵³ Finally, "China's land reclamation and construction of artificial islands is incompatible with the obligations on a state during dispute resolution proceedings," according to the ruling.⁹⁵⁴

To the question of the legality of the ruling and the jurisdiction of the court, the ruling "was made by an arbitration tribunal constituted under the United Nations

⁹⁴⁸ "China Calls KFC Protests 'Jingoistic,'" July 20, 2016, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36842660>.

⁹⁴⁹ "Philippines Wins South China Sea Case."

⁹⁵⁰ "Philippines Wins South China Sea Case."

⁹⁵¹ "China Calls KFC Protests 'Jingoistic.'"

⁹⁵² "South China Sea Tribunal: Key Points," July 12, 2016, sec. Asia, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36772813>.

⁹⁵³ "South China Sea Tribunal."

⁹⁵⁴ "South China Sea Tribunal."

Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which both countries have signed.” The ruling is “binding, but the Permanent Court of Arbitration has no powers of enforcement.”⁹⁵⁵ BBC quoted a lawyer for the Philippines who said that the verdict was a “clear and unanimous judgement that upholds the rule of law and the rights claimed by the Philippines.”⁹⁵⁶

2. China’s reaction and analysis

BBC reports that China called the ruling “null and void” and implied the judges were “brainless or paid, or both,” as it “didn’t go China’s way.”⁹⁵⁷ The Chinese reaction to the ruling – “an almost daily slew of state-sanctioned viral videos warning that a giant western conspiracy is afoot to bring China down and turn it into a second Syria” – came as China was doing quite well at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, which caused BBC’s skepticism about “the evidence of a sinister anti-China bias.”⁹⁵⁸ Other than this, the BBC’s description of China’s reaction is generally dry and devoid of emotion: China “firmly rejected” the ruling and claimed its rights (though “has not clarified its claims sufficiently”⁹⁵⁹), but also expressed commitment to “resolving

⁹⁵⁵ “China Defiant at South China Sea Ruling.”

⁹⁵⁶ “Philippines Wins South China Sea Case.”

⁹⁵⁷ Carrie Gracie, “China at Rio 2016: Paranoia and the People,” August 12, 2016, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-37056194>.

⁹⁵⁸ Gracie.

⁹⁵⁹ “Why Is the South China Sea Contentious?”

disputes.”⁹⁶⁰ One of the analysts found such an approach from China “conciliatory” and suggested that the ruling was overall “a major loss of face for China” (and a “comprehensive victory” for the Philippines), after which China apparently decided not to “[ramp] up the pressure on the Philippines.”⁹⁶¹

An article, which discussed “China’s ambitions for global leadership” in the context of the ongoing conflict, provided an analysis of “China’s dilemma” of finding a balance between political control (the party’s main objective) and free economy, which benefits the country. In particular, the article pointed out that China’s “win-win” rhetoric is “cheap talk,” while China is “often the master of meaning-light slogans” and is yet to find “the language to lead a troubled world.”⁹⁶²

BBC did not disregard the Chinese media’s role in the unfolding events: it reported that the media “have not lost time in reinforcing” China’s position and claims, but also worked hard to air “masses of fresh material aimed at discrediting The Hague tribunal’s ruling.”⁹⁶³ The official media also posted about a “toxic mindset of China-phobia”⁹⁶⁴ – a part of the Chinese public’s widespread victimization narrative,

⁹⁶⁰ “China Defiant at South China Sea Ruling.”

⁹⁶¹ “China Defiant at South China Sea Ruling.”

⁹⁶² Carrie Gracie, “China G20: To Lead or Not to Lead?,” September 2, 2016, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-37241315>.

⁹⁶³ Kerry Allen, “Beijing Engineers Coverage of South China Sea Ruling,” July 12, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36774489>.

⁹⁶⁴ Kathy Marks, “Pacific Grim: Australia Torn between US and China,” August 30, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37211357>.

for which BBC claimed, “China’s state media only have themselves to blame.”⁹⁶⁵ BBC, however, pointed out that the media also “hinted” at the possibilities of future cooperation with other actors and negotiations with the Philippines.⁹⁶⁶

The social media have been active too, while the state-controlled media launched an “attempt to control online discussion” through hashtags and censorship.⁹⁶⁷ Such online campaigns included not only the official point of view on the court ruling but also, for example, the calls to boycott fruit imported from the Philippines – both types of messages reportedly being shared by hundreds of thousands of people in China.⁹⁶⁸ However, despite the wide circulation of those messages, BBC pointed out that the Chinese media “made no mention of any discussion about the South China Sea” between Barack Obama and Xi Jinping’s meeting during the G20 summit – even though the problem was raised between the two.⁹⁶⁹

In general, as one article identified on the example of China’s G20 summit in Hangzhou, China strives to promote its “strategic” and “triumphal” narrative that is based on “the decline of the West” and the idea that “only China is a reliable engine of

⁹⁶⁵ Gracie, “China at Rio 2016.”

⁹⁶⁶ Allen, “Beijing Engineers Coverage of South China Sea Ruling.”

⁹⁶⁷ Allen.

⁹⁶⁸ “Chinese Call for Philippine Mango Boycott,” July 13, 2016, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36780967>.

⁹⁶⁹ “Obama Presses Xi to Abide by Sea Ruling,” September 3, 2016, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-37267372>.

growth, its politics less populist, its leadership farsighted,” which makes it a better world leader and a “better guardian of global economic governance.”⁹⁷⁰

3. The Philippines

BBC reported that the Philippine government “welcomed the ruling as a ‘milestone decision,’ but there was little outright celebration” (“hardly even a smile”⁹⁷¹), which might be attributed to the change of power.⁹⁷² A correspondent argued that the new president Rodrigo Duterte could have offered a “quiet, dignified response” in return for “promises of Chinese investment.”⁹⁷³ Already on the day of the ruling, confirming that “experts were now analysing the ruling,” the Philippine Foreign Secretary “called on all concerned to exercise ‘constraint and sobriety,’” supporting BBC correspondent’s claim that “[a]ll the indications are that [Duterte] is more willing to seek accommodation with the Chinese than his predecessor.”⁹⁷⁴

BBC provided some background on Duterte within the articles, pointing out that the new president “likes to display machismo and bravado,”⁹⁷⁵ and was inclined to use insulting and provocative language when discussing his Western counterparts,

⁹⁷⁰ Gracie, “China G20,” 20.

⁹⁷¹ Allen, “Beijing Engineers Coverage of South China Sea Ruling.”

⁹⁷² “China Defiant at South China Sea Ruling.”

⁹⁷³ “Philippines Wins South China Sea Case.”

⁹⁷⁴ Allen, “Beijing Engineers Coverage of South China Sea Ruling.”

⁹⁷⁵ “Obama Scraps Talks after ‘whore’ Jibe,” September 6, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37281821>.

including “an obscenity-filled rant” towards the EU.⁹⁷⁶ That, as well as his statement that “eventually” he would “break up with America” because he would “rather go to Russia and to China,”⁹⁷⁷ help illustrate the mood of the new government.

4. The role of the US, and some other actors

There is no extensive coverage of the US in the studies articles, though the US is frequently mentioned to put the situation in context: a country that has a “longstanding defence relationship” with the Philippines (with the Philippines heavily relying on the US) has welcomed and supported the ruling.⁹⁷⁸ BBC reported that the US “sent an aircraft carrier and fighter jets to the region ahead of the decision” and then urged China to abide by the ruling.⁹⁷⁹ The US calls are mentioned in several articles, include one, in which Obama is cited emphasizing the importance of UNCLOS and China’s obligations in the context of “the rules-based international order.”⁹⁸⁰

⁹⁷⁶ “Saying the Unsayable: Philippine President Duterte,” September 30, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36251094>.

⁹⁷⁷ “Duterte Tells Obama to ‘Go to Hell,’” October 4, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37548695>.

⁹⁷⁸ “Duterte Tells Obama to ‘Go to Hell’”; “What Do ‘hangars’ in the South China Sea Tell Us?,” August 10, 2016, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-37031049>.

⁹⁷⁹ “China Defiant at South China Sea Ruling.”

⁹⁸⁰ “Obama Presses Xi to Abide by Sea Ruling.”

5. ASEAN

BBC reported that “some” countries argued China should negotiate with ASEAN about the claims, while China is “opposed” to that, and ASEAN was “divided” about how to proceed.⁹⁸¹ Then, “[a]fter days of discord,” the organization “bowed to pressure”⁹⁸² and released “a watered down joint statement” that “avoids rebuking China.”⁹⁸³ To further demonstrate the weakness of the organization, BBC explained in another article that “[e]conomically, Asean is increasingly living in the shadow of China,” which leads to most of its members being “remarkably timid” about China’s dominance.⁹⁸⁴ The article further adds that such an approach by ASEAN comes from an attempt to “strike the right balance” between China and the US, which cannot be ignored.⁹⁸⁵ Still, ASEAN is “crippled by its consensus-based decision-making,” and China is heavily exploiting this feature of the organization, while “creating ‘facts’ in the sea by building islands on disputed reefs.”⁹⁸⁶

⁹⁸¹ “Why Is the South China Sea Contentious?”

⁹⁸² Jonathan Head, “What’s the Point of Asean?,” July 25, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36881530>.

⁹⁸³ “Asean Avoids Criticising China over Sea,” July 25, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36878995>.

⁹⁸⁴ Karishma Vaswani, “Summit Diplomacy, Duterte-Style,” September 6, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37288971>.

⁹⁸⁵ Vaswani.

⁹⁸⁶ Head, “What’s the Point of Asean?”

6. The aftermath

Perhaps, the most interesting part of the BBC coverage is the analysis and discussion of the potential impact of the court ruling, and the aftermath. The related coverage does not include a lot about the immediate, specific impact of the verdict on the regional actors. One small example is the Chinese nationalists' protests, the KFC protests, which resulted in some loss of profit: the company that owns the restaurant chain reported at least 1% less in sales in the months following the court ruling.⁹⁸⁷ The iPhone was also targeted.⁹⁸⁸

The more discussed consequences include the situation within China and China's increasingly aggressive behavior in the region. Speaking of the aftermath in China itself, an article covering some Pew research data from October 2016 demonstrated a high level of optimism about the future among the Chinese. According to the cited research, 77% of the respondent said "their way of life needs to be protected from foreign influence."⁹⁸⁹ BBC pointed out it was "interesting" that "some would see the Obama administration's so-called 'pivot to Asia' as a greater threat than say jihadist extremist groups just across the western border."⁹⁹⁰ Other opinion polls showed that "more than 80% of the public think [Olympic] Rio's judges have a

⁹⁸⁷ "Yum Brands Hit Ahead of China Spin-Off," October 6, 2016, sec. Business, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-37570660>.

⁹⁸⁸ "iPhone 7? You're Fired!," October 2, 2016, sec. BBC Trending, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-37523712>.

⁹⁸⁹ Stephen McDonell, "The Future Is Bright: Just Ask the Chinese," October 6, 2016, sec. China blog, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-37570965>.

⁹⁹⁰ McDonell.

sinister bias against China”: “Chinese patriots have a lot of complaints.”⁹⁹¹ The opinion article author asked why the Chinese fans took everything personally and suggested the answer: “China’s absence of free debate and... driven herd mentality,” or, more specifically, “the propaganda machine whipped up public rage.”⁹⁹²

Regarding the aggressive behavior, one of the articles reported an increase in cyber-attacks in Asia. Those attacks are “state-sponsored and target areas with heightened geopolitical tensions,” including the SCS. The article also states that evidently, China was refocusing its cyber-attacks from Europe and the US to Asia and that the Asian organizations are “ill-equipped” to handle the attacks.⁹⁹³ One example of a Chinese cyber-attack was the hacked screens in Vietnam airports that broadcast anti-Vietnamese and anti-Philippine messages.⁹⁹⁴ China demonstrated military force in more traditional ways as well: about 40 Chinese aircraft flew close to the Japanese border in what was called a “routine drill” by China, while “seen as a show of force by China” by others.⁹⁹⁵ Additionally, “China has sailed a fleet of 230 vessels near Japanese-controlled waters in the East China Sea,” which causes protests by the Japanese officials, a behavior called by BBC “increasingly assertive about waters

⁹⁹¹ Gracie, “China at Rio 2016.”

⁹⁹² Gracie.

⁹⁹³ Leisha Chi, “Asia Has ‘World’s Worst Cybersecurity,’” August 24, 2016, sec. Technology, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-37163076>.

⁹⁹⁴ “Vietnam Airports Hacked over S China Sea,” July 29, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36927674>.

⁹⁹⁵ “Japan Scrambles Jets over China Flights,” September 26, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37469983>.

[China] believes are Chinese.”⁹⁹⁶ A part of this behavior described by BBC was China accusing the US, Japan, and Australia of “‘fanning the flames’ of regional tensions.”⁹⁹⁷

Finally, BBC reported that China continued engaging in “vast amounts of construction on various disputed islands,”⁹⁹⁸ including, according to a Washington-based think tank, “building aircraft hangars.”⁹⁹⁹ An article argued that “China is rapidly building islands to buttress its territorial claims has stoked tension in the region,”¹⁰⁰⁰ while another one claimed that “[o]n issues of territorial sovereignty, [China] has veered toward sabre-rattling, including occupying and developing contested islands in the South China Sea.”¹⁰⁰¹ An analysis suggested that through this, China “embarked on a power projection drive in the region which will considerably extend the range of its naval and air capabilities.”¹⁰⁰²

⁹⁹⁶ “Chinese Fleet Sails near Disputed Isles,” August 6, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36996534>.

⁹⁹⁷ Marks, “Pacific Grim.”

⁹⁹⁸ “China Calls KFC Protests ‘Jingoistic’”; “What Do ‘hangars’ in the South China Sea Tell Us?”

⁹⁹⁹ “Japan Says China Ties ‘Deteriorating,’” August 9, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37019028>.

¹⁰⁰⁰ “Taiwan Asks Google to Blur Island Images,” September 22, 2016, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37436696>.

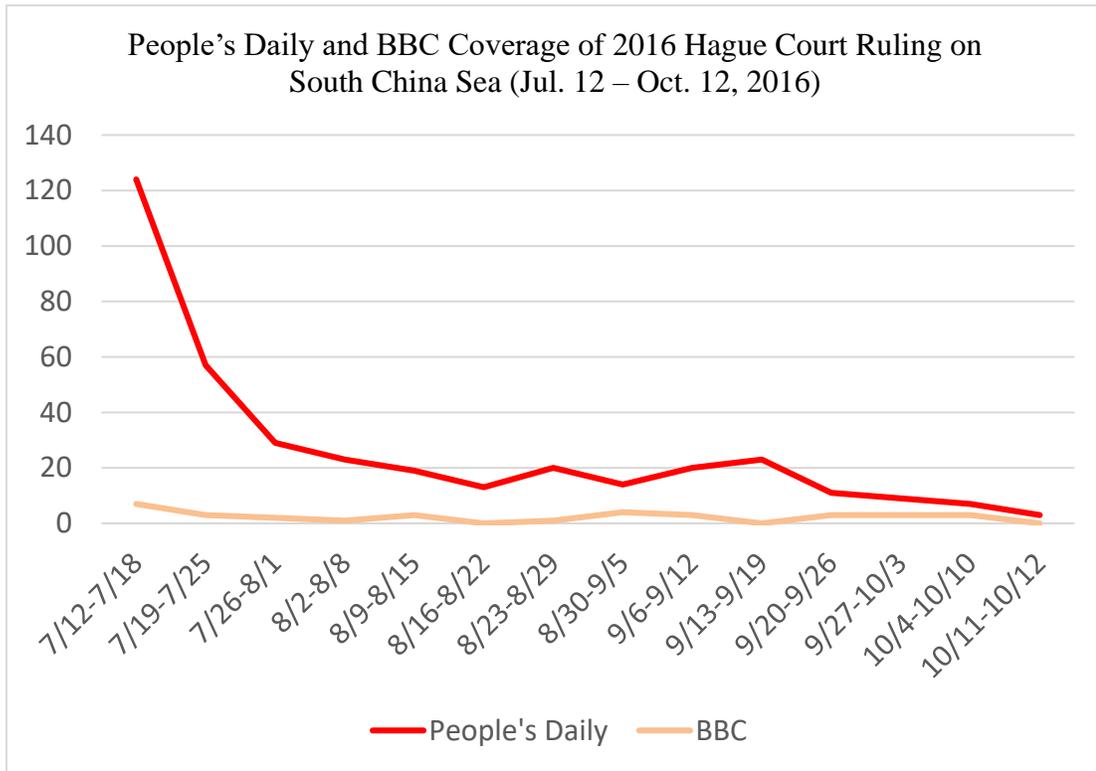
¹⁰⁰¹ Anthony Zurcher Zurcher Anthony, “Clinton v Trump v Merkel v Putin,” September 21, 2016, sec. US Election 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-37423550>.

¹⁰⁰² “What Do ‘hangars’ in the South China Sea Tell Us?”

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter investigated the way China's state-controlled media Renmin Ribao (People's Daily) covered the 2016 Hague court ruling, which rejected China's claims in the South China Sea. The arbitration was initiated by the Philippines in 2013 and involved, in particular, the Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands. The court ruled that China, despite its claims, did not have any exclusive historical rights to the sea. I started the chapter with a review of the history and development of the Chinese media, focused on the role People's Daily plays in the country's media environment, and then described the events before and after the court ruling. After that, I discussed and analyzed the data I collected from the People's Daily official English-language website. The following section analyzed the way BBC covered the same issue during the same period of time. See below for the distribution of the articles by People's Daily and BBC week by week during the studied period.

Figure 6 People's Daily and BBC Coverage Article Distribution



Modern journalism in China started during the Opium Wars period in the 19th century. Soon after, it became a tool of political struggle against colonization; subsequently, it served the revolutionaries in the 20th century. Xinhua News Agency, which remains the central news agency of China today, was established in 1931. People's Daily, the main Communist Party newspaper, was established in 1948. After the foundation of the PRC in 1949, the communist leadership worked to centralize all national publications and control them using Soviet propaganda methods. The diversity and quality of the media environment significantly deteriorated during the following decades, and even with the creation of the Internet and new media, the Party

did not loosen its grip to maintain strict control. People's Daily, just like the Xinhua News Agency, which generates most of the content, is an official mouthpiece of the government.

Today, China is one of the most censored countries in the world and a top jailer of journalists. With the developments of new media, the Chinese government has been taking measures to assert control: through new laws and regulations, and increasingly strict Internet censorship, which became one of the top priorities of the government. As part of the governmental apparatus, People's Daily possesses considerable political power and resources. The online version of People's Daily, which was launched in 1997, has been working to shape public opinion not only in China but also abroad. While People's Daily as an international propaganda outlet may not be as successful as, for example, RT, due to China's international image and the fact that the newspaper is the official party mouthpiece, an effort to shape global narratives on current events is clearly noticeable.

According to China's Constitution, which was adopted in 1982, there is freedom of speech and press in China. The state promotes the development of the press, broadcasting, and publishing.¹⁰⁰³ In 2010, the government issued a white paper

¹⁰⁰³ "CONSTITUTION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA," People's Daily Online, December 4, 1982, <http://en.people.cn/constitution/constitution.html>; "CONSTITUTION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (Full Text after Amendment on March 14, 2004)," The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, December 4, 1982, http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Constitution/node_2825.htm.

on the Internet, in which it called it a “major symbol of contemporary advanced productive force.”¹⁰⁰⁴ According to the document, the Chinese government fully understands the importance of the Internet and advocates for its development, “[t]o build, utilize and administer the Internet well” is regarded as critical for the state security, sovereignty, dignity, and interests. The government’s “basic policy” for the Internet, which aims to ensure “a healthy and harmonious Internet environment” and make the Internet “more reliable, [and] useful” involves “law-based administration and ensured security.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Everyone is required to respect China’s “Internet sovereignty.” The report claims that 80% of Chinese people get their news mainly online, where the freedom of speech is “guaranteed.” Therefore, the new media’s function is to “promptly [release] authoritative information.”¹⁰⁰⁶ In other words, the Chinese government fully understands the power and possibilities of the new media and is determined to realize its potential in serving its interests.

Below is a brief comparative analysis of the differences between coverage of the Hague court ruling by People’s Daily and BBC. The major identifiable tactics used by People’s Daily are the following:

¹⁰⁰⁴ “The Internet in China - China.Org.Cn” (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, June 8, 2010), http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7093508.htm.

¹⁰⁰⁵ “The Internet in China - China.Org.Cn.”

¹⁰⁰⁶ “The Internet in China - China.Org.Cn.”

1. Generation of a massive stream of repetitive categorical claims
2. Creation of a simplified narrative, one-sided identities and explanations, and disregard for the rest
3. Focus on the “enemy” as a source of problems

The tactics and differences are discussed below.

1. Generation of a massive stream of repetitive categorical claims

As can be seen in the discussion section of the coverage, there is little ambiguity in the way People’s Daily presents the information. The coverage tends to create binaries in which the two sides are entirely opposite. In one case, there is China vs. the Hague court and its ruling. According to the Chinese media outlet, China is completely right in the situation, while the court is completely wrong, or, in other words, everything China has done is completely “legal” while everything about the court is completely “illegal.” The coverage is aimed to delegitimize the court as an organization, its members’ personal integrity and intelligence, and the final decision. The legality is central to the argument, and without further details or explanation, the articles bombard the reader with the repetitive claims about it.

It is evident that BBC published significantly fewer articles on the issue during the specified time frame – ten times less. Nevertheless, the thirty BBC articles cover considerably more ground than People’s Daily in terms of discussing various aspects of the issue: participating sides, their positions, and background, their reasoning, as well as the implications of the developments.

2. Creation of a simplified narrative, one-sided identities and explanations, and disregard for the rest

The narrative by People's Daily is that China, as a benevolent actor, is opposed to the ill-wishers who create an issue where there is no issue. The coverage includes the discussion of China as a country and an international player, implying that its image can by itself serve as a proof that China is right in the case of the South China Sea as well. More specifically, China's self-proclaimed identity and ideology as a "peace-loving nation," which always complies with international law, serve to support the argument that China cannot be a perpetrator of any kind. In addition to the main image, People's Daily provides China's main principles and preferred techniques, such as sovereignty and bilateral negotiations. BBC, while discussing China's stance, pointed out that bilateral methods can be considered unfair by other countries due to China's relative power.¹⁰⁰⁷

The coverage of the issue by BBC includes the discussion of China's ambitions in the region (including China's influence on ASEAN), as well as domestic factors shaping some of the decision-making processes (such as the "dilemma" of the need for political control and free economy¹⁰⁰⁸). BBC also discussed the way China's

¹⁰⁰⁷ "Why Is the South China Sea Contentious?"

