

## **Building Narratives: A Study of Terrorism Framing by Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya TV Networks**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the coverage of terrorism by Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya TV networks. It focuses on how the two networks differ or are similar in covering news about terrorism and identifies factors that may influence each network's news selection processes and the framing of terrorism stories. The paper applied a media framing approach using content analysis to examine several framing devices such as framing types, framing perspective, geographical locations, sources used, perpetrators, victims, episodic versus thematic, and responsibility. It was found that the narrative that 'the terrorist is Muslim' prevailed in the news coverage analyzed. Furthermore, contrary to the pattern among Western media, both networks were consistent in at least implying that the majority of terrorism victims are Muslims. In addition, the findings reveal that substantial focus was placed on disseminating and supporting official positions and decisions, and that humanitarian suffering from terrorism is seldom brought to the attention of the public.*

### **Introduction**

Years after the 9/11 attacks, news sources still devote considerable attention to terrorism and terrorist related activity. US national news networks broadcast more than 5,000 stories concerning terrorism in the years 2002-2006.<sup>i</sup> Much attention from media scholars in recent years has therefore understandably turned to investigating the representation of terrorism.<sup>ii</sup> Still, most of this work has focused on Western media framing of terrorism. This study attempted to analyze selected news stories from Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya TV networks based on framing theory. Using content analysis, the study examined data on how the two networks framed their reporting of terrorist-related activity. Based on the existing literature, eight framing devices were considered: types of news frames, framing perspectives, geographical location of terrorism coverage, sources used, perpetrators, victims, episodic versus thematic framing, and responsibility.

### **Terrorism Definitions**

Generally, it is accepted that the attacks of 9/11 were an act of terrorism, while the subsequent invasion of Iraq is often not considered in these terms.<sup>iii</sup> As articulated by Gaines and Miller, "Terrorism means different things to different people in different situations; politicians, academics, and legal experts have long struggled to determine which acts of violence qualify as terrorism and which do not."<sup>iv</sup> Over time, the term has frequently shifted in meaning.<sup>v</sup> Historian Walter Laqueur writes, "no definition of terrorism can possibly cover all the varieties of terrorism that have appeared throughout history."<sup>vi</sup> He suggests that terrorism is "the use or the threat of the use of violence, a method of combat, or a strategy to achieve certain targets... [I]t aims to induce a state of fear in the victim, that is ruthless and does not conform with humanitarian rules... [P]ublicity is an essential factor in the terrorist strategy."<sup>vii</sup>

Terrorism is too complex and diverse to be explained on the basis of a single cause or even a set of causes. The commonly held belief that terrorists are "madmen" is unfounded; there is no evidence of a "terrorist mind," "terrorist personality," or of any specific psychological factors that directly give rise to terrorism.<sup>viii</sup> Therefore, terrorism occurs in diverse and divergent social, political and economic conditions and needs to be viewed through historical, cultural, demographic, economic, social and

political lenses. In this respect, terrorism has become a global phenomenon, evolving from a local or non-local threat into a multinational and even a global one. There are several reasons given for the use of terrorism. Among them, to create high profile impact on the public with the goal of undermining public confidence in government; to make routine social activity difficult; to inflict as much as damage as possible; to seek vengeance; and to create physical pain and cause panic, chaos, unrest, fear, paranoia, anxiety, anger, grief, and a sense of tragedy.<sup>ix</sup>

Political discontent, marginalization and alienation are often associated with terrorism, as is religious fanaticism, but these explanations are all insufficient to account for the rise of terrorism in any specific time and locale. Poverty is not a cause of terrorism, nor is it a cause often advocated by terrorists. Structural inequalities on the national and international level may underlie conditions or correlates of terrorism, but they are insufficient to explain or predict terrorist attacks. The impacts of globalization, rapid modernization and socioeconomic and cultural disruptions may be associated with the rise of terrorism, and are often exploited by terrorists. However, they do not explain the phenomenon.<sup>x</sup>

### **Framing News Events**

Media framing has been understood as a concept of selecting and packaging on-going issues.<sup>xi</sup> As “schemata of interpretation,”<sup>xii</sup> how the media reports an event allows consumers to understand the event.<sup>xiii</sup> The concept of framing involves both inclusion (emphasizing) and exclusion (de-emphasizing) and media news outputs can prioritize some aspects over others, therefore intentionally or unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events.<sup>xiv</sup>

Before proceeding, it should be kept in mind that there are several problematic issues in reviewing the literature on framing theory. First, most of the literature this study relies on was developed within the Western context. This means that there are cultural and contextual differences between the content analyzed and the existing literature, which would not match the interpretations of the study’s findings. Second, no previous studies have been found in the Arab world directly linked to the use of framing theory. Third, and most importantly, no Arab media research has attempted to measure the two networks from the framing perspective, as some have examined the coverage of the two networks from different theoretical perspectives such as news production or news interest. Despite this, attempts were paid to connect between previous Western media research coverage of terrorism and the data analyzed here.

