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**FRAMING AND COUNTER-FRAMING
IN WORLD POLITICS:**

**The Case Study of Russian International
Broadcasting, RT**

by

Elizaveta Kuznetsova

A dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

City, University of London
Department of International Politics

June 2018

For Anna

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London, 1 January 2018

Abstract

The burgeoning literature in IR has pointed to the importance of global communication for enriching our understanding of global politics. However, practically, few works provide comprehensive analysis of meaning construction that goes beyond the notion of strategic persuasion. This work will address this limitation by opening up to another, tactical level of discourse through the analysis of ‘competing’ discourses. This dissertation aims to advance understanding of framing and counter-framing in world politics with reference to the case study of RT. Empirically, it analyses how RT framed the Syrian Crisis in 2013 and the Annexation of Crimea in 2014. It focuses on the dialogic nature of international communication and applies a systematic methodology of framing and counter-framing to the case studies. The study analyses the dialogue between RT and its discursive rival, CNN, that emerges as a result of tactical efforts of the channels to promote interpretations. Making theoretical advancements in framing theory, the work proposes a structural model of data analysis. In particular, the work employs textual, visual and intertextual methods to extract sub-frames and identify meta-frames of the discourse. By exposing the countering strategies and the internal dialogism of RT’s narratives the work theorizes on the origins and implications of Russia’s defensive rhetoric.

Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis, except those elements specifically declared, is all my own work carried out and finished at City, University of London.

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Introduction

“{I}t is difficult for us to expect any positive steps from Washington. With russiaophobia raging over the ocean, the potential for cooperation in international and bilateral affairs remains largely unfulfilled”

(Lavrov, 2017).

a. Objectives of the Study

The Syrian crisis and the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea have dashed the hopes of those aspiring for a ‘reset’ in US-Russia relations (Monaghan, 2015). In fact, the two sides have fallen into the familiar Cold War discourse (Ciolan, 2016; Wintour & Washington, 2016). Yet, the tensions sparked by these conflicts are only chapters in a much longer tale of suspicion and mistrust between Russia and the West. NATO policymakers and EU officials describe these tensions as the conflict that has gotten out of hand, fuelled by the decades of socio-political antipathy and competing strategic objectives (MacAskill, 2016). Thus, the existing lack of common purpose on the policy front is continuously portrayed in terms of the ideological disconnect. Sustaining if not reinforcing this divide are the media discourses both in Russian domestic news outlets, the country’s broadcasting abroad, and the mainstream media in Europe and the US. Moreover, EU and US policy-makers continuously raise concerns over Russia’s ability to employ its public diplomacy tools for undermining the legitimacy of the current world order. In particular, the use of international broadcasting and social media as the platforms for disseminating ‘fake news’ has been driving the debates (Reetman, 2017).

This lack of prospect for reconciliation or even a noticeable improvement of the bilateral relationship has sparked academic debates. The situation is often assessed in realist terms as Kremlin’s resistance to submit to the Western hegemonic world order and thus seen as a struggle for power. In this context, Russian foreign policy is often evaluated as predominantly driven by material interests (Sakwa, 2008; Sussex, 2012) or by “authoritarian resistance” (Ambrosio, 2009; Silitski, 2006). In other quarters, the burgeoning literature in a constructivist vein looks at Russian identity, in particular focusing on the country’s great power status

(Neumann, 2015, 2016) and mapping the terrain of its legitimacy (Hopf, 2005, 2016; Morozov, 2009). While the literature on identity has provided valuable insights into what structures mean for the actors in world politics, and thus sheds new light on understanding the strategic priorities of states, the relational aspect of foreign policy has received much less scrutiny. This is in large part due to the dominant focus on official speeches as the object of research and the neglect of the dynamic media field as an avenue for empirical study.

Liberal research has been engaging in public diplomacy analysis, fuelled by the popularity of the catchy soft power concept (Dolinsky, 2013; Dougherty, 2013; Just, 2016; Lukyanov, 2013; Saari, 2014a). While all of these works, although to a different extent, recognise global political communication as the legitimate object of study, they are bound by normative limitations of the concept. The special issue of *Politics on The Soft Power of Hard States* has provided a number of articles that address this dominant positioning of Russia and China as the polar normative ends in the international system (Barr, Feklyunina, & Theys, 2015; Kiseleva, 2015; Wilson, 2015). These works have contributed a great deal to the discipline by problematizing the conceptual limitations of soft power, in particular in application of it to the foreign policy of the states that are not deemed part of the 'liberal world'. Within this group of researchers, some voices have articulated the importance of using the framework of relationship when assessing soft power (Feklyunina, 2015). However, by adopting the constructivist framework, these works still maintain the analysis within the realm of strategy.

This study thus contends that the discipline could benefit from a more inclusive operational research toolkit for assessing the relationship at the ideational level. This objective for finding analytical tools for understanding the relationship between the competing discourses is the starting point from which I embark on the journey of this research. The overarching purpose of this study is thus to suggest a way to correct this oversight through attending to methodology that would better deal with the questions of persuasion in foreign policy choice. In particular, I propose that *frame* and *counter-frame analysis* methods applied to the competing discourses that manifest themselves in the international communicative environment can help closing this gap in IR.

While frame analysis has been used extensively by the Social Movement scholars (Benford & Snow, 2000; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996), *counter-framing* is the phenomenon that lacks coherent conceptualization, both within the discipline of IR and the broad field of Political Communication studies, the large group of interdisciplinary approaches that

popularized the method and advanced its practical application. In IR, constructivist research (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Payne, 2001) has often pointed to the utility of this method. In fact, constructivist norm research looks at framing within the concept of persuasion and thus focuses on strategic meaning construction (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Payne, 2001). In this sense, the constructivist research agenda has pointed towards the potential of frame analysis but to date has failed to adequately to deploy it in practice.

The reason for this is that these scholars often dismiss the fact that central to meaning construction is the journalist. In fact, reporters work in an environment where their professional practice is limited by the form of the journalistic product that they are required to produce. These limitations come from various sides – be it the editor’s vision of the news agenda, procedural factors, or the ethical norms guiding journalistic conduct. In this respect, the practice of reporting is largely bound by the notion that they cannot tell stories effectively without packaging the story elements in a way that conveys meaning (Van Gorp, 2010). Moreover, frame-building process is often a result of constant communicative exchange between journalists and elites (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012; Tuchman, 1978). Thus, in order to understand better the mechanisms of meaning construction within the process of persuasion, it is necessary to direct our attention to the dynamic media field. Thus, the purpose of this study is to bring news analysis to the field of IR, integrate the methodological know-hows – developed by frame analysis practitioners – into a systematic analytical model that can be applied across paradigms in the discipline, and apply this analytical lens to the empirical example of Russia with the aim to generate novel insights about meaning construction in foreign policy. Thus, this work does not claim to offer groundbreaking empirical conclusions but rather proposes broadening the analytical lens to include another, tactical dimension of meaning construction.

b. Research Strategy and Guiding Questions

This research understands framing as a social phenomenon that can be looked at from three different angles. *First*, it is an object of research, the process of communication that we can analyze through the conceptual prism of *persuasion*. *Second*, it is a methodology that allows us to study how the meanings are constructed in the international. Within this traditional understanding, the focus is on strategic framing. Indeed, strategic efforts are an important facet of communication that by all means should be taken into consideration. This is the very reason why this study will not sideline this angle. *Third*, although frames are commonly used intentionally to promote an opinion in order to achieve a shift in meanings (Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012; McAdam et al., 1996; Payne, 2001), it has remained unclear to what extent the meaning construction process may be subject to communicative distortions of rival discourses in the international ideational environment. In attempting to synthesize and build upon the advancements of the fragmented field of framing research, this dissertation sets off to provide theoretical insights into the process of meaning construction that will be guided by the following questions:

RQ1. What are the mechanisms of shaping understandings in world politics?

RQ2. How can news framing and counter-framing analysis advance our understanding of meaning construction?

Thus, RQ1 concerns framing as an object of research, while RQ2 points the study towards finding the correct methodology for understanding this process. In addressing these questions, the work will develop a multi-level frame analysis model. With this methodological strategy, the study will be able to delve into the facets of discourse that were previously side-lined. Thus, the predominant focus on *strategy* in frame construction will be expanded to include the *tactical* dimension of framing. In doing so, the study will fulfil its objective to expand our understanding of direct framing and conceptualize *counter-framing*. Unlike previous studies that evaluate counter-frames and counter-narratives as elements of monologic discourses, the approach of this research will treat is a process that is relational and *dialogic*.