¹⁰⁰⁸ Gracie, "China G20."

state-controlled media worked on the issue and suggested that their methods paid off – as seen in the Pew research data.

3. Focus on the “enemy” as a source of problems

One more binary that can be identified in the coverage is China vs. the US, which is clearly an “enemy.” The coverage of the US is extensive and colorful: it employs a variety of well-known clichés and terms to describe the US, including labeling it imperialistic and hegemonic. The US is also opposed to China as the immoral actor, which is a source of trouble everywhere in the world, while China is morally superior. Interestingly, despite such a bluntly negative flow of information, People’s Daily leaves the door open for a possibility of rapprochement when it expresses hope that the US still can be “reasonable” or “rational.”¹⁰⁰⁹

Japan can be considered villain #2 within the People’s Daily coverage of the South China Sea issue, and many tactics, which are applied to the US, work for Japan as well. The coverage of the other states that criticized China is minimal or virtually non-existent. Instead, the coverage focuses on listing the countries or other actors that

¹⁰⁰⁹ “South China Sea Issue Should Not Come between China and US: Chinese Ambassador - People’s Daily Online.”

expressed their support for China – these are labeled in positive terms, such as “peace-loving countries.”¹⁰¹⁰

Unlike People’s Daily, BBC provides a much drier coverage of the events and focuses on analyzing both the bigger picture (“Why is the South China Sea contentious?”),¹⁰¹¹ and more specific aspects of the problem. BBC discusses the reasons for particular actions by the participants and reviews the ruling and its reasoning. What People’s Daily calls a “history of illegal land reclamation at sea by Philippines, Vietnam,”¹⁰¹² BBC calls “recent flashpoints”¹⁰¹³ of the territorial disputes among the neighboring states. Additionally, BBC delivers a more substantial analysis of the position of and reaction by the Philippines, and profiles the newly elected president. BBC pays significantly less attention to the US while covering the South China Sea.

In general, the BBC coverage appears to be significantly more multifaceted and informative without labels or emotional tone, while People’s Daily focuses on the forceful promotion of the Chinese government’s point of view.

¹⁰¹⁰ “People’s Daily Calls for Return to Negotiating Table to Resolve South China Sea Dispute - People’s Daily Online.”

¹⁰¹¹ “Why Is the South China Sea Contentious?”

¹⁰¹² “Spotlight: Long History of Illegal Land Reclamation at Sea by Philippines, Vietnam - People’s Daily Online.”

¹⁰¹³ “Why Is the South China Sea Contentious?”

Chapter 5

CASE STUDY III: DAILY SABAH'S COVERAGE OF THE 2016 COUP ATTEMPT IN TURKEY

In this chapter, I show how the Turkish government was using Daily Sabah, an English-language newspaper and online news source connected to Erdoğan, to broadcast its take on the 2016 coup attempt (and its take on some key liberal values) to a larger international audience. First, I provide an overview of the history of media control in Turkey and identify the place Daily Sabah takes in today's online media environment. Then I review the development of the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. After that, I discuss Daily Sabah's coverage of the coup events during the first three months after the attempt, which involves accessing the messages and themes running through nearly four hundred articles. In order to evaluate the potential governmental agenda behind the coverage, I compare it to the way BBC covered the Turkish coup attempt during the same period of time. I use NVivo software to code the articles and help identify major themes and sentiment. In the end, I try to identify the techniques the Turkish government is using to manipulate the rhetoric around politics in Turkey.

5.1 The Mass Media in Turkey

Since the foundation of modern Turkey, journalists played a role of “interlocutors of civil society” and “champions of rational democracy.”¹⁰¹⁴ Radio broadcasting was started in Turkey in 1927 by the government to promote modernization and nationalism.¹⁰¹⁵ The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) was established in 1964. While initially radio was more common in households, television became the population’s main source of information by the 1990s. The state had a monopoly on radio and television broadcasting until 1993 when private commercial broadcasting was legalized.¹⁰¹⁶ As for the newspapers and periodicals, by the mid-1990s, there were over thirty dailies in Turkey, among which *Hürriyet* was the largest. Most newspapers, radio, and television at that time depended on the Anadolu Ajansi official news agency as a source of domestic news.¹⁰¹⁷ By 2016, television continued to be the leading news medium, with about 300 private television stations operating together with the state-controlled TRT.¹⁰¹⁸ The largest business operating the press was the Dogan Holding, which was established in 1980.

¹⁰¹⁴ Metin Heper and Tanel Demirel, “The Press and the Consolidation of Democracy in Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 110.

¹⁰¹⁵ Helen Chapin Metz, Library of Congress, and Federal Research Division, *Turkey: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1996).

¹⁰¹⁶ Metz, Library of Congress, and Federal Research Division.

¹⁰¹⁷ Metz, Library of Congress, and Federal Research Division.

¹⁰¹⁸ “Turkey Profile - Media,” *BBC News*, March 18, 2016, sec. Europe, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17992011>.

In 2016, the group owned Hürriyet Daily News (bought in 2001), and television channel Kanal D. Hürriyet created an online version in 1997, becoming one of the first online newspapers in Turkey.¹⁰¹⁹ Today, the English language version of Hürriyet is the most visited news website in the country.¹⁰²⁰ According to the Dogan Group website description that was available in 2017, the newspaper was “the symbol of independent and reliable journalism in the Turkish press through its commitment to both ethical principles and innovative approach of publishing.”¹⁰²¹ The “independent and reliable journalism” sent the newspaper under fire, for example, at the beginning of 2017, when president Erdoğan criticized Hürriyet for reporting the lack of coordination between the government and the army when the former decided to lift the ban on the headscarf in the military. The share of the Dogan Group dropped 10% after the criticism.¹⁰²²

In March 2018, the Dogan Media Company – the media arm of the Dogan Holding – sold its assets to pro-Erdoğan conglomerate Demiroren Holding after being fined and pressured by the government. A prominent Turkish journalist Kadri Gursel

¹⁰¹⁹ “Online Platform > Media > Business Areas > Doğan Holding,” accessed June 22, 2017, <http://www.doganholding.com.tr/en/business-areas/online-platform.aspx>.

¹⁰²⁰ “Top Websites in Turkey - SimilarWeb Website Ranking,” accessed June 22, 2017, <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/turkey>.

¹⁰²¹ “Publishing > Media > Business Areas > Doğan Holding,” accessed June 22, 2017, <http://www.doganholding.com.tr/en/business-areas/publishing.aspx>.

¹⁰²² “Turkey’s Erdogan Criticises Hurriyet Newspaper, Sends Its Shares Tumbling - World | The Star Online,” accessed June 22, 2017, <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2017/02/28/turkeys-erdogan-criticises-hurriyet-newspaper-sends-its-shares-tumbling/>.

claimed that Erdoğan had organized the media “according to the Putin model” – directly under his control.¹⁰²³ Similarly, the Turkey representative for Reporters without Borders Erol Onderoglu commented that the sale meant “the death of pluralism and independent journalism in Turkey’s mainstream media.”¹⁰²⁴

Kanal D (another media formerly owned by Dogan Holding) was reported to have been “the most watched TV channel in 2016 in the All Day A/B socio-economic group.” The website of Kanal D had “9.3 million unique visitors and more than 122 million total page views monthly” in 2016. The channel boasted its social media activity and 13 million followers in total.¹⁰²⁵ In addition to Kanal D, CNN Türk was also operated by the Dogan Group jointly with Time Warner. CNN Türk became “the first national channel to offer 24-hour news coverage in another national language,” and in 2016 had “16 million unique visitors and over 154 million page views per month.”¹⁰²⁶ To put this into perspective, overall, according to InternetLiveStats, there were close to 40 million Internet users (“user” defined as “an individual who has access to the Internet at home”) in Turkey in 2014 (51% of the population), and over

¹⁰²³ “Turkish Media Group Bought by Pro-Government Conglomerate,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/world/europe/turkey-media-erdogan-dogan.html>.

¹⁰²⁴ Daren Butler and Ece Toksabay, “Sale of Dogan Set to Tighten Erdogan’s Grip over Turkish Media,” *Reuters*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-dogan-holding-m-a-demiroren-idUSKBN1GY0EL>.

¹⁰²⁵ “Broadcasting > Media > Business Areas > Doğan Holding,” accessed June 22, 2017, <http://www.doganholding.com.tr/en/business-areas/broadcasting.aspx>.

¹⁰²⁶ “Broadcasting > Media > Business Areas > Doğan Holding.”

46 million (58% of the population) in 2016, making Turkey #14 on the list of countries with the largest number of Internet users.¹⁰²⁷

Despite the development of the new media, by 2016, the practice of surveillance and censorship, which has historically been plaguing press freedom in Turkey, was not significantly affected by the age of the Internet. In the case of Turkey, it is worth briefly discussing different types of censorship, such as official, or government censorship, private, or commercial censorship, and self-censorship. State censorship is simply understood as “the use of repressive or prohibitive actions of government agencies to prevent the distribution of certain information to the public.”¹⁰²⁸ Governments exercise censorship and restrict the freedom of the press through introducing laws and regulations, punishing journalists and media companies, as well as encouraging and helping pro-governmental media to dominate in the media sphere.¹⁰²⁹

Historically, authoritarian governments posed a more significant threat to freedom of speech than other entities, such as churches and commercial corporations,

¹⁰²⁷ “Internet Users by Country (2014) - Internet Live Stats,” accessed June 21, 2017, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/2014/>; “Internet Users by Country (2016) - Internet Live Stats,” accessed June 21, 2017, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/>.

¹⁰²⁸ Bilge Yesil, “Press Censorship in Turkey: Networks of State Power, Commercial Pressures, and Self-Censorship,” *CCCR Communication, Culture & Critique* 7, no. 2 (2014): 156.

¹⁰²⁹ E. M Barendt, *Freedom of Speech* (Oxford [etc.: Oxford University Press, 2010); John Street, *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

though religious or other interests could have guided governmental actions.¹⁰³⁰ Nevertheless, private censorship, when an author is prevented from communicating his or her ideas by a publishing company due to one or another concern, can account for a large number of restrictions. At the same time, while private censorship exists, it may be harder to identify or prove in some instances because a potential author's freedom of speech may interfere with the newspaper's freedom of speech, or freedom to choose its publications.¹⁰³¹ Importantly, modern censorship is not necessarily highly institutionalized and centralized. It can be "dispersed across a wide range of sites and agencies," and overall represents a "constitutive act that limits free expression and defines the boundaries of the public sphere."¹⁰³² Censorship can be formal and informal, and the latter includes self-imposed censorship, or self-censorship, which is likely to occur against the background of the government's exercise of ideological sovereignty. True freedom of speech comes from genuinely independent media. Part of the problem with the Turkish media stems from the fact that most news outlets have been historically controlled by large groups, either related to business or the state. The media financially depend on such groups, which possess economic and political power and become increasingly commercialized.¹⁰³³

¹⁰³⁰ Barendt, *Freedom of Speech*, 22.

¹⁰³¹ Barendt, 152.

¹⁰³² Robert Post and Calif. Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities (Los Angeles, eds., *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 21.

¹⁰³³ Andrew Finkel, "Who Guards the Turkish Press? A Perspective on Press Corruption in Turkey," *Jinteaffa Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 147–66; Ali Arslan, "The Power and the Problems of the Media in Turkey and

Moreover, such large groups may also have conflicting economic interests forcing them to compete with each other or with the government.¹⁰³⁴

A press law passed in Turkey in 1983 severely restricted journalist freedom in the country as it allowed for journalist prosecution and closing of newspapers when they published what was considered offensive to the Turkish state. Such offenses included criticism of the government, the military, the founder of modern Turkey Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and propagation of any religion.¹⁰³⁵ The Anti-Terror Law of 1991 gave the state the power to ban publications, arrest journalists, editors, and publishers for so-called communist or separatist propaganda, alleged anti-government or anti-army coverage, and coverage of the Kurdish issue.¹⁰³⁶ Being a Kurdish sympathizer or being affiliated with such has been an issue in itself: about two-thirds of all journalists in prison in 2012 were Kurdish, who were accused of harming Turkish national security and territorial integrity, spreading propaganda and hatred.¹⁰³⁷ Some amendments to the law were passed in 2006, and some of the sanctions were lifted as a part of Turkey's European Union membership bid process;

Political-Religious Identity of Turkish Media Elites," *International Journal of Human Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2005).

¹⁰³⁴ Esra Elmas et al., *Communicating Democracy - Democratizing Communication: Media in Turkey : Legislation, Policies, Actors* (Istanbul: TESEV Publications, 2011).

¹⁰³⁵ "The International Press Institute Urged Turkey's Military Government Monday...," *UPI*, November 14, 1983, <http://www.upi.com/Archives/1983/11/14/The-International-Press-Institute-urged-Turkeys-military-government-Monday/7603001430674/>.

¹⁰³⁶ Yesil, "Press Censorship in Turkey," 159.

¹⁰³⁷ Yesil, "Press Censorship in Turkey."

however, the journalist freedom is still largely suppressed. One of the problems, which represents incredible leverage for the government, is the remaining vagueness and broadly interpreted definitions of such concepts as terrorism and terrorist propaganda.

The government practices using taxes and fines to suppress the voice of the undesirable media. For example, in 2009 the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government pressed enormously high charges against the Dogan Group, supposedly for some tax-irregularities, but the situation was seen by some experts as the government's displeasure with Dogan's media coverage of a certain scandal around some AKP officials and its measures taken to suppress the criticism.¹⁰³⁸ The Dogan Group had to sell some of its assets and fire most critical journalists as a result.¹⁰³⁹ In other instances, the government took measures to create friendly media support through forcing corporations owning the media to sell them to pro-government companies.¹⁰⁴⁰ A striking example is the 2007 corruption charged-related sale of Sabah-ATV to a holding controlled by Erdoğan's son-in-law.¹⁰⁴¹

¹⁰³⁸ Andrew Higgins, "Turkish Mogul Butts Heads With Premier," *Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2009, sec. Business, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB123534107237243861>; Ivan Watson, "Turkish 'media War' Causes Alarm in Europe - CNN.Com," CNN.com, September 16, 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/09/16/turkey.press.freedom/>.

¹⁰³⁹ Yesil, "Press Censorship in Turkey."

¹⁰⁴⁰ Raşit Kaya and Barış Çakmur, "Politics and the Mass Media in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 4 (2010): 521–37; Yesil, "Press Censorship in Turkey."

¹⁰⁴¹ J.D Hendrick, "Media Wars and the Gulen Factor in the New Turkey," *MIDDLE EAST REPORT* 41, no. 260 (2011): 40–46.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), in 2012, Turkey had the largest number of journalists in prison (49 journalists).¹⁰⁴² In 2015, the number was fourteen, which was behind China, Egypt, Iran, and Eritrea.¹⁰⁴³ In 2016, however, Turkey retook the lead with 81 people in prison following the July coup attempt.¹⁰⁴⁴ Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Turkey 149th out of 180 countries in its World Press Freedom Index for 2015, 155th for 2017,¹⁰⁴⁵ and 157th for 2019.¹⁰⁴⁶ Freedom House rated Turkey’s press freedom status as “not free” in 2017, citing the increased powers of the government under a state of emergency introduced after the 2016 coup attempt, which led to a shutdown of over 150 media outlets “including newspapers, television and radio channels, news agencies, magazines, publishing houses, and news websites,” as well as Turkey becoming the “world’s leading jailer of journalists,” while thousands of media workers reportedly lost their jobs, and hundreds – their media credentials.¹⁰⁴⁷

¹⁰⁴² “Committee to Protect Journalists,” accessed June 21, 2017, <https://cpj.org/imprisoned/2012.php>.

¹⁰⁴³ “Committee to Protect Journalists,” accessed June 21, 2017, <https://cpj.org/imprisoned/2015.php>.

¹⁰⁴⁴ “Committee to Protect Journalists,” accessed June 21, 2017, <https://cpj.org/imprisoned/2016.php>.

¹⁰⁴⁵ “2017 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders.”

¹⁰⁴⁶ “2019 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders.”

¹⁰⁴⁷ “Turkey | Country Report | Freedom of the Press | 2017,” Freedom House, accessed June 21, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/turkey>.

In February 2017, The Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights issued a 25-page memorandum describing the situation with freedom of expression and media freedom in Turkey, including before and after the July 2016 coup attempt. One of the general major concerns emphasized in the document was the fact that “prosecutors and courts in Turkey often perceive dissent and criticism as a threat to the integrity of the state, and see their primary role as protecting the interests of the state, as opposed to upholding the human rights of individuals.”¹⁰⁴⁸ Such an approach allows for skewed interpretation and applications of certain provisions of the Turkish legislation by the courts and prosecutors, which negatively affected freedom of expression in the country.

Overall, the problems with freedom of expression and media freedom have been worsening in Turkey in recent years.¹⁰⁴⁹ According to a number of researchers, pluralism, diversity, and freedom of the press in Turkey suffered for decades from state interference, commercial pressures, and the breakup of unions.¹⁰⁵⁰ However,

¹⁰⁴⁸ “Commissioner for Human Rights - Memorandum on Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom in Turkey, by Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights,” February 15, 2017, 2, [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&Ref=CommDH\(2017\)5&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864&direct=true](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&Ref=CommDH(2017)5&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864&direct=true).

¹⁰⁴⁹ “The Commissioner - CommDH(2017)5,” 3.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Yesil, “Press Censorship in Turkey”; Finkel, “Who Guards the Turkish Press?”; Kaya and Çakmur, “Politics and the Mass Media in Turkey”; Miyase Christensen, “Notes on the Public Sphere on a National and Post-National Axis,” *Global Media and Communication* 6, no. 2 (2010): 177–97; Christian Christensen, “Concentration of ownership, the fall of unions and government legislation in Turkey,” *Global Media and Communication* 3, no. 2 (2007): 179–99.

when the AKP came to power, it started utilizing repressive governmental mechanisms more actively and forced self-censorship on the media, which achieved especially significant levels after 2007, when the party entered its second term.¹⁰⁵¹ The AKP, which was praised for its liberalization course after 2002, made a turn to “maintain its ideological sovereignty over media and communications... in the name of protecting the nation from external and internal threats.”¹⁰⁵² The deterioration further intensified under the state of emergency declared after the 2016 coup attempt, which led the Commissioner to conclude that “the current media landscape in Turkey is considerably less diverse, and public debate more stifled and impoverished than in 2011.”¹⁰⁵³ To the question of media pluralism and independence, it is reported that the Turkish government has been using its resources to foster pro-governmental media while taking actions to “intimidate and punish negative media coverage.”¹⁰⁵⁴ For example, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), the state agency which manages television and radio broadcasting, imposed fines on several television channels that attempted critical reporting of governmental actions during the Gezi events in 2013. Such critical coverage was labeled “one-sided” and “biased” by the agency, and to achieve the “accurate” coverage of the protests, RTÜK found it necessary to pressure media companies to change their editorial policy and dismiss or

¹⁰⁵¹ Yesil, “Press Censorship in Turkey.”

¹⁰⁵² Yesil.

¹⁰⁵³ “The Commissioner - CommDH(2017)5,” 4.

¹⁰⁵⁴ “The Commissioner - CommDH(2017)5,” 6.

fire inconvenient staff members.¹⁰⁵⁵ After the 2016 coup attempt and the introduced state of emergency, the government was able to make “purely executive decisions” to close dozens and dozens of media companies, including newspapers, television and radio stations, periodicals, publishing houses, and press agencies, which the Commissioner for Human Rights considered unjustifiable.¹⁰⁵⁶

Another aspect of governmental intervention in the media processes is the blocking and filtering of online resources, including news websites and social media platforms. While Turkish authorities decline requests to share official statistics for the blocked websites, the EU Commission’s Progress Report counted some 111,786 banned websites in June 2016, with over 77% of them banned without any court ruling.¹⁰⁵⁷ While such resources as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube were temporarily blocked at certain times in recent years, after the coup attempt, the situation worsened. According to a transparency report from Twitter, Inc. released in March 2017, “Turkey once again led globally in a number of content takedown requests by court order in the second half of 2016.”¹⁰⁵⁸ And while Reddit complied with all Turkey’s censorship orders and blocked all LGBTI sections in Turkey,¹⁰⁵⁹ Wikipedia refused to

¹⁰⁵⁵ “The Commissioner - CommDH(2017)5,” 6.

¹⁰⁵⁶ “The Commissioner - CommDH(2017)5,” 8.

¹⁰⁵⁷ “The Commissioner - CommDH(2017)5,” 19.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Editorial, “Turkey Leads in Social Media Censorship: New Twitter Transparency Report,” *Turkey Blocks* (blog), March 21, 2017, <https://turkeyblocks.org/2017/03/21/turkey-leads-social-media-censorship-new-twitter-transparency-report/>.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Editorial, “LGBTI Sections Disappear as Reddit Complies with 100% of Turkey Censorship Orders,” *Turkey Blocks* (blog), April 4, 2017,

remove the pages portraying the Turkish government as a sponsor for the Islamic State (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda terrorist organizations. Turkey blocked it in April 2017 for “becoming an information source acting with groups conducting a smear campaign against Turkey in the international arena.”¹⁰⁶⁰

With that said, some authors may disagree that the situation with the freedom of the press in Turkey is critical. At least in 2015, the Middle East Eye (MEE) news portal, which is led by a journalist David Hearst who used to be a lead writer for the Guardian, wrote that “the Turkish media landscape is more diverse than critics of the government would have you think,” and specifically, that despite the bad press freedom rankings by the Reporters Without Borders, such headlines as “May this government of murder be toppled” did find their way to front pages of local newspapers.¹⁰⁶¹ In addition, statistically, out of the five largest newspapers, only one (Sabah) is explicitly pro-government, while the opposition newspapers often dominate the market.¹⁰⁶² Perhaps, this situation is what Erdoğan resolved to change in recent years.

<https://turkeyblocks.org/2017/04/04/lgbti-sections-disappear-as-reddit-complies-with-turkey-censorship-orders/>.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Editorial, “Wikipedia Blocked in Turkey,” *Turkey Blocks* (blog), April 29, 2017, <https://turkeyblocks.org/2017/04/29/wikipedia-blocked-turkey/>; Zeynep Bilginsoy, “Access to Wikipedia Blocked by Government in Turkey,” *chicagotribune.com*, accessed June 22, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-turkey-wikipedia-20170429-story.html>.