Entman explains that to “frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.”<sup>xv</sup> Thus, important elements of framing lie in the causal and treatment responsibilities of a news event as framed and presented to the public. As defined by Iyengar, “causal responsibility focuses on the origin of a problem, while treatment responsibility focuses on who or what has the power to alleviate the problem.”<sup>xvi</sup>

In this context, news frames can help the public formulate their beliefs and opinions about terrorist events. Through framing, the media simplify, prioritize, and structure the narration of terrorist activities, which allows an individual to quickly sort, interpret, categorize, and evaluate the events.<sup>xvii</sup> The literature also suggests that for every occurrence there are various possible perspectives to be taken, thus framing encourages an audience or a reader to understand an issue in a certain way.<sup>xviii</sup>

Over the last decade numerous comparative framing analyses of events have been conducted. For example, Jasperson and El-Kikhia classified news frames into three main categories: the official frame, the military frame, and the humanitarian frame.<sup>xix</sup> Official frames refer to news frames concerning support for the government and leaders in a country, including national unity and public support for the government. For our purposes, military frames refer to depictions of strategies used in “wars on terrorism” (e.g., operations, strategies of fighting terrorist groups, etc.) and humanitarian frames focus on victims of terrorism, notably the suffering and damage caused by the actions of terrorists.

Another important element in analyzing framing is proximity. Most scholarship on news coverage has evaluated proximity as a recognized news value.<sup>xx</sup> Studies found geographic distance affected the volume of news one nation received in another nation's media.<sup>xxi</sup> In examining newsgathering and distribution, Chang and Lee concluded that proximity was one of the important factors in determining the newsworthiness of information.<sup>xxii</sup>

A further key element is source. Literature indicates that news sources reference some ideas and not others. News sources create frames that render some ideas more salient and memorable than others. The literature suggests sources of a news story determine the basic nature of the story and influence the flow of information through the media.<sup>xxiii</sup> In other words, by examining the distribution of sources in news stories, a pattern of coverage can be traced and the media's institutional bias can be revealed.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Classifying groups has also been important in framing studies as well. Studies have suggested that definitional challenges reflect organizational and routine-level issues that impact the resulting news content.<sup>xxv</sup> Research has indicated that perpetrators of a particular attack are usually labelled simultaneously by different news outlets as terrorists, guerrillas, freedom fighters, or revolutionaries depending on the perspective of the outlet and their interests.<sup>xxvi</sup> Thus, the choice of words describing the perpetrators makes the audience understand how "ugly" and/or "heroic" they are.

How victims are framed in terrorist attacks also plays a role in how much a news story will reach societal salience. For example, by being able to identify with the victims or their relatives, the target audience is more likely to feel empathy for their suffering.<sup>xxvii</sup> Therefore, one aim of this paper is to facilitate a better understanding of the sources and consequences of these activities and offer decision-makers more insight into how to tackle terrorism.

Another aspect is the use of episodic versus thematic frames. As described by Iyengar, "Episodic frames focus on the immediate event or incident and give little or no context about underlying issues or context."<sup>xxviii</sup> Several studies have noted episodic coverage focuses on concrete occurrences or events with little contextual or thematic connection.<sup>xxix</sup> Meanwhile, "thematic frames focus on the big picture, for instance, by providing statistics, expert analysis or other information to help the public view the event in a broader context."<sup>xxx</sup> Thematic coverage therefore provides a broader and more contextualized understanding of the background factors contributing towards the issues covered.<sup>xxxi</sup> Regarding terrorism reporting, Iyengar found that the way episodic frames are used and the references to specific groups that are made within these episodes make viewers less likely to hold public officials accountable for terrorist events and also less likely to hold them responsible for solving these issues.<sup>xxxii</sup> Studies have defined a responsibility frame as "a way of attributing responsibility for a cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group".<sup>xxxiii</sup>

### **Why TV Networks?**

Research has consistently confirmed the importance of television as a public news source. This is true in particular of where people seek news about acts of terrorism.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Stempel and Hargrove found 91 percent of respondents said television news was a useful source of information about terrorist attacks, while 67 percent indicated that newspapers were a useful source.<sup>xxxv</sup>