In fact, the *dialogue* is the concept that overarches this research. Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981), the study treats the implicit conversation between competing discourses as the realm within which framing and counter-framing operate, analyzing which

we are better able to see the co-constitutive elements of meaning construction process. With regard to *instrumental* framing, my primary focus will be on Russian international broadcaster, RT. Since its launch, the channel has transparently targeted an international audience to justify Russia's point of view on current affairs. With the desire to keep up with the West on the ideational front, the Russian government sought to strengthen its position in the global discourse with the help of public diplomacy tools (Simonyan, 2013). Within Kremlin's understanding of soft power, the tools of global communication are paramount. In fact, the dominant understanding of the role of soft power outlets is that they pose an inherent threat to stability within the country by the constant attempts to infiltrate the society on the ideational level and thus destabilize the government, stirring revolutions, for example (Kuhrt & Feklyunina, 2017; Saari, 2014b). In this respect, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 are often perceived by the Russian political elite as concocted by the Western powers through the successful exercise of soft power and ultimately public diplomacy. Thus, in order to evaluate the strategic framing, this study will highlight how frames function at the level of public diplomacy through the use of persuasive communication.

In particular, the process of adopting new ideas does not necessarily work in a direct way, from 'frame sponsor' government to target state government. Public diplomacy works at a different level, by engaging the public of the target state, which in turn has the potential to influence policies of its government (McDowell, 2008). Thus, strategic framing can be understood as part of public diplomacy efforts. In *Figure 1*, I illustrate how normative ideas within the persuasive process travel through a chain of sub-targets in order to reach an ultimate audience and subsequently the persuasive goal, which can be, for example, the behavioral change of the target state that is favorable for the frame sponsor state. Thus, the project draws a theoretical link between the normative ideas, or the structural pillars of discourse, strategic framing and audiences. To theorize foreign policy as a discursive phenomenon is to acknowledge that normative interpretations and policy are constituted through the process of dialogic meaning construction. This process of continuous narration, responsive communicative adjustment to rival discourses is what reshapes subjects and objects.



Figure 1. Framing and Public Diplomacy.

Through this analytical lens, the study will look at the empirical example of Russia, focusing on how it advances the interpretations within its public diplomacy. By exposing the various contextualisation techniques, the work will shed new light on the ideational elements that inform Kremlin’s discursive practices, and thus contribute to understanding of Russian *foreign policy*. Although Russia sees its broadcasting abroad as part of the country’s soft power, this research is not a study of soft power as such but rather of the mechanisms of shaping understandings and constructing meaning in world politics. In this respect, the work will deal with the ideas that Russia sees as potentially attractive to foreign publics and how these ideas are framing the interpretations of events. Thus, the secondary aim of the project is to elaborate on the following sub-question:

SQ. What can the analysis of the Russian international broadcasting tell us about the country’s foreign policy?

The research will argue that framing within the methodology proposed in this research can be used to theorize the constitutive relationship between international norms, their interpretations and foreign policy messages. The empirical analysis will be structured around the two case studies, the coverage of the of the Syrian crisis in 2013 and the 2014 Referendum turmoil in Crimea. Although my primary objects of analysis are the discourses promoted by RT, they will not be assessed in the isolated, ‘sterile’ environment of the monologue. In accordance with the project’s objectives to transcend the boundaries of strategy analysis, I will look at the discourse in a relational manner. In this respect, RT’s coverage will be assessed in its relation to CNN’s

narratives. The choice of CNN as the discursive opponent of RT was dictated by RT's explicit countering of the channel in its coverage of events.¹ I will specifically look at the dialogue between the news outlets which emerges as a result of counter-framing. In particular, the Syrian crisis demonstrates a situation in which Russia explicitly attempted to block the American intervention in Syria, acting as a *peacekeeper* against the *aggressive* US, as constructed by RT's strategic framing. The White House and CNN framed the events in terms of a humanitarian intervention, where the US is driven by the issue of *national security* and acts as the *responsible* world policeman. The Crimean crisis demonstrates an almost polar situation, in which the main actors – namely Russia and the USA – virtually exchanged their discursive roles.

Unlike similar studies which look at objectivity and bias in media framing, this research focuses on how opposing discourses create new meanings by deconstructing opponents' rhetoric. Although the object of analysis in the focus of this research is the Russian state-funded international broadcaster RT, this work does not study freedom of the press in Russia, nor does it aim at evaluating news objectivity. Moreover, the guiding idea of this research is to delve into the mechanisms of meaning construction rather than assessing the effects of framing. In fact, analyzing the effects of framing is the exact methodological puzzle that this study wishes to distance itself from. Instead of focusing on the political structures in a positivist sense, the project chooses to tackle the discursive realm. In this respect, the claims that this work generates are not aimed at explaining why, for example, Russia supports Assad, but rather to provide insights into the choice of contexts employed by the channels.

Practically, the study applies the intertextual method of analysis to the news discourses of RT and CNN. Although intertextual analysis has been used by some representatives of the post-structuralist strand of IR, it mainly applied to the analysis of representations in society, in particular with respect to marginalized groups. Thus, the topics that are explored are primarily situated around society and cultural meaning (Kristeva, 1980). Some of the linguists also apply the method to study media discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Hodges, 2015). However, these approaches rarely take it forward to explore what it means for our understanding of foreign policy. Thus, this study uses intertextuality as the starting point for the overarching multi-level frame analysis model. Therefore, conceptually, this work is broadly situated within the post-

¹ A detailed justification of the case selection is presented in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

positivist strand of IR, critiquing the attempts of liberal scholars to apply a rationalist lens to discursive processes. At the same time, the project distances itself from the overly normative premise of post-structuralist approaches that are essentially aimed at uncovering the hierarchies in societies. The multi-level framing model of this research instead provides a rather neutral theoretical backdrop for the analysis of meaning. In this, the study pushes the agenda of a more inclusive conceptual framework that does not side-line the various channels of communication.

c. Television News as Source Material

In IR, written communication is often given a privileged position as object of analysis, while images and even verbal communication tend to receive much less scrutiny. In fact, this linguistic focus persists even in the field of Political Communication (Griffin, 2001, p. 434). This study will address this gap by directing its attention to the medium of the global political information exchange that conveys meaning through the synergy of written, verbal, and visual communications. The reason why international broadcasting will serve well as the source material for this study is that the immediate, responsive nature of the 24-hour news channels can offer researchers a better view on the tactical elements of persuasive practices. Television is thus “ephemeral, episodic, specific, concrete and dramatic in mode” as it combines often contradictory signs in order to produce meanings, and its ‘logic’ is both, “oral and visual” (Fiske & Hartley, 1978, p. 15).

In fact, television discourse is unique in its resemblance to the spoken reality that is achieved through the combination of text, voice, sound, and image, all transmitted in a homogenous flow of information. Television has its own language encoded in the signs that resemble social reality but are nevertheless at one remove from it. Unlike the written forms of journalism, broadcasting has borrowed a large number of its genres from various forms of performing arts (Camacho & Manvell, 2015). In this respect, news broadcasting analysis enriches the research with a form of reflection that emerges out of television experience. It is due to this resemblance but at the same time due the density of interpretive material that emanates from the screen that understanding structures behind television messages can help us shed new light on the way in which social relations work (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). Moreover, television is an important stage for political communication. In fact, it is the exact platform that familiarizes the public with political figures. Thus, dismissing the information that is conveyed through this medium means closing up the research to the whole segment of socio-political reality.

Analysing news broadcasting has its peculiarities because the nature of television context dictates the methods of analysis that are distinct from those of any other form of written or verbal text. In fact, traditional discourse analysis applied to TV texts would generate limited, incomplete inferences due to the dismissal of the key elements of conveying meaning, the images. Moreover, framing as a strategy of meaning construction is inherently linked to visuals. Just like the frame of a painting defines the boundaries of what is essential for constituting an

art piece, each frame of a film is intended to exclude what is redundant from the composition. In this respect, framing is more concerned with the form rather than the material. It is indeed this notion that will guide this dissertation – that the overarching assembly of the discourse may be no less informative than the analysis of the exact meanings which are conveyed through persuasive practices.

In sustaining this argument, the study will develop a multi-level model that is inclusive of the various methods of *textual* and *visual* analysis. In fact, the combination of the two forms of frame analysis under one conceptual umbrella is one of the key methodological novelties of this dissertation. Within the framework of relational, intertextual framing and counter-framing, the study will thus focus on the internal dialogism between the image and the text (Metz, 1974). In this respect, despite the impression that the television output gives by showing only precise things, such as particular people, television image can also bring ambiguity by showing and not explaining (Stephenson, 1976). This intrinsic internal relationship between the visual and textual information contributes to the meaning construction will be one of the facets in the focus of this research. The *multi-level frame analysis* model applied to television news can thus explain the mechanisms of framing within the persuasive practices of the countries, which, in turn, can shed new light on the ideational elements of foreign policy.