¹⁰⁶¹ Mehmet Solmaz, “The Other Side of the Coin in Turkish Media,” *Middle East Eye*, December 10, 2015, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/other-side-coin-turkish-media-707841943>.

¹⁰⁶² Solmaz.

One can assess the political orientation of the media, or media involvement in politics through analyzing the degree of political parallelism of the media in a specific case or in a particular country. The possibility to identify a political stance in media coverage, including news and entertainment sections, signifies that political parallelism takes place.¹⁰⁶³ Political parallelism will be reinforced through organizational connections between the media and various political institutions, such as political parties. Hallin and Mancini (2004) pointed out that the Western media systems have been historically connected to political institutions from which they derived the resources to maintain their existence.¹⁰⁶⁴ Depending on the degree of political parallelism, other aspects of the media market development, the level of journalistic professionalism, and the state intervention policies, Hallin and Mancini identified three models of the media development. The model that can describe, for example, some states in Mediterranean Europe, shows the integration of the media into party politics, weaker independent media, and a high degree of state involvement.

Kaya and Çakmur argued that political parallelism has always been an important feature of Turkish media. Starting from the first newspapers in the Ottoman Empire, Turkish media appeared to be rather a reaction to the foreign media involvement than a beginning on its own: “The first Turkish newspapers were founded

¹⁰⁶³ Colin Seymour-Ure, *The Political Impact of Mass Media*. (London; Beverly Hills, Calif.: Constable; Sage Publications, 1974); Jay G Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995); Daniel C Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁶⁴ Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*.

by the state authorities to counter the foreign sources of information.”¹⁰⁶⁵ Another feature of Turkish media is their tendency to divide into camps. During World War I, the media were divided into nationalists and proponents of collaboration with the occupying allied forces.¹⁰⁶⁶ At the start of the Republican era, there was a division into the proponents of “Kemalist Modernization” and traditional conservatives. The media served as advocacy platforms but also worked to suppress the opposing views.¹⁰⁶⁷

The party-press parallelism (PPP) is the most basic type of political parallelism when media work is aligned to a certain political party. Such alignment can be traced through examining organizational connections of the media to the party, content of the coverage, personal ties of the journalists, and political affiliation of the readership.¹⁰⁶⁸ Carkoglu and Yavuz (2010) observed that between 2002 when the AKP came to power and 2007, internal pluralism within various Turkish newspapers was declining, which suggested the increased bias of those newspapers towards certain political parties. In other words, the fact that the readership of a particular newspaper tended to become more homogenous indicated that a certain political and ideological orientation of that newspaper had developed or became more prominent.¹⁰⁶⁹ At the same time,

¹⁰⁶⁵ Kaya and Çakmur, “Politics and the Mass Media in Turkey,” 523.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Kaya and Çakmur, 523.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Kaya and Çakmur, 524.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ali Çarkoğlu and Gözde Yavuz, “Press-Party Parallelism in Turkey: An Individual Level Interpretation,” *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 4 (2010): 613–24.

external pluralism of the Turkish media increased with a large number of emerging newspapers. Çarkoğlu and Yavuz (2010) suggested that such a development should only induce the intensifying political polarization and partisan debate, which, in turn, means that “finding a public debate arena where cooperative deliberation of different ideas and viewpoints will hence become more difficult.”¹⁰⁷⁰

5.2 About Daily Sabah

The following is a description that Daily Sabah¹⁰⁷¹ at DailySabah.com¹⁰⁷² offers in its “About Us” page:¹⁰⁷³

“Daily Sabah is a nationwide publication. Daily Sabah presents its readers with accurate facts while remaining committed to the democracy, the rule of law, human rights and liberty.

Founded in 2014, Daily Sabah provides millions of people with everything they need to understand the local, national, regional and international developments.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Çarkoğlu and Yavuz, 623.

¹⁰⁷¹ "Sabah" literally means "morning" in Turkish.

¹⁰⁷² The website has three versions: in English, in German, and in Arabic.

¹⁰⁷³ The description was temporarily removed from the website was not available for some time between mid-2017 and late 2019 or early 2020, after which it was returned.

Our publications, products and services span the spectrum of today’s media landscape. Daily Sabah is a Turkuvaz Media Group corporation. Daily Sabah abides by the rules of press ethics.”¹⁰⁷⁴

Daily Sabah’s commitment to democracy and the accuracy of facts has attracted significant criticism from other international media and beyond, despite its short history. As *Foreign Policy*’s William Armstrong put it, “*Daily Sabah*... [became] quite useful as an English-language window into the AKP’s thinking — a slicker version of what so many Turks read every day.”¹⁰⁷⁵ Armstrong pointed out that the government realized it needed an international propaganda outlet after a series of domestic setbacks, such as the Gezi Park protests of 2013, after which it “ramped up an aggressive international information blitzkrieg.”¹⁰⁷⁶ Another reason to create a strong pro-governmental mouthpiece, not unrelated to the protests, was the 2013 conflict and split between the Erdoğan government and the Gülen Movement. Arguably feeling threatened, Erdoğan moved to launch a campaign to consolidate his power. The central sentiment of the official rhetoric is that the West, along with its media outlets, is increasingly hostile to Turkey as a whole, and such an argument may be strong enough to both move forward the governmental propaganda, and justify the actions of the government in the eyes of the population.

¹⁰⁷⁴ “About Us.”

¹⁰⁷⁵ Armstrong, “Army of Spin.”

¹⁰⁷⁶ Armstrong.

The fact that the Daily Sabah was banned from the European Parliament in March 2017 demonstrates that the newspaper does not exist unnoticed. Until the ban, the publication was distributed in the European Parliament once a week; however, the director of the organization's press department posed that several members of the Parliament demanded to ban the paper because they "had been disturbed by the publishing line of the paper."¹⁰⁷⁷ Others also claimed that its publications "spread hate." Erdoğan reacted to the ban by promising "consequences" to those who opposed the Daily Sabah distribution.¹⁰⁷⁸

According to Mert Yildiz, in 2014, there were "four types of newspapers in Turkey: pro-Gülen, opposition, pro-Erdoğan and swing."¹⁰⁷⁹ Before 2018, newspapers of Dogan Holding, including Hürriyet, for example, would belong to the swing category as their willingness to make compromises, and their attitude towards the government fluctuated through the 2000s and after, under pressure from the Erdoğan's regime. In this classification, Daily Sabah is a pro-Erdoğan newspaper because someone in the president's circles owns it.¹⁰⁸⁰

¹⁰⁷⁷ "European Parliament President Bans Distribution of Daily Sabah at Parliament - EUROPE."

¹⁰⁷⁸ "European Parliament President Bans Distribution of Daily Sabah at Parliament - EUROPE."

¹⁰⁷⁹ Yildiz, "Erdoğan's Rise to Power through the Media."

¹⁰⁸⁰ Timo Kivimaki, "State-Media Relations in Turkey: Daily Sabah and Yeni Afak as a Tactical Arm of the AKP's Foreign Policy," *ASIAN POLITICS & POLICY* 7, no. 2 (2015): 323–27; Asli Aydintasbas, "Turkey's War on the Press," *Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 2009, sec. Opinion, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203917304574414503346981992>.

Yildiz claimed that Erdoğan understood his relative public unpopularity when coming to power in 2002. He saw the media as a crucial leverage to change public opinion. After a few years of trying to work with the existing media, Erdoğan started building his own “media empire.”¹⁰⁸¹ The first step was to the 2007 purchase of Sabah, one of the most popular newspapers at that time, by Calik Holding – a company managed by close Erdoğan allies, including his son-in-law. The importance of pro-Erdoğan newspapers only grew after the 2013 Gezi Park protests, when both pro-Gülen and Dogan newspapers started demonstrating their opposition to Erdoğan much more.¹⁰⁸² As Turkey was working on its anti-American rhetoric, some authors pointed out that Daily Sabah’s coverage of Turkish politics, the US-Turkish relations slowly followed the trends in bilateral relations. While in 2014, Daily Sabah still worked to portray Turkey as a partner of the West, such as in an article devoted to Turkey’s “best efforts” to accept refugees, including Yazidis (a predominantly ethnically Kurdish group)¹⁰⁸³ fleeing from ISIS,¹⁰⁸⁴ its coverage became much less liberal with the deterioration of the US-Turkish relations. In 2016, it became clear that the Obama administration did not see Erdoğan as a moderate leader, but rather

¹⁰⁸¹ Yildiz, “Erdoğan’s Rise to Power through the Media.”

¹⁰⁸² Yildiz.

¹⁰⁸³ Raya Jalabi, “Who Are the Yazidis and Why Is Isis Hunting Them?,” *The Guardian*, August 11, 2014, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/07/who-yazidi-isis-iraq-religion-ethnicity-mountains>.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Meryem İlayda Atlas, “Turkey Hosts Ever-Growing Number of Refugees,” *DailySabah*, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://www.dailysabah.com/columns/meryem-ilyda-atlas/2014/09/22/turkey-hosts-evergrowing-number-of-refugees>.

considered him a dictator. In turn, Turkey was growing increasingly unhappy about the US support for the Kurds.¹⁰⁸⁵ The change was reflected in Daily Sabah coverage, which criticized “Obama’s irresponsible policies” and “the U.S.’s deliberate failure to acknowledge that the PKK and PYD¹⁰⁸⁶ are one and the same” that put the US-Turkish relations “on the brink of ending.”¹⁰⁸⁷ To point out the correlation, Turkey’s population attitude towards the US has been on the decline for years as well: according to the Pew Research Center, 52% of the Turks viewed the US favorably in 1999/2000, which was declining after the US war in Iraq¹⁰⁸⁸; in 2013 only 21% of the Turks had a favorable opinion of the US and 70% – unfavorable opinion¹⁰⁸⁹; in 2017, 18% of the Turks favored the US, while 79% had a negative opinion.¹⁰⁹⁰

Daily Sabah became an essential tool of Turkey’s campaign to condemn the West and offer the world the government’s perspective on politics.¹⁰⁹¹ Turkey being a

¹⁰⁸⁵ Marcus, “US-Turkey.”

¹⁰⁸⁶ The Democratic Union Party (PYD) is supported by the US.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Karagöz, “US Support for PKK’s Syrian Wing Risks Turkey-US Relations.”

¹⁰⁸⁸ “Global Public Opinion in the Bush Years (2001-2008),” *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project* (blog), December 18, 2008, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2008/12/18/global-public-opinion-in-the-bush-years-2001-2008/>.

¹⁰⁸⁹ “Chapter 1. Attitudes toward the United States,” *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project* (blog), July 18, 2013, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/07/18/chapter-1-attitudes-toward-the-united-states/>.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Richard Wike et al., “1. The Tarnished American Brand,” *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project* (blog), June 26, 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/06/26/tarnished-american-brand/>.

¹⁰⁹¹ Armstrong, “Army of Spin.”

victim of Western aggression as a part of national rhetoric, started to serve as an effective way to isolate the population from the foreign ideas of freedom and democracy. Delegitimizing the Western media as anti-Turkey propaganda has also become part of this rhetoric. The whole attitude can be demonstrated with the help of an article by Ibrahim Karagul of Yeni Safak, another pro-Erdoğan newspaper. Portraying the West as a self-serving manipulator (“New conflicts were manufactured in the Middle East and our region was used to experiment with social upheaval models like the Arab Spring”¹⁰⁹²), Karagul claimed that the world has been turning into a “shoulder-barging club” in its power struggle, and because Turkey does not desire to be ruled by the West, and is “trying to create a new and strong political language,” the West has “declared war against Turkey.”¹⁰⁹³

Yeni Safak,¹⁰⁹⁴ which was founded in 1994, seems to be a more hardcore pro-Erdoğan news source. Although the English online version of the media claims that it works “with all our might to democratize all institutions in our country, in order for the national will and our values to prevail” and promises that “[e]very day is going to be a new hope with Yeni Şafak,”¹⁰⁹⁵ the paper was involved in controversy and

¹⁰⁹² İBRAHİM KARAGÜL, “The G20, a global showdown, and Turkey’s struggle...,” *Yeni Şafak*, accessed July 21, 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/en/columns/ibrahimkaragul/the-g20-a-global-showdown-and-turkeys-struggle-2006056>.

¹⁰⁹³ KARAGÜL.

¹⁰⁹⁴ “Yeni Safak” literally means “New Dawn” in Turkish.

¹⁰⁹⁵ “About,” Text, *Yeni Şafak*, accessed July 21, 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/en/corporate>.

accused of using hate speech in its publications.¹⁰⁹⁶ Most recently, the same Karagul wrote in an article in July 2017 that the 2016 coup attempt resulted from the US plan to kill Erdoğan and “make [Turkish] people kill each other.”¹⁰⁹⁷ As pointed out in *Washington Post*, the *Daily Sabah* demonstrated a more careful approach as it ran a Twitter poll with a question “Do you agree with allegations that US had directly or indirectly supported failed Gülenist coup attempt in Turkey?”¹⁰⁹⁸

Erdoğan’s attitude towards the international press started to shift after 2013. Joel Simon, who met with the president to discuss Turkey’s press freedom crisis together with the Committee to Protect Journalists in the fall of 2014, pointed out that Erdoğan abandoned his practice of declaring a commitment to press freedom as a starting point of the discussion. Instead, “he went on the offensive... attacking [international] media coverage as biased, intrusive, and tendentious.”¹⁰⁹⁹ Simon claimed that international journalists are no longer respected in countries like Turkey because the ruling elites “believe that the international media no longer shapes global

¹⁰⁹⁶ Mehves Evin, “Study Reveals Increasing Hate Speech in Turkish Press,” *Al-Monitor*, April 23, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2014/04/turkey-increase-hate-speech-press.html>; “Turkish Daily Apologizes for Fabricated Chomsky Interview,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, September 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-daily-apologizes-for-fabricated-chomsky-interview.aspx?pageID=238&nID=53668&NewsCatID=341>.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ishaan Tharoor, “The U.S. Tried to Kill Erdogan, Says Editor in Chief of Turkish Daily,” *Washington Post*, July 19, 2016, sec. WorldViews, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/07/19/the-u-s-tried-to-kill-erdogan-says-editor-in-chief-of-turkish-daily/>.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Tharoor.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Simon, “International Journalists Are in Danger as Never Before.”

opinion,” which makes them an easy target.¹¹⁰⁰ Because of the development of the Internet, the media, both domestic and international, became so multiple, diverse, and diffuse, that the authoritarian governments found themselves in a convenient position to use the media environment to achieve their goals. At the same time, large media companies are undermined as they lose their monopolies on particular audiences, and journalists themselves are at greater risk because their survival is no longer necessary to pass certain information to the world. The advancement of information technologies has shaped all these developments.¹¹⁰¹

There are parallels between the Russian propaganda through RT and Turkish Daily Sabah, however, Simon argued that while the goal of the former seems to be mainly the disruption of the Western narrative, the latter actively strives to persuade the Western audience in addition to that. Simon found that odd and mostly futile due to the already significantly deteriorated international image of Turkey and its president. Although a few years ago, the country and its leader were frequently praised for its democratic efforts, today, the perception is drastically different¹¹⁰²: Erdoğan is rather seen as “a figure of ridicule — an increasingly erratic authoritarian popping up to make wacky statements every few weeks.”¹¹⁰³ Overall, Simon described Daily Sabah strategy as confusing and illogical: if the Western media do, in fact, work to

¹¹⁰⁰ Simon.

¹¹⁰¹ Simon.

¹¹⁰² Simon also brought an example of the New York Times as a newspaper which had demonstrated its positive attitude to Erdoğan's democracy for a while only to be labeled "English spies" after publishing an article about ISIS recruiting in Turkey.

¹¹⁰³ Simon, “International Journalists Are in Danger as Never Before.”

undermine Turkey's international position, then persuading them in anything does not seem worthwhile.¹¹⁰⁴

5.3 2016 Coup Attempt

Late Friday, July 15th, 2016, the Turkish military attempted to overthrow Erdoğan's regime. There were tanks on the streets of Ankara and Istanbul, and the troops blocked the bridges over the Bosphorus strait in Istanbul.¹¹⁰⁵ This was followed by an announcement by Prime Minister Binali Yildirim about an ongoing coup d'état attempt, and a message by representatives of the Turkish military broadcast on the national television claiming they have seized power to protect the democratic order from Erdoğan.¹¹⁰⁶ An hour after the statement from the military, Erdoğan managed to address the nation via cell phone video call broadcast on CNN Turk: he urged people to "go to the streets and give them their answer."¹¹⁰⁷ The coup attempt was over within a few hours, with about 250-300 people dead and over 2,000 people injured. As Erdoğan promised compensations to victims' families, he also vowed to retaliate.

¹¹⁰⁴ Simon.

¹¹⁰⁵ Gul Tuysuz and Elliott C. McLaughlin, "Failed Coup in Turkey: What You Need to Know," CNN, accessed July 23, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/18/middleeast/turkey-failed-coup-explainer/index.html>; "Turkey's Coup Attempt: What You Need to Know," *BBC News*, July 17, 2016, sec. Europe, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36816045>.

¹¹⁰⁶ "TIMELINE-Turkey's Attempted Coup," *Reuters*, July 16, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/turkey-security-timeline-idUSL8N1A158X>.

¹¹⁰⁷ "TIMELINE-Turkey's Attempted Coup"; Tuysuz and McLaughlin, "Failed Coup in Turkey."

During the next few days, several thousands were arrested or detained in relation to the coup. Within a few weeks, 60,000 people from various institutions across the country were fired or suspended.¹¹⁰⁸

Soon after the coup attempt was over, Erdoğan assigned the blame: he claimed that Fethullah Gülen was responsible for the coup attempt, and even addressed the Obama administration with the call to extradite Gülen, who currently lives in the US, to Turkey.¹¹⁰⁹ Gülen, an imam who is in his 70s and has been living in Pennsylvania since 1999, denied the accusation and condemned the coup.¹¹¹⁰ The Hizmet movement, which could be the world's largest Muslim network, was inspired by Gülen's ideas of tolerant Islam and education. The movement is believed to have millions of followers who hold important posts in the Turkish government, or engage in philanthropy and business while helping fund schools and students in Turkey and beyond.¹¹¹¹

The 2016 coup attempt was the bloodiest in Turkish history. One of the ways, in which it was different from the previous coups, is that the perpetrators never

¹¹⁰⁸ Patrick Kingsley, "Turkey Coup: Erdoğan Mourns Casualties – and Vows Retribution," *The Guardian*, July 18, 2016, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/17/recep-tayyip-erdogan-mourns-coup-casualties-and-vows-retribution>; Tiffany Ap CNN, "Turkey to Compensate Victims of Coup Attempt," CNN, accessed July 25, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/06/middleeast/turkey-coup-attempt-compensation/index.html>.

¹¹⁰⁹ Tuysuz and McLaughlin, "Failed Coup in Turkey."

¹¹¹⁰ "Turkey's Coup Attempt"; Tuysuz and McLaughlin, "Failed Coup in Turkey."

¹¹¹¹ "Profile: Fethullah Gulen's Hizmet Movement - BBC News," BBC News, December 18, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-13503361>.

identified themselves and instead released a statement. The fact that it never became clear who was behind the coup paved the way to the idea that the coup was planned outside of the military and then employed through it.¹¹¹² For Erdoğan, this became a basis for developing the narrative accusing external forces, including Gülen, of orchestrating the coup. However, there are other opinions.

A study written by an anonymous group of former Turkish government officials, who lost their government positions as a result of the coup attempt even though they were not in the country on July 15, 2016, highlighted the questions left unanswered and offered its explanation of the events. The authors pointed out that while Erdoğan's staying in power was celebrated as a triumph of the will of the people, the actual democracy, the rule of law, and rights and freedoms in Turkey suffered tremendously following all the harsh measures taken by the president to consolidate his power.¹¹¹³ This is not a coincidence: Erdoğan's growing authoritarian inclination had been showing for years. Interestingly, earlier in 2016, a journalist Fatma Sibel Yüksek even suggested that Erdoğan may employ a controlled coup in order to become a "full president" who defeated a coup.¹¹¹⁴

The authors of the anonymous study cited "multiple testimonies" of military officers who were arrested after reporting to their units to be deployed to respond to a

¹¹¹² Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, "Turkey: How the Coup Failed," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 1 (January 10, 2017): 59–73, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0006>.

¹¹¹³ "A Search for Truth. 15 July 2016 of Turkey," April 28, 2017.

¹¹¹⁴ Fatma Sibel Yüksek, "RTE'nin Darbeyle Başkan Olma Umudu [RTE's Hope to Become President with Coup]," *Açık İstihbarat [Open Intelligence]*, March 22, 2016, <http://acikistihbarat.com/Haberler/1092-Yazilar-RTE>.

terror attack and imprisoned for being involved with the coup.¹¹¹⁵ Despite the large-scale arrests, the actual number of dissenters was such that pro-Erdoğan forces would not have any issues stopping them. However, the situation, in which the dramatic events were broadcast live on TV and the Internet (which was fully functional) and in which Erdoğan addressed the nation and asked people to go to the streets, allowed Erdoğan to emerge as a national hero and a democratic leader. Multiple indications suggest that Erdoğan, at the very least, was aware of the impending coup attempt and used it in his favor, or, at most, fully orchestrated it to consolidate power.¹¹¹⁶

In any case, Erdoğan called the failed coup a “gift from God” that would give him a chance to reshape the country, build a “new Turkey.”¹¹¹⁷ Erdoğan signaled that his presidential power would grow, while the power of the secular political elites would fade. A year after the coup attempt, the unity that emerged in the Turkish people was mostly gone due to Erdoğan’s divisive rhetoric and persecution of enemies. The populism he employed was aimed at building a narrative portraying Erdoğan personally as the necessary condition of Turkey’s bright future.¹¹¹⁸ In April

¹¹¹⁵ “A Search for Truth. 15 July 2016 of Turkey.”

¹¹¹⁶ “A Search for Truth. 15 July 2016 of Turkey.”

¹¹¹⁷ Georgi Gotev, “Erdoğan Says Coup Was ‘Gift from God’ to Reshape Country, Punish Enemies,” *Www.Euractiv.Com* (blog), July 18, 2016, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/erdogan-says-coup-was-gift-from-god-to-re-shape-country-punish-enemies/>; Marc Champion, “Coup Was ‘Gift From God’ for Erdoğan Planning a New Turkey,” *Bloomberg.Com*, July 17, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-07-17/coup-was-a-gift-from-god-says-erdogan-who-plans-a-new-turkey>.