In addition, scholars have argued that television is more emotionally arousing than are print media.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Inspired by the ideas of Marshall McLuhan, some scholars have argued that television, with its combination of audio and visual tracks, its apparent real life tempo, its nonlinear juxtaposition of video images taken at different times and locales, and so on, interacts with human senses in a unique way. It is thus capable of producing its own forms of thinking and communicating.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Some also argue that these technical attributes interact with market forces to create unique media logic, a format of presentation that integrates visual images, tempo, and rhythm in the unfolding of a news story, depictions of personalities, and dramatization of human emotions to make television news qualitatively different from print-based journalism.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Other scholars have argued for the uniqueness of television by focusing not on its technological attributes, but on social uses of the technology.<sup>xxxix</sup> Schudson pointed out that “the way technology is used has a relation to, but is not fully determined by, the technology itself.”<sup>xl</sup> To these scholars, the technological potential of television as a medium is cultivated in a market-driven “showbiz” context. As a result television news coverage is driven by the overreaching desire of broadcasting organizations for good visuals, good stories, and personalities; key elements for conjuring higher ratings. In routine news coverage, such desire gets translated into episodic coverage;<sup>xli</sup> namely, concrete occurrences or events with little contextual or thematic connection. When a major news event occurs, television broadcasting goes live, creating not only an enormous news hole, as is the case with 24/7 news coverage,<sup>xlii</sup> but also excitement in both newsrooms and society. Live television broadcasts often turn celebrity journalists and authoritative figures into star performers of an unfolding melodrama. They also turn news events into occasions for collective experiences of emotion.<sup>xliii</sup>

Research has provided evidence that in terms of covering events such as terrorist attacks, television news tends to focus on stories about specific acts excluding related historical, economic, or social context.<sup>xliv</sup> Iyengar found that for news coverage of terrorism, episodic reports outnumbered thematic reports by a ratio of three to one.<sup>xlv</sup> Other content analyses have also identified similar patterns in television terrorism reports.<sup>xlvi</sup>

The strengths of television in covering breaking news are said to be partly responsible for a subtle but significant shift in the orientation of print media. Newspapers have started to focus on providing in-depth, analytical coverage on existing issues, which has been called the new long journalism.<sup>xlvii</sup> Such in-depth, thematic, and analytical coverage is exemplified by the New York Times’ coverage of the 9/11 terror attacks.<sup>xlviii</sup>

To Cho et al., these theories provide a foundation to predict major differences in the language and tone of television and newspaper coverage of terrorist attacks.<sup>xlix</sup> Indeed, the nature of the terrorist attacks as a “what-a-story” news event<sup>l</sup> provided the conditions (including drama, uncertainty, and live breaking stories) that should amplify the emotional differences between television and newspaper content. In addition, television journalists scrambling for information and reporting live from such scenes as “ground zero” and the Pentagon during 9/11 were able to capture the real-time reactions of political leaders and ordinary citizens as the events were unfolding.

Much of the verbal content of television coverage was spoken spontaneously by emotionally-involved individuals. As a result, television coverage was likely to be not only more episodic with clear visual markers of actors and scenes, but also more emotional in terms of verbal expression.

These two networks were chosen for several reasons. Al Jazeera’s and Al Arabiya’s approaches have been to provide comprehensive coverage of news and events that matter to the Arab and Muslim world more than any Arab or non-Arab networks. This has made them not only the most watched channels in the Arab world, but also as an integral part of the political fabric of the region with a potential influence on public policy and opinion. The networks seem to have different methods of covering events related to the Arab world, especially terrorism. For example, Lahlali said that Al Jazeera has proven popular because it credits the Arab public’s actions, often discredits governments, and offers its audience news and information in line with their own thoughts.<sup>li</sup> During the period from 2000 to 2011, the two networks played increasingly ‘significant’ roles in influencing Arab viewers on internal and external issues, including covering terrorist attacks. They have also played a role in challenging censorship imposed by the Arab governments.

The two networks also are 24/7 news services and are sufficiently comparable to infer similarities and differences in the form and content of news using standardized measures. Both networks were launched as a result of financial support from governments in the Middle East, with Al Jazeera sponsored by the Qatari government and Al Arabiya by the Saudi government. Finally, both have demonstrated an interest in the broad coverage of terrorist events and related international news.