The audio-visual materials represented in this research through textual quotations and visual captions were accessed via two sources: RT's online archive and the Multimedia Archive of the British Library.

d. Conceptual Innovation and Key Argument

The novelty of this study lies, on the one hand, in its systematic *methodological* approach that expands the dominant focus on strategy in persuasion and the assessment of foreign policy within monologic frameworks by directing its attention to the discursive dialogue between RT and CNN, including the facets of discourse that were previously side-lined. In this respect, it offers an analytical tool that can be applied across the different approaches in the discipline. On the other hand, by presenting a detailed examination of the discursive processes that take place at the two levels of communication, this work will demonstrate how the various contextualisation techniques that shed the new light on the ideational elements that inform Kremlin's discursive practices, and thus contributes to the understanding of Russian *foreign policy*. Here, I will address the paradox that while consistently appealing to liberal norms, Russia often promotes its great power identity (Hopf, 2005; Just, 2016; Kiseleva, 2015) and its desire to be perceived as a 'special' power (Massari, 1998).

In fact, public diplomacy research on Russia often highlights the country's foreign policy inconsistencies (Just, 2016; Saari, 2014b). This project will reconcile these insights by tracing the discursive underpinnings to it. As the following chapters will demonstrate, both RT and CNN, while intending to achieve opposing outcomes, utilized very similar framing mechanisms, i.e. appealing to liberal norms. Thus, at the tactical level of discourse, the journalists of RT operate with *ad-hoc* justifications that are rather responsive to the 'rival' discourses. This allows to counter the traditional approaches to Russian foreign policy that portray the country's persuasive efforts as operating in a vacuum. This analytical bias results from the methodological frameworks that have traditionally been used to study it. Unlike the Soviet Union that was characterized by the high degree of isolation, Russia is highly embedded in the international ideational environment. The argument here, however, is not to deny that there are normative elements that constitute Russia's rhetoric. Instead, by breaking down the normative ideas, meta-frames and sub-frames and exposing the dynamics versus statics of these elements of discourse, the analysis can explain how they relate to each other within the process of persuasion.

This study argues that the process of shaping understanding is not monologic but rather dialogic in the sense that its strategic efforts are highly connected to the volatile context and the

communicative distortions of rival discourses. In this respect, it is useful to look at counter-framing that, as the following chapters will demonstrate, can take various shapes. Firstly, there is direct countering when the frame sponsors explicitly identify the narratives they wish to contradict and reinterpret. Secondly, it can also take the form of implicit countering, when frame sponsors pre-emptively engage with the potential counter-arguments that they anticipate from their discursive rivals. As the text of this dissertation will demonstrate, this internal dialogism in large part determines the way in which interpretations are produced. By looking at this process through the prism of the multi-level frame analysis model, this work will showcase that the process of shaping understandings happens at the two levels of discourse and entails both strategic and tactical efforts of frame sponsors.

e. Research Outline

To address the issues problematized above and fulfil the objectives of this research, the dissertation is organized as follows:

Chapter 1 reviews the literature on Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and Constructivist research. It identifies the methodological limitations of these three bodies of literature, all of which recognise global communication as an important element of international relations and deal with ideational matters in world politics. The chapter critically engages with the conceptual and empirical works of these approaches, highlighting the epistemological inconsistencies that result in the lack of analytical toolkit for comprehensive evaluation of relational aspects of foreign policy. In turn, it illuminates how the methodological limitations have resulted in the inability of the three bodies of literature to provide systematic analysis of Russia's foreign policy messages. The chapter concludes by arguing for the need of developing the right methodology that would allow researchers to better deal with the ideational questions in IR.

Following up on this objective, *Chapter 2* proposes a methodological solution for this problem. By delving into the conceptual advancements and limitations of framing, discourse analysis and intertextuality, the chapter develops a conceptual framework that organises the study. By separating the levels of discourse and fitting the structural frame analysis design into these dimensions, the chapter goes beyond the strategic bias surrounding the analysis of meaning construction and opens up to the tactical facet of communication. In turn, it presents a multi-level framing model that can serve as an analytical tool for various approaches in IR.

Chapter 3 deals with the methodological particularities of applying this model in practice. In particular, it argues for the combination of linguistic and visual frame analysis under one conceptual umbrella. It explains how each of these methods can enrich the analysis and contribute to our understanding of meaning construction. In doing so, the chapter outlines the empirical research strategy employed in this project by explaining the rationale behind case selection, data collection and coding procedures.

Chapter 4 lays out the setting for the case studies of this dissertation by putting RT in a historical perspective of Russian broadcasting abroad. In particular, it highlights the role of the state-funded international news broadcaster in Russia. Based on semi-structured interviews and

secondary literature, the chapter highlights the distinct Soviet tradition that has influenced the practice of RT's journalists. In this, it provides a setup for the following Chapters 5 and 6 that will study the way in which the channel constructs meaning.

Chapter 5 presents the detailed frame and counter-frame analysis of the way in which RT covered the Syrian crisis in 2013. The chapter follows the structure of the multi-level frame analysis model and thus looks both at the strategic and tactical efforts of the channel to construct meanings and promote interpretations. This is achieved through the in-depth analysis of the implicit dialogue between the Russian state broadcaster and its discursive rival, CNN. In doing so, it exposes the various tactical framing techniques and juxtaposes these with the strategic framing process. Thus, it not only sheds light on both the process of framing and counter-framing as well as the ideational underpinnings of Russian foreign policy but also provides a useful point of comparison for the second case study.

Chapter 6 presents the Case Study II by delving into the way in which the Crimean Referendum was covered by the channels. This chapter is structured around the same discursive levels, strategic and tactical. The purpose of this chapter is to showcase how the channels reported a different political situation in which the actors of the conflict, Russia and the US, exchanged their discursive roles. In this, it further enriches the investigation with the empirical data to illuminate the mechanisms of meaning construction that is achieved both through strategic and tactical framing.

The final *Chapter 7* pulls together the insights generated by the two case studies and presents the conclusions arrived at through comparative analysis, followed by more general theoretical inferences. It stresses the differences between the processes of strategic and tactical framing and explains the mechanisms of counter-framing. Subsequently, it highlights how the conclusions of this project contribute to the discipline of IR and maps out avenues for future research. The study closes with the section that speak back to the problems raised above and concludes this dissertation.

Chapter 1.

Situating the Project: A Literature Review

“Just imagine that, for the purposes of your everyday social practice, you had to find your way by means of, say, deductive theory testing (“trial and error”), or the inductive derivation of theoretical propositions from empirical observations. You would get lost, stumble around, and eventually share the fate of the astronomer-philosopher Thales of Miletus, who fell into a well while observing the stars and was consequently scorned by a female servant who had both feet firmly on the ground. At the bottom of our hearts, we all know that the way we produce knowledge in our everyday social practice has advantages over standard scientific methods”

(Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009, p. 702).

a. Introduction

Following the growth of disappointment with the dominant explanations of international politics by neorealist and neoliberal theorists, scholars of International Relations (IR) shifted their focus of research from material and tangible factors to ideational aspects of global politics². This trend has streamed through various and often mutually exclusive research programs that work within different ontological frameworks, enriching the discipline with conceptual reorientations. New critical voices have sought to re-evaluate problems of agency, causality and power. These deconstruction efforts have revealed dominant narratives in the discipline leading to a key postmodern postulate that theory is never benign in the sense that it always influences practice even if one does not acknowledge it. In this critical vein, the field of Social Sciences appeared in a sense a discursive creation of scientists themselves³. This radical notion has brought a degree of confusion to the practice of research in IR that needed to be conceptually reoriented; as a result, the discipline has found itself in an epistemological debate.

² For a review of the ‘Third Debate’ and genealogy of constructivism, see Fierke & Jørgensen (2001), *Introduction*, in “Constructing International Relations: The next generation”.

³ For the development of this point, see Ashley (1988) in IR and Lyotard (1984) in Philosophy.

In general, although rather contested, terms the split is between the so-called ‘positivist’ approaches and ‘postmodern’ research paradigms (Klotz, 2008). While this classification is contested, with few modernists strictly adhering to the ‘positivist orthodoxy’ and many postmodernists rejecting ‘extreme relativism’, the split is rooted in rather substantial ontological and epistemological disparities. Advocates of positivist approaches maintain that the traditional theory-testing research defends the field’s right to scientific inquiry, continuing the quest for incontrovertible variables. The opposite camp of post-modern scholars insists on moving away from the form of objective claims pointing towards the failure of traditional epistemology to provide ‘incontrovertible’ foundations of knowledge. But despite their philosophical nature, the ultimate problematique of these debates is the domain of empirical research. The advocates of positivist tradition, for instance, are reluctant to include language as an object of scientific inquiry, even when it comes to interpreting meaning (Wendt, 1999), relying on the “mind-world dualism” (Jackson, 2011). Postmodernists insist on the mutual constitution of objective and subjective variables, rejecting direct testing against reality (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009).