¹¹¹⁸ Ishaan Tharoor, “Analysis | Turkey’s Erdoğan Turned a Failed Coup into His Path to Greater Power,” *Washington Post*, July 17, 2017,

2017, Erdoğan won a referendum that put a formal start to the political transformations of the country: strengthening presidential power at the expense of the legislative and judicial branches. According to Henri Barkey, the director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the proposed new system – the constitutional changes that are “tailored to Erdoğan” – “has no parallel in the modern world.”¹¹¹⁹

5.4 Daily Sabah Data Discussion

The data for this project were collected from the English-language version of the Daily Sabah website.¹¹²⁰ In order to conduct the most thorough search, I used the keyword “coup” for the period between July 15 and October 15, 2016 – the first three months after the coup attempt. I filtered the results to view only articles published under the “Politics” category. I received some 388 results, out of which one article referred to a different coup and was not included in the analysis.¹¹²¹ The other 387

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/07/17/turkeys-erdogan-turned-a-failed-coup-into-his-path-to-greater-power/>.

¹¹¹⁹ Henri Barkey, “Opinion | Turkey Will Never Be the Same after This Vote,” Washington Post, April 11, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/04/11/turkey-will-never-be-the-same-after-this-vote/>; Ishaan Tharoor, “Analysis | Turkey’s Referendum Is the Ultimate Vote on Erdogan,” Washington Post, April 14, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/04/14/turkeys-referendum-is-the-ultimate-vote-on-erdogan/>.

¹¹²⁰ www.dailysabah.com

¹¹²¹ “Supreme Court of Appeals Decides to Issue Red Notice for Gülenist Prosecutor Wanted for Role in Ergenekon Plot,” DailySabah, October 4, 2016,

articles were processed with the help of the NVivo 12 Plus software. Out of those, about a quarter were published during the first two weeks after the coup, and over half (213) – during the first month. The word frequency query showed that other than “coup,” “attempt,” and “Turkey” or “Turkish,” the most frequently used words are “FETÖ” (1282 count), “Gülen” (1105 count), “Gülenist(s)” (825 count), and “terror” (603 count).¹¹²² See the “word cloud” below for a visual of the results.

Figure 7 Case III: Daily Sabah Data “Word Cloud”



<https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/10/04/supreme-court-of-appeals-decides-to-issue-red-notice-for-gulenist-prosecutor-wanted-for-role-in-ergenekon-plot>.

¹¹²² The other words that made a top fifteen but were not mentioned above are “people,” “military,” “July,” “also,” “Erdoğan,” “government,” and “state.”

The major themes from the coverage are below:

1. The Gülen Movement behind the coup attempt
 - Fethullah Gülen and the Movement
 - References to September 11, 2001
2. Turkey as a country, its government, and President Erdoğan
3. The US and its role in the coup attempt
4. The International (mainly Western) media

See the theme distribution in the table below.

Table 5 Daily Sabah: Theme Distribution Across Articles

Theme	Number of articles	Number of References
1. <u>The Gülen Movement behind the coup attempt</u> Fethullah Gülen and the Movement References to September 11, 2001	297 14	523 16
2. <u>Turkey as a country, its government, and President Erdoğan</u>	155	248
3. <u>The US and its role in the coup attempt</u>	119	279
4. <u>The International (mainly Western) media</u>	24	32

The following is the discussion of the Daily Sabah's coverage of the failed coup attempt of 2016:

1. The Gülen Movement behind the coup attempt

As it is evident in the word count query, the central theme of the coverage is Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen Movement, which is most often referred to as FETÖ (Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü meaning Fethullah Terrorist Organization¹¹²³) by Daily Sabah. The two primary arguments throughout the coverage are that Gülen has organized the failed coup attempt (while “no one but Gülenists sided with the coup”¹¹²⁴) and that he and anyone related to him and the movement are highly dangerous. Starting from the first article in the set and on, Gülen is described as a “terrorist leader,”¹¹²⁵ “leading a terrorist organization,”¹¹²⁶ psychopath,¹¹²⁷ a “key

¹¹²³ The Gülen Movement was declared a terrorist organization by the Turkish Government in May 2015.

¹¹²⁴ Nagehan Alçı, “Reality Goes Far beyond Hollywood Movies,” DailySabah, July 20, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/nagehan-alcı/2016/07/20/reality-goes-far-beyond-hollywood-movies>.

¹¹²⁵ Yahya Bostan, “Gülenist Terror Organization and the US,” DailySabah, July 21, 2016, https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/yahya_bostan/2016/07/21/gulenist-terror-organization-and-the-us.

¹¹²⁶ “At Least 1,563 pro-Coup Military Personnel Detained across Turkey,” DailySabah, July 16, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/16/at-least-1563-pro-coup-military-personnel-detained-across-turkey>.

¹¹²⁷ Mahmut Övür, “Was the US behind the Coup?,” DailySabah, July 20, 2016, https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/mahmut_ovur/2016/07/20/was-the-us-behind-the-coup.

suspect,”¹¹²⁸ a “traitor,” “accused of a long-running campaign to overthrow the state,”¹¹²⁹ “among Turkey’s most wanted,”¹¹³⁰ who “even obtained his passport through illegal means,”¹¹³¹ “the mastermind of a recent bloody but failed coup attempt,”¹¹³² “the FETÖ ringleader,”¹¹³³ “a terrorist from Pennsylvania disguised as

¹¹²⁸ “Over 10,000 Detained after Gülenist Coup Attempt in Turkey,” DailySabah, July 22, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/22/over-10000-detained-after-gulenist-coup-attempt-in-turkey>.

¹¹²⁹ “Evidence Points to FETÖ Terror Organization in Failed Gülenist Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, July 21, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/21/evidence-points-to-feto-terror-organization-in-failed-gulenist-coup-attempt>.

¹¹³⁰ “Fethullah Gülen’s Key Aide Captured after Failed Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, July 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/24/fethullah-gulens-key-aide-captured-after-failed-coup-attempt>.

¹¹³¹ Mehmet Solmaz, “Decoding the Gülenist Terror Organization,” DailySabah, July 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/24/decoding-the-gulenist-terror-organization>.

¹¹³² Fatih Şemsettin Işık, “After Supporting Coups in Turkey, Gülen Lies about His Past in NYT Op-Ed,” DailySabah, July 26, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/27/after-supporting-coups-in-turkey-gulen-lies-about-his-past-in-nyt-op-ed>.

¹¹³³ “How Is US a Partner If It Continues to Harbor Gülen? Erdoğan Asks,” DailySabah, August 2, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2016/08/02/how-is-us-a-partner-if-it-continues-to-harbor-gulen-erdogan-asks>.

an Islamic scholar,”¹¹³⁴ whose “decades-long dream is to become the supreme imam of the universe and rule people in accordance with his ideology.”¹¹³⁵

The Gülen Movement is referred to as a “terrorist organization,” a “clandestine network,” the “parallel structure” (in 14 articles), a “shadowy group,”¹¹³⁶ a “junta,” a “cult-like organization,”¹¹³⁷ “the most widespread and insidious terrorist organization in the world,”¹¹³⁸ a “secretive structure,”¹¹³⁹ “a secretive messianic cult,”¹¹⁴⁰ a “terror

¹¹³⁴ “Pawns of Imperialism Posed as Turkish Soldiers on July 15, Says MHP’s Bahçeli,” DailySabah, August 7, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/07/pawns-of-imperialism-posed-as-turkish-soldiers-on-july-15-says-mhps-bahceli>.

¹¹³⁵ Yunus Paksoy, “CO-Founder of Gülen Movement: Cult Leader Gülen Works with CIA, Aims for Imamate of the Universe,” DailySabah, August 12, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/13/co-founder-of-gulen-movement-cult-leader-gulen-works-with-cia-aims-for-imamate-of-the-universe>.

¹¹³⁶ “At Least 1,563 pro-Coup Military Personnel Detained across Turkey”; “Former Police Chief Found in Tank during Failed Gülenist Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, July 18, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/18/former-police-chief-found-in-tank-during-failed-gulenist-coup-attempt>; “DS Asks: What Is Your Opinion of Allegations of US Role in Turkey’s Failed Gülenist Coup Attempt?,” DailySabah, July 19, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/19/ds-asks-what-is-your-opinion-of-allegations-of-us-role-in-turkeys-failed-gulenist-coup-attempt>.

¹¹³⁷ Ragıp Soylu, “Former US Ambassador to Turkey James Jeffrey: US Gov’t Can Make Gülen’s Life Very Difficult,” DailySabah, August 8, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/08/former-us-ambassador-to-turkey-james-jeffrey-us-govt-can-make-gulens-life-very-difficult>.

¹¹³⁸ Yahya Bostan, “Gülenist Terror Organization and the US.”

¹¹³⁹ “Fethullah Gülen’s Key Aide Captured after Failed Coup Attempt.”

¹¹⁴⁰ Ali Ünal, “Turkey’s International Disposition Will Not Shift after July 15 Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, July 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on->

cult”¹¹⁴¹ (in 71 articles), a “criminal network,” a “covert empire,” a “religious cult,”¹¹⁴² “an exceptional structure with some religious claims organized both overtly and covertly while engaging in deep international lobbying and networks,”¹¹⁴³ “an urban version of the DAESH terrorist organization,”¹¹⁴⁴ a “wolf in sheep’s clothing,”¹¹⁴⁵ a “treacherous group [that] has deceived people by abusing the name of

terror/2016/07/24/turkeys-international-disposition-will-not-shift-after-july-15-coup-attempt.

¹¹⁴¹ “NBA Player Enes Kanter Says Ready to Sacrifice His Life for Gülenist Terror-Cult,” DailySabah, August 8, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/basketball/2016/08/08/nba-player-enes-kanter-says-ready-to-sacrifice-his-life-for-gulenist-terror-cult>; “Directorate of Religious Affairs Suspends 2,560 Personnel over Ties with Gülenist Terror-Cult,” DailySabah, August 9, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/investigations/2016/08/09/directorate-of-religious-affairs-suspends-2560-personnel-over-ties-with-gulenist-terror-cult>.

¹¹⁴² “Coup Leader Gülen Must Be Extradited to Turkey for Trial: Presidential Spokesman Kalin,” DailySabah, July 25, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/25/coup-leader-gulen-must-be-extradited-to-turkey-for-trial-presidential-spokesman-kalin>.

¹¹⁴³ Burhanettin Duran, “FETÖ Is Not an Ordinary Terrorist Organization,” DailySabah, July 26, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/duran-burhanettin/2016/07/27/feto-is-not-an-ordinary-terrorist-organization>.

¹¹⁴⁴ Safure Cantürk, “Minister Akdağ: FETÖ Is an Urban DAESH,” DailySabah, August 3, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/04/minister-akdag-feto-is-an-urban-daesh>.

¹¹⁴⁵ “FETÖ Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing, Gülen Not a Religious Scholar,” DailySabah, August 3, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/04/feto-wolf-in-sheeps-clothing-gulen-not-a-religious-scholar>.

God almighty and the prophet,”¹¹⁴⁶ a “cancer,”¹¹⁴⁷ and a national, as well as international threat.¹¹⁴⁸

The movement is said to have “used religion to cover illegal activities,”¹¹⁴⁹ “declared war on Turkey by illegal wiretapping thousands of people, putting on sham trials to imprison FETÖ’s critics, money laundering, blackmail, extortion and forgery through infiltrators,”¹¹⁵⁰ “introduced a new type of terror to the world’s agenda,”¹¹⁵¹ and “betrayed Turkey.”¹¹⁵² Additionally, the movement “threatens the integrity of the

¹¹⁴⁶ “FETÖ Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing, Gülen Not a Religious Scholar.”

¹¹⁴⁷ “Pawns of Imperialism Posed as Turkish Soldiers on July 15, Says MHP’s Bahçeli”; Serdar Karagöz, “Most Effective Counter-Daesh Fight Waged by Turkey, Erdoğan Says,” DailySabah, September 25, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/25/most-effective-counter-daesh-fight-waged-by-turkey-erdogan-says>.

¹¹⁴⁸ “Gülenist Police Chief Commits Suicide While Being Detained,” DailySabah, August 10, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/11/gulenist-police-chief-commits-suicide-while-being-detained>; “FETÖ’s Money Frenzy: Turkey’s Anti-Smuggling, Organized Crime Units Reveal Laundering Scheme,” DailySabah, September 20, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/20/fetos-money-frenzy-turkeys-anti-smuggling-organized-crime-units-reveal-laundering-scheme>.

¹¹⁴⁹ Mehmet Çelik, “Turkey’s Diyanet Says Gülenists Exploited Islamic Teachings to Cover Illegal Activities,” DailySabah, August 4, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2016/08/04/turkeys-diyanet-says-gulenists-exploited-islamic-teachings-to-cover-illegal-activities>.

¹¹⁵⁰ “Gülenist Police Chief Commits Suicide While Being Detained.”

¹¹⁵¹ Serdar Karagöz, “Turkey Open to Cooperating with US to Free Raqqa from DAESH,” DailySabah, September 6, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/07/turkey-open-to-cooperating-with-us-to-free-raqqa-from-daesh>.

¹¹⁵² “PM Yıldırım: FETÖ Terrorists Will Be a Problem for Germany If Not Dealt With,” DailySabah, September 28, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on->

Turkish state and the health of Turkish democracy more insidiously than other terrorist group,”¹¹⁵³ “has the power to create serious chaos, including killing President [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan,”¹¹⁵⁴ while “the main goal of this structure was not to do politics but to redesign politics by taking over the tutelage regime prevalent back in the day,”¹¹⁵⁵

The “Gülen case” is labeled “unique.”¹¹⁵⁶ Daily Sabah reported that Gülen “orchestrated” the coup,¹¹⁵⁷ “commanded the death of hundreds of people through a reactionary coup,”¹¹⁵⁸ that he “was directly involved in the coup attempt on July 15

terror/2016/09/29/pm-yildirim-feto-terrorists-will-be-a-problem-for-germany-if-not-dealt-with.

¹¹⁵³ “Princeton Historian Highlights Threat Posed by FETÖ to Turkey,” DailySabah, September 28, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/29/princeton-historian-highlights-threat-posed-by-feto-to-turkey>.

¹¹⁵⁴ “Retired General Says FETÖ Threat Not over Yet,” DailySabah, September 29, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/30/retired-general-says-feto-threat-not-over-yet>.

¹¹⁵⁵ Mahmut Övür, “Gülenists Using Political Parties as Camouflage,” DailySabah, October 11, 2016, https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/mahmut_ovur/2016/10/11/gulenists-using-political-parties-as-camouflage.

¹¹⁵⁶ “Gülen Will Be Extradited Ultimately, Says Lawyer Probing Terror-Cult Leader,” DailySabah, August 20, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/investigations/2016/08/20/gulen-will-be-extradited-ultimately-says-lawyer-probing-terror-cult-leader>.

¹¹⁵⁷ Ali Ünal, “Turkish Military Penal Code Allows Capital Punishment for Putschist Soldiers,” DailySabah, July 19, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/20/turkish-military-penal-code-allows-capital-punishment-for-putschist-soldiers>.

¹¹⁵⁸ Melih Altınok, “Turkish Public Wants Gülen from US,” DailySabah, July 21, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/melih-altinok/2016/07/21/turkish-public-wants-gulen-from-us>.

and infiltration of state institutions,”¹¹⁵⁹ that “there is no room for doubt that Gülen ordered the military officers he controlled to attack civilians, kill people, and drag the country to the brink of a great abyss,”¹¹⁶⁰ and that he overall “has no characteristics which belong to Islam.”¹¹⁶¹

An American lawyer is quoted saying that the attempted coup was “a pure act of terror.”¹¹⁶² As it was mentioned earlier, the word “terror” is used 603 times in this set of articles, and additionally, the word “terrorist(s)” is used 482 times, and “terrorism” 108 times. Not every time are these words used to refer directly to the Gülen Movement, but in most cases, the movement is still discussed in the context. Turkey declared the Gülen Movement a terrorist organization, a terror threat, and joined the list of other terrorist organizations in 2015.¹¹⁶³ Most articles that discuss the Gülen Movement state that it is a terrorist organization and is engaged in terrorist activities; however, it is rarely mentioned what those activities are and why they are

¹¹⁵⁹ “Confessions and Accusations by Coup Plotters All Point to Same Pennsylvania Address,” DailySabah, July 30, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/30/confessions-and-accusations-by-coup-plotters-all-point-to-same-pennsylvania-address>.

¹¹⁶⁰ Yahya Bostan, “Gülenist Terror Organization and the US.”

¹¹⁶¹ Mehmet Çelik, “Turkey’s Diyanet Says Gülenists Exploited Islamic Teachings to Cover Illegal Activities.”

¹¹⁶² “Gülen Will Be Extradited Ultimately, Says Lawyer Probing Terror-Cult Leader.”

¹¹⁶³ “Turkey Expects US to Cooperate on Gülen’s Extradition, Finds Lack of Support ‘Heartbreaking’: PM Yıldırım,” DailySabah, July 26, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2016/07/26/turkey-expects-us-to-cooperate-on-gulens-extradition-finds-lack-of-support-heartbreaking-pm-yildirim>.

categorized as terrorism. In other words, the definition of terrorism cannot be traced throughout the coverage and remains vague.

An attempt to overthrow the government is identified as a long term goal of the movement, while the main strategy is “infiltration” of the government institutions to gain control of state mechanisms, and creation of the “parallel structure” – “a group of Gülenist bureaucrats and senior officials embedded in key posts of the country’s institutions, including the judiciary and police.”¹¹⁶⁴ The group is said to make its way through “cheating and blackmail,” “conspiring against the Turkish state,” as well as “wiretapping thousands of people.”¹¹⁶⁵ These techniques became part of the “plan to invade Turkey for decades” developed by Gülen, implemented through the movement, and with “professional help” from the CIA, which will be discussed in more detail later.¹¹⁶⁶

Labeling the Gülen Movement a terror threat helps to not only justify any measures taken by the government to defeat it but, perhaps even more importantly, it

¹¹⁶⁴ “At Least 1,563 pro-Coup Military Personnel Detained across Turkey”; “Former Police Chief Found in Tank during Failed Gülenist Coup Attempt”; “Turks Living in Tanzania Call for Closure of Gülen Schools, Condemn the Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, July 19, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/19/turks-living-in-tanzania-call-for-closure-of-gulen-schools-condemn-the-coup-attempt>.

¹¹⁶⁵ “Former Police Chief Found in Tank during Failed Gülenist Coup Attempt”; “Turks Living in Tanzania Call for Closure of Gülen Schools, Condemn the Coup Attempt.”

¹¹⁶⁶ Yunus Paksoy, “Gülen, FETÖ Work Together with US, Receive Professional Help from CIA,” DailySabah, August 9, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/10/gulen-feto-work-together-with-us-receive-professional-help-from-cia>.

creates a binary, two opposing categories within the discourse around the Turkish state. While terrorism (as the evil) is the first category, the second category (the good) is “democracy,” and its definition is generally as vague as that of “terrorism.” The discourse on democracy will be discussed later. In order to strengthen the idea about the terrorist nature of the Gülen Movement, Daily Sabah extensively discusses its similarities and connection to other terrorist organizations, mainly PKK (the Kurdistan Worker’s Party) and the “Islamic State” or ISIS, which is always referred to as Daesh (or Daish) in Daily Sabah’s coverage. It is often emphasized that these two are recognized terrorist organizations in the European Union and the US, or said to be “globally recognized,”¹¹⁶⁷ even though the PKK is not considered a terrorist organization by the United Nations, or such states as Russia, China, and India.

The prime minister Yildirim called the PKK the “brother organization of FETÖ,”¹¹⁶⁸ while “intelligence reports obtained by the Sabah daily” suggest that there is “close affiliation” and “strong collaboration” “between the PKK and FETÖ.”¹¹⁶⁹ Additionally, “there are recordings from PKK radio transmissions in which they offer

¹¹⁶⁷ Yahya Bostan, “Biden Said Nothing about Fethullah Gülen,” DailySabah, August 25, 2016, https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/yahya_bostan/2016/08/26/biden-said-nothing-about-fethullah-gulen.

¹¹⁶⁸ Elif Petek Samatyali, “AK Party Left Alone in Anti-FETÖ Fight before Coup Attempt, PM Yildirim Says,” DailySabah, August 2, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/03/ak-party-left-alone-in-anti-feto-fight-before-coup-attempt-pm-yildirim-says>.

¹¹⁶⁹ Merve AydoganAğlarcı, “Close Affiliation between PKK, FETÖ, Indictment Says,” DailySabah, August 1, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/01/close-affiliation-between-pkk-feto-indictment-says>.

FETÖ terrorists to ‘embrace one another’ and ‘move jointly.’”¹¹⁷⁰ Daily Sabah also cited President Erdoğan repeatedly saying that the PKK, Daesh, and FETÖ are “all the same.”¹¹⁷¹

Interestingly, just as the Gülen Movement is compared to the PKK and ISIS, the July 15 failed coup attempt is compared to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in the US: the coup attempt is labeled “similar”¹¹⁷² or “no different”¹¹⁷³ from 9/11, and Turkey is said to have been “struck in the heart just as the U.S. was hit by the 9/11 attack.”¹¹⁷⁴ In addition, Daily Sabah cited Justice Minister Bekir Bozdağ, who claimed that “Fethullah Gülen is for Turkey and the Turkish people whatever Osama bin Laden is for the U.S.”¹¹⁷⁵ In total, 14 articles express a similar sentiment and

¹¹⁷⁰ “216 Officers Fugitives from Justice, Says Deputy PM,” DailySabah, August 8, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/09/216-officers-fugitives-from-justice-says-deputy-pm>.

¹¹⁷¹ “216 Officers Fugitives from Justice, Says Deputy PM”; “PKK Offers Help, Collaboration to FETÖ Members, Radio Records Show,” DailySabah, August 3, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/04/pkk-offers-help-collaboration-to-feto-members-radio-records-show>; “President Erdoğan: FETÖ Same as PKK, DAESH, Act Jointly,” DailySabah, August 1, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/01/president-erdogan-feto-same-as-pkk-daesh-act-jointly>.

