Mediated Policy Effects of Foreign Governments on Iraqi Independent Media During Elections

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Abstract

I use the term *mediated policy* to refer to messages about Iraq sent by international news media outlets of foreign governments during the Iraqi parliamentary elections of 2010, and I hypothesize that US Mediated Policy, Iranian Mediated Policy, and Saudi Mediated Policy are three latent constructs interacting in a structural model where they influence a fourth latent variable, Iraqi Independent Media. To feed the model with data, I run a content analysis of relevant international and domestic media coverage. I measure saliences of two news media frames, Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. The analysis shows that in 2010: (1) English represented a barrier to Iraqi independent media. (2) US foreign policy simultaneously dealt with two opposing regional policies, Iranian and Saudi. (3) There were significant policy messages about Iraq carried by international news media of foreign governments, which evidently influenced Iraqi independent media.

Introduction

News media in Iraq expanded significantly after April 2003, when the regime of Iraqi Dictator Saddam Hussein was ousted by a foreign military intervention, and efforts were made to establish the foundations of Iraqi independent media. Today, news media in Iraq can be categorized into three types: governmental, partisan, and independent. (Al-Rawi, 2012) The focus of this study is on the independent sector, because the governmental part carries messages of Iraqi government, while the partisan part carries messages of Iraqi political parties. I define the term *Iraqi independent media* as that part of the Iraqi news media landscape not sponsored by foreign or local governments or political parties. However, observers argue that domestic and foreign powers influence the majority of Iraqi news media outlets; (Abdulmajeed, 2009) therefore, the role of Iraqi independent media becomes especially crucial during elections, and examining that role should get special attention.

In 2010, then Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was able to win approval for a new government on December 21, giving him a second term in office, despite his bloc having lost to the rival alliance of Former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi in the parliamentary elections on March 7. The Islamic Republic of Iran supported Maliki's bid to stay in office for four more years; however, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supported Allawi's bid to return to office for four years. All of this was happening while the United States of America was still militarily present in Iraq. (Al-Azdee, 2013) In this study, I analyze the interaction within the coverage of the 2010 Iraqi elections reported by international news media of the US, Iranian, and Saudi governments, and subsequent effects on relevant coverage in Iraqi independent media. I employ *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency* as a criterion defining Iraqi

independent media in 2010. This media outlet was formed and funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which is a neutral international donor compared to any political party or government. ("Project Name," n.d.)

State media are vehicles for governmental messages. An international media outlet under government control carries the government's foreign policy messages abroad. A government's foreign policy message passes through one of the government's international media outlets aiming at a target in another country. A government's international media outlet delivers the government's foreign policy message to a target in another country. In this study, I use the term, *mediated policy*, to refer to messages about Iraq sent by international news media outlets of foreign governments during the Iraqi parliamentary elections of 2010, and I hypothesize that US Mediated Policy, Iranian Mediated Policy, and Saudi Mediated Policy are three latent constructs interacting in a structural model where they influence a fourth latent variable, Iraqi Independent Media. To feed the model with data, I run a content analysis of relevant international and domestic media coverage. I measure saliences of two news media frames, Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. The analysis shows that in 2010: (1) English represented a barrier to Iraqi independent media. (2) US foreign policy simultaneously dealt with two opposing regional policies, Iranian and Saudi. (3) There were significant policy messages about Iraq carried by international news media of foreign governments, which evidently influenced Iraqi independent media. In other words, this study shows that during the 2010 elections in Iraq, there were effects of international news media of foreign governments on the framing of news in Iraqi independent media.

Saliences of Frames in News Media
Framing of news may refer to the selection of political figures involved in a reality, to make them more salient in a news story. In this case, "to frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text,*" (Entman, 1993, italics in original) however, news framing in a media outlet is not merely a matter of choice. Journalists are geared to rules that govern their work, not rules they invent. Journalists operate within the appropriate rules of their media outlets. (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2008) I argue that these rules change saliences of frames in media coverage. This argument complies with previous studies on framing effects, which link the selection of a frame to the amount of the frame in media texts. (Gans, 2004) So, by studying the conditions under which the salience of a frame is being generated, I combine two fundamental but workable problems, the selection of the frame and the amount of the frame. (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984) Accordingly, the illumination of the interaction that involves the transfer of saliences of frames from one news media outlet to another is a prime component of the analysis of intermedia effects. (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996)

As there are intermedia effects, there are extramedia effects. (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) News framing in a media outlet is a process that has a rim, but the rim is both part of the news media outlet and the surrounding world. Therefore, the rim is simultaneously internal and external. (Goffman, 1974) For example, in a media outlet run by a government, news framing is clearly internal, but the media outlet has a certain relation with an external sponsor, the government, and a representative of the government might be present at the media outlet. Therefore, there is always an interface between this media outlet's internal news framing and the external world where the outlet's coverage of an issue should resonate with the government's policies on the issue.