This meta-theoretical debate has resulted in the empirical research still lacking practical answers at the level of methodology (Klotz, 2008). By methodology I mean not the tools of gathering and processing data but rather the conceptual structure that organizes the practice of inquiry in Social Sciences (Jackson, 2011). In this chapter, I argue that IR theory has difficulty accounting for the dynamics of meaning in part because thus far it has not developed a clear understanding of the process of dialogue, the essential process that constitutes the relationship between actors. The reason for this limitation is the lack of methodological tools for studying the ideational relationship between political actors. In particular, this is due to the lack of inquiry into communication processes. What essentially happens is that the importance of communication as a venue for political interaction is acknowledged but barely any strategies to study it have been implemented. This methodological gap has resulted in a large empirical gap, with studies unable to provide comprehensive answers to the question of meaning in foreign policy, in particular of the states that are not deemed part of the ‘liberal world’.

To highlight these conceptual and empirical gaps in IR literature this review is organized around the bodies of literature that in their own ways deal with ideational matters in the international and have recognized the field of communication as a legitimate object of inquiry.

Thus, it follows three lines of review. Section *b* critically engages with the existing studies on *Soft Power*. It argues that while this area of research has done a great job of popularising the realm of ideas as an object of emphasis in the discipline, its strategy to apply a rational lens to an essentially discursive practice has lead soft power inquiry into an epistemological deadlock. Section *c* looks at Soft Power's neighboring body of literature, *Public Diplomacy*. While the importance of media has been pointed out by these scholars, the empirical research in this field has been fragmented, mainly due to methodological limitations that will be addressed in this chapter. Section *d* of this chapter engages with *Constructivist* research, the framework that pays particular attention to meaning in IR and has suggested potential methodological roads for future research, such as frame analysis. This has emerged as a result of a meta-quest for theoretical foundations but the field has found itself in an epistemological stalemate that prevents it from producing empirical studies that employ this analytical tool in practice. This section highlights the methodological gap, in particular within the constructivist norm research.

Each section of this chapter concludes by showcasing how methodological limitations have resulted in the empirical gap. This is presented through the review of the literature on Russia's foreign policy, in particular, the inability of each of the three bodies of research to provide systematic analysis of Kremlin's, often conflicting, messages to the world. Ultimately, the chapter argues for the potential of frame analysis to advance the empirical research program by providing an analytical tool that will allow to answer the pressing questions raised by IR literature.

b. Soft Power

The concept of *power* is central to the discipline of International Relations. However, with multiple approaches to the issue, IR theory lacks a common conception of power. Realists tend to perceive it as an entity determined by tangible resources, which suggests a strong link with what is traditionally defined as *hard power* (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1959). An alternative to traditional theorisations is a relatively new concept of *soft power*, which rests on ideas, norms, and culture. Although Joseph Nye, who coined the term, was not the first one to introduce an alternative to the dominant in IR coercive power,⁴ in recent years his notion has gained particular popularity across the field as well as in media discourse. Nye (2008) defines soft power as “*the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment*” (Nye, 2008, p. 94). Although he acknowledges that the concept of *soft power* is rooted into what realist E.H. Carr called ‘power over opinion,’ his notion more readily fits into the liberal paradigm. In particular, it emphasises the role of institutions as non-coercive and non-violent elements of soft power. In his book *Soft Power: the means to success in world politics* Nye argues:

“Soft power is a staple of daily democratic politics. The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate of having moral authority. If a leader represents values that others want to follow, it will cost less to lead”

(Nye, 2004).

It particularly emphasises the role of well-developed democratic society as the imperative precondition within which soft power can be operationalised. As Nye maintains, “*in democracy, the presence of dissent and self-criticism can be beneficial: it enhances the credibility of messages*’ (Nye, 2011, p.109). This normative focus on democracy is apodictic within this paradigm to an extent that countries that are not deemed part of the liberal world are denied the right to hold soft power. For instance, in his rhetorical essay *What Russia and China Don’t Get About Soft Power* Nye delegitimises Russia’s and China’s attempts at soft

⁴ Steven Lukes, for example, suggests that power is a social phenomenon that is not necessarily based on tangible resources but works through preference creation (Lukes, 2005). And within post-modern approaches power is understood as a series of force relations produced through discourse (Foucault, 1977).

power by arguing that with the weak form of ‘civil society’ that is not ‘free and open’ prevents these countries to succeed in the world:

“In today’s world, information is not scarce but attention is, and attention depends on credibility. Government propaganda is rarely credible. The best propaganda is not propaganda”

(Nye, 2013).

Thus for Nye, soft power is a morally superior mode of political interaction. Bearing in mind the implicitly negative connotation that the term *propaganda* invokes, the popularity of soft power as a rhetorical structure can be explained by its potential to give a rather positive spin to the same term.⁵ For example, Bilial Mattern (2005) argues that the reality of attractiveness which soft power rests upon is a ‘*sociolinguistic construct*’, “*an interpretation that won out over many other possible interpretations*” (Mattern, 2005, p. 585).

On the theoretical front, despite its clear-cut and catchy definition, the conceptual and analytical value of soft power has been widely contested. The term bears a number of inner inconsistencies that are rooted in the imperfect conceptualisation. The issues begin to arise from the point at which Nye lays the notion’s foundation, *attractiveness*. It is simultaneously understood as a presupposed basis for activating the tool of influence and at the same time as an ultimate goal that is gained by exercising power. In other words, attraction is assumed as “*a precondition for its own production*” (Mattern, 2005, p. 596). Thus, the conceptualisation of resources of power, its instrumental arsenal, and the ultimate goal it is aimed at is insufficiently articulated. The critique that follows is that his notion is not a radical alternative to the traditional definition of international politics as a struggle for power but an extension of the realist concept into a non-material “struggle over ideas” (Kiseleva, 2015, p. 319). Hence the distinction between soft and hard power, both of which are rooted in coercion (which in the case of soft power is sociolinguistic), becomes impossible (Mattern, 2005).

All the above-mentioned problems can be overarched by the integrally flawed epistemological basis. In particular, soft power is an approach that applies a rationalist lens to an essentially discursive practice. For example, much of the empirical and policy-oriented research is filled

⁵ Some scholars acknowledge that soft power is a new phrase for an old phenomenon. See, for example, Parmar and Cox (2010).

with attempts to measure soft power, despite the conceptual emphasis on the intangible resources.⁶ Strong positive trends in research lead to an over-emphasis on “ideal functions” rather than “real structures and relations”, limiting the possibility of understanding social practices (Pamment, 2014, p. 51). And while Nye acknowledges that soft power is a relational concept, it still lacks methodological arsenal for studying this relationship. Subsequently, these conceptual inconsistencies lead to a methodological stalemate. There is a missing theoretical path that would lead practical researchers from ontological and epistemological basis to methodology. And this missing link is research design. How do we link soft power to the empirical world? Should we attempt to measure the intangible variables? What are the tools that are fit for answering these questions?

As a result, there is confusion amongst researchers who choose to work within this paradigm over how to apply soft power conceptually. Some lean towards the instrumental element of Nye’s concept and understand it as a *tool/means* that can be operationalized within foreign policy strategies (Nye, 2004). From this point, however, the target/recipient issue arises that pushes scholars into a theoretical struggle whether soft power can be directly targeted at foreign populations or policy makers or neither of them (Layne, 2010). Other researchers draw their attention to the soft power ‘phenomenon’ (Hayden, 2012). Thus, it becomes an object of research which stays rather focused on public diplomacy efforts of various countries. While the studies that focus on the EU and USA as case studies provide relevant empirical material (Cross & Melissen, 2013; Hill, 2010; Krige, 2010), those who focus their research on non-Western countries have faced conceptual difficulties (Suzuki, 2010). Here the problem lies within the theoretical limitation of soft power that is rooted in the ‘universal’ neo-liberal values that do not appear as natural and organic in different social and political contexts.⁷ Hence analytical utility of the notion remains rather limited.

⁶ For example, an annual index is published by Portland Communications that measures outlined by Nye soft power resources by combining both ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ data (Portland & Facebook, 2016; Portland & USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2017).