Despite their leading roles among Arabic media outlets, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya differ from one another. While both channels have demonstrated an interest in broad coverage of terrorist events and related international news, Al Arabiya has remained closer to pro-Western governments such as Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia in their coverage, leaning towards what has been termed the “moderation axis.”<sup>lii</sup> Zayani and Ayish argue that:

“Al-Arabiya strives to match Al-Jazeera’s proclaimed independence while avoiding its provocative style, eschewing its sensationalistic appeal, insisting on making a clear distinction between fact and opinion, and steering clear from the politics of other Arab and especially Gulf countries. By and large, Al-Arabiya pitched itself as a neutral channel that cares for Arab interests and staying away from pursuing ambiguous agendas and other parties’ interests.”<sup>liii</sup>

In this paper, for the analysis of news stories reported by Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, if an act carried out by a particular group or an individual involves killing or threatening civilians or non-combatants or destroying public or private property, and it is indicated or generally suspected that the act was carried out for specific or non-specific political purposes, then that act will be considered an act of terrorism.

### **Research Questions**

Based on content analysis, this study seeks to understand whether these two networks differed in framing and coverage of terrorism related stories. The following research questions underpin the study: How did Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya TV networks differ in their newscasts in terms of 1) framing type; 2) framing perspective; 3) using attributed news sources; 4) identifying terrorism perpetrators; 5) proximity; 6) identifying terrorism victims; 7) using episodic versus thematic frames; and 8) using responsibility frames?

### **Method**

This study relied on content analysis to examine a particular context of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya networks relating to terrorist activities within a specific time-frame in 2012. Sample materials from evening newscasts were digitally recorded (Today’s Harvest 20:00GMT on Al Jazeera and Last Hour 20:00GMT on Al Arabiya) during what is considered to be prime viewing time, increasing the likelihood of the news items analyzed having reached a comparatively large audience.<sup>liv</sup> These evening news programs were recorded daily from March 3, 2012 to July 30, 2012. One evening news program was chosen from each TV network, with the program on Al Jazeera continuing 30 minutes longer than Al Arabiya. There were 100 news stories relating to terrorism per channel recorded, and from the 200 a total of 171 terrorism-related stories (83 from Al Jazeera and 88 from Al Arabiya) were content analyzed.

On both channels, the dominant news stories in this category related to al-Qaeda in Yemen, al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the armed attack on a Jewish school in Toulouse, France. Stories covering terrorist attacks in Yemen and Iraq ran for just one day in a single report for each. These events were covered for a short period of time partly because of the massive coverage devoted by the two channels to the Syrian uprising during the collection of the study sample. Stories surrounding the Toulouse attacks ran more than one report across a number of days, attracting media attention for longer because these events were synchronised with the French presidential elections. Furthermore, the French police investigation took a week to identify the perpetrator, who was eventually killed by French elite forces.

The unit of analysis used here was the entire news story. Overall 85% of all the news stories were sampled. Based on framing literature, the study specifically examines a range of news frames as: conflict frame, military frame, humanitarian frame, episodic vs. thematic frames and responsibility frame. The coding categories were designed to capture both objective characteristics of the stories (e.g., number of programmes, programme where the story was reported, and channel on which it was broadcast) and more subjective characteristics (e.g., presence of various frames). The results show some stark differences and some similarities in the way both channels reported on and framed terrorism and related events.

## **Findings**

RQ1 analyzed whether there were differences in framing types of terrorism stories employed by the two networks. Chi-square analysis revealed significant differences between the two networks ( $\chi^2=15.49$ ,  $df$  1,  $p < 0.005$ ). Al Arabiya employed 92.1 percent of its stories in official and military frames, compared to 73.5 percent on Al Jazeera. Most notably Al Arabiya used a larger percentage of military frames (43.2%) than Al Jazeera (31.3%) did. However data also showed the ranking of the four types examined were similar for each channel. For example, the use of official frames by Al Arabiya (49%) was higher than Al Jazeera (42.2%). Both seemed to embrace the official perspective of their respective governments in coverage of terrorism; a trend repeatedly found in previous research on Western media.<sup>lv</sup>

In terms of the humanitarian perspective, Al Jazeera (6.0%) was more likely than Al Arabiya (1.1%) to pay attention to humanitarian situations resulting from terrorism. It is important to note that the numbers of stories were small. Hence, the differences found here are not very robust. Nevertheless these results support findings by Aday, Livingston and Hebert<sup>lvi</sup> and Barnett and Reynold<sup>lvii</sup> who found that Al Jazeera had a high percentage of critical reporting with a strong focus on civilian casualties, suggesting that Al Jazeera gives greater priority in its coverage to humanitarian portrayals such as civilian suffering and disruptions in society than its counterpart. Broadly, results of the limited data showed very little use of this frame by both channels (less than 10% overall). Finally, the least amount of coverage was related to crime and catastrophe. While Al Arabiya used this frame in some stories (3.4%), Al Jazeera had only one story that dealt with crime (1.2%).