Therefore, intermedia and extramedia effects are central concepts of this study where I use framing theory to examine effects of foreign policy messages about Iraq, delivered by international news media of foreign governments, on Iraqi independent media after 2003.

Foreign Governments, International Media, and Iraqi Elections
During the Iraqi elections of 2010, two major candidates competed to win the vote, Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. (Arango, 2010; McEvers, 2010) If there were international news media outlets of the US, Iranian, or Saudi governments when the elections took place, they should have carried foreign policy messages of their governments, either in favor of Maliki or Allawi, because the governments of the US, Iran, and Saudi Arabia had special interests in Iraq that year.

> **American interests in Iraq in 2010.** (1) No regional war: The United States had an enduring interest in Iraq's internal chaos not triggering regional conflict, and in regional actors not further exacerbating Iraq's internal tensions. (2) No al-Qaeda safe havens: The United States had an enduring interest in preventing Iraq from becoming Afghanistan before September 11, 2001. (3) No genocide: The United States had an enduring interest in preventing ethnic and sectarian genocide in Iraq (Bremer, 2006; Woodward, 2010). For all these reasons, the Americans in 2010 sought national unity in Iraq. Because the majority of the Iraqi population was Shiite, the United States was looking for a moderate Shiite leader who had the potential of being accepted by Iraqi Shiites (because he was Shiite) and by the Sunni minority as well (because he was moderate). Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki represented that Iraqi figure to the Americans. They saw in him a leader who might be able to promote an inclusive Iraqi national identity in time when America was planning to pull out all its troops from Iraq. Therefore, the United States supported Maliki's bid to stay in office for a second term. (Al-Azdee, 2013)

> **Iranian interests in Iraq in 2010**. (1) Security: Iran wanted to ensure the unity of Iraq. A breakup of Iraq could destabilize Iran. Iraq and Iran had also been historical rivals, and many Iranians believed Iraq could return to that role in the future. There was, therefore, an importance to improve ties between the two so that conflict would not happen anytime soon. The Iranian opposition group, Mujahadeen e-Khalq, was also based in Iraq, which Tehran wanted to keep in check. (2) Effects of the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988): Many Iranians wanted to make sure that they did not fight the war for nothing. This led to popular support for good relations with Iraq so that another war could be prevented. Iraq also owed Iran around $150 billion in reparations. The Iranian government brought this up, and it was a domestic issue in Iran. There were also ongoing disputes about the border between the two countries where rich oil fields reside. Either or both issues could lead to a conflict. (3) Culture: The desire amongst many Iranians was to have good relations with Iraq. This was tied up with access to Shiite shrines in Karbala and Najaf in Iraq. Having open borders was important so that the Iranian people could have access to these areas. (4) Trade with Iraq: Before the Iraq War in 2003, most of Iran's trade was through Turkey and Russia. Iran increased trade, tourism, and energy connections with Iraq after the collapse of the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein that year. For example, the two countries signed a number of memoranda of understanding on industry, electricity, trade, and housing. They also signed a deal to develop joint border oil fields. (Woodward, 2010) So, for all these reasons, and just like the Americans, the Iranians, too, supported the same bid of Maliki. As an Islamic republic, Iran was looking for an Iraqi Islamic leader. And as a Shiite state, Iran was looking

for an Iraqi Shiite figure that the Iranians themselves knew well, a one from the Iraqi Shiite Islamic parties that Iran dealt with for long time. To the Iranians, Maliki was the figure they were looking for in Iraq. They saw in him a leader who would promote Iraq's Shiite Islamic identity. (Al-Azdee, 2013)

Saudi interests in Iraq in 2010. Saudi interests were dominated by four concerns about the future of Iraq: domestic stability, regional intervention, oil production, and role of Shiites in political power. All that can be summarized in the cross-border sectarian influence on Shiites in Saudi Arabia from Shiites in Iraq, and on Iraq's Sunni community from Saudi Arabia's support of Wahhabism. These factors created ample room for divergence between Saudi Arabia and Iraq that year, especially considering the demonstrated effect of the rise of Shiites in Iraq on Shiites in Saudi Arabia. (Bremer, 2006; Woodward, 2010) So, contrary to both the US and Iran, Saudi Arabia supported Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's bid in 2010 to get back to office for four years. The Saudis knew that the majority of Iraq's population was Shiite, and believed the prime minister of Iraq had to be Shiite for that reason. Although Allawi was Shiite, he was secular, and he opposed Iran's policies in Iraq, showing a clear leaning towards Sunni Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia. (Al-Azdee, 2013)