⁷ This point is well articulated in neo-Gramscian critique that explains the inconsistency by suggesting that all theories are inherently linked to the social and political context of their authors (Cox, 1981). Although Nye acknowledges the influence of Gramscian theory on his work, he disregards hegemony, and in this respect, the aspect of power that can exist independently of hard power only through consent is an illusion, that ignores “social reality populated by intrinsic mechanisms of coercion” (Zahran & Ramos, 2010, p. 24).

i. Russia's Soft Power

Despite its conceptual ambiguities, Nye's concept has affected enormously the theory and practice of foreign policy in China and India (Kroenig, McAdam, Weber, 2014; Thusu, 2013; Cross and Melissen, 2013; Wang, 2011). Following the trend in the studies of western and Asian states, international scholars have been also looking at Russia's soft power, its effectiveness as foreign policy strategy (Dolinsky, 2013; Dougherty, 2013; Lukyanov, 2013; Saari, 2014), the way in which Russia is revisiting soft power by integrating it with hard power (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015), or exposing the attractiveness of Russian conservative values to international publics (Kaczmarska & Keating, 2017).

In Russia, the term 'soft power' has found its way into official speeches, widely used in media commentary and is often a topic of political discussions. In February 2013, the official Foreign Policy Concept included the concept of soft power into its strategy of developing '*its own effective means of information influence on public opinion abroad*' (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013). Soft power here was mainly understood as a tool of culture promotion within the strategies of political PR and Public Diplomacy. A more recent document introduced in 2016 still includes soft power with a rather vague definition of it:

"In addition to traditional methods of diplomacy, "soft power" has become an integral part of efforts to achieve foreign policy objectives. This primarily includes the tools offered by civil society, as well as various methods and technologies – from information and communication, to humanitarian and other types"

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016).

A burgeoning literature in the country, both academic and policy oriented, has been preoccupied with adopting the concept, either by equating it to ideology promotion or the so-called 'soft diplomacy' (Naumov, 2015; Ponomareva, 2013). This has been looked at mainly within the framework of geopolitics, analysing soft power of states in terms of spheres of interest (Ponomareva, 2013). Other scholars in Russia have been looking at the necessity to utilise it for expanding influence in the world (Lebedeva & Kharkevich, 2014) or exploring the mechanisms of it within the western democracy promotion practices mainly in relation to the 'coloured revolutions' (Naumov, 2016).

As a whole, Russian scholarly works on soft power lie vaguely within the frameworks of Public Diplomacy and Political PR, which indicates the overall interest in the instrumental aspects of the notion rather than the appeal of it as a concept of power in IR. All the above resulted in a disintegrated understanding of the Nye's normative concept within Russia. This phenomenon is mainly due to the Russian discipline of Social Sciences being predominantly influenced by either materialist or realist theoretical frameworks (inherited from the communist ideological structure). While the notion has entered the realm of common sense and became a reference point as a discursive element in the public, the fragmented interpretation of soft power is also due to the inability of the concept to endure outside the ideology of liberal democracy.

By adopting Nye's liberal model all the above-mentioned studies that evaluate Russia's behavior on the international arena through the prism of soft power overlook the extent to which this concept is Western-centric, normative and rationalist. In fact, the conceptual flaws that are outlined in greater detail in the previous section of this chapter have led to the production of particularly inconsistent empirical analysis of the Russian case. The research has failed to adequately explore the nature of Russia's attractiveness to foreign publics and there remains lack of consensus whether Russia has any soft power potential at all. In broad terms, the issue lies within the conflict of explanatory vs. interpretive approaches in IR. Soft power research is dominated by positivist research programs, while ignoring "*complex structural and organizational concerns surrounding why and how PD activities are conducted, evaluated and justified*" (Pamment, 2014, p. 51). Thus, positivist approaches fail to provide a full picture of the international interaction that is not based on tangible elements due to the lack of tools to study meaning. On another front, interpretive approaches that focus on meanings lack system and often emphasize strategy overlooking dynamics of interaction.

Recently, for example, IR scholars in Russia have acknowledged the limitations of Nye's western-specific concept, in particular focusing on the normative aspects of soft power and the lack of conceptual rigour of the theory (Pimenova, 2017). Some works, in a "constructivist/post-structuralist vein", have looked at Russia's soft power from the point of view of hegemonic discourse that soft power has ultimately become (Kiseleva, 2015). Russia, in this respect, is seen as adopting the discourse of the hegemon '*in pursuit of power and status in international affairs*' (Kiseleva, 2015). While Kiseleva has taken an interpretivist approach to Russia's soft power and managed to explore the reasons behind Kremlin's

‘superficial’ attitude to the concept, it still looks at Russia as a unitary state that is pursuing a grand strategy (Kiseleva, 2015). This fails to grasp apparently contradictory foreign policy outcomes that are often perceived as Kremlin’s ‘unpredictability’. This is due to the methodological choice of looking at official speeches while neglecting the dynamic media stage, the area that manifests volatility of context. And while the interpretivist approach does provide a deeper insight into Kremlin’s foreign policy, there is lack of systematic approach to the study of relationship, in particular, the discursive interaction between different states. Thus, the empirical gap remains with lack of studies that explore such controversies as, for example, why Russia’s public diplomacy often appeals to liberal norms and at the same time promotes its unique and authentic, if not the opposite to the democratic world, path. For example, she argues:

“The Russian discourse on soft power situates itself in reference to its hegemonic counterpart, from which it takes some of its characteristics. But the target/recipient of Russian soft power is not only the West as hegemon, but also the West as Russia’s Other”

(Kiseleva, 2015, p. 317).

And while Kiseleva states that her study adopted a ‘relational approach to power’, it remains unclear whether the method that has been employed has the analytical capacity to study the relationship in sufficient detail. In particular, Kiseleva looks at how policy makers have responded to the hegemonic discourse, but due to the lack of systematic method to look at the narratives and counter-narratives, the picture remains incomplete.

Another emerging strand that is partly related to soft power research but is rather critical of Nye’s traditional framework is strategic narratives scholarship (Roselle, Miskimmon, & O’Loughlin, 2014b). Strategic narratives are understood as directly addressing “the formation, projection and diffusion, and reception of ideas in the international system. Finally, when we see how different states try to use narratives strategically to sway target audiences, we begin to see how contestation works, especially in a more complex media ecology” (Roselle, Miskimmon, & O’Loughlin, 2014a, p. 74). Proposed as an alternative way of looking at ‘soft’ as opposed to ‘hard’ influence, this framework particularly emphasises the need to look at audiences’ perceptions (Feklyunina, 2015). In particular, they study the reasons why some

narratives are accepted in the target audiences and others are not as successful in reaching their receivers. The scholarship on Russia, in this vein, is concerned with communicative “linkage” between the narratives and the audience. Szostek (2017), for example, looking at the limits of Russia’s strategic narratives in Ukraine argues that the acceptance of strategic narratives in the audience that “maintains personal and cultural connections to the foreign state through regular travel”, “media consumption”, etc. is more likely. At the same time, she acknowledges the limitations of this framework, emphasising that the “less strategic” messages and their reception lie beyond the scope of strategic narratives analysis. It is this other, tactical dimension of persuasive messages that my work will bring into focus.

The strategic narratives framework has received some criticism from discourse analysis scholars. For example, Shepherd (2015) argues that Roselle, Miskimmon and O’Loughlin undermine the notion of co-constitutiveness of actors and subjects in the discourse by applying a rationalist lens to narratives. This criticism has been met with a response that the intentional efforts of actors, even if “actors’ subjectivities are constituted through discourse”, still deserve attention of scholars, in particular when we look at persuasive communication (Miskimmon et al., 2015). Indeed, the strategic nature of political communication, even within the understanding of the inability to assess this from the extra-discursive reality, is one of the gears that constitute meaning construction mechanisms in international politics. The scholarship on strategic narratives has brought us much closer to understanding the effects of soft power efforts in the near abroad. However, the mechanisms of strategic narratives that Russia promotes in the Western countries has received much less scrutiny.

My work will, in fact, in large parts deal with strategic narratives but they will not be the sole focus of the research. These will rather be treated as elements of a larger and more complex meaning construction process. Moreover, I will expand my focus from narrative analysis to include a broader spectrum of genres of persuasive communication, for example the ones that are not structured as a coherent story. Thus, if we want to understand the mechanisms of meaning construction, it is my contention that we need to employ a more inclusive framework for analysing the multiplicity of discursive utterances. The framework that will be proposed in the next chapter will on the one hand look at the strategic and intentional dimension of the discourse. On the other hand, it will dig deeper into the tactical level of communication by investigating the relationship between competing discourses. Thus, my work will partly deal with the research agenda raised by a number of identity and soft power scholars, who have

pointed out that strategic communication targets the environment that is often ideationally fragmented and rarely ‘monolithic’ (Feklyunina, 2015; Hansen, 2006). For example, Feklyunina says:

“even when the goals and values are shared not by the ‘state’, but only by some of the audiences within state B, they can – depending on their position within the society and their proximity to the locus of foreign policy decision-making – have a noticeable impact on the reinterpretation of the state’s interests in the official discourse.