RQ2 asked whether there were differences in perspectives between Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. In comparing the two channels, there were significant differences in foci between the two networks ( $\chi^2=21.32$ ,  $df$  4,  $p = 0.000$ ). Nearly half of Al Jazeera news stories (45.8%) focused on the event itself, substantially more than Al Arabiya (26.1%). In contrast, Al Arabiya (63.6%) focused more of its news stories on the government's view than Al Jazeera (31.3%). Al Arabiya maintaining the government line was not surprising, as it may be difficult for the channel to disengage from regional politics, as Feuillerade has indicated.<sup>lviii</sup> Critics of the network have claimed that its content is more controlled than Al Jazeera's content because Al Arabiya reflects loyalty to both the Saudi and US governments.<sup>lix</sup>

Especially notable was the complete omission of the views of perpetrators by Al Arabiya. In contrast Al Jazeera allocated at least some space (7.2%) to these perspectives, particularly in those reports broadcast from Mali. This might be explained by what some view as Al Jazeera's efforts at covering multiple sides of the story. Miles explains that, "knowing it is scrutinized more rigorously than any other news station, Al Jazeera is fastidious in presenting both sides of the story."<sup>lx</sup> Finally it is worth noting that the perspective least covered concerned the consequences of terrorism; covered slightly more by Al Jazeera (9.6%) than Al Arabiya (6.8%).

Regarding the geographic locations of terrorist activity (RQ3), results showed no significant differences ( $\chi^2=4.35$ ,  $df$  2,  $p = 0.114$ ). Despite the lack of differences between channels, some results are worth noting. On each network, the greatest proportion of terrorist-related reporting referred to events that took place in the Middle East (84.1% on Al Jazeera and 81.9% on Al Arabiya). This finding is not surprising considering that the majority of the powerful and notorious terrorism organizations in the world (e.g., al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, Morocco, Somalia, and Pakistan) are located in the Middle East.<sup>lxi</sup> In addition, this region has witnessed the longest war on terrorism in history, and more terrorism victims compared to other parts of the world.<sup>lxii</sup>

RQ4 looked at the use of attributed news sources by the two networks. Because news channels sometimes mention more than one source per story, each news source was cross-tabulated with each news channel individually. The data showed significant differences between the two networks in six of the variables analyzed: official/military/police, experts, perpetrators, witnesses, victims and relatives, and religious leaders. There were no significant differences however between the two networks regarding the use of other media sources, health professionals, court sources and unidentified sources. Al Jazeera used more expert sources (24.2%) than Al Arabiya (5.2%) ( $\chi^2=44.05$ ,  $df$  2,  $p < 0.001$ ) while Al Arabiya used more official, military and police sources (44.3%) than Al Jazeera (19.2%) ( $\chi^2=4.26$ ,

df 2,  $p < 0.05$ ). Differences were also noted in Al Jazeera's more frequent use of sources from witnesses (13.2%) ( $X^2=8.26$ , df 2,  $p < 0.05$ ) and Islamic leaders (1.6%) ( $X^2=4.34$ , df 2,  $p < 0.05$ ) as compared to Al Arabiya (8.7% and 0.9% respectively). Al Jazeera was more likely (3.3%) to use victims and relatives in its stories than Al Arabiya (0.0%), ( $X^2=6.59$ , df 2,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Further, it should be noted that Al Arabiya did not use a single source from perpetrators and victims while Al Jazeera (10%) did, ( $X^2=21.33$ , df 2,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results support previous research that Al Jazeera tends to use different sources including sources from terrorists' representatives in its reporting.<sup>lxiii</sup> Al Jazeera did not hesitate to broadcast a tape from Osama Bin Laden, even when it faced potential backlash from the US government for projecting anti-Americanism.<sup>lxiv</sup>