In this study, I hypothesize that during the Iraqi parliamentary elections of 2010, these interests of the governments of the United States, Iran, and Saudi Arabia were delivered through their international news media, by focusing the coverage of the elections on Maliki or Allawi. I argue that Maliki and Allawi became two competing media frames in news stories about the 2010 Iraqi elections reported by *Voice of America (VOA)*, *Tehran Times*, and *Asharq Al-Awsat*. In the United States, *VOA* is an international news media outlet run by a division of the US government (Hansen, 1989); therefore, *VOA*'s website carries foreign policy messages of the government of the United States of America. In Iran, *Tehran Times* is an international news media outlet that defines itself as a loud voice of the Islamic Revolution of Iran; ("About Tehran Times," n.d.) therefore, *Tehran Times'* website carries foreign policy messages of the government of Iran. In Saudi Arabia, *Asharq Al-Awsat* is an international news media outlet. The owner of *Asharq Al-Awsat* is Prince Turki Bin Salman Al Saud, a member of the ruling Saudi Royal Family. In fact, Prince Turki is one of the sons of King Salman. Therefore, *Asharq Al-Awsat*'s website carries foreign policy messages of the government of Saudi Arabia.

Accordingly, considering the 2010 Iraqi elections, I hypothesize that foreign policy messages of the US, Iranian, and Saudi governments can be conceptualized in a model through the framing of news reported on the websites of *VOA*, *Tehran Times*, and *Asharq Al-Awsat*, respectively.

Modeling and Framing

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has facilitated the achievement of important research designs and findings in mass communication. Holbert (2005) used SEM to examine the often-overlooked media effects that originate from relations among various media outlets. Maoz and Ellis (2008) employed SEM to evaluate the conditions of controlling intergroup communicative contacts. Tsfati (2007) relied on SEM to explore the concept that minority perceptions associated with the strong influence of biased media are more likely to indirectly cause an increase in minority alienation. I received guidance from these studies to build and analyze a structural model associated with the Iraqi elections of 2010. The model relies on saliences (i.e., frequencies) of frames in relevant news reported by foreign government's international media (*VOA* – USA, *Tehran Times* – Iran, and *Asharq Al-Awsat* – Saudi Arabia). I operationalized Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Former

Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi as two separate news media frames competing in the coverage of the 2010 Iraqi elections, because each of them was a central organizing figure, holding together and giving coherence to arrays of symbols and elements of interests within the Iraqi political arena that year .(Ahmed, 2010; Gamson, 2001)

Analyzing news framing can be achieved through the analysis of media emphasis. (Entman, 1991) In this case, framing can be salience-based. (Entman, 1993) I defined emphasis on a frame in media coverage as the salience of the frame in the news. In other words, the salience of a frame in a news media text is the frequency of the frame in the text. In this study, I measured frequencies of two competing news media frames, Maliki and Allawi, to generate data for the structural model I built and tested.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the previous discussion, this study answers the following two research questions and tests their corresponding hypothesized answers:

> *RQ1*. What is the relation between foreign policy messages carried by international news media outlets of foreign governments with respect to the Iraqi elections of 2010?

> *H1*. With respect to the Iraqi elections of 2010, the relation between foreign policy messages, carried by international news media outlets of foreign governments, is more likely to be covariance, such that variation in one of the mediated policies tends to cause variance in the other.

> *RQ2*. What is the effect of foreign policy messages carried by international news media outlets of foreign governments with respect to the Iraqi elections of 2010?

> *H2*. With respect to the Iraqi elections of 2010, variation in foreign policy messages, carried by an international news media outlet of a foreign government, is more likely to influence variance in relevant coverage reported by Iraqi independent media, such that when the variation changes, the variance tends to change as well.

Method
Modeling

Based on knowledge of theory, empirical research, or the situation, a researcher can conceptualize relations between observed indicators and latent variables a priori, and then test the hypothesized structure statistically. (Blunch, 2008) Therefore, as I argued previously, the US government's foreign policy regarding the Iraqi elections of 2010 can be examined through *VOA*'s online coverage of the elections, by operationalizing the frequencies (i.e., saliences) of two news media frames, Maliki and Allawi, in two separate indicators, then allowing these saliences to compete to predict a latent variable that represents the US government's mediated policy associated with the Iraqi elections. The same argument can be applied to the Iranian government's mediated policy through the website of *Tehran Times*, and the Saudi government's mediated policy through the website of *Asharq Al-Awsat*. These arguments provide a structural model with three latent variables: US Mediated Policy, Iranian Mediated Policy, and Saudi Mediated Policy, respectively. Variance in each of these latent variables is predicted through two observed indicators, Maliki and Allawi.