(Feklyunina, 2015, p. 780)

Although my work will not deal with the audiences in the sense of the broader population, it will nevertheless look at how the rhetorical rival of RT affects the discourse of the channel at the tactical level. As Chapter 2 will illustrate, this research understands the relationship between RT and CNN as a co-constitutive process of constant frame exchange. Both of the channels are thus the recipients of the rival discourses. In this respect, the work will partially address the problem of strategic narratives reception, but will also add the tactical dimension to take a closer look at the dynamics that affect meaning construction.

Overall, the theoretical basis of soft power insists that there is a complex interaction between practices of social communication but the methodological arsenal of such works could benefit from a more inclusive approach. The framing and counter framing analytical tools proposed in the dissertation aim at providing the means to broaden the methodological spectrum of interpretive approaches. By filling this methodological gap in the literature this study will also complement the empirical research on Russia’s foreign policy by providing the missing links in the understanding of norms and discursive practices, by focusing on messages of RT. At the same time, it will emphasize the importance of integrating media research in IR, an important methodological avenue that is as much discussed in theory as it is neglected in empirical research.

c. Public Diplomacy

The trend on soft power in IR resulted in the burgeoning literature on public diplomacy adopting the concept's framework. Thus, the studies that acknowledge an importance of international communication as an instrument of foreign policy also recognize it as a component of soft power (Hayden, 2012; Susman, 2010). The point at which these two movements in foreign policy research meet is their shared focus on the *strategic influence* that “*suggests a strong link between public diplomacy and soft power*” (Hayden, 2012).

The term has entered the language of international relations in the mid-1960s, after Edmund Gullion, a former US Ambassador and Dean of the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy at Tufts University, introduced it. He referred to public diplomacy denoting a means of influence over public opinion that would have a potential to affect diplomatic relations. At the time, Gullion had been looking for an overarching term to define the kind of multilateral cultural programmes as well as international news broadcasting efforts aimed at foreign public employed by the US. As Nicholas Cull summarises:

“Gullion's original sense of 'public diplomacy', as a more acceptable term for 'propaganda', reflected the extreme circumstances of the Cold War. Since that moment of coining, the differences between the two concepts have become more evident and the two terms are not now seen as synonyms. Similar to propaganda, public diplomacy was about 'influence'; but unlike propaganda, that influence was not necessarily a one-way street from the speakers to their target. At its best, public diplomacy is a two-way street: a process of mutual influence, whereby a state (or other international player) facilitates engagement between publics or tunes its own policies to the map of foreign public opinion. In the ideal case, public diplomacy treats the foreign public as an active participant - not just as a flock of sheep waiting to be ideologically shorn”

(Cull, 2010, p. 12).

Today, public diplomacy is broadly defined as «*an international actor's attempts to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public*» (Cull, 2010). IR scholars suggest that being an instrument of strategic influence, public diplomacy creates a favourable environment for conducting foreign policy (Kosachev, 2012). Nancy Snow (2009) suggests that public diplomacy, being a relatively dated term, has been practised by global

governments for a long time, while soft power represents a more precise concept of the phenomenon we are witnessing at the moment (Snow, 2009). However, these two terms are not deemed equivalents but are rather seen within a structure, with soft power being an overarching strategy and public diplomacy, one of the tools for gaining soft power (Hayden, 2012; Nye, 2008). But despite the clear-cut definition of the phenomena, the theoretical dimension of this area of research remains rather unstructured. As it is often noted, public diplomacy research “*has no consensus on its analytical boundaries*” (Gregory, 2008). In the recent years, the studies on public diplomacy almost in every instance overlap with soft power or nation branding research, while the conceptual distinction between public diplomacy and soft power has been rather vaguely articulated by its proponents, with only a few scholars offering theoretical guidance (Gilboa, 2008). To illustrate the lack of systematic research agenda in this area, those who frame their research within the concept are called ‘soft power-inspired programmes’ (Hayden, 2012, p.4). The definition points to the lack of theoretical rigour of such ‘programmes’ that often attempt at interdisciplinary analysis but lack efficient methodological strategies to deal with the research questions they pose. For example, Craig Hayden points to the importance of communication studies:

“While the conclusions may be pertinent to enduring questions in international relations, the method and subject matter are grounded in communication studies”

(Hayden, 2012, p. 4).

However, his empirical analysis then neglects media and addresses the question by employing “*rhetorical analysis of policy discourse*” to highlight “the consequences of such texts as both functional knowledge *and* practice” (Hayden, 2012, p. 4). Thus, the epistemological focus on the communication does not fully translate into concrete research practice. The particular reasons for neglecting media analysis as a tool for solving the questions the answers to which can be found in the communicative environment remain unclear. Such inconsistencies are due to the lack of methodological means that would effectively provide the missing link between the conceptual and empirical dimensions of public diplomacy research.

Overall, literature from the broad body of PD theory has failed to adequately address the issue around the function and dynamics of norms and frames within strategic narratives directed at foreign publics. Once the range of theoretical and empirical gaps have been fully revealed, the

work presented here suggests a way to correct this omission through showcasing the novel methodological and conceptual advancements.

i. Russia's Public Diplomacy

In the recent decade Russia has been developing “its own effective means of information influence on public opinion abroad” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016). Due to Putin’s government growing investment in Russia’s public diplomacy that manifests itself in the international news outlets, such as RIA Novosty news agency with RT international 24-hour news TV channel and Sputnik News online portal, in recent years great scholarly attention has been given to Russia’s strategies of influence on foreign publics, starting from the studies that look at the legacy of the compelling set of values and socio-economical goals of the USSR’s ideology within current Russian concept to the works that are more focused on the newly developed strategies. Two major trends in this body of literature stand out: those who focus on ideology that Russia is promoting abroad (Just, 2016; Simons, 2014) and the studies that look at tools and methods the country tends to utilize (Saari, 2014; Yablokov, 2015). Both of these approaches commonly link Russia’s public diplomacy with the concept of soft power.

While RT readily fits into the framework of public diplomacy (being explicitly financed by the Russian government and aimed at promoting Russia’s point of view abroad (RT, 2017)), most of the studies that analyse it within this body of literature tend to approach it rather superficially, sustaining the empirical gap in the literature on Russia’s public diplomacy. For example, James Sherr (2013) provides a comprehensive overview of what are the roots and forms of Russian influence in the world but pays very little attention to the use of media (Sherr, 2013). In this vein, current Russia’s “message to the world” rests on two main aspects: its unique cultural difference from the West (Sherr, 2013) and the assumption that “there is a ‘natural’ attraction of weak powers to the strong on a voluntary basis” (Simons et al., 2014). Based on this analysis a broad consensus amongst liberal scholars has emerged that Russia lacks significantly the values that would be potentially attractive to foreign publics (Avgerinos, 2009; Simons et al., 2014). This criticism is explained by the fact that particularly the post-Soviet states, which are the deemed the main targets of Russia’s PD, historically perceive Russia as a powerful “big brother” but also as an invader. Within this liberal paradigm,

transforming this image has been seen as tremendously challenging for the country's foreign policy strategies. In particular, the challenge is understood in terms of transforming the traditional hard power approaches to more subtle and diffuse means of influence. Thus, the majority of studies that look at Russia's PD strategies in the Commonwealth states and post-Soviet states tend to conclude that Russia hasn't managed to change the constructed image of an aggressor. For example, Jaroslav Cwiek-Karpowicz, describing Russian influence on the Eastern Partnership Countries, notes:

“The manner in which Russia tries to promote its own history and culture often poses a serious threat to the national identity of other post-Soviet states”

(Cwiek-Karpowicz, 2011).

This normative conclusion appears fragmented and even distorted. Firstly, there is lack of articulation of what the notion of attractiveness entails and secondly, the PD literature has failed to adequately elaborate on the reasons why some norms and values may be more attractive for foreign states than others. All the above drawbacks of public diplomacy literature are largely due to the imperfect methodological arsenal that the theory has at its disposal. The most important gap in public diplomacy literature on Russia is that all these studies either dismiss the role of media within it or overlook the countering efforts of RT and therefore fail to explain the reasons behind Russia's often defensive rhetoric.