¹¹⁷² “Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey Was like 9/11, MP Says,” DailySabah, August 5, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/05/failed-coup-attempt-in-turkey-was-like-911-mp-says>.

¹¹⁷³ Ali Ünal, “July 15 Coup Attempt Was No Different than 9/11, Turkish Diplomat Says,” DailySabah, July 21, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/21/july-15-coup-attempt-was-no-different-than-911-turkish-diplomat-says>.

¹¹⁷⁴ Melih Altınok, “Turkish Public Wants Gülen from US.”

¹¹⁷⁵ “U.S. Must Show Turkey Empathy over Gülen’s Extradition: Justice Minister,” DailySabah, October 9, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on->

compare the failed coup to the 2001 terrorist attack in the US. Moreover, Daily Sabah's terrorist umbrella term fits well in Erdoğan's "all terrorist" rhetoric, such as when he was quoted saying, "Can there be good terrorists and bad terrorists? All of them are terrorists and all of them are bad,"¹¹⁷⁶ and when he "urged world leaders for a globally united stance against all terror groups without classifying them as "good terrorists or bad terrorists."¹¹⁷⁷

2. Turkey as a country, its government, and President Erdoğan

The discourse on Turkey as a state can be divided into several interrelated categories, including President Erdoğan personally, the government, and the Turkish people. Upon closer look, these categories, as they appear in Daily Sabah coverage, can be easily merged into one, as there is no government juxtaposed to President Erdoğan, and seemingly no "people" juxtaposed to President Erdoğan or the government (except for dozens of thousands of Gülen sympathizers, who are all labeled "terrorists"). The combined discourse on the president, the government (often

terror/2016/10/10/us-must-show-turkey-empathy-over-gulens-extradition-justice-minister.

¹¹⁷⁶ "Daesh Terror Could Be Finished off by Combined Turkey-US Efforts, President Erdoğan Says," DailySabah, September 23, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/24/daesh-terror-could-be-finished-off-by-combined-turkey-us-efforts-president-erdogan-says>.

¹¹⁷⁷ "No Concrete Steps Taken towards Syria Safe Zone, President Erdoğan Says, Urges United Stance against Terror," DailySabah, September 5, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2016/09/05/no-concrete-steps-taken-towards-syria-safe-zone-president-erdogan-says-urges-united-stance-against-terror>.

including the “opposition” parties), and the “people” – the “nation” – represent the good, which is opposed to the evil – the terrorists – and are labeled “democracy.”

The phrase “democratically elected government” in reference to the Erdoğan administration, can be found across the coverage some 74 times, mostly in the context of its being a victim to the “Gülenist” coup plot. In fact, Turkey as a whole is a victim, which among other things, was (and in some cases, “felt”) “betrayed” by Gülen and FETÖ,¹¹⁷⁸ as well as the US.¹¹⁷⁹ Erdoğan also “warned citizens... to stay vigilant constantly as ‘betrayal can come from anywhere and anyone.’”¹¹⁸⁰

Erdoğan himself is portrayed as a strong leader who is not afraid to criticize anyone who is not included in the “democracy” category. For example, Erdoğan (and in some cases his representatives) multiple times “slammed” or “lashed out” at Gülen

¹¹⁷⁸ “At Least 1,563 pro-Coup Military Personnel Detained across Turkey.”

¹¹⁷⁹ “Justice Minister: Coup Plotter Gülen Searching for New Safe Haven,” DailySabah, October 4, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/10/05/justice-minister-coup-plotter-gulen-searching-for-new-safe-haven-1475613304>; “Survey Finds 88 Pct for Death Penalty for FETÖ Putschists,” DailySabah, August 3, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/03/survey-finds-88-pct-for-death-penalty-for-feto-putschists>.

¹¹⁸⁰ “US Has to Choose Either Gülenist Terror-Cult or Turkey, Says President Erdoğan,” DailySabah, August 11, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/11/us-has-to-choose-either-gulenist-terror-cult-or-turkey-says-president-erdogan>.

and the movement,¹¹⁸¹ the West,¹¹⁸² the European Union,¹¹⁸³ “Turkey’s so-called allies,”¹¹⁸⁴ foreign ministers¹¹⁸⁵ and “other world leaders,”¹¹⁸⁶ the US,¹¹⁸⁷ and even Amnesty International.¹¹⁸⁸

¹¹⁸¹ “At Least 1,563 pro-Coup Military Personnel Detained across Turkey”; “Gülenist Terror-Cult, Daesh Exploit Religion, Must Be Avoided, President Erdoğan Says,” DailySabah, August 31, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/31/gulenist-terror-cult-daesh-exploit-religion-must-be-avoided-president-erdogan-says>.

¹¹⁸² “Erdoğan Slams the West over Indifference towards Casualties Caused by Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, July 29, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/29/erdogan-slams-the-west-over-indifference-towards-casualties-caused-by-coup-attempt>; “No Letup in Counterterror Fight as PKK Escalates Terror Attacks,” DailySabah, August 19, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/19/no-letup-in-counterterror-fight-as-pkk-escalates-terror-attacks>.

¹¹⁸³ “Erdoğan Slams the West over Indifference towards Casualties Caused by Coup Attempt”; “Sweden Promises to Shelter Coup Plotters, Calls Gülen ‘Opposition Leader,’” DailySabah, August 3, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/04/sweden-promises-to-shelter-coup-plotters-calls-gulen-opposition-leader>.

¹¹⁸⁴ “Erdoğan Slams the West over Indifference towards Casualties Caused by Coup Attempt”; “Sweden Promises to Shelter Coup Plotters, Calls Gülen ‘Opposition Leader.’”

¹¹⁸⁵ Yunus Paksoy, “Extension of State of Emergency to Benefit People, President Erdoğan Says,” DailySabah, September 29, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/29/extension-of-state-of-emergency-to-benefit-people-president-erdogan-says>.

¹¹⁸⁶ “We Cannot Lose More Time for a Political Solution in Syria, Says Erdoğan at UN Assembly,” DailySabah, September 20, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/20/we-cannot-lose-more-time-for-a-political-solution-in-syria-says-erdogan-at-un-assembly>.

¹¹⁸⁷ “How Is US a Partner If It Continues to Harbor Gülen?”; Mahmut Övür, “Public Suspicious of US Due to Weak Stance on Gülenist Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, July 19, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/20/public-suspicious-of->

The international community can be divided into those in “solidarity with the Turkish government and the Turkish people during their democratic resistance”¹¹⁸⁹ who explicitly condemned the coup attempt, and those who did not. The first group includes such countries Somalia,¹¹⁹⁰ Britain,¹¹⁹¹ Greece,¹¹⁹² Russia,¹¹⁹³ Saudi

us-due-to-weak-stance-on-gulenist-coup-attempt; Yunus Paksoy, “Turkey Furious at US Officials Who Regret Losing Putschist Allies,” DailySabah, July 30, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/30/turkey-furious-at-us-officials-who-regret-losing-putschist-allies>.

¹¹⁸⁸ Elif Petek Samatyali, “Turkey to Protect Its Democratic Values, Not Because the West Enforces Them, President Says,” DailySabah, August 16, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/16/turkey-to-protect-its-democratic-values-not-because-the-west-enforces-them-president-says>.

¹¹⁸⁹ “Somalia Suspends Gülen-Linked School after Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey,” DailySabah, accessed June 1, 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/16/somalia-suspends-gulen-linked-school-after-failed-coup-attempt-in-turkey>.

¹¹⁹⁰ “Somalia Suspends Gülen-Linked School after Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey.”

¹¹⁹¹ “May Calls Erdoğan, Praises People’s Bravery in Preventing Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, July 19, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/20/may-calls-erdogan-praises-peoples-bravery-in-preventing-coup-attempt>.

¹¹⁹² “Coup Plotters Not Welcome in Greece, Tsipras Tells Erdoğan,” DailySabah, September 23, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/23/coup-plotters-not-welcome-in-greece-tsipras-tells-erdogan>.

¹¹⁹³ “Hotline between Turkish, Russian Militaries Become More Active,” DailySabah, September 16, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2016/09/17/hotline-between-turkish-russian-militaries-become-more-active>.

Arabia,¹¹⁹⁴ and Hungary.¹¹⁹⁵ However, even the expression of support is not enough if it is not “sincere”: according to Erdoğan, it is not “ethical for countries to call Turkey to congratulate it for thwarting the coup attempt, but not sincerely support it when Turkey tries to fight those who attempted to bring down the democratically elected government,”¹¹⁹⁶ which may refer, in particular, to Britain. The second group includes the US,¹¹⁹⁷ Germany,¹¹⁹⁸ and the EU in general.

The Turkish public (the “nation” or, more specifically, “brave and honorable nation”¹¹⁹⁹) is portrayed as the main reason the coup failed: “Turkey survived the coup attempt through its desire for democracy and public resistance to the coup

¹¹⁹⁴ Merve AydoğanAğlarıcı, “Saudi Arabia in Close Cooperation with Turkey against Terrorism as Saudi FM Affirms No Passage for Gülenists,” *DailySabah*, September 9, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/10/saudi-arabia-in-close-cooperation-with-turkey-against-terrorism-as-saudi-fm-affirms-no-passage-for-gulenists>.

¹¹⁹⁵ Merve AydoğanAğlarıcı, “Turkey Ready to Provide Support of All Kinds for the Jarablus Operation, FM Çavuşoğlu Says,” *DailySabah*, August 23, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/syrian-crisis/2016/08/23/turkey-ready-to-provide-support-of-all-kinds-for-the-jarablus-operation-fm-cavusoglu-says>.

¹¹⁹⁶ “President Erdoğan,” August 1, 2016.

¹¹⁹⁷ Mahmut Övür, “Public Suspicious of US Due to Weak Stance on Gülenist Coup Attempt.”

¹¹⁹⁸ “July 15 Coup Attempt Defeated by Turkish Solidarity, Unity: President Erdoğan,” *DailySabah*, August 7, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/07/july-15-coup-attempt-defeated-by-turkish-solidarity-unity-president-erdogan>.

¹¹⁹⁹ İlnur Çevik, “Didn’t We Suffer a Coup Attempt in Turkey?,” *DailySabah*, July 26, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/ilnur-cevik/2016/07/27/didnt-we-suffer-a-coup-attempt-in-turkey>.

makers;”¹²⁰⁰ “millions of Turkish citizens in favor of democracy;”¹²⁰¹ “many civilians standing up against tanks to defend democracy;”¹²⁰² “thanks to the people’s democratic reflexes;”¹²⁰³ “Turkish people gave a democracy lesson to the world with their bravery, faith, unity and solidarity while fighting against those traitors.”¹²⁰⁴ Daily Sabah cited Erdoğan, who said during his UN General Assembly speech: “If it had not been for my nation, I wouldn’t have been here;”¹²⁰⁵ as well as prime minister Yildirim, who said that “no terrorist organization can defeat the nation and that Turkey will never kneel down before them.”¹²⁰⁶

Moreover, the civilians killed during the coup attempt (and some police and military officers) are proclaimed “martyrs.” Forty-one articles mentioned “martyr(s)”

¹²⁰⁰ Cemil Ertem, “The Failed Coup’s inside Story,” DailySabah, July 20, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/cemil-ertem/2016/07/20/the-failed-coups-inside-story>.

¹²⁰¹ “113 Officials from the Judiciary Arrested for Having Links to Gülenist Coup in Turkey,” DailySabah, July 20, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/investigations/2016/07/20/113-officials-from-the-judiciary-arrested-for-having-links-to-gulenist-coup-in-turkey>.

¹²⁰² Yahya Bostan, “Gülenist Terror Organization and the US.”

¹²⁰³ Burhanettin Duran, “July 15 Marks the Birth of a Brand New Period,” DailySabah, July 21, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/duran-burhanettin/2016/07/21/july-15-marks-the-birth-of-a-brand-new-period>.

¹²⁰⁴ “AK Party Youth Gather to Denounce Coup Attempt, Pledge to Unify Turkey,” DailySabah, July 28, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/28/ak-party-youth-gather-to-denounce-coup-attempt-pledge-to-unify-turkey>.

¹²⁰⁵ Serdar Karagöz, “Most Effective Counter-Daesh Fight Waged by Turkey, Erdoğan Says.”

¹²⁰⁶ “No Letup in Counterterror Fight as PKK Escalates Terror Attacks.”

or that people “martyred” during the coup. Most commonly the term is used to announce the number of victims; however, other notable examples are the “Democracy and Martyrs Rally” that was held in August following the coup attempt,¹²⁰⁷ Yildirim giving “thanks to our martyrs lying honorably under the ground, today we are living on this land united as one, and with our honor, independence and solidarity intact,”¹²⁰⁸ and Erdoğan claiming that “history will remember the names of our martyrs... will write their names down in golden letters.”¹²⁰⁹

The unity, or unification, discourse is critical for explaining the state of emergency, purges, and increased pressure of the government on the opposition under the guise of a compromise¹²¹⁰ and a “path of solidarity.”¹²¹¹ Daily Sabah reiterates the message that the “opposition parties have united against the coup attempt, condemning it in the harshest terms”¹²¹² and expressed support of the Turkish

¹²⁰⁷ “Democracy Rallies to Continue in Eastern Provinces with MHP, CHP in Attendance,” DailySabah, August 12, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/13/democracy-rallies-to-continue-in-eastern-provinces-with-mhp-chp-in-attendance>.

¹²⁰⁸ “Gülen Will Come to Turkey and Pay for What He Did, Says Yıldırım at Istanbul Democracy Rally,” DailySabah, August 7, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/07/gulen-will-come-to-turkey-and-pay-for-what-he-did-says-yildirim-at-istanbul-democracy-rally>.

¹²⁰⁹ “July 15 Coup Attempt Defeated by Turkish Solidarity, Unity.”

¹²¹⁰ “July 15 Coup Attempt Opened ‘new Door of Compromise’ for Turkish Politics,” DailySabah, August 7, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/07/july-15-coup-attempt-opened-new-door-of-compromise-for-turkish-politics>.

¹²¹¹ “July 15 Coup Attempt Defeated by Turkish Solidarity, Unity.”

¹²¹² “113 Officials from the Judiciary Arrested for Having Links to Gülenist Coup in Turkey”; “Academics Begin Petition to Express Support for Turkish Democracy after

democracy, the rule of law, and, by extension, – whatever response president Erdoğan would offer to the terrorists. The solidarity entailed joint democracy rallies,¹²¹³ having joint meetings with the president¹²¹⁴ and the prime minister,¹²¹⁵ collective push for the

Failed Coup,” DailySabah, July 22, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/22/academics-begin-petition-to-express-support-for-turkish-democracy-after-failed-coup>; “At Least 49,000 Government Workers Dismissed from Duty over Alleged Links with Gülenists,” DailySabah, July 19, 2016, 49, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/19/at-least-49000-government-workers-dismissed-from-duty-over-alleged-links-with-gulenists>; “Coups Plotters Carried out Sonic Boom Tests Months before the Coup Attempt: Officials,” DailySabah, July 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/24/coup-plotters-carried-out-sonic-boom-tests-months-before-the-coup-attempt-officials>; “Dutch Court: School Linked to FETÖ Not ‘terrorist’,” DailySabah, September 16, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/eu-affairs/2016/09/17/dutch-court-school-linked-to-feto-not-terrorist>; “Gülenists Paid UK MP More than \$150,000 to Write Report on Turkey,” DailySabah, August 1, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/01/gulenists-paid-uk-mp-more-than-150000-to-write-report-on-turkey>; “Istanbul Intelligence Unit Chief Removed from Duty Following Failed Coup,” DailySabah, July 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/24/istanbul-intelligence-unit-chief-removed-from-duty-following-failed-coup>.

¹²¹³ “AK Party to Join Democracy Rally Organized by Opposition CHP in Taksim Square in Historic First,” DailySabah, July 22, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/21/ak-party-to-join-democracy-rally-organized-by-opposition-chp-in-taksim-square-in-historic-first>.

¹²¹⁴ “Erdoğan to Meet Leaders of Three Main Parties in Parliament after Failed Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, July 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/24/erdogan-to-meet-leaders-of-three-main-parties-in-parliament-after-failed-coup-attempt>.

¹²¹⁵ Serdar Karagöz, “PM: Assad Has No Future in Syria, Presence in Transition ‘Minor Detail,’” DailySabah, August 21, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/21/pm-assad-has-no-future-in-syria-presence-in-transition-minor-detail>.

Gülen’s extradition,¹²¹⁶ collective criticism of the West,¹²¹⁷ being “on same page” with the AKP about the need of a new constitution,¹²¹⁸ demanding purges,¹²¹⁹ and overall pledging “full support to the government.”¹²²⁰ The opposition parties reinforce the same message as the AKP, which is that Gülenists are enemies of not just the president but the society as a whole: "There are secret Gülenists, or enemies of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, within the state that seek to victimize people en masse. They successfully transformed the fight against the coup into a fight against society.”¹²²¹

¹²¹⁶ “Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey Was like 9/11, MP Says.”

¹²¹⁷ “German Gov’t Claims Ankara Supports Extremist Groups,” DailySabah, August 16, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/17/german-govt-claims-ankara-supports-extremist-groups>.

¹²¹⁸ Ali Ünal, “Gov’t, CHP, MHP on Same Page for Constitutional Change to Tackle Gülenist Infiltration,” DailySabah, July 26, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/27/govt-chp-mhp-on-same-page-for-constitutional-change-to-tackle-gulenist-infiltration>.

¹²¹⁹ Elif Petek Samatyali, “MHP Chairman Bahçeli: FETÖ, PKK Pose the Same Threat,” DailySabah, August 1, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/01/mhp-chairman-bahceli-feto-pkk-pose-the-same-threat>.

¹²²⁰ “No Letup in Counterterror Fight as PKK Escalates Terror Attacks.”

¹²²¹ Yahya Bostan, “Öcalan Must Dissolve PKK,” DailySabah, September 26, 2016, https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/yahya_bostan/2016/09/26/ocalan-must-dissolve-pkk.

Such behavior from the opposition parties resulted in being “praised” by the government,¹²²² and in all opposition parties “passing the test.”¹²²³ Finally, the “solidarity,”¹²²⁴ and particularly rallying together, became a “historic first” for the country,¹²²⁵ and “for the first time in a long time, everyone united against a threat, from the opposition parties to media outlets.”¹²²⁶ Thus, the discourse on democracy is, in this case, used to silence alternative opinions or any criticism of the government. In fact, it becomes clear in the coverage that any criticism – foreign or domestic – of Erdoğan’s actions is to be seen as “trying to attack Turkey.”¹²²⁷

¹²²² “Gülen Will Come to Turkey and Pay for What He Did, Says Yıldırım at Istanbul Democracy Rally.”

¹²²³ Fatih Şemsettin Işık, “All Parties Stand United against Gülenist Threats to Democracy,” DailySabah, July 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/24/all-parties-stand-united-against-gulenist-threats-to-democracy-1469384518>.

¹²²⁴ The word “solidarity” appears in the Daily Sabah’s coverage some 42 times.

¹²²⁵ “July 15 Coup Attempt Opened ‘new Door of Compromise’ for Turkish Politics”; “Turkey Has Buried Coups in History by Uniting as One Nation, Says Parliament Speaker,” DailySabah, August 7, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/07/turkey-has-buried-coups-in-history-by-uniting-as-one-nation-says-parliament-speaker>; “AK Party to Join Democracy Rally Organized by Opposition CHP in Taksim Square in Historic First.”

¹²²⁶ Nagehan Alçı, “Reality Goes Far beyond Hollywood Movies.”

¹²²⁷ “Threats to Turkey after July 15 Gülenist Coup Attempt Not over, Erdoğan Spokesman Says,” DailySabah, July 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/24/threats-to-turkey-after-july-15-gulenist-coup-attempt-not-over-erdogan-spokesman-says>.

3. The US and its role in the coup attempt

The next major theme necessary to discuss is the discourse on the US. This discourse not only communicates the Turkish government's attitude towards Washington, but also helps develop and flesh out the ideas about all the topics mentioned above, including the views on democracy and terrorism, the Turkish nation and the government, and the role of Turkey in the world. After the coup attempt, the US-Turkish relations are described as "strained"¹²²⁸ and "going through difficult times."¹²²⁹ It is implied in the coverage that the US does not value Turkey as its ally.¹²³⁰ The criticism, in addition to coming from the government, is set to reflect public opinion, when, for example, "the people in Turkey are asking if the U.S. is an ally or a country that does not come to the help a NATO ally in its darkest hour."¹²³¹ The failure to send Gülen to Turkey "would mean that the U.S. is willing to sacrifice Turkey over a terrorist."¹²³²

¹²²⁸ Fatih Şemsettin Işık, "Analysts Expect Russian Policy Shift on PYD," *DailySabah*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/13/analysts-expect-russian-policy-shift-on-pyd>.

¹²²⁹ Ali Ünal, "Ankara to Urge US to Stop Supporting PYD, FETÖ," *DailySabah*, August 23, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/24/ankara-to-urge-us-to-stop-supporting-pyd-feto>.

¹²³⁰ Ali Ünal.

¹²³¹ Ragıp Soylu, "Instead of Extradition, US Can Deport Fethullah Gülen," *DailySabah*, July 21, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/ragip-soylu/2016/07/21/instead-of-extradition-us-can-deport-fethullah-gulen>.

¹²³² Elif Petek Samatyali, "Justice Minister: US Not Returning Gülen Means It Has Chosen FETÖ over Turkey," *DailySabah*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2016/08/12/justice-minister-us-not-returning-gulen-means-it-has-chosen-feto-over-turkey>.

According to Daily Sabah, the US is treating the Gülen issue inappropriately, as a political issue, “stalling, defending it as a legal issue instead,”¹²³³ is “making all sorts of excuses to not extradite terrorist Gülen,”¹²³⁴ and “is making things difficult.”¹²³⁵ By “turning a deaf ear to the charges against Gülen” and being “reluctant,” the US is said to have angered the Turkish people, who “stood up against Gülen’s coup attempt and defended democracy by lying in front of tanks.”¹²³⁶ The US is advised to finally take action, or it “will never be forgiven by the Turkish people.”¹²³⁷ Also, “the media and people in Turkey will not forget that the U.S. government is hiding behind the law and dragging its feet on this.”¹²³⁸

The US reaction to the Gülen problem and Turkey’s criticism is portrayed on the defensive. For example, Joe Biden is cited saying that “the U.S. has no, no, no, no interest whatsoever in protecting anyone who has done harm to an ally” and that the US needs to “meet the legal standard requirement under our law.”¹²³⁹ Biden “even

¹²³³ Ali Ünal, “Ankara to Urge US to Stop Supporting PYD, FETÖ.”