In this study, I hypothesized that foreign policy messages through international news media of the US, Iranian, and Saudi governments influenced Iraqi independent media during the 2010 elections in Iraq. Therefore, Iraqi independent media should be represented in the structural model, and variance in the latent variable, Iraqi Independent Media, should be estimated according to the same criteria used to estimate variances in the other three latent variables in the model. As explained in previous sections of this paper, I selected *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency* to represent Iraqi independent media. So, the model now includes a fourth latent variable, Iraqi Independent Media. Variance in this latent variable is estimated in relation to the Iraqi elections of 2010, by operationalizing the frequencies (i.e., saliences) of two news media frames, Maliki and Allawi, in two separate indicators, then allowing these saliences to compete to predict this same latent variable.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual structural model analyzed in the current research. The latent variables US Mediated Policy, Iranian Mediated Policy, and Saudi Mediated Policy hypothetically influence the latent variable Iraqi Independent Media. Single-headed arrows represent these conceptualized effects from the latent variables US Mediated Policy, Iranian Mediated Policy, and Saudi Mediated Policy to the latent variable Iraqi Independent Media.
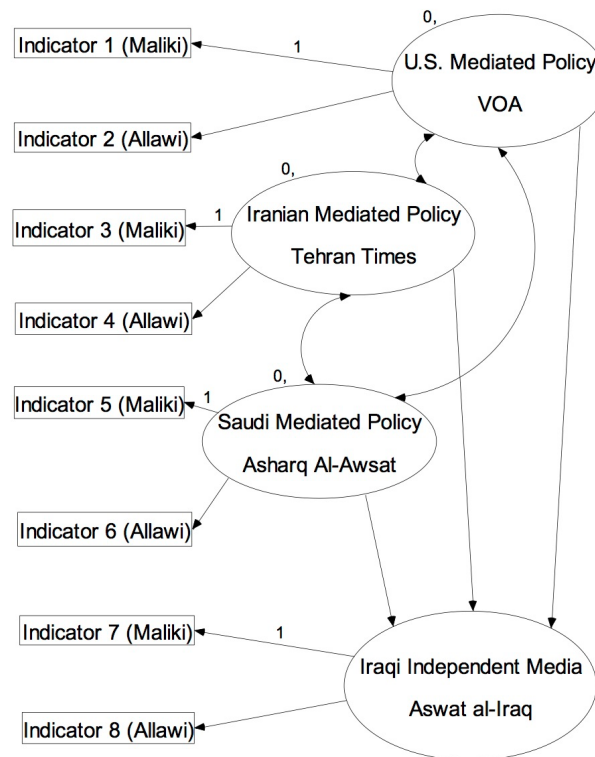

Figure 1. The structural model conceptualized and analyzed in the current research.

In Figure 1, it is also conceptualized that the latent variables US Mediated Policy, Iranian Mediated Policy, and Saudi Mediated Policy interact with each other through covariance. Three double-headed arrows between these three latent variables represent these relations. The significance of each of these hypothesized effects is tested statistically.

Sample Timeframe, Procedure, and Size
In the Iraqi elections of 2010, the most interesting part was the period immediately after the elections, not before it. Former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi won the vote with a small margin, leaving the second place to Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki who was still in office at that time. Despite losing the elections, Maliki was able to form a coalition government, but Allawi was not. (Al-Azdee, 2013) For the time period, from the day the elections took place on March 7 until the day the Iraqi House of Representatives approved the second cabinet of Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on December 21, I identified 59 days through systematic sampling. (Krippendorff, 2004) Then, I used relevance sampling (Krippendorff, 2004) of news texts reported by the websites of *VOA*, *Tehran Times*, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, and *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency* during those days to collect a sample of total size equal to 650 news stories, distributed in the following way: *VOA* = 136, *Tehran Times* = 104, *Asharq Al-Awsat* = 144, and *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency* = 266. All these stories were specifically about the Iraqi elections of 2010.

Coding of Observed Indicators
I became a coder (i.e., coder 1). Assisted by a graduate student (coder 2), I coded the stories of the research sample. We both had experience in using the software MAXQDA; therefore, we used it to operationalize the coding scheme.

The stories of *Asharq Al-Awsat* (i.e., Saudi Mediated Policy) and *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency* (i.e., Iraqi Independent Media) were in Arabic. The stories of *VOA* (i.e., US Mediated Policy) and *Tehran Times* (i.e., Iranian Mediated Policy) were in English. Both coders fluently spoke both Arabic and English.

Coding Scheme and Intercoder Reliability
I used the Weber Protocol (Weber, 1990) to set the coding scheme (Appendix) employed by the two coders, coder 1 (i.e., myself) and coder 2 (i.e., my graduate assistant). Reliability between the two coders was estimated for the content of each of the four news media outlets operationalized in the current analysis. Estimates of the Interclass Correlation (*ICC*) were used to establish intercoder reliability between coder 1 and coder 2, because frequencies of news media frames were measured on continuous scales. (Shrout & Fleis, 1979) As I chose *n* stories at random, and they were coded by *k* coders, and as I sought absolute agreements on the ratings between the coders (i.e., replicable measurements), I used the *ICC(2,1)* of Shrout and Fleiss (1979), which is based on the two-way random-effects ANOVA. It is also known as the *ICC(Absolute Agreement)*. (McGraw & Wong, 1996) The value of the *ICC(2,1)* should be between zero and 1, where values closer to 1 indicate less coding error and stronger reliability. However, recommendations for the interpretation of the *ICC(2,1)* are diverse. Anastasi (1988) recommends .6 as the minimum acceptable value of the *ICC(2,1)*. Portney and Watkins (1993) suggest that a value of the *ICC(2,1)* equal to or greater than .75 represents good reliability. Randolph, McCrea, and Barr (2005) argue that the value of the *ICC(2,1)* must be greater than .9 to make concrete decisions on reliability of measurements. In the current analysis, the *ICC(2,1)* was established at significant levels equal to or greater than .95 ($p <$ .01) for each of the four news media outlets. The reasons why strong intercoder reliability values were achieved are: (1) The two coders had experience in coding news media texts for content