There are number of more in-depth studies however, such as, for example, Yablokov's (2015) analysis of conspiracy theories that are often presented on RT, which is a compelling study. While, in essence, it does focus on the countering efforts of the channel, looking at *“how various conspiratorial notions in programmes broadcast by RT legitimise Russian domestic and foreign policies and, in turn, delegitimise policies of the American government”* (Yablokov, 2015), it takes only a fragment rather than a system of tools that RT utilises as his object of focus and it lacks a structured methodological approach to the issue. Thus, the strategy to single out one of the RT's element doesn't manage to fill the gap in PD literature that would have provided a comprehensive explanation of Russian intentions and their roots. My study, on the other hand, employing a systematic approach of framing and counter framing that benefits from a symbiotic relationship between its conceptual and methodological aspects will attempt to close the apparent gap in the PD literature.

d. Constructivism

As an alternative to rationalist positions in IR, constructivists have developed theoretical advancements of mutual constitution of structures and agents, where objects and subjects are mutually shaped by a series of practices that operate through creation and dynamics of rules and norms. While there remains lack of clarity over what constructivism is with several groups of closely related approaches, the theoretical assumption that they tend to share can be summarized into the below:

“<...> the actions of states contribute to making the institutions and norms of international life, and these institutions and norms contribute to defining, socializing, and influencing states. Both the institutions and the actors can be redefined in the process”

(Hurd, 2008, p. 304).

Informed by the linguistic turn in Sociology and Philosophy⁸, constructivist research has broadened the understanding of international organizations and law, ideas and norms, as well as argument and persuasion in IR. The new avenue of inquiry has stretched the borders of what is considered as a “legitimate object of analysis in IR” (Hofferberth & Weber, 2015). Great emphasis by this school of thought has been given to meaning in world politics and to how these understandings of political reality shape actors’ behavior.

“Constructivists argue that people strive not only to make sense out of their world and to act within it, but also to communicate their understandings to others”

(Kowert, 1998).

Thus, the meaning is viewed within the context of intersubjectivity, another overarching aspect of constructivist approaches in IR. Constructivism as a rather heterogeneous current of related approaches are split into modern and postmodern streams (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001; Price & Reus-Smit, 1998). The first camp clings to some of the epistemological assumptions of the “positivist orthodoxy”, while the poststructuralism-leaning constructivists refuse claims of

⁸ For example, Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language, in particular, the idea that language is the linking force of social nature, as well as the works of Jurgen Habermas and Anthony Giddens – to name a few – have largely inspired modern and postmodern constructivisms (Fierke & Jørgensen, 2001).

objective knowledge. For example, in Wendt's (1999) social reality actors do not communicate through language but rather through signals, or "conversation of gestures", for post-positivist constructivists language is central (Kratochwil, 1989; Onuf, 1989). Another point of contention over constructivist and poststructuralist epistemological assumptions is the emphasis on either a priori rationality (Wendt, 1992) or a priori meaning (Campbell, 1998; Zehfuss, 2002).⁹

Poststructuralists insist that intersubjectivity is a '*dialogical relationship in so far as meaning and practices arise out of interaction*' and that casual explanations are unfit for an ontology of mutual constitution (Fierke, 2001, p. 107), however practically this group of researchers has not produced methodological advancements for the comprehensive study of this relationship. There are two reasons for this limitation. Firstly, discourse analysis as the method largely utilised by poststructuralists, is primarily directed at monologic texts. Secondly, the lack of coherent conceptualization of dialogue is due to the neglect of reactive and responsive field of media communication. Moreover, the so-called 'critical' constructivist research has been rather actively engaged in empirical work, which main objective is not to explain casual mechanisms but rather to denaturalise prevailing social constructs. In this poststructuralist vein, this is not seen outside of the power relations in their research. These works provide, for example, insights into the meaning of historical milestones in international relations, such as Cuban missile crisis (Weldes, 1996) or the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Fierke, 1996). Others explore the role of discourse as a means of political and economic exploitation (Doty, 1996) or advance theory of speech, argument and persuasion as mechanisms of social construction (Crawford, 2002; Kratochwil, 1989). From Fierke's perspective, the limitations of such approach is due to the lack of conceptual links between theory and practical research:

"In fact, one can argue that the critical endeavour of the poststructuralists suffers precisely because their own, often very abstract, theoretical assumptions are not sufficiently related to the analysis of actual practices"

(Fierke, 2001, p. 108).

⁹ For example, Wendt's constructivism assumes that rational interest precedes any form of communicative action in social reality or intersubjective codes, such as language (Fierke, 2001). For poststructuralists, meaning presupposes action (Campbell, 1998; Doty, 1996; Fierke, 2001; Zehfuss, 2002)

Thus, the conceptualisation of identity in their works leads to an exercise of research that is not entirely dissimilar to the positivist tradition, that is that their ontological assumptions presuppose and heavily influence the practice of poststructuralist research¹⁰.

There are number of conceptual inconsistencies in the mainstream constructivist as well as poststructuralist views on research design and at the same time, several proposals to resolve these issues, such as, for example, the desire to develop an “explicitly constructivist criteria for constructing ‘better’ accounts of international politics” has been raised (Fierke & Jørgensen, 2001). The attempts to provide solutions for the problem can be categorized into three streams: proposals to continue testing hypotheses in a neopositivist vein, abandon criteria for assessing validity claims as such by adopting poststructuralist epistemological stance, or find a middle ground that would allow to maintain a form of criteria but will not necessarily translate into hypotheses testing and falsification. However, these epistemological disputes in constructivist norm research have held it lagging behind from other strands in adapting the methods that are already effectively used across the field of Social Sciences and integrating them into a structured and operational research methodology.

Indeed, while constructivists often advertise the strength of their theoretical arguments, in particular in the area of norms and interpretations (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001), they have received criticism for a number of conceptual inconsistencies that emerged from the internal epistemological conflict of explaining change in international relations. For example, Hofferberth and Weber (2015) contend that the main theoretical argument of constructivist norm research – that there is constant negotiation and re-negotiation of norms and meanings in social communication – has dissolved in the flawed research design:

“We argue that the commitment to a methodological framework that posits a unidirectional causal relationships between independent and dependant variables has led the constructivist norm research to a categorical separation of norms and action and to a theorisation of their relation in a cultural-determinist way”

(Hofferberth & Weber, 2015).

¹⁰ See, for example, Hoy and McCarthy(1994), who note that poststructuralist discourse is essentially normative, that is heavily reliant on a strict list of ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ for performing research.

This is largely due to conceptualisation of norms as variables that are held stable at the stage of empirical analysis. Defined as ‘standards of appropriate behaviour’, they are seen as structural elements that communicate clear-cut and unchanging instructions. Thus, norms are seen as having ‘regulative effects’ on the ‘behaviour’ of actors, and they are analytically treated as independent variables (Finnemore, 1996; Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999). This neopositivist framework with a “structuralist” bias (Jackson, 2003) appears rather static to be able to analyse interpretive change. In particular, such methodology offers little analytical power to look at discursive interaction in the international. Consequently, the promise to provide deeper insight into the process of international change and the relationship between norms and interpretations, in particular, has not been met and this gap in IR literature remains due to the missing methodological resource.

Moreover, constructivist research on norm construction and persuasion suffers from strategic bias. While the constituting part of the constructivist ontology is compelling, they also perceive the states as ‘unitary actors to which we legitimately can attribute anthropomorphic qualities like identities, interests, and internationality’ (Wendt, 1999, p. 43). Thus, they give great emphasis to the links between strategic behavior and norms. Constructivists do not exclude the element of ‘self-interest’ that constitutes the social relationship in the international. This ontological basis explains why constructivists are mainly preoccupied with strategic behavior. This issue lies within the constructivism vs. rationalism dispute over state interests, and there is lack of clarity in the constructivists approaches around their treatment of strategic behavior. While they move away from rational interpretation of state behavior based on causality, they at the same time agree that “states act in pursuit of what they see as their interests, and they are as concerned with ‘power and interests’ as are realists (and liberals)” (Hurd, 2010). In this vein, discourse within constructivism is inherently linked to the strategic behavior, while the tactical elements are often omitted. The struggle over critical vs. empirical approaches has confused the researchers that attempt to find pragmatic answers to the concerns of international politics. As Fierke (2001) put it,

“{T}he argument, which emerged during the Third Debate, that realists cannot adequately account for processes of change, is an act of disconfirmation. In this respect, to disconfirm is to raise questions about the validity or accuracy of a set of theoretical assumptions”

(Fierke, 2001, p. 125).