RQ5 looked at whether the two networks differed in identifying perpetrators in their newscasts. Because news channels sometimes mentioned more than one perpetrator of terrorism per story, each perpetrator identified was cross-tabulated with each news channel individually. Eight out of ten categories examined were statistically significant. These were: Muslim/extremist/jihadist/Salafi; reference to terrorism perpetrators as al-Qaeda; terrorist; combatant; attacker/gunman; bomber; kidnapper; and unknown differed between Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya news outlets. Al Arabiya identified the largest proportion of its terrorist perpetrators in their stories as Muslim/extremist/jihadist/Salafi (27.3%) compared to Al Jazeera (6.2%) ( $X^2=37.77$ , df 2,  $p < 0.001$ ), and al-Qaeda (25.5% versus 21% respectively) ( $X^2=18.91$ , df 2,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings support previous research that some leading news outlets in the Middle East might disseminate stereotypical information related to terrorism and its affiliation.<sup>lxv</sup> Al Arabiya was more likely (12%) than Al Jazeera (0.0%) to denote *terrorist* in its news ( $X^2=20.16$ , df 2,  $p < 0.001$ ); *bomber* (8.7% versus 4.1% respectively) ( $X^2=5.58$ , df 2,  $p < 0.05$ ); and *kidnapper* (5.0% versus 1.3% respectively) ( $X^2=5.33$ , df 2,  $p < 0.05$ ). Al Jazeera, on the other hand, had its largest proportion of terrorist perpetrators mentioned as *unknown* (35.1%) compared to Al Arabiya (3.1%) ( $X^2=31.73$ , df 2,  $p < 0.001$ ); *attacker/gunman* (13.4% versus 0.0% respectively) ( $X^2=11.99$ , df 2,  $p < 0.01$ ); and *combatant* (13.4% versus 0.6% respectively) ( $X^2=11.99$ , df 2,  $p < 0.01$ ). Regarding perpetrators, this finding suggests that Al Jazeera has specifically moved away from identifying and framing terrorism perpetrators. This shift implies prudent reporting standards by Al Jazeera regarding crafting how news about terrorism is framed.

The identification of terrorism victims was analyzed in RQ6. A chi-square test showed insignificant differences between the two networks. Despite the absence of differences in identifying victims and their relatives, it is worth noting that the largest proportion of unknown victims were reported on by Al Arabiya (46.6%) followed by Al Jazeera (32.5%) ( $X^2=12.95$ , df 5,  $p = 0.024$ ). A post hoc analysis looked at nationalities of the victims and their relatives and found that the largest proportion of news stories identified them as being in the Middle East (47.0% on Al Jazeera and 45.5% on Al Arabiya.) This finding is not surprising. It is in line with US government data that indicates about sixty percent of terrorism fatalities occur in Middle Eastern countries.<sup>lxvi</sup> Al Jazeera (29%) was more likely than Al Arabiya (11.4%) to identify mixed terrorism victims,<sup>lxvii</sup> while Al Arabiya (23%) was slightly more likely than Al Jazeera (22%) to identify combatant victims.

RQ7 examined whether the two networks differed in their use of episodic versus thematic frames. Findings indicated that Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya did not differ in episodic and thematic frames employed ( $X^2=.64$ , df 2,  $p = 0.728$ ). Despite the lack of difference there were some interesting findings worth noting. For example, news coverage was more episodic than thematic on both channels (96% in Al Arabiya and 93% in Al Jazeera). Further, reports that included both frames remained scarce (2.3% in Al Jazeera and 1.1% in Al Arabiya.) These findings suggest that the news outlets *failed* to give a multi-dimensional background to viewers about the terrorist attacks they reported on.

The use of responsibility frames was also examined (RQ8). The findings revealed that the networks did not differ in the responsibility frame employed ( $X^2=12.95$ , df 2,  $p = 0.338$ ). However, it was noted that the largest proportion of the stories analyzed here did not place responsibility on any entity (83.1% in Al Jazeera and 74% in Al Arabiya.) In other words, while both networks provided extensive coverage of terrorist attacks, neither condemned them in clear and direct language by attributing

blame or assigning accountability, for example on al-Qaeda, for its role in threatening national security.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This research has examined the framing of terrorism news stories by two leading Arabic TV news services, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. This analysis comes at a time when the news media landscape in the Arab world has undergone considerable change, following the introduction of new satellite TV services in the early 1990s, and news services through the Internet in the 2000s.<sup>lxviii</sup> Despite the scramble to establish new news services in the Arab world, so far little is known about the framing of terrorism by the two networks. This study was designed in part to fill this gap. From this research it emerged that the two news outlets focused much on disseminating and supporting official positions and decisions regarding terrorism. Further, results showed limited coverage of humanitarian suffering overall.

In examining differences between the types of frames employed by Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, the two outlets framed terrorism coverage differently. Al Arabiya used military frames more than Al Jazeera. Specifically in examining the terrorist events analyzed in Yemen, the military frame dominated Al Arabiya's coverage. A May 21, 2012 story on the war on al-Qaeda mentioned: "the last several days have witnessed fierce fighting between al-Qaeda and Yemeni forces sometimes backed with raids by US drones in the context of 'War on Terrorism'." The lack of alternative frames here attests to the fact that Al Arabiya did not challenge the military frames in reporting these events.