analysis studies. (2) A coding software (i.e., MAXQDA) was used in the coding process. (3) The coding process was manageable, because it required the collection of frequencies of frames (i.e., names: Maliki and Allawi) in a straightforward procedure.

Model Testing and Bootstrapping

At this point, the structural model in Figure 1 was loaded with the data of the eight observed indicators. Although it was loaded with data, the Amos software could not identify the model in Figure 1 for SEM analysis. With four latent (unobserved) variables present in this model, it was definitely unidentifiable. (Arbuckle, 2007) I solved this problem by following the recommendation of Blunch (2008). I randomly imposed a constraint equal to 1 on some of the measurement coefficients. Figure 1 shows that the paths US Mediated Policy → Indicator 1 (i.e., Nouri al-Maliki), Iranian Mediated Policy → Indicator 3 (i.e., Nouri al-Maliki), Saudi Mediated Policy → Indicator 5 (i.e., Nouri al-Maliki), and Iraqi Independent Media → Indicator 7 (i.e., Nouri al-Maliki) were all set to unity. The study proceeded to reporting results of model testing, using the Amos software. The test relied on bootstrapping. I requested the Amos software to employ a bootstrapping level of 2,000 to fit the model.

Results
Descriptive Statistics

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is an advanced version of regression analysis. In any regression analysis, it is useful to first obtain descriptive statistics to better understand the dataset under consideration.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Each of the Eight Observed Indicators

	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 4	Indicator 5	Indicator 6	Indicator 7	Indicator 8
N	80	56	60	44	77	67	173	93
M	2.11	1.07	1.96	1.03	5.12	3.37	13.98	5.39
SD	3.58	2.12	4.34	2.39	3.24	2.79	8.31	3.79

Table 1 shows that all the eight indicators of the structural model (Figure 1) are measured on continuous scales. Sample sizes of these indicators are: Indicator 1 = 80 news stories, Indicator 2 = 56 news stories, Indicator 3 = 60 news stories, Indicator 4 = 44 news stories, Indicator 5 = 77 news stories, Indicator 6 = 67 news stories, Indicator 7 = 173 news stories, and Indicator 8 = 93 news stories. The mean of Indicator 1 is 2.11 ($SD = 3.58$), the mean of Indicator 2 is 1.07 ($SD = 2.12$), the mean of Indicator 3 is 1.96 ($SD = 4.34$), the mean of Indicator 4 is 1.03 ($SD = 2.39$), the mean of

Indicator 5 is 5.12 (*SD* = 3.24), the mean of Indicator 6 is 3.37 (*SD* = 2.79), the mean of Indicator 7 is 13.98 (*SD* = 8.31), and the mean of Indicator 8 is 5.39 (*SD* = 3.79).

Model Fitting
I followed the recommendation of Blunch (2008) that a combination of measures of goodness-of-fit should be calculated. The output of the Amos software shows that the Comparative Fit Index is .98 (*CFI* > .95), the Tucker–Lewis Index is .96 (*TLI* > .95), the Bentler-Bonett Normed Fit Index is .92 (*NFI* > .9), the Bollen's Incremental Fit Index is .98 (*IFI* > .95), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation is .047 (*RMSEA* < .05), and the Relative Chi-Square is 1.33 (χ^2_{min} / df < 2). All these estimates indicate that the goodness-of-fit test of the model in Figure 1 is satisfactory. (Byrne, 2010)