¹²³⁴ “Pawns of Imperialism Posed as Turkish Soldiers on July 15, Says MHP’s Bahçeli.”

¹²³⁵ “President Erdoğan: US Makes Extradition Issue Difficult,” DailySabah, August 21, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/22/president-erdogan-us-makes-extradition-issue-difficult>.

¹²³⁶ Yahya Bostan, “Gülenist Terror Organization and the US.”

¹²³⁷ Yahya Bostan.

¹²³⁸ Ragıp Soylu, “Instead of Extradition, US Can Deport Fethullah Gülen.”

¹²³⁹ Merve AydoğanAğlarcı, “Biden Insists US Had No Foreknowledge of Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, August 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/25/biden-insists-us-had-no-foreknowledge-of-coup-attempt>.

apologized to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for not having visited the country earlier,” and yet, the Turkish people would not “buy into Mr. Biden’s talking points.”¹²⁴⁰ Such diplomatic efforts are not exactly rated highly by Daily Sabah, as well as the arguments made by Biden or other US representatives. Biden’s visit is called “a glorified public relations stunt.”¹²⁴¹

Daily Sabah claims that the Turkish public “became convinced that the U.S. was behind the failed coup attempt,” which is “unsurprising”: “It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out why many Turks are angry at the U.S. government.”¹²⁴² More specifically, the US is said to have failed to notice the multiple victims of the coup attempt, and demonstrated “ostensible unwillingness” to extradite Gülen, which means it chose to “shelter a known terrorist.”¹²⁴³ Another article penned by a Turkish academic adds that “many people believe the United States is behind this coup attempt” because historically “the U.S. has always taken the plotters’ side,” and especially after Vladimir Putin “insinuated that the U.S. must be involved” in the attempt, “almost everyone in Turkey now has doubts about the U.S.”¹²⁴⁴ Furthermore, “polls of the Turkish public indicate a widespread belief that the United States administration played a role in the attempted coup,” and it is emphasized that it is not

¹²⁴⁰ Yahya Bostan, “Biden Said Nothing about Fethullah Gülen.”

¹²⁴¹ Yahya Bostan.

¹²⁴² Yahya Bostan.

¹²⁴³ Yahya Bostan.

¹²⁴⁴ Beril Dedeoğlu, “Coup Attempt and Its Foreign Connections,” Daily Sabah, July 26, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/beril-dedeoglu/2016/07/27/coup-attempt-and-its-foreign-connections>.

the government, in the first place, but rather the people, who demand action from the US, including the extradition of Gülen.¹²⁴⁵ In accord with the other 9/11 references, Daily Sabah discusses a “motorcade held banners” during Biden’s visit that read “What if bin Laden was in Turkey after 9/11, and we didn’t hand him over.”¹²⁴⁶

The US is basically portrayed as a supporter of terrorism. (Erdoğan is quoted literally saying that “unfortunately, the West supports terror and sides with coup plotters”¹²⁴⁷). An article entitled “American men fighting for terrorist group in Syria received as heroes in the US” discusses how three members of the US military were killed fighting along with the PYD (the Democratic Union Party) and YPG (the People’s Protection Units) and their bodies were received with military honors upon arrival in the US.¹²⁴⁸ The American taxpayers, in turn, are said to be “funding Gülenist terror-cult FETÖ” (though mostly unknowingly).¹²⁴⁹ Overall, speaking about

¹²⁴⁵ “Demonstrators Demand Biden Accelerate Extradition of Gülen,” DailySabah, August 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/24/demonstrators-demand-biden-accelerate-extradition-of-gulen>; Yunus Paksoy, “Erdoğan to US: You Are Either with Democracy or Terrorist Gülen,” DailySabah, August 11, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/12/erdogan-to-us-you-are-either-with-democracy-or-terrorist-gulen>.

¹²⁴⁶ “Demonstrators Demand Biden Accelerate Extradition of Gülen.”

¹²⁴⁷ “How Is US a Partner If It Continues to Harbor Gülen?”

¹²⁴⁸ Mehmet Çelik, “American Men Fighting for Terrorist Group in Syria Received as Heroes in US,” DailySabah, September 16, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/09/17/american-men-fighting-for-terrorist-group-in-syria-received-as-heroes-in-us>.

¹²⁴⁹ Mustafa Kırıkçıoğlu, “Are American Taxpayers Funding Gülenist Terror-Cult FETÖ?,” DailySabah, August 19, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2016/08/20/are-american-taxpayers-funding-gulenist-terror-cult-feto>.

the US people, Erdoğan pointed out that “we need to convince the American public.”¹²⁵⁰ Perhaps, part of the persuasion strategy is Daily Sabah’s coverage of American charter schools linked to the Gülen movement, and FBI investigations into some of them.¹²⁵¹ Importantly, persuasion is an important part of Daily Sabah’s coverage style, as its journalists or commentators literally say things like “Do not consider what the think tanks in the U.S. say” as part of their analysis.¹²⁵² Another article says that Washington think tanks’ analyses are “ignorant and arrogant.”¹²⁵³

The US (and sometimes the West in general) is criticized for the lack of support for the values it stands for – or, in other words, for hypocrisy (the term “hypocrisy” in relation to the US is, however, mentioned only once – in a subtitle “US Hypocrisy” in an article on Gülen’s extradition problem,¹²⁵⁴ not counting the Obama administration’s “two-faced strategy against Turkey”¹²⁵⁵). For example, as one author explains that “Allahu akbar” only means “God is great,” she criticizes “some international media accounts on Twitter and Facebook,” which presented the crowd shouting the phrase in a negative light. “Will you bomb us just because we say ‘Allahu

¹²⁵⁰ “Daesh Terror Could Be Finished off by Combined Turkey-US Efforts, President Erdoğan Says.”

¹²⁵¹ About a dozen articles cover the subject.

¹²⁵² Burhanettin Duran, “FETÖ Is Not an Ordinary Terrorist Organization.”

¹²⁵³ Ragıp Soylu, “Instead of Extradition, US Can Deport Fethullah Gülen.”

¹²⁵⁴ “Turkey Expects US to Cooperate on Gülen’s Extradition, Finds Lack of Support ‘Heartbreaking.’”

¹²⁵⁵ Yunus Paksoy, “Erdoğan to US.”

akbar,” wrote the author, “What happened to your love for the freedom of speech?”¹²⁵⁶

Similarly, the US is said to want Gülen as Turkey’s president instead of Erdoğan, because the latter “cannot be controlled.”¹²⁵⁷ The US does not want to see democracy in Turkey, and is intimidated by Turkey’s “unstoppable growth.”¹²⁵⁸ Erdoğan also said that the US “has lost its political will.”¹²⁵⁹ At the same time, the US “owes Turkey a debt” for “the work that has been done to try to expose” Gülen.¹²⁶⁰ The issue of morality is raised in an interview with a Turkish investigative journalist who claims that “the west and the U.S. think they are always right so long as they are the strong one.”¹²⁶¹ Daily Sabah also reported that, according to the Turkish Justice Minister, the US has to extradite Gülen in order to “prove its faith in democracy.”¹²⁶²

¹²⁵⁶ Merve Şebnem Oruç, “‘Allahu Akbar’ Just Means God Is the Greatest,” DailySabah, July 21, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/merve-sebnem-oruc/2016/07/21/allahu-akbar-just-means-god-is-the-greatest>.

¹²⁵⁷ Yunus Paksoy, “CO-Founder of Gülen Movement.”

¹²⁵⁸ Yunus Paksoy.

¹²⁵⁹ “Daesh Terror Could Be Finished off by Combined Turkey-US Efforts, President Erdoğan Says.”

¹²⁶⁰ “Gülen Will Be Extradited Ultimately, Says Lawyer Probing Terror-Cult Leader.”

¹²⁶¹ Yunus Paksoy, “Journalist Nedim Şener Framed by FETÖ: Used by CIA as Intelligence Agency, FETÖ Surely behind Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, August 5, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/06/journalist-nedim-sener-framed-by-feto-used-by-cia-as-intelligence-agency-feto-surely-behind-coup-attempt>.

¹²⁶² “Minister: Turkey Has Intelligence Gülen Searching for Countries to Flee,” DailySabah, July 28, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/29/minister-turkey-has-intelligence-gulen-searching-for-countries-to-flee>.

Thus, it is implied that the US needs to prove to Turkey that it is a true democracy (and “meet the requirements of a democratic state governed by the rule of law,”¹²⁶³ as well as “demonstrate their dedication to democratic values”¹²⁶⁴) by extraditing Gülen. Another illustration of this is the claim that “if the U.S. is truly condemning this coup attempt, they should extradite that deranged terrorist [Gülen] to Turkey.”¹²⁶⁵ Finally, as Daily Sabah quotes a Princeton historian, “it is surely a great irony - or tragedy - that the United States ... may actually have helped to subvert and to weaken the most important democracy in the Middle East.”¹²⁶⁶

A part of the US-Gülen discourse is the alleged cooperation (“in various ways”¹²⁶⁷) between the US-based imam and the CIA. Daily Sabah quoted a “co-founder” of the Gülen movement, Nurettin Veren, who claimed Gülen “collaborates with the CIA and serves Turkish intelligence to the U.S.”¹²⁶⁸ The CIA, according to Veren, seems to have similar techniques to those of Gülen, as it “infiltrated... former

¹²⁶³ “Turkey Demands Gülen’s Extradition from US, Doubts Value of Ally That Sides with Terror,” DailySabah, August 2, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/02/turkey-demands-gulens-extradition-from-us-doubts-value-of-ally-that-sides-with-terror>.

¹²⁶⁴ Ali Ünal, “Turkey’s International Disposition Will Not Shift after July 15 Coup Attempt.”

¹²⁶⁵ “Nationalist Leader Bahçeli: FETÖ as Heinous as PKK,” DailySabah, August 2, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/03/nationalist-leader-bahceli-feto-as-heinous-as-pkk>.

¹²⁶⁶ “Princeton Historian Highlights Threat Posed by FETÖ to Turkey.”

¹²⁶⁷ Yunus Paksoy, “Erdoğan to US.”

¹²⁶⁸ Yunus Paksoy, “CO-Founder of Gülen Movement.”

Soviet countries with English teachers.”¹²⁶⁹ A former Chief of General Staff İlker Başbuğ is also quoted claiming that the CIA and FETÖ organized the coup attempt. The reasoning is presented in the form of rhetorical questions: “Where does [FETÖ leader Fethullah] Gülen live? In the U.S. Who provides him opportunities? The CIA. Did this intelligence agency give him a residence permit for nothing? Do you think that the intelligence will not use him?”¹²⁷⁰ According to another opinion, “FETÖ is an intelligence service under the control of the CIA,”¹²⁷¹ which effectively implies the US involvement in the failed coup.

The binary of the “good” (“democracy” embodied by Erdoğan) and the evil (terrorism, embodied by everyone who does not support Erdoğan) is reinforced in the US discourse, when, for example, Erdoğan is quoted demanding the US to make a choice: “either Turkey or FETÖ” or “either democracy or terrorist Gülen.”¹²⁷² In fact, in addition to many articles covering the Turkish government’s demands, there are two that specifically discuss the “ultimatum” that the president gave to the US.¹²⁷³ Clearly, the “ultimatum” did not work, at least in the sense that Gülen has not been extradited

¹²⁶⁹ Yunus Paksoy.

¹²⁷⁰ “Former TSK Chief: CIA, FETÖ behind Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, August 2, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/03/former-tsk-chief-cia-feto-behind-coup-attempt>.

¹²⁷¹ Yunus Paksoy, “Journalist Nedim Şener Framed by FETÖ.”

¹²⁷² Yunus Paksoy, “Erdoğan to US.”

¹²⁷³ “US Has to Choose Either Gülenist Terror-Cult or Turkey, Says President Erdoğan”; Mustafa Kırıkçıoğlu, “Opposition Parties: US Must Extradite Gülen to Turkey,” DailySabah, August 11, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/12/opposition-parties-us-must-extradite-gulen-to-turkey>.

from the US. According to US officials, the US government, which does not support terrorists, promised to support Turkey's investigation. The decision on whether to extradite Gülen, however, was to be taken by the court after the Department of Justice formally evaluated the documents provided by Turkey and made other steps related to that "legal" and "technical" process. In the end, according to the US officials, Turkey never provided sufficient evidence and information to move the extradition case further.¹²⁷⁴

4. The International (mainly Western) media

It is worth separately discussing the references to the international, and mainly the Western media, in the Daily Sabah's coverage of Turkey's coup attempt. Those references, mostly critical, are present throughout the publications. The Western media's coverage and approach are characterized as "biased,"¹²⁷⁵ and the social media

¹²⁷⁴ "Daily Press Briefing by the Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 7/19/2016," [whitehouse.gov](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/19/daily-press-briefing-press-secretary-josh-earnest-7192016), July 19, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/19/daily-press-briefing-press-secretary-josh-earnest-7192016>; Margaret Coker, "Turkish Premier Demands U.S. Help With Gulen," *Wall Street Journal*, July 26, 2016, sec. World, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/turkish-premier-demands-u-s-help-with-gulen-1469555265>; Karen DeYoung, "Turkish Evidence for Gulen Extradition Pre-Dates Coup Attempt," *Washington Post*, August 19, 2016, sec. National Security, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/turkish-evidence-for-gulen-extradition-pre-dates-coup-attempt/2016/08/19/390cb0ec-6656-11e6-be4e-23fc4d4d12b4_story.html.

¹²⁷⁵ "AK Party Youth Gather to Denounce Coup Attempt, Pledge to Unify Turkey"; "BBC Email Exposes Biased Stance against Democratically Elected Gov't after Failed Gülenist Coup," *DailySabah*, July 24, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/24/bbc-email-exposes-biased-stance-against-democratically-elected-govt-after-failed-gulenist-coup>.

“quite bizarre and suspicious.”¹²⁷⁶ The media are said to reveal the real attitude of the representatives of the Western states: their wait-and-see attitude without condemning the coup attempt immediately¹²⁷⁷ and their disappointment about the coup’s failure.¹²⁷⁸ Daily Sabah condemned any Western criticism of Erdoğan, and expressed its discontent about the West ignoring “the unity Turkish citizens put forward against the coup soldiers, in order to protect their democratic choices and people’s will.”¹²⁷⁹

The Western media are said to contain “all kinds of distortions, gossip and fabrications,” attempted to “justify” the coup,¹²⁸⁰ and have failed to “[acknowledge] the heavy price the Turkish people paid to defend their democracy.”¹²⁸¹ Such behavior, including “pretending as if the nightmare we lived through on the night of July 15 did not happen” and “talking about the rights of the coup plotters and Gülen,” is “ridiculous,” “unacceptable,” and “not only an unfriendly act against Turkey and the

¹²⁷⁶ Merve Şebnem Oruç, “‘Allahu Akbar’ Just Means God Is the Greatest.”

¹²⁷⁷ “AK Party Youth Gather to Denounce Coup Attempt, Pledge to Unify Turkey”; Ali Ünal, “July 15 Coup Attempt Was No Different than 9/11, Turkish Diplomat Says”; Ali Ünal, “Retired Lt. Gen. Pekin: Group in Obama Administration Supported Gülenist Coup Attempt,” DailySabah, August 1, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/01/retired-lt-gen-pekin-group-in-obama-administration-supported-gulenist-coup-attempt>.

¹²⁷⁸ Merve Şebnem Oruç, “‘Allahu Akbar’ Just Means God Is the Greatest.”

¹²⁷⁹ “BBC Email Exposes Biased Stance against Democratically Elected Gov’t after Failed Gülenist Coup.”

¹²⁸⁰ Ali Ünal, “‘Turkey’s International Disposition Will Not Shift after July 15 Coup Attempt.’”

¹²⁸¹ İlnur Çevik, “Didn’t We Suffer a Coup Attempt in Turkey?”

Turkish people but an indicator that they support a part of this treachery.”¹²⁸² Instead, according to the journalist İlnur Çevik, should have “applauded” the Turkish people and been “proud to be associated” with the nation.¹²⁸³ According to him, and other authors, it is unacceptable for anyone to suggest that the Turkish government might have been involved in the coup.¹²⁸⁴ Accordingly, “many Turks resent” it if the Western media make such suggestions.¹²⁸⁵

Similarly, the coverage of the coup-related arrests and purges is heavily criticized by Daily Sabah. These arrests and purges, “carried out within the legal boundaries by the authorized organs,” are referred to as cleansing, and even “purification,” and Western criticisms are called “manipulative and partial” while being “part of an ideological agenda.”¹²⁸⁶ Finally, Daily Sabah sums up that “Western media approaches Gülenist coup attempt in Islamophobic, orientalist manner, research reveals.”¹²⁸⁷ The mentioned research was conducted by two professors at a Turkish

¹²⁸² İlnur Çevik.

¹²⁸³ İlnur Çevik.

¹²⁸⁴ İlnur Çevik; “Foreign Ministry Removes 88 Gülenists, More to Follow,” DailySabah, July 29, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/29/foreign-ministry-removes-88-gulenists-more-to-follow>.

¹²⁸⁵ “Former TSK Chief.”

¹²⁸⁶ Fahrettin Altun, “Turkey’s Struggle with DAESH: New Opportunities,” DailySabah, August 25, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/fahrettin-altun/2016/08/26/turkeys-struggle-with-daesh-new-opportunities>.

¹²⁸⁷ Merve AydoğanAğlarıcı, “Western Media Approaches Gülenist Coup Attempt in Islamophobic, Orientalist Manner, Research Reveals,” DailySabah, August 5, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/05/western-media-approaches-gulenist-coup-attempt-in-islamophobic-orientalist-manner-research-reveals>.

university who looked at “a number of media outlets; primarily the BBC and CNN” and “provided 38 examples of controversial reports made within a two-week period” [after the coup attempt].¹²⁸⁸ The study found that “the stance taken by Western media outlets has been highly problematic, focused primarily on criticizing the democratically elected government of Turkey” which became “a shocking defamation campaign of Turkey and its citizens for standing against the attempted coup” while making “serious aims to legitimize the terrorist leader and depict the citizens who stood up against the coup-attempt as ‘Islamists,’ ‘Erdoğan followers,’ or ‘powers loyal to and affiliated with Erdoğan.’”¹²⁸⁹ Interestingly, many criticisms of the Western behavior in Daily Sabah are accompanied by some variation of the claim that the “Turkish people will never forget this,”¹²⁹⁰ or *should not* forget about one or the other action or inaction by the Western media, government, or nations.¹²⁹¹

5.5 BBC Coverage Discussion

I collected the data for this part of the chapter by searching the BBC.COM website using the Google search engine. I used the keywords “Turkey + coup” and looked at the same period for the Daily Sabah: between July 15 and October 15, 2016.

¹²⁸⁸ Merve AydoğanAğlarıcı.

¹²⁸⁹ Merve AydoğanAğlarıcı.

¹²⁹⁰ “AK Party Youth Gather to Denounce Coup Attempt, Pledge to Unify Turkey”; İlnur Çevik, “Didn’t We Suffer a Coup Attempt in Turkey?”

¹²⁹¹ Fatih Şemsettin Işık, “Analysts Expect Russian Policy Shift on PYD”; Ragıp Soyulu, “Instead of Extradition, US Can Deport Fethullah Gülen.”

Google offered close to 140 results, a few of which I filtered out manually as they did not, in fact, discuss the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. I also did not use the articles that contained videos and/or pictures only (such as those from the BBC’s “Week in Pictures” section) for the analysis. Consequently, I used 120 articles for this analysis, and I coded them with the help of the NVivo 12 Plus software. Over half of these articles were published during the first two weeks after the coup attempt. The word frequency query demonstrated that, other “Turkey,” “Turkish,” and “coup,” the most frequently used words are “Erdoğan” (480 count), “president” (365 count), “people” (328 count), and “Gülen” (325 count). Refer to the “word cloud” below for a visual of the results.

Figure 8 Case III: BBC Data “Word Cloud”



The major themes from the coverage are the following:

1. Who organized the coup and why
2. The Turkish government and President Erdoğan
3. Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen Movement
4. The US and the West, and the rest

See the theme distribution in the table below.

Table 6 BBC (Case III): Theme Distribution Across Articles

Theme	Number of articles	Number of References
1. <u>Who organized the coup and why</u>	8	18
2. <u>The Turkish government and President Erdoğan</u>	80	211
3. <u>Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen Movement</u>	25	54
4. <u>The US and the West, and the rest</u>	41	61

The following is the discussion of the BBC coverage of the Turkey 2016 coup attempt.

1. Who organized the coup and why

BBC demonstrates overall dry coverage of the coup events, reporting the information that is available at the time, referring to the sources (e.g. “according to the

Turkish government”), and avoiding making absolute statements. This means that, for example, the word “alleged” is used 33 times through the 120 articles (while the same word is used 42 times throughout the 387 Daily Sabah articles). There is a more strong indication when certain facts are unconfirmed, such as in the sentence “Forces loyal to Turkey’s government **appear**¹²⁹² to have quashed the coup.”¹²⁹³

To the question of who organized the coup, unlike Daly Sabah, BBC does not provide an answer: it is “unclear.”¹²⁹⁴ One of the articles lists “several theories” that aim to explain: that it was a “false flag” event organized by Erdoğan to gain more power (BBC somewhat dismisses this theory), that Kemalists in the army “tricked the Gülenists into staging a coup” to provoke the cleansing, that the plotters had to proceed with the coup earlier than planned because they learned about the government’s plans to arrest Gülen sympathizers in the army (this theory is also

¹²⁹² Emphasis added.

¹²⁹³ “Briton ‘Woken by Explosion in Marmaris,’” *BBC News*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-36814636/a-british-tourist-said-he-was-woken-by-loud-explosion-in-the-turkish-resort-of-marmaris>.