In contrast, coverage on Al Jazeera did not use terms such as "War on Terrorism" to describe the on-going war in Yemen. In fact, Al Jazeera questioned the legitimacy of using force in Yemen, particularly when it came to US involvement. In an interview with a Yemeni political analyst on May 21, 2012, Mohamed al-Zahari said to Al Jazeera viewers that "The American presence in Yemen is greater than should be, their presence is unlawful based on international law, and I would say with great sadness that Yemen's sovereignty is violated." In this example, Al Jazeera's coverage supports previous findings by Nisbet and Shanahan regarding the prevalence of negative attitudes towards the US in Arab media.<sup>lxix</sup>

While there were stark differences in the frames employed overall, both networks demonstrated similar trends in their use of official frames. Embracing the official perspective is not surprising, however. Both outlets are sponsored by Arab governments, which have their own regional and political agendas.<sup>lxx</sup> In this case, the two networks clearly supported the positions and political interests of their sponsors (governments), as well as serving their policies. This trend supports previous research examining Western media showing similar tendencies.<sup>lxxi</sup> In its coverage of the Afghan war (post-9/11), for example, CNN was observed to employ official frames that reinforced the administrative position and patriotic message.<sup>lxxii</sup> Instead of challenging officials frequently cited in news stories, journalists endorsed and legitimized official views.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

In addition, Nacos<sup>lxxiv</sup> and Zeng and Tahat<sup>lxxv</sup> found that Western media embraced the language of government officials. Research into news coverage on CNN, right after the 9/11 attack, supports these findings.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Relying heavily on official sources, CNN's coverage showed a clear, dominant frame consisting of three thematic clusters that involved war and military response, American unity, and justification. Keywords within the war and military response and justification cluster included statements referring to the US more frequently as (America) instead of (the United States) and using the words *war* and *an act of war* to describe the attack, labelling the event as *horrific* and *unbelievable*. In the coverage, words such as *cowards* and *madmen* were used to describe the terrorists. Moreover, journalists made atypical references to God and the need to pray or for prayer and used words such as *freedom*, *justice*, and *liberty* as simple descriptors of America and its ideals. Ryan came to the same conclusion studying the editorials of ten US newspapers after 9/11.<sup>lxxvii</sup> Bush's "War on Terror" frame was accepted without any counterarguments and even reinforced by a select group of sources.

Further, the data showed limited coverage on terrorism from the humanitarian perspective. Although some scholars have credited Arab media, especially Al Jazeera, for caring about civilian suffering,<sup>lxxviii</sup>



the analysis here showed humanitarian suffering from terrorism was seldom brought to the attention of the public by either network. One can only observe that both Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya have a long way to go to provide contextualized and accurate descriptions of terrorism and its consequences.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Regarding differences in perspectives, the data revealed significant differences in foci between the two networks. While only one third of the stories analyzed from Al Jazeera focused on the government's viewpoint, Al Arabiya's more extensive focus on the government's perspective was striking in contrast. This suggests alternative sides in the majority of Al Arabiya's coverage were completely missing. This finding was not surprising as many of its critics have claimed that Al Arabiya's content is more controlled than that of Al Jazeera because of the network's support for the Saudi and US governments.<sup>lxxx</sup> It therefore seems that even though both networks are owned by Arab governments and both tend to focus on using mostly official frames; Al Jazeera appears to have had more freedom to report the news from different perspectives than its counter-part.

In fact, the data showed that Al Jazeera did an overall better job of presenting a balanced narrative by providing perspectives of both governments and perpetrators. Voices of alleged perpetrators, assumed terrorists and Islamic leaders were all represented in reports broadcast by the network. It can be argued that Al Jazeera seems to put forth an effort to be less biased<sup>lxxxi</sup>, which was demonstrated by its coverage of the conflict in Yemen. For instance, in analyzing stories for this study Al Jazeera focused on both sides of the conflict by mentioning the human toll of both official soldiers and members of al-Qaeda. This was not the case for Al Arabiya. In its report on May 7, 2012 from Yemen, Al Arabiya described the situation as an aggravation of the terrorism risk in Yemen, explaining that new coordination between the Yemeni government and the US administration had begun, and attacks of US drones against al-Qaeda targets were escalating as part of the war against terrorism. The findings here, therefore, support previous research by El-Nawawy<sup>lxxxii</sup> examining Al Jazeera's efforts at covering multiple sides of the story. This research lauded the station's attempts at communicating with the *enemy*, that is, those standing on the opposite side of a conflict despite the fact that during times of war, the context in which reporters operate would make such communication with the enemy unacceptable.