Mediated Foreign Policies
Figure 2 presents unstandardized estimates of variances, effect paths, and squared multiple correlations (R^2) of the variables in the model analyzed in the current research. Table 2 shows unstandardized measurement coefficients and their standard errors. Table 3 demonstrates unstandardized effect estimates and their standard errors.
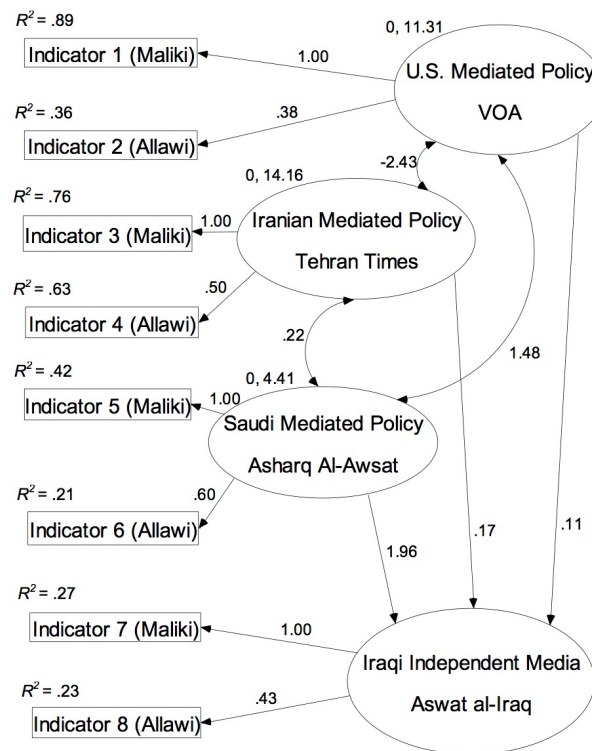

Figure 2. Unstandardized estimates of variances, effect paths, and squared multiple correlations of the variables in the structural model.

Table 2

Unstandardized Measurement Coefficients and Their Standard Errors in the Model

Path	Estimate	SE	p
US Mediated Policy → Indicator 1 (Maliki in VOA)	1		
US Mediated Policy → Indicator 2 (Allawi in VOA)	.38	.16	.02
Iranian Mediated Policy → Indicator 3 (Maliki in Tehran Times)	1		
Iranian Mediated Policy → Indicator 4 (Allawi in Tehran Times)	.5	.18	.005
Saudi Mediated Policy → Indicator 5 (Maliki in Asharq Al-Awsat)	1		
Saudi Mediated Policy → Indicator 6 (Allawi in Asharq Al-Awsat)	.6	.22	.005
Iraqi Independent Media → Indicator 7 (Maliki in Aswat al-Iraq)	1		
Iraqi Independent Media → Indicator 8 (Allawi in Aswat al-Iraq)	.43	.15	.006

Table 3

Unstandardized Effect Estimates and Their Standard Errors in the Model

Path	Estimate	SE	p
Variance			
US Mediated Policy	11.31	4.97	.02
Iranian Mediated Policy	14.16	5.41	.009
Saudi Mediated Policy	4.41	1.65	.007
Covariance			
US Mediated Policy ↔ Iranian Mediated Policy	−2.43	1.3	.047
US Mediated Policy ↔ Saudi Mediated Policy	1.48	.9	.086
Iranian Mediated Policy ↔ Saudi Mediated Policy	.22	1.04	.8
Effects			
US Mediated Policy → Iraqi Independent Media	.11	.21	.6
Iranian Mediated Policy → Iraqi Independent Media	.17	.18	.36
Saudi Mediated Policy → Iraqi Independent Media	1.96	.5	.000

Variance in the latent variable US Mediated Policy is 11.31 ($SE = 4.97$, $p < .05$). This is a measurement of variance estimated through two competing saliences of news media frames, Maliki and Allawi, in the coverage of the 2010 Iraqi elections on the website of *VOA*. This variance is caused by this news media outlet's tendency to promote the salience of one of these two frames over the other. In other words, it is a measurement of significant US mediated policy. Measurement coefficients of the single-headed arrows from the latent variable US Mediated Policy to Indicator 1 (i.e., Maliki) and Indicator 2 (i.e., Allawi) are significant at 1 (assigned measurement coefficient) and .38 ($SE = .16$, $p < .05$), respectively.

Variance in the latent variable Iranian Mediated Policy is 14.16 ($SE = 5.41$, $p < .01$). This is a measurement of variance estimated through two competing saliences of news media frames, Maliki and Allawi, in the coverage of the 2010 Iraqi elections on the website of *Tehran Times*. This variance is caused by this news media outlet's tendency to promote the salience of one of these two frames over the other. In other words, it is a measurement of significant Iranian mediated policy. Measurement coefficients of the single-headed arrows from the latent variable Iranian Mediated Policy to Indicator 3 (i.e., Maliki) and Indicator 4 (i.e., Allawi) are significant at 1 (assigned measurement coefficient) and .5 ($SE = .18$, $p < .01$), respectively.

Variance in the latent variable Saudi Mediated Policy is 4.41 ($SE = 1.65$, $p < .01$). This is a measurement of variance estimated through two competing saliences of news media frames, Maliki and Allawi, in the coverage of the 2010 Iraqi elections on the website of *Asharq Al-Awsat*. This variance is caused by this news media outlet's tendency to promote the salience of one of these two frames over the other. In other words, it is a measurement of significant Saudi mediated policy. Measurement coefficients of the single-headed arrows from the latent variable Saudi Mediated Policy to Indicator 5 (i.e., Maliki) and Indicator 6 (i.e., Allawi) are significant at 1 (assigned measurement coefficient) and .6 ($SE = .22$, $p < .01$), respectively.