¹²⁹⁴ “Turkey Purge after Failed Coup Attempt,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36813924>; “A Brief Guide to Turkey’s Coup,” *BBC News*, July 17, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36816045>; “Erdogan Denounces Turkish Coup Attempt,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36809083>.

discussed in another article, which also adds that “the sheer numbers of arrests... suggests that Mr Erdoğan did already have lists of targets”¹²⁹⁵).¹²⁹⁶

BBC acknowledges that Erdoğan blames Gülen for the coup, but expresses doubts: “He may be right, but there is a lot that does not add up” (e.g., violence is not a usual Gülen movement’s method, and the plotters’ statement read on TV sounded similar to the Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s famous speech given to the Turkish Youth – though it could be done to frame Kemalists).¹²⁹⁷ A part of the analysis is devoted to the reasons why the coup did not succeed (which angered Daily Sabah). At the basic level, the failure is attributed to the lack of support from the military, the politicians, and the public.¹²⁹⁸ More importantly, however, according to BBC, the perpetrators failed to “control the narrative and fundamentally misunderstood the significance of social media” in Turkey, which “has a vibrant social media community.”¹²⁹⁹ Erdoğan, as opposed to the coup plotters, understood the social media significance and successfully acted on it. In fact, while he “tried to shut down entire social media

¹²⁹⁵ “What Is Turkey’s Gulen Movement?,” *BBC News*, July 21, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36855846>.

¹²⁹⁶ Ezgi Basaran, “Who Was behind Attempted Turkey Coup?,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36815476>.

¹²⁹⁷ Basaran.

¹²⁹⁸ Thom Poole, “Why Mobiles Beat Tanks in Turkey’s Coup,” *BBC News*, July 18, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36822858>; “Turkey’s Coup Attempt”; Paul Kirby, “Why Did Turkish Coup Plot Fail?,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36814044>.

¹²⁹⁹ Poole, “Why Mobiles Beat Tanks in Turkey’s Coup.”

networks in the past,” during the coup attempt, “the Turkish government used social media to its advantage. There were no major restrictions on the Turkish internet.”¹³⁰⁰

2. The Turkish government and President Erdoğan

The Turkish government action following the coup dominates the BBC coverage. The word “crackdown” is used 48 times throughout the coverage (7 times in Daily Sabah’s coverage), and the word “purge(s/d)” 85 times (21 times in Daily Sabah’s coverage). The crackdowns and purges are characterized as widespread,¹³⁰¹ “far-reaching,”¹³⁰² “unprecedented,”¹³⁰³ “massive,”¹³⁰⁴ “huge,”¹³⁰⁵ “sweeping,”¹³⁰⁶

¹³⁰⁰ “This Week in Turkey: Live Streaming’s Political Moment?,” *BBC News*, July 23, 2016, sec. BBC Trending, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-36867331>.

¹³⁰¹ “‘Nearly 9,000 Troops Joined’ Turkey Coup,” *BBC News*, July 27, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36906724>.

¹³⁰² “Putin Mends Broken Turkey Relations,” *BBC News*, August 9, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37018562>.

¹³⁰³ Mark Lowen, “Pride and Fear in a Changed Turkey,” *BBC News*, August 15, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37079704>.

¹³⁰⁴ “Turkey Steps up Army Sackings over Coup,” *BBC News*, July 31, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36936232>.

¹³⁰⁵ “Turkey Checkpoint Car Bomb Kills 18,” *BBC News*, October 9, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37601196>; “Dozens Killed in Turkey-PKK Clashes,” *BBC News*, July 30, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36932941>.

¹³⁰⁶ “Turkey Criticises EU over Refugee Deal,” *BBC News*, July 26, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36892393>.

“the biggest... in Turkey’s modern history,”¹³⁰⁷ of “staggering” depth,¹³⁰⁸ and “of exceptional proportions”¹³⁰⁹ (quoting Amnesty International).

Accordingly, significant time is spent discussing those affected by the measures taken by the Turkish government, providing updated numbers and detailed characteristics: “thousands of soldiers - including high-ranking generals - were arrested, along with members of the judiciary. Since then, more than 50,000 state employees have also been rounded up, sacked or suspended, and 600 schools closed. Academics have been banned from foreign travel, and university heads have been forced to resign. The government has also revoked the press credentials of 34 journalists.”¹³¹⁰ BBC also listed specific numbers of the affected media organizations: “Three news agencies, 16 TV channels, 23 radio stations, 45 papers, 15 magazines and 29 publishers will be shut.”¹³¹¹ In one of the articles, entitled “Turkey coup attempt:

¹³⁰⁷ “Turkey Frees Convicts Jailed before Coup,” *BBC News*, August 17, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37103965>; Mark Lowen, “Turkey Post-Coup Purge Convulses Society,” *BBC News*, October 3, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37517735>.

¹³⁰⁸ Lowen, “Turkey Post-Coup Purge Convulses Society.”

¹³⁰⁹ “EU Calls Turkey Measures ‘Unacceptable,’” *BBC News*, July 21, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36861154>; “Turkey Charges 99 Top Officers over Coup,” *BBC News*, July 20, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36843180>.

¹³¹⁰ “EU Calls Turkey Measures ‘Unacceptable.’”

¹³¹¹ “Turkey Shuts More than 130 Media Outlets,” *BBC News*, July 28, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36910556>.

Who's the target of Erdoğan's purge?" BBC asks "who," "why," and "what next?" questions.¹³¹²

The phrase "human rights" is mentioned 61 times, and "rights and freedoms" 12 times (Daily Sabah mentions "human rights" 39 times, including references to human rights groups' data on terrorist activities (such as in Syria),¹³¹³ Turkish (and other countries') government officials assuring that the measures are consistent and in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR),¹³¹⁴ an article about how "Gülenists paid UK MP more than \$150,000 to write report on Turkey" criticizing the human rights situation,¹³¹⁵ denials of Amnesty International "allegations" on tortures of coup detainees,¹³¹⁶ as well as criticism of "reports and

¹³¹² Paul Kirby, "Who's the Target of Turkey's Purge?," *BBC News*, July 20, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36835340>.

¹³¹³ Mehmet Çelik, "American Men Fighting for Terrorist Group in Syria Received as Heroes in US"; Ali Ünal, "With US Policy in Syria a Complete Failure, Turkey Now Follows Different Priorities," *DailySabah*, September 19, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2016/09/19/with-us-policy-in-syria-a-complete-failure-turkey-now-follows-different-priorities>.

¹³¹⁴ "FM Çavuşoğlu: Turkey Will Do Whatever Necessary to Clear FETÖ Elements from State within Law," *DailySabah*, October 12, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/10/13/fm-cavusoglu-turkey-will-do-whatever-necessary-to-clear-feto-elements-from-state-within-law>; Ali Ünal, "German Deputy Brok: We Would Have Responded as Turkey Did If German Parliament Was Bombed," *DailySabah*, August 25, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/08/26/german-deputy-brok-we-would-have-responded-as-turkey-did-if-german-parliament-was-bombed>.

¹³¹⁵ "Gülenists Paid UK MP More than \$150,000 to Write Report on Turkey."

¹³¹⁶ Elif Petek Samatyali, "Turkish Justice Ministry Denies Allegations Coup Detainees Tortured," *DailySabah*, July 26, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/07/27/turkish-justice-ministry-denies-allegations-coup-detainees-tortured>.

analyses outside of Turkey that reveal that the failure of the coup attempt has disappointed many figures and institutions that define themselves as defenders of democracy, human rights, peace and justice.”¹³¹⁷

The BBC’s coverage, in turn, quotes Amnesty International’s claims that it “received credible evidence of detainees being subjected to beatings and torture, including rape, since the coup attempt,”¹³¹⁸ and discusses concerns by other human rights groups.¹³¹⁹ Other uses include concerns about the purges expressed by the international community members, who argue that “we need... to have Turkey respect democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms.”¹³²⁰ BBC’s 16 articles also discuss “the rule of law”: almost exclusively in the context of European,¹³²¹ US,¹³²²

¹³¹⁷ Merve Şebnem Oruç, “‘Allahu Akbar’ Just Means God Is the Greatest.”

¹³¹⁸ “‘Arrest Warrants’ for Turkey Journalists,” *BBC News*, July 25, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36881943>.

¹³¹⁹ “Turkey to Disband Presidential Guard,” *BBC News*, July 23, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36877067>; “Turkish Vow to Purge Cleric’s Followers,” *BBC News*, July 19, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36833972>.

¹³²⁰ “Turkey General Denies Planning Coup,” *BBC News*, July 18, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36829574>.

¹³²¹ “Turkey ‘Must Respect Rule of Law,’” *BBC News*, August 3, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36964857>; “EU Calls Turkey Measures ‘Unacceptable’”; “Police Purge in Turkey after Coup Bid,” *BBC News*, July 18, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36824045>; “Turkey Coup Sparks State of Emergency,” *BBC News*, July 21, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36852080>; “Press Fears Worst after Turkish Coup Attempt,” *BBC News*, July 18, 2016, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-36824837>.

¹³²² “Trump: US May Abandon Nato Protection,” *BBC News*, July 21, 2016, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-36852805>; “Arrests as

and UN¹³²³ officials “voicing concerns” and “urging” Turkey to conform to the rule of law. A couple of articles also quote Erdoğan¹³²⁴ and Yildirim¹³²⁵ claiming that Turkey is a democracy governed by the rule of law, and opposition leaders stressing the importance of “abiding by the rule of law” during the democracy rallies.¹³²⁶

The phrase “state of emergency” is used 49 times throughout BBC’s coverage, which indicates a certain level of concern over its consequences, including the fact that it “automatically suspended [the Turkish government’s] adherence to the European Convention on Human Rights,”¹³²⁷ allowed “the president and the government to bypass parliament when drafting new laws and to restrict or suspend

Turkey Targets Coup ‘Virus,’” *BBC News*, July 17, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36818401>; “Turks Rally to Calls to Back Democracy,” *BBC News*, July 17, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36817980>.

¹³²³ “Turkey Crackdown Toll Exceeds 50,000,” *BBC News*, July 20, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36842073>; “Turkey’s Purge Widens to Education,” *BBC News*, July 19, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36838347>; “Turkish Vow to Purge Cleric’s Followers.”

¹³²⁴ “Erdogan Signals Death Penalty Return,” *BBC News*, July 19, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36832071>.

¹³²⁵ “Turkish Vow to Purge Cleric’s Followers.”

¹³²⁶ “Turks Join Mass Pro-Democracy Rally,” *BBC News*, July 24, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36879075>; Selin Girit, “Will Turkey Bring Back Death Penalty?,” *BBC News*, July 19, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36829284>.

¹³²⁷ “Turkey ‘Must Respect Rule of Law.’”

rights and freedoms,”¹³²⁸ that a large number of people were charged with “terrorism propaganda,”¹³²⁹ that “restrictions on demonstrations” were imposed,¹³³⁰ and that overall Erdoğan received “radically enhanced powers.”¹³³¹ BBC highlights that the “fears” of the consequences are significant, especially given that Turkey’s “judicial independence has plummeted.”¹³³² BBC also pointed out that Turkish society is “divided over the merits and risks of the state of emergency.”¹³³³

In the meantime, BBC provides some background and/or analysis of Turkey’s political climate, as well as the role Turkey plays in the world arena. Turkey is “heavily destabilised by a series of IS and Kurdish PKK attacks, the subsequent collapse of its tourist industry, the absorption since 2011 of three million Syrian refugees.”¹³³⁴ As the purges continue, “Turkish society is undergoing its most

¹³²⁸ “‘Arrest Warrants’ for Turkey Journalists”; “Turkey Detentions ‘Tip of the Iceberg,’” *BBC News*, July 22, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36868230>; “‘Nearly 9,000 Troops Joined’ Turkey Coup,” 000.

¹³²⁹ “Portraits of the Purge,” *BBC News*, October 3, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-37534984/portraits-of-the-purge>.

¹³³⁰ “Transgender Murder Sparks Turkish Outcry,” *BBC News*, August 21, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37143879>.

¹³³¹ “EU Calls Turkey Measures ‘Unacceptable.’”

¹³³² “Mass Police Purge in Turkey over Coup,” *BBC News*, October 4, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37551889>.

¹³³³ Nick Thorpe, “Turkey Divided over State of Emergency,” *BBC News*, July 22, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36863203>.

¹³³⁴ Diana Darke, “Aleppo: Is Besieged Syrian City Facing Last Gasp?,” *BBC News*, July 22, 2016, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-36853689>.

dramatic reordering in decades. An emboldened government has a free hand. And there is little sign that it is loosening its grip.”¹³³⁵ Internationally, Turkey-EU relations are “deteriorating.”¹³³⁶ It is, however, emphasized that Turkey is still an important member of NATO¹³³⁷ and that “the West sees Turkey as part of the solution in the Middle East.”¹³³⁸

3. Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen Movement

As for Gülen, according to BBC, he is “regarded by followers as a spiritual leader and sometimes described as Turkey’s second most powerful man,”¹³³⁹ According to BBC, he “promotes a tolerant Islam which emphasises altruism, modesty, hard work and education.”¹³⁴⁰ It is repeatedly reported that Gülen denied any coup involvement and condemned the attempt,¹³⁴¹ as well as that he suggested

¹³³⁵ Lowen, “Turkey Post-Coup Purge Convulses Society.”

¹³³⁶ “Migrant Numbers Rise on Greek Islands,” *BBC News*, August 17, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37099332>.

¹³³⁷ “Russia and Turkey in Military Tie-Up,” *BBC News*, October 10, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37613273>.

¹³³⁸ Jeremy Bowen, “Why Turkish Stability Matters to the Region and Beyond,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36815956>.

¹³³⁹ “Turkish NBA Star Disowned over Gulen,” *BBC News*, August 9, 2016, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-37024429>.

¹³⁴⁰ “What Is Turkey’s Gulen Movement?”

¹³⁴¹ “EU Calls Turkey Measures ‘Unacceptable’”; “Turkey Crackdown Toll Exceeds 50,000”; “Turkey’s Purge Widens to Education.”

Erdoğan was to blame for the attempt.¹³⁴² Covering an interview with Gülen himself, BBC published Gülen’s criticism of the coup attempt, as well as his take on the Turkish democracy, or lack thereof.¹³⁴³

The Gülen movement “runs schools all over Turkey and around the world, including in Turkic former Soviet republics, Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Western nations including Romania and the US.”¹³⁴⁴ To further describe the organization, “no-one really knows how extensive that movement is” (“possibly in the millions” of followers¹³⁴⁵) and that Gülen “has made a lot of enemies but he also has a large number of followers.”¹³⁴⁶

The main difference between Erdoğan’s and Gülen’s views of the role of Islam is that, quoting Turkish writer and journalist Mustafa Akyol, “Mr Erdoğan is seen as favouring a Turkish version of political Islam... while Mr Gülen presents himself as espousing a form of cultural rather than political Islam.”¹³⁴⁷ Overall, it can be claimed that Gülen is portrayed in a more positive light than Erdoğan, as the former is

¹³⁴² “Arrests as Turkey Targets Coup ‘Virus’”; “Turkey Coup ‘Could Have Been Staged,’” *BBC News*, July 19, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-us-canada-36819291/fethullah-gulen-turkey-coup-could-have-been-staged>.

¹³⁴³ “Turkey General Denies Planning Coup”; Barbara Plett Usher, “Turkish Cleric Gulen Condemns ‘Witch-Hunt,’” *BBC News*, July 19, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36833704>.

¹³⁴⁴ “Turkish NBA Star Disowned over Gulen.”

¹³⁴⁵ “What Is Turkey’s Gulen Movement?”

¹³⁴⁶ Kirby, “Who’s the Target of Turkey’s Purge?”

¹³⁴⁷ “What Is Turkey’s Gulen Movement?”

“unfazed” by Erdoğan’s extradition demands, and “[seeks] to rise above the political to the spiritual,”¹³⁴⁸ while the latter is quoted demanding Gülen’s extradition and calling him “terrorist.”¹³⁴⁹ Erdoğan has also launched crackdowns which affected not only thousands of Turkish people but also many schoolchildren across the world who lost their access to scholarships and education after Gülen-linked schools were targeted.¹³⁵⁰

4. The US and the West, and the rest

One more aspect of the BBC coverage of the Turkey coup attempt is the portrayal of the US and the European Union, or the West in general. As it was discussed earlier, much of the coverage is devoted to the response of the Western countries to the Erdoğan’s cleansing and arrests of the alleged Gülen supporters. While Daily Sabah criticizes the lack of support from the allies, BBC’s coverage clearly indicates that the US and Europe have expressed their condemnation¹³⁵¹ of the coup attempt and support for the Turkish democracy – even despite the fact that the Western criticism of the purges has led to “tensions” in their relations with Turkey¹³⁵²

¹³⁴⁸ Usher, “Turkish Cleric Gulen Condemns ‘Witch-Hunt.’”

¹³⁴⁹ “Erdogan Signals Death Penalty Return.”

¹³⁵⁰ Jenny Norton and Cagil Kasapoglu, “Turkey Crackdown Hits ‘Gulen Schools’ Worldwide,” *BBC News*, September 23, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37422822>.

¹³⁵¹ Lowen, “Pride and Fear in a Changed Turkey”; “A Brief Guide to Turkey’s Coup.”

¹³⁵² “Turkey ‘Must Respect Rule of Law.’”

(according to BBC, the US was “more cautious than European governments about criticising the extent of the crackdown”¹³⁵³) More specifically, it is pointed out that, for example, “Biden also sought to dispel any doubts about America’s solidarity with its Nato ally”¹³⁵⁴ (but “Ankara believes the US was far too slow to condemn”¹³⁵⁵), that Obama¹³⁵⁶ and John Kerry said the US expressed “absolute support for Turkey’s democratically elected, civilian government and democratic institutions”¹³⁵⁷ and Kerry said the US “will certainly support bringing perpetrators of the coup to justice” (but cautioned against “going well beyond that”).¹³⁵⁸

As tensions between Turkey and the West grew, Turkish-Russian relations (despite the existing problems) are discussed in the light of the two states’ similarities: “Both feel isolated. Both have taken a decidedly authoritarian turn in their politics. Both have significant tensions with Washington. And both have strategic stakes in

¹³⁵³ “Fear of Attack on Turkish Cleric’s Life,” *BBC News*, August 5, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36988726>.

¹³⁵⁴ “Turkey-Backed Rebels Take Syrian Town,” *BBC News*, August 24, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37171995>.

¹³⁵⁵ “US Warns over Turkish Actions in Syria,” *BBC News*, August 29, 2016, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-37212256>.

¹³⁵⁶ “Erdogan Denounces Turkish Coup Attempt.”

¹³⁵⁷ “Turkey ‘Coup’: International Reaction,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36812863>.

¹³⁵⁸ “Mass Police Purge in Turkey over Coup.”

Syria...”¹³⁵⁹ This situation suggests that the two countries may grow closer,¹³⁶⁰ because “Erdoğan needs all the friends he can get” even it entails an “alliance of misfits” with Russia.¹³⁶¹

Finally, BBC provides some analysis of Turkish governmental rhetoric in the context of Erdoğan’s politics: “A firebrand president, he is known for using nationalist, confrontational talk to rally his core supporters, particularly in the patriotic fervour since July’s attempted coup.”¹³⁶² Additionally, BBC summarizes the eagerly covered by Daily Sabah solidarity in one sentence: “Since last month’s failed coup in Turkey, there has been much talk of national unity.”¹³⁶³ The “unity,” manifested in joint democracy rallies, is “rare,”¹³⁶⁴ however, has limits: BBC points out that the pro-Kurdish HDP party is excluded.¹³⁶⁵

¹³⁵⁹ “Russia and Turkey in Military Tie-Up.”

¹³⁶⁰ “Putin Mends Broken Turkey Relations.”

¹³⁶¹ Sarah Rainsford, “Russia and Turkey: An ‘Alliance of Misfits’?,” *BBC News*, August 12, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37045724>.

¹³⁶² Mark Lowen, “Turkey-Iraq Row Threatens Mosul Offensive,” *BBC News*, October 13, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37629577>.

¹³⁶³ “Twelve Dead in Eastern Turkey Blasts,” *BBC News*, August 18, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37116743>.

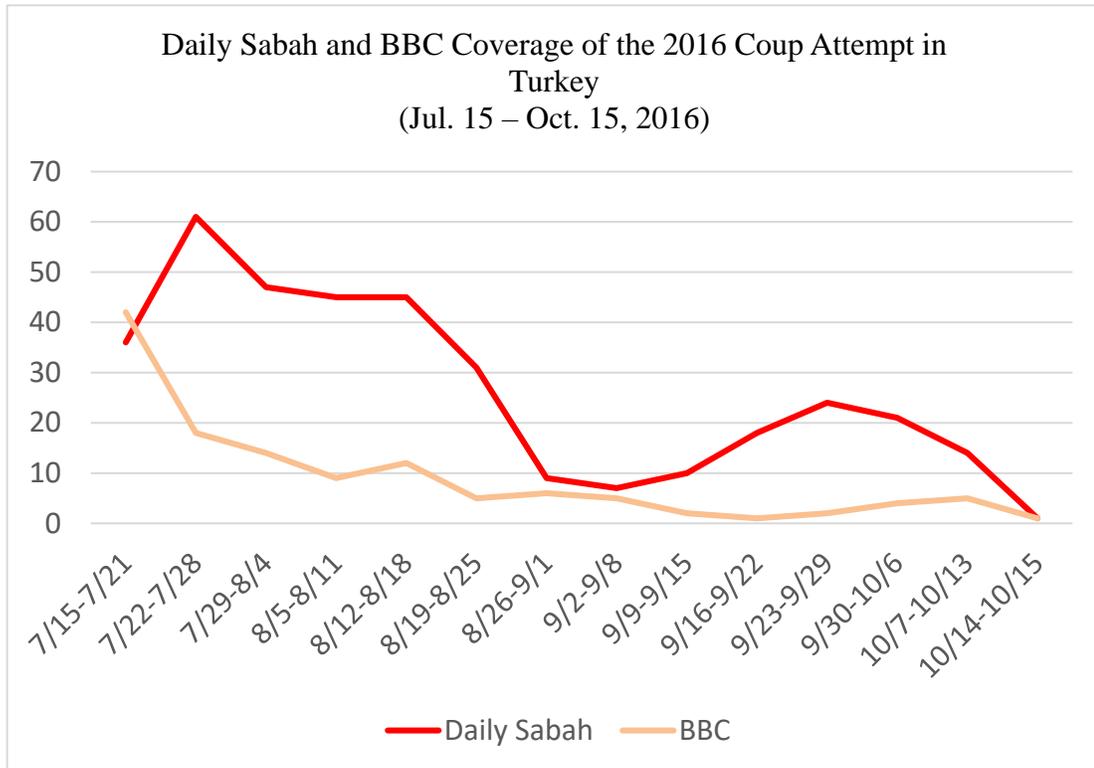
¹³⁶⁴ “Turks Join Mass Pro-Democracy Rally.”