Despite the lack of differences between the two channels regarding geographic location, it was noted that in more than eight out of ten stories analyzed, coverage occurred in the Middle East. This might suggest a strong and significant regional focus. However, this conclusion is unclear as one would need to examine whether, during the time of analysis, most stories about terrorist acts on both channels occurred in the Middle East and/or North Africa. In other words, terrorist events may have been geographically more distributed, yet Arab news editors may choose to give strong preference to those occurring inside the Arab world. Whether this would be evidence of a news value causing biased reporting needs further examination and is currently beyond the scope of this study.

Regarding use of sources, Al Arabiya used more official sources than Al Jazeera. This finding supports the work of Al-Dawud and Majid who found Al Arabiya stories about terrorism attacks in Riyadh 2003 focused on the official response to acts of terrorism.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> While it is not surprising that official sources are popularly used in terrorism coverage,<sup>lxxxiv</sup> past research<sup>lxxxv</sup> also suggested that officials are considered more biased than experts. One can, therefore, assume that Al Arabiya was more likely than Al Jazeera to use biased sources.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

In regard to perpetrators, Al Arabiya identified its largest proportion of terrorist perpetrators as Muslim/extremist/jihadist/Salafi. This supports previous findings that some leading news channels in the Middle East, particularly Al Arabiya, are stereotyping messages to their target audience.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Al Jazeera conversely had its largest proportion of terrorist perpetrators unidentified and mostly avoided using terms such as terrorist or radical to describe al-Qaeda members. Supporting previous findings the analyses here showed Al Jazeera had more objective standards by using more neutral terms to refer to the attackers as fighters.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

In examining how both networks framed victims of the attacks, the largest proportions of victims referred to by Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya remained unknown. A later analysis of their origin however revealed that the largest proportion of news stories identified them in the Middle East. This finding appears to be in line with US Government data that suggest the majority of terrorism based fatalities occur in the Middle East.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Regarding thematic versus episodic framing, neither network provided their audiences with thematic narratives to make sense of a range of diverse information related to terrorism. Examples of thematic framing include information such as comparing each reported event to previous attacks, highlighting its implications for the region and shedding some light on the background of a suicide bomber and his/her reasons for committing such acts. Although in most stories both networks included diverse panellists to assess the attacks, reports that included thematic frames remained scarce. These findings are in line with El-Nawawy who suggested that Arab journalists tend to cover terrorist events more episodically when terrorist attacks take place inside the Arab world.<sup>xc</sup> Iyengar also reported that television news is overwhelmingly episodic and narrowly focused on specific events, issues, or developments at the expense of thematic approaches that report more extensively on the larger context.<sup>xci</sup> In the age of sound bites, there is less opportunity for thematic reporting specifically during conflict. In their analysis of the Iraq war, Dimitrova and Strömbäck pointed out that the media's focus on episodic elements failed to present the big picture about the conflict to the general audience.<sup>xcii</sup>

Moreover, it was noted that news stories on Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya by and large did not place responsibility of terrorism on any entity. This is not surprising especially regarding the way episodic frames have been used to make viewers less likely to hold public officials accountable for terrorism acts<sup>xciii</sup> and therefore less likely to hold them responsible for resolving any consequences of those acts.

Finally, this research was designed to examine the framing of terrorism based on two Arab TV networks. From a theoretical perspective, this research adds to the literature exploring framing of terrorism and pan-Arab coverage of terrorist acts. How different Arab television networks portray terrorism remains a neglected area of scientific inquiry and the proposed research represents a substantive effort to remedy this deficiency. However, the coverage examined here is just one snapshot in time. The framing of terrorism has been a top issue on the agenda of every nation directly or indirectly impacted by terrorism – including Arab and Middle Eastern nations. Thus, while the sample size was relatively small and the differences noted not very robust, future content analysis of terrorism should examine a larger sample size as well as coverage under a variety of circumstances, such as during and since the Arab uprisings of 2011. This is particularly important given the changes in the Arab media landscape since this time and the emergence of new Jihadist groups, most notably so-called *Daesh* (ISIS). Further, the way Arab and Middle Eastern media portray and interpret terrorism events should be an on-going topic in content analysis research. Therefore, media scholars should build a stronger framework to explain the unfold events in the Middle East, which may lead to the re-drawing of geo-political maps and radical changes in some Arab communities.

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