Measurement coefficients of the single-headed arrows from the latent variable Iraqi Independent Media to Indicator 7 (i.e., Maliki) and Indicator 8 (i.e., Allawi) are significant at 1 (assigned measurement coefficient) and .43 ($SE = .15$, $p < .01$), respectively.

Relying on variance as a criterion for comparison, the findings show that with respect to the Iraqi elections of 2010, the Iranian government had the highest foreign policy effects carried by its international news media ($var = 14.16$, $SE = 5.41$, $p < .01$), the American government was second ($var = 11.31$, $SE = 4.97$, $p < .05$), and the Saudi government was third ($var = 4.41$, $SE = 1.65$, $p < .01$). But, these findings show that governments of the United States, Iran, and Saudi Arabia employed, in general, their international news media outlets to carry foreign policy messages about Iraq during the 2010 elections.

Discussion
Estimates of Covariance Relations
Figure 2 and Table 3 answer the first research question (RQ1). They show that the first hypothesis (H1) is partially supported. The covariance between the two latent variables, US Mediated Policy and Iranian Mediated Policy, is negative but highly significant ($cov = -2.43$, $SE = 1.3$, $p < .05$), and the covariance between the two latent variables, US Mediated Policy and Saudi Mediated Policy, is positive and moderately significant ($cov = 1.48$, $SE = .9$, $p < .1$). This confirms previous research findings that the United States in 2010 supported Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's bid

backed by Iran to stay in the top job in Iraq for a second term. This was an odd situation in the relation between Iran and the US. Governments of both countries wanted Maliki to remain in the position of Iraq's premier for four more years; however, the Americans and the Iranians saw totally opposite things in what Maliki might represent in terms of their interests in Iraq (i.e., negative covariance, but highly significant), as explained in earlier sections of this paper. To a lesser extent, however, the Americans wanted to satisfy their Saudi ally. They wanted Former Iraqi Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi, a secular Shiite who had the backing of Saudi Arabia, to have some power (i.e., positive covariance, but moderately significant). (Al-Azdee, 2013)

Figure 2 and Table 3 also show that the covariance between the two latent variables, Iranian Mediated Policy and Saudi Mediated Policy, is insignificant (*cov* = .22, *SE* = 1.04, *p* = .8). This confirms the arguments of Former US President Barack Obama (2009–2017) that "the competition between the Saudis and the Iranians—which has helped to feed proxy wars and chaos in Syria and Iraq and Yemen—requires us to say to our friends [the Saudis] as well as to the Iranians that they need to find an effective way to share the neighborhood and institute some sort of cold peace" (Goldberg, 2016). Ultimately, these findings show that under President Obama, and during the Iraqi elections of 2010, US foreign policy simultaneously dealt with two opposing regional policies, Iranian and Saudi. Apparently, by attempting to promote Maliki and, to a lesser extent, Allawi, the Americans were trying to upset neither the Iranians nor the Saudis, because the United States was on its way to end the Iraq War in 2011, and wanted to leave a stable Iraq in the region, as explained earlier.

Mediated Policy Effects on Iraqi Independent Media

In Table 3, the latent variable US Mediated Policy has insignificant effect on the latent variable Iraqi Independent Media (*b* = .11, *SE* = .21, *p* = .6). In other words, the United States government's foreign policy messages about the Iraqi elections of 2010, through the website of *VOA* in English, had insignificant effect on Iraqi independent media represented by the website of *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency* in Arabic. The table shows that the latent variable Iranian Mediated Policy has insignificant effect on the latent variable Iraqi Independent Media (*b* = .17, *SE* = .18, *p* = .36). In other words, the Iranian government's foreign policy messages about the Iraqi elections of 2010, through the website of *Tehran Times* in English, had insignificant effect on Iraqi independent media represented by the website of *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency* in Arabic. Table 3 also demonstrates that the latent variable Saudi Mediated Policy has significant effect on the latent variable Iraqi Independent Media (*b* = 1.96, *SE* = .5, *p* < .001). In other words, the Saudi government's foreign policy messages about the Iraqi elections of 2010, through the website of *Asharq Al-Awsat* in Arabic, had significant effect on Iraqi independent media represented by the website of *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency* in Arabic. This is the answer to the second research question (RQ2). The second hypothesis (H2) is partially supported.

These findings provide important evidence: (1) English is more likely to be a barrier that impedes effects of mediated policy messages of foreign governments on Iraqi independent media. Although *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency* had an English service in 2010, this media outlet's content in English was just a translation from its reporting in Arabic. Accordingly, Arabic news media outlets of the government of the United States, such as *Radio Sawa* and *Alhurra TV*, are more likely to be essential in terms of carrying messages of US foreign policy about Iraq. However, I argue that English is not a barrier to *Asharq Al-Awsat*. Although it is an Arabic news media outlet of the Saudi government, *Asharq Al-Awsat* is based in London. (2) There are mediated policy effects of foreign governments on Iraqi independent media.