¹³⁶⁵ Lowen, “Pride and Fear in a Changed Turkey”; “Twelve Dead in Eastern Turkey Blasts.”

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter studied the way Turkish state-controlled media Daily Sabah covered the July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. The event was the Turkish military's endeavor to overthrow the Erdoğan regime that failed soon after the president addressed the nation via video call and urged people to resist. The result was countless victims, the state of emergency introduced by the Turkish government, and a variety of anti-democratic measures consolidating power in Erdoğan's hands. In order to evaluate the role Daily Sabah played in building the post-coup reality in Turkey, this chapter reviewed the history of mass media in the country, introduced Daily Sabah as a pro-governmental media outlet, and outlined the way the coup attempt unfolded. After that, I analyzed the coverage of the event by Daily Sabah during the three months after it. Finally, I discussed the findings of my analysis of the BBC coverage of the coup attempt during the same period. See below for the distribution of the articles by Daily Sabah and BBC week by week during the studied period.

Figure 9 Daily Sabah and BBC Coverage Article Distribution



Despite the history of governmental control and censorship in Turkey, there was a variety of media outlets in the country, including influential liberal publications, at the beginning of the 21st century. The problems with media freedom started aggravating in the years after AKP came to power. Taking the media under the control of the government and building a “media empire” was a strategic decision by president Erdoğan, who sought to consolidate his authority throughout the 2000s, and then even more so after the Gezi Park protests and the conflict with the Gülen Movement in 2013. One of the initial critical steps in that direction was the 2007 purchase of Sabah

by a company owned by Erdoğan's allies. The 2018 acquisition of the Dogan Media Company became the final nail in the coffin.

Founded in 2014, Daily Sabah became part of Erdoğan's media empire. It has served as an English-language mouthpiece of the Turkish government – an international propaganda channel. Daily Sabah's take has fluctuated depending on the regime's foreign policy outlook. While early on, the West was portrayed as a partner of Turkey, when the US-Turkish relations soured, Daily Sabah changed its stance and became harshly critical of the US and its allies. As other domestic media were critical of the US as well, public opinion in Turkey towards the West significantly deteriorated. Since then, criticism of the West and the victimization of Turkey became central to Daily Sabah's coverage. While taking control of the Turkish media, the government set the goal to also shape domestic public opinion through delegitimizing the international media. The goals for Daily Sabah exist at the international level: it is summoned to disrupt the Western media narrative and assist in reshaping the "global opinion."

References to the new media, and mass media in general, are harder to spot across Turkey's foreign policy-related documents, compared to the Russian and Chinese cases. According to Turkey's constitution, the state protects the freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of information. However, the media may be "held responsible," suspended, or seized by a decision of a judge if they, for example, "threaten the internal or external security of the State or the indivisible

integrity of the State with its territory and nation.” These actions can be taken as a “preventive measure.”¹³⁶⁶

Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website mentions the media under the foreign policy issue of Terrorism. More specifically, the document discusses Turkey’s call for international cooperation to fight terrorism (“ranging from FETÖ to... terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and DAESH”) and warns that terrorist groups are “operating media outlets to disseminate their propaganda and glorify their vicious acts abroad.”¹³⁶⁷ Interestingly while references to the new media are scarce, both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Turkey President’s websites feature separate subsections on the 2016 coup attempt. The Ministry website has a subsection called “Fight Against FETÖ and July 15 Coup Attempt” under the Terrorism section,¹³⁶⁸ which provides a link to a whole separate website <http://15.07.gov.tr/> called “July 15th 2016 PEOPLE’S VICTORY.” That website includes an elaborately illustrated timeline, latest news, and information sections, such as “Perpetrators (What is

¹³⁶⁶ “Refworld | Constitution of the Republic of Turkey,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed March 13, 2020, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5be0.html>.

¹³⁶⁷ “Turkey’s Contributions to International Community’s Efforts to Fight Terrorism,” Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed March 13, 2020, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-contributions-to-international-community_s-efforts-to-fight-terrorism.en.mfa.

¹³⁶⁸ “Fight Against FETÖ and July 15 Coup Attempt,” Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed March 14, 2020, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/fight-against-fet%C3%B6-and-july-15-coup-attempt.en.mfa>.

FETÖ?).”¹³⁶⁹ The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey website has a “16 July” section under “Activities,” which also includes an informational video gallery about the coup attempt.¹³⁷⁰

Evidently, in relation to the media, so far, the Turkish government has been focusing on eliminating anti-government outlets and building a media system with a strong pro-government voice. The 2016 coup attempt and the subsequent state of emergency significantly contributed to this cause. Still, the analysis of Daily Sabah’s coverage allows discussing the content of a state-controlled outlet and the discourse it strives to create in the global media environment. A comparison to BBC coverage of the same event allows one to flesh out the specific tactics used by Daily Sabah. The tactics are:

1. Generation of a massive stream of strongly-worded repetitive categorical claims
2. Creation of a simple narrative that defines “good” vs. “bad,” omission of unrelated context, and lack of analysis
3. Strong emphasis on presenting itself as a “voice of the people”

¹³⁶⁹ “July 15th 2016 - PEOPLE’S VICTORY,” accessed March 14, 2020, <http://15.07.gov.tr/#home>.

¹³⁷⁰ “Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey : July 15 Coup Attempt and People’s Victory,” Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey, accessed March 14, 2020, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/activities/15july/>.

The tactics and differences are discussed below.

1. Generation of a massive stream of strongly worded repetitive categorical claims

As it can be seen from the discussion of the coverage, Daily Sabah published hundreds of articles after the failed coup attempt, and roughly three-fourths of them addressed the theme of the Gülen Movement as the perpetrator of the coup. From the earliest articles in the set, Daily Sabah identified the Gülen Movement and Gülen personally as the organizer – either because president Erdoğan stated that, or without any basis at all. Instead, the publication focused on creating a variety of labels and strong-language statements to describe the perpetrators. The descriptions of Gülen personally portray a picture of a highly dangerous, mentally unstable, immoral individual with a sinister global agenda. The descriptions of the Movement are quite condemnatory as well (“wolf in sheep’s clothing”¹³⁷¹). Importantly, the Gülen Movement was labeled a terrorist organization, even though it is not entirely clear from the coverage what specific actions make it such (for example, the movement “betrayed Turkey”¹³⁷²). The coup attempt was compared to the US terrorist attacks

¹³⁷¹ “‘FETÖ Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing, Gülen Not a Religious Scholar.’”

¹³⁷² “PM Yıldırım.”

of September 11, 2001. In sum, vast portions of the coverage are devoted to repetitive categorical claims naming Gülen and the Movement perpetrators of the failed coup.

2. Creation of a simple narrative that defines “good” vs. “bad,” omission of unrelated context, and lack of analysis

Gülen and the Gülen Movement are distinctly defined as the enemy, a terrorist organization, or the evil that threatens both Turkey and the international community. The government of Turkey and Erdoğan are, accordingly, opposed to the evil and represent good, mostly due to being a “democratically elected government.”¹³⁷³ Under this rhetoric, the coverage strongly suggests that not only anyone who can tolerate the Gülen Movement would be labeled a terrorist as well, but also that anyone who would criticize the Erdoğan regime would face a similar fate. In other words, not subscribing to the Turkish government’s opinion is seen as an attack on Turkey. The coverage of the US illustrates this well: the US is accused of politicizing the issue and supporting a terrorist organization because of not extraditing Gülen to Turkey.

Unlike Daily Sabah, BBC pursues the same set of general questions that can be found while covering other events, such as who the actors are and what their motives are. BBC discusses the existence of different theories that explain the attempted coup and questions the problems within them. A significant portion of the

¹³⁷³ “President Erdoğan,” August 1, 2016.

coverage by BBC is devoted to addressing the purges and the related human rights issues – something that is missing in Daily Sabah’s coverage. As BBC usually does, it also provides some background information and analysis of Turkey’s domestic situation and international standing.

3. Strong emphasis on presenting itself as a “voice of the people”

Daily Sabah does not merely claim to be offering the official point of view of Turkey. It claims to be providing insight into the position of the people of Turkey. As it was discussed in the previous sections, there is no division of the president’s personality, the government, and the people – all of them represent a whole. In other words, Erdoğan is the government, and the government is the people because the government was democratically elected. Presenting the government’s point of view as the people’s point of view strengthens the legitimacy of the government, and, by extension, strengthens the legitimacy of the point of view itself. Turkey is portrayed as a unified force, while anyone within who disagrees with the government is, at least, disregarded and, at most, labeled a terrorist. Accordingly, the Turkish government’s displeasure with the US behavior becomes the Turkish people’s displeasure with the US, thus lifting the stakes the US faces. It is not the Turkish government, but the Turkish people that ask the US to cooperate, and they will not forgive the US if it does

not.¹³⁷⁴ To be clear, BBC does not claim to know the overall position of people of any country. Still, it does analyze opinion polls conducted by independent organizations and may publish stories of specific groups or individuals.

Overall, Daily Sabah focused on blaming the Gülen Movement for the coup attempt, while BBC analyzed different sides of the story, including the Erdoğan's purges.

¹³⁷⁴ Yahya Bostan, "Gülenist Terror Organization and the US."

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

This dissertation aimed to explore the way governments in non-democratic states (Russia, China, and Turkey are rated “not free” by Freedom House¹³⁷⁵; Russia and China are rated “authoritarian” with democracy scores of 3.11/10 for Russia and 2.26 for China, and Turkey is rated “Hybrid regime” with 4.09/10 democracy score by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2019¹³⁷⁶) use the state-controlled new media to influence international public opinion, legitimize and generate support for their policies, and shape the international discourse around topical questions. I argued that such governments can benefit from the new media more than any other actor due to their motivation and resources and are increasingly successful in using the new media to assert their power. The findings of this dissertation challenge the conventional wisdom that new media tilted the balance of power in favor of civil society and NGOs, thus undermining authoritarianism and empowering bottom-up democratization.

¹³⁷⁵ “Explore Democracy and Net Freedom around the World,” Freedom House, accessed March 25, 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/explore-the-map>.

¹³⁷⁶ “Democracy Index 2019,” The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), accessed March 25, 2020, https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=democracyindex2019.

New and innovative technologies have always played an important role in politics: from book printing to tape recorders to the Internet, and then to advertisement and audience targeting capabilities offered by Facebook. Modern technologies facilitate the dissemination of information in qualitatively new ways. The new media messages can reach audiences across the world in seconds. However, it is the content of those messages and that information that have remained and even become increasingly critical. Spreading disinformation is a political weapon used to elect officials, suppress voters, cause social discord, and manipulate the opinion of the public and political elites. Some disinformation is somewhat easy to identify, albeit it can still cause significant harm, while other disinformation is served in a much more subtle and sophisticated manner – through large and well-known state-operated media outlets. There it is part of discourses created and promoted by the states to achieve their own goals.

For this dissertation, I conducted a discourse and content analyses of three state-controlled digital media English-language coverages of three unique events and analyzed the techniques they employed. The first case studied the way Russia-controlled RT covered the first three months of Russia's official military involvement in the Syrian War in the last quarter of 2015. The second case addressed the methods used by the Chinese government-operated People's Daily when covering the 2016 Hague court ruling regarding the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. The third case evaluated the Turkish government-controlled online newspaper Daily Sabah's coverage of the failed 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. I also studied the way BBC

covered all three events during the same periods of time to compare the discourses and show the divergence between different outlets' approaches to the task.

I collected the data using the Google search engine, which allows searching a specific website, such as RT.com and BBC.com, and in the cases of People's Daily and Daily Sabah's data, I used People's Daily and Daily Sabah's websites, which, unlike RT and BBC, allow for a search of articles within a specific timeframe. I used 198 RT articles and 171 BBC articles for the RT case study, 306 People's Daily articles and 30 BBC articles for the People's Daily case study, and 387 Daily Sabah articles and 120 BBC articles for the Daily Sabah case study. The additional articles that were identified during the search process were duplicates, articles in different languages, no-text articles, and random unrelated articles that were found by mistake. These additional articles were filtered out manually and not included in the analyses. Therefore, the articles that were used represent the entire relevant coverage by the respective media. There is, however, a conclusional limitation from the methodological perspective due to no formal test of intercoder reliability. For this dissertation, all the coding of the themes was done by one coder.

Russia, China, and Turkey have a history of censorship and propaganda. After the turbulent 1990s, which were the freest period in Russian history, the Putin regime started turning increasingly authoritarian and dramatically suppressed any independent media freedom while strengthening the state-controlled media. The communist regime in China has kept the media centralized and under control since the establishment of the PRC while cultivating top governmental outlets which would voice the position of

the ruling elites. In Turkey, media freedom started deteriorating in the 2000s. In all three countries, the tightening of the media control was a strategic decision of the government. In the case of Russia, the strategy is reflected in various foreign policy documents, including the Foreign Policy Concept issued in 2008 and in 2016. Strengthening Russia's state-controlled media is tied with the "international information environment" and "culture" and Russia's "strategic national priorities."¹³⁷⁷

The three countries, along with the rest of the world, had to face the rise of the new information and communication technologies, which led to the development and domination of the new media. The white paper on the Internet, issued by the Chinese government in 2010, fully acknowledged the importance of the new media in today's political environment and China's national security and has been taking measures to ensure the new media are contained. In Turkey, Erdoğan, like Putin in Russia, has built a "media empire" to boost his popularity and support among the population, as well as to keep any opposition voices in check. Daily Sabah, a newer outlet created at the dawn of Erdoğan's increased authoritarianism, has aimed to participate in reshaping of the "global opinion." It may have a long way to go to match the success of RT, which reaches vast international audiences and operates on different media platforms, but already today, it is working hard to convey the point of view of the

¹³⁷⁷ "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016)."

Turkish government. As for People's Daily, while there is certain skepticism regarding its ability to be taken seriously abroad due to the reputation of the Chinese government, undoubtedly, People's Daily does have an audience and makes an effort to reach out at the international level.

The discourse analyses of the three media coverage of three respective events, as well as the comparative analysis of the three media coverage to that of BBC, helped identify the tactics used by the state-controlled media in the three countries to achieve their foreign policy media goals. One tactic, which is present in all cases, is the generation of a massive stream of information. Extensive coverage of the event important to a government is a step towards prominence in, if not the domination of, the media environment. The more news pieces are produced, the higher the probability that some of them will reach the targeted audience. The more articles bombard an audience, the more their message is likely to dominate the agenda. When it comes to an event of interest for a government, the state-controlled media from all three cases made an aggressive effort to promote its rhetoric as the most legitimate one. RT published extensively on the international media covering civilian casualties in Syria and criticized the information that was not confirmed by the Russian government. People's Daily sought ulterior motives behind foreign criticism of its handling of the South China Sea issues. Daily Sabah shut down any alternative explanation of the 2016 coup attempt as an attack against Turkey. All three studied media heavily criticized the international media coverage for "bias," hypocrisy, and phobia against their respective countries – victims of the international media.

Thus, a massive stream of information, which included criticism of the international reaction and victimization of a state-controlled media's government, was a distinctive feature in all three cases. It is also worth pointing out that in the case of the more sophisticated RT's coverage, the stream of information was primarily driven by storytelling and a more elaborate structure to the discourse. In the cases of People's Daily and Daily Sabah, the coverage included more of the repetitive claims that were often categorical in nature.

Another tactic used in all three cases is creation of a simplified narrative, and in all cases, it manifested itself through one-sided identities and explanations, lack of criticism of the government in control of the media, and general lack of analysis. In the Russian case, there was little discussion of Russia's motives in Syria – Russia's actions are not questioned, like China's, and Turkey's actions are not questioned in the coverage by People's Daily and Daily Sabah. The coverage by these two outlets included a strong image of an enemy, at whom the negative coverage was aimed. The Turkish narrative had a more prominent "good vs. bad" discourse, in which Turkey was opposed to the enemies, which made the narrative more ideological and normative. The Chinese narrative, which also emphasized the benevolence of China's intentions, was less inclined to divide everything into two camps. Following the Chinese ideology of non-interference and careful diplomacy, People's Daily harshly criticized the "enemy," but did not necessarily label it as "bad" as a whole, and even expressed hope for future improvement.

RT, the most sophisticated of the three, generally did not put countries into boxes, did not identify them explicitly as an enemy or “bad.” However, its coverage sent the most elaborate negative message about the enemy. In all three cases, the US was the main, or one of the main targets of the negative coverage. While anti-American rhetoric was blunter in coverage by People’s Daily and Daily Sabah, it was more far-reaching in the case of RT because it consisted not of repetitive claims but rather of elaborate story-telling and is driven by subtle disinformation tactics. Compared to the studied media, BBC focused much less on the US (and the West) in each of the cases. In the Russian case, BBC provided some facts-based analysis of the likely mistakes of the American leadership in Syria. In the Chinese case, BBC mainly reported on the US relationship with the states involved in the conflict and on their reactions to the ruling. Similarly, in the Turkish case, BBC discussed the US and Europe’s responses to the coup attempt and the aftermath.

In general, BBC offered a drier coverage of the events, did not assign labels or blame, provided more context and structure, and asked more questions. BBC strived to include comments and official reactions by different sides of the conflicts and evaluated them. BBC relied on data collected by authoritative independent international organizations. Additionally, BBC questioned assumptions and criticized actions by various actors. Undoubtedly, BBC offered significantly more analysis.

Interestingly, morality and legality are two concepts used to support the pro-governmental coverage in all three cases. While both are inherently vague, using them sends a powerful message intended to compensate for lack of actual reasoning and

analysis. RT called any Western military action in Syria illegal, and every Russian action legal due to Assad's request for Russia's help. People's Daily devoted dozens of articles to discussing the illegality of the South China Sea arbitration while claiming that China's actions were entirely legal. Daily Sabah defended Turkish government-conducted purges as legal while defining the Gülen Movement and even the US actions as illegal. In the cases of RT and People's Daily, legality was tied mainly to the self-proclaimed compliance with international law. The idea of morality rested on legality and compliance with international law. Both RT and People's Daily portray their respective states as morally superior. The case of Daily Sabah is different as instead of appealing to the international law and morality, it created a dichotomy of "good" vs. "bad," in which the former is represented by the Turkish government, people, and their supporters and the latter are terrorists and their supporters.

In sum, I identified the following techniques used by RT, People's Daily, and Daily Sabah in their coverage of the beginning of Russia's military involvement in Syria, the Hague Court's ruling on the South China Sea, and the failed Turkish coup attempt respectively:

- RT'S COVERAGE OF RUSSIA'S 2015 INVOLVEMENT IN THE SYRIAN WAR
 - ✓ Generation of a massive stream of information and elaborate storytelling
 - ✓ Overwhelming pronounced approval of Russia's actions
 - ✓ Simplification of processes, lack of different views and self-criticism

- ✓ Avoidance of discussion of motives and reasoning
 - ✓ Delegitimation of other media and watchdog organizations
 - ✓ Employment of the concepts of morality and legality to justify behavior
 - ✓ Targeted negative coverage through disinformation and selective experts' opinions
- PEOPLE'S DAILY'S (RENMIN RIBAO) COVERAGE OF 2016 HAGUE COURT RULING ON SOUTH CHINA SEA
 - ✓ Generation of a massive stream of repetitive categorical claims
 - ✓ Overwhelming pronounced approval of China's actions
 - ✓ Creation of a simplified narrative, one-sided identities and explanations, and disregard for the rest
 - ✓ Focus on the "enemy" as a source of problems
 - ✓ Employment of the concepts of morality and legality to justify behavior
- DAILY SABAH'S COVERAGE OF THE 2016 COUP ATTEMPT IN TURKEY
 - ✓ Generation of a massive stream of strongly-worded repetitive categorical claims
 - ✓ Overwhelming pronounced approval of Turkey's actions
 - ✓ Creation of a simple narrative that defines "good" vs. "bad," omission of unrelated context, and lack of analysis
 - ✓ Strong emphasis on presenting itself as a "voice of the people"
 - ✓ Focus on the "enemy" as a source of problems

- ✓ Delegitimation of other media and watchdog organizations
- ✓ Employment of the concept of legality to justify behavior

While all three media employed massive streams of information and were praising their respective governments, it is clear that RT is the most sophisticated media machine, while People's Daily represents a more basic propaganda-style coverage producer, and Daily Sabah is at an earlier stage of development. Arguably, both People's Daily and Daily Sabah use RT as an example in their learning process. While all three use the concept of legality and criticize or disregard different interpretations of it, RT can find the most effective balance for structuring selective criticism, omissions, elaborate storytelling, quasi-analytical arguments, humor, and subtle negativity. RT manipulates the information and thus aims to manipulate the discourse.

The research conducted for this dissertation has confirmed the theoretical claims proposed in Chapter 2. All three states have been acquiring and learning new technologies and new media. The case study chapters demonstrated how Putin and Erdoğan have been building their media empires and how the Chinese government put all mass media under centralized control. Russia's Foreign Policy Concepts provided evidence to show that Putin's regime has taken the role of the new media seriously and has been working to empower the state-controlled outlets, such as RT. The Chinese white paper on the Internet revealed the PRC's commitment to utilizing the new media fully to its own advantage. Erdoğan's purges of dissident journalists and aggressive

propaganda by outlets like Daily Sabah showed the Turkish government's shifting priorities. RT, People's Daily, and Daily Sabah are all aimed at reshaping the international discourse, or, so to speak, global public opinion. All three studied media outlets, even if with different degrees of sophistication, are using a variety of techniques and tactics to make their publications more effective.

It is hard to estimate the effectiveness of the international propaganda conducted by state-controlled media. However, the results from similar efforts abroad, such as Russia-organized disinformation campaigns related to US elections or other high-profile events, are significantly more tangible and show that such efforts do matter. According to Foucault, there is no single truth, but there are mechanisms that make us believe it exists. International propaganda efforts by RT, People's Daily, and Daily Sabah strive to alter these mechanisms and affect our perception of truth. The techniques they use are aimed at disrupting the dominant global discourse and changing the rules that govern the process of the creation of such global discourse.

These findings contribute to the understanding of the role of the new media in non-democratic states' propaganda and foreign policy aspirations. The findings can also be useful for studying disinformation and agenda-driven coverage in non-state-controlled media and in democratic states. Since similar methods can be visible when observing, for example, Fox News, further research could address the parallels between a state-controlled media and an outlet in a developed democratic country and assess the implications of such developments for democracy in the world.

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