I put the interpretation of these two findings in a bigger picture. I argue that journalists of an Iraqi independent media outlet, like *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency*, learned how to cover the Iraqi elections of 2010 (saliences of media frames are the criterion) from messages of international news media of foreign governments, provided that the messages were in Arabic.

Directions for Future Research

In this study, I used the term, *mediated policy*, to refer to messages about Iraq sent by international news media outlets of foreign governments during the Iraqi parliamentary elections of 2010, and I hypothesized that US Mediated Policy, Iranian Mediated Policy, and Saudi Mediated Policy are three latent constructs interacting in a structural model where they influence a fourth latent variable, Iraqi Independent Media. To feed the model with data, I ran a content analysis of relevant international and domestic media coverage. I measured saliences of two news media frames, Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. The analysis showed that in 2010: (1) English represented a barrier to Iraqi independent media. (2) US foreign policy simultaneously dealt with two opposing regional policies, Iranian and Saudi. (3) There were significant policy messages about Iraq carried by international news media of foreign governments, which evidently influenced Iraqi independent media.

In any content analysis, the connection between the content of the analyzed texts and the characteristics of the outlet that produced the texts may introduce ambiguity with respect to inferences, (Huff, 1990) but this concern should be addressed by the use of different outlets in a replicable research paradigm, especially when delivered policy messages might be simultaneously framed in totally distinctive ways by different governmental media outlets. (Barkho, 2010) According to the findings of this research project, English represents a barrier to Iraqi independent media, which may define the target audience in Iraq, including Iraqi journalists. Therefore, when replicating the current analysis during the upcoming Iraqi elections in 2018, and while expanding the discussion to include the concept of *public diplomacy*, I will replace the English website of the US government's *VOA* with the Arabic website of the US government's *Radio Sawa*, and the English website of the Iranian government's *Tehran Times* with the Arabic website of the Iranian government's *Alalam TV*. But, most importantly, I should develop a new criterion representing Iraqi independent media, instead of *Aswat al-Iraq News Agency*, because the UNDP is currently not a sponsor of this media outlet.

I argue that it is equally important to apply the model analyzed in this study to independent media in other democracies emerging in the post-Arab Spring Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

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Appendix: Coding Scheme

1. Definition of the coding unit: A frame, that is a name, as defined in each category mentioned below.
2. Aim of coding process: To count the number of times each frame is mentioned per story.
3. Definition of the coding categories: Each of the following categories represents a frame:
3.1. Maliki: Nouri al-Maliki, Nuri al-Maliki, al-Maliki (when it refers to Nouri al-Maliki or Nuri al-Maliki), Maliki (when it refers to Nouri al-Maliki or Nuri al-Maliki).
3.2. Allawi: Ayad Allawi, Iyad Allawi, Allawi (when it refers to Ayad Allawi or Iyad Allawi).
4. Each coder should read, listen to, or watch the randomly selected stories under consideration. After that, each coder should calculate the frequency of each frame mentioned in 3 above in every story.
5. Each coder should read, listen to, or watch the randomly selected stories under consideration. After that, each coder should attribute each story to only one of the two frames mentioned in 3 above. A story should be associated with only one frame. A story should never be tied to more than one frame. The attribution of a story to a frame should depend on the frequency of the frame in the story. A story should be attributed to the frame mentioned more than the other frame in the story.
6. Test of coding scheme on sample texts: coder 1 and coder 2 should use the MAXQDA file to test the coding scheme on the stories number 1 to 30 of each media outlet.
7. Assessment of accuracy and reliability of the sample coding: *ICC(2,1)* will be employed to examine the agreement between coder 1 and coder 2.
8. Evaluation of the coding rules:
8.1. If *ICC(2,1)* is significant, and if *ICC(2,1)* ≥ .9, then coding rules require no revision. Go to step 10.
8.2. If *ICC(2,1)* is insignificant, or if *ICC(2,1)* < .9, then coding rules require revision. Go to steps 4, and retest the coding of the sample stories while refining the coding categories in coordination with the other coder.
9. Return to step 4 until *ICC(2,1)* is significant and *ICC(2,1)* ≥ .9 are achieved between coder 1 and coder 2.
10. Coding of all texts: coder 1 and coder 2 should now code all the stories in the sample of the current research.
11. Assessment of achieved reliability or accuracy: After satisfying the conditions in steps 7, 8, 9, and 10, use *ICC(2,1)* to evaluate coding reliability between coder 1 and coder 2 for the entire sample.
12. Prior to the current coding process, the researcher decided that the acceptable level of intercoder reliability is *ICC(2,1)* ≥ .9, as mentioned in step 8 above. If this level would not be achieved by the end of the coding process, the whole coding scheme should be repeated.