Thus, stuck in a meta-theoretical quest for epistemological solutions of positivist vs. post-positivist debate, constructivist norm research has largely ignored methodological tools of communication studies that are ready to be applied as analytical tools to provide the answers to the ideational questions concerning foreign policy. Although some point to the potential of framing (Klotz & Lynch, 2015), these methodologies have not been systematically applied in practice when looking at the relationship between norms and frames in foreign policy, which this research aims to bring into stark focus.

i. Constructivist Research on Russia

There has been a growing number of studies that analyse Russia's behaviour on international arena through the prism of meaning. Within this segment, two trends stand out: security studies that are preoccupied with how state identity influences external security policy (Snetkov, 2012; Wilhelmsen, 2016), literature of status and its legitimacy (Hopf, 2005; Morozov, 2009; Neumann, 2015, 2016) and a group of works that evaluate Russia's policy choices by bringing Kremlin's interests into stark focus (Feklyunina, 2015; Roberts, 2014; Tsygankov, 2012, 2014, 2016; White & Feklyunina, 2014). Many of these studies have presented rich analysis of Russian post-communist identity and the dominant discourses that inform its construction.

The first strand of identity research on Russia suffers from a number of epistemological limitations: Within constructivist framework, actors are often assessed as rather unitary players in the field of international, which, in turn, produces works that emphasise the ideational frameworks that are driving Russian foreign policy such as the country's "great power identity" (Hopf, 2005) and "superiority complex" (Neumann, 2016) but this does not further highlight the tactical communicative particularities that also influence the way relationship between countries work in the international.

The second strand of this literature provides a more accurate account of the conflicting elite discourses that determine Russia's self-recognition. For example, White and Feklyunina (2014), in their comprehensive work, present an insightful analysis of identity debates and explain what these mean for Russia through qualitative and quantitative analysis. By assessing the meaning of Europe in what constitutes it for post-communist countries, they show how the

official foreign policy discourse has evolved from “Russia as Europe” during the Gorbachev’s presidency to a more Eurasian orientation of the past decade. In contrast to liberal and realist accounts, these works emphasise the relational aspect of foreign policy. Russia is thus seen as seeking recognition from the West and redefining its own identity in relation to the ‘Other’ (Tsygankov, 2016). As Tsygankov puts it, “identity is therefore a system of meanings that expresses the self’s emotional, cognitive, and evaluative orientations towards the Other.” This notion suggests an explanation of Russia’s on the one hand constant strive for the opponent’s recognition but on the other hand the country’s shielding from it in order to construct its own distinctiveness. Drawing on the above-mentioned works, this defensive element of Russia’s foreign policy messages will be in stark focus of this research.

Another important work that, located at the intersection between post-colonial, post-structuralist and constructivist approaches in IR, looks at Russia as a ‘subaltern empire’ (Morozov, 2015). Using this framework to draw ‘modest generalisations’ and some ‘cross-national’ comparison Morozov points out that reason behind Russia’s ‘subversive’ discourse. He further emphasises Russia’s desire to “mimic” the West within the normative space of the hegemon. This theoretical insight will be particularly closely explored in this research by directing my attention to the discursive boundaries within which Russia operates.

Unlike identity research, however, I will not look at Russia’s foreign policy as a systematic set of ideas based on elite discourses. Rather, this work opens up another dimension of it, the level of tactical interpretations. In other words, I will aim to understand the extent to which rival discourses of other countries may influence the meaning construction process. This work will aim to add to this second strand of knowledge on Russian identity by looking more closely at the exact relationship between norms and frames. Apart from focusing on the elite discourses, this work will look closer at the discursive interaction at the tactical level. This will, in turn, present a more accurate understanding of the current ideational setup in Russian foreign policy. It will also offer a more precise toolkit for reading Russian foreign policy messages, opening up the ‘between the lines’ dimension of the discourse.

Thus, in this work I wish to distance the research from attributing agency to the elite groups in Russia and take a closer look at the more dynamic discursive space, the dialogic and intertextual processes that take place in the international communicative environment. In doing

so, this research will expand this narrow focus on strategy by advancing another, tactical level of states behavior, emphasizing the *ad hoc* justifications that surround messages emanating from public diplomacy outlets. It will do so by advancing the methodological arsenal of constructivism, such as framing and in particular counter framing. Framing provides methodological means for constructivist analysis, in particular for such approaches that work with epistemological claims that Zehfuss summarizes into the below:

“As social problems do not have logically necessary solutions and social situations are necessarily indeterminate, analysis has to concentrate on how questions concerning validity claims are decided through discourse”

(Zehfuss, 2002, p. 17).

It is able to compliment the analysis that posits ‘reality’ as a significant point of reference, the existence of material world is not disputed. And framing can be applied within the ontology of the less ubiquitous nature of discourse (compared to, for example post-structuralist approaches), where rules and norms shape actors’ behavior but do not fully determine it (Kratochwil, 1989). Moreover, the research strategy that will be proposed in the following chapter can complement both approaches. It has the potential to expand on the insufficiently explored by constructivists role of language within the reality of intersubjectivity, in particular, the meaning and the mechanism that drive its creation. On the other hand, the tactical framing can be explored beyond agency. Thus, framing feeds in to both positive-leaning and fundamentally post-positive epistemological approaches. On the one hand, it can work with hypothesis that is proposed *a priori*, which can then be tested through empirical study. On the other hand, the ‘*logic of discovery*’ can presuppose any empirical research, making ‘*one’s point of departure the meaningful practices of the actors themselves and how these led to the construction of one outcome rather than the other*’ (Fierke, 2001, pp. 126–127) and fit well within the post-positivist epistemological positions.

e. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed three bodies of IR literature that deal with ideational factors in international politics and point to the importance of social communication. By critically engaging with these rather different approaches it highlighted the methodological limitations that have led to a state of research that is unable to provide comprehensive empirical accounts of the relations between competing narratives internationally. The problem of rational approaches is not only the reliance on ‘positivist orthodoxy’ that is incompatible with studying discursive practice but also the neglect of tools of analysis that would allow us to evaluate social reality in a relational manner. The similar pattern is observable within interpretive approaches that too often focus on analysing narratives in a unidirectional manner rather than looking at counter narratives in a co-constitutive way.

This chapter suggests that the existing literature in a constructivist vein, broadly defined, has already provided us with good and insightful accounts of Russian identity and has advanced the knowledge on the country’s postcolonial hybridity and often conflicting foreign policy messages. This is where my work could add to the existing knowledge and provide a more detailed analysis of the particular meaning construction dynamics. This can be achieved by making several methodological steps. First, we need to carry forward the theoretical insights that social communication is important and include international media into the focus of our empirical research. Second, we need to pause the theoretical quest for epistemological foundations and attend to methodology by developing tools in a research design that allows to study the relationship in international relations.

To solve the problems outlined in this chapter, this study will present a rather practical solution. By looking at the co-constitutive elements of framing and counter framing the next Chapter 2 proposes a multi-level methodological model, where framing is understood not only as a strategic effort, but also as a mechanism, where frame sponsors, frames, subjects of framing, counter frames, all define each other in the process. These methodological developments of framing and counter framing will be seen as elements of a single analytical structure. Thus, this study develops an analytical framework that is ready to be applied across various research paradigms in IR.

Chapter 2.

Conceptual Framework:

A Multi-Level Frame Analysis Model

“Poets are bound to the condition of achieving intellectual and aesthetic pleasure as well as certain emotional effects, and for that reason they cannot represent the stuff of reality unaltered, but are obliged to isolate fragment of it, dissolve obstructive connections, soften the whole and fill any gaps. These are the privileges of what is known as ‘poetic licence’. In addition, they can express only a small degree of interest in the origin and development of such mental states, which they describe as complete”

(Freud, 2006, p. 241).

a. Introduction

The attempts to promote meanings in societies can be traced thousands of years back (Welch, 2013). In fact, Ancient Greeks put plenty of effort into developing effective methods of public influence through art of rhetoric. Some of these systematic works, such as Xenophon’s *Anabasis* and Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, laid down the foundations for the premodern as well as postmodern meaning construction strategies. Throughout the centuries these methods got engrained in public life, and the forms of public influence have been naturalised through systems of signs, linguistic and visual. Many contemporary sociologists today insist that individuals in the society need interpretive guidance in order to make sense of reality, as a form of existential mechanisms of human psyche (Goffman, 1975). Indeed, social life consists of a series of conversations; and conversation is something that the majority of us tend to perceive as natural. Postmodern critical thinkers across the field of Social Sciences have challenged this notion and have been engaged in deconstructive efforts to bring awareness to these patterns of influence, disturbing the conventions of societies.

In IR, the argument that “political analysis must be contextual and take account of the power practices actually manifested in the concrete political situation” allowed researchers to study power in an advanced way (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950, p.94), or more precisely to move beyond power by, as Nicholas Onuf put it, painting a picture of “staggering complexity and constant change” within the interwoven patterns of overlapping social arrangement (Onuf, 1989). States, balances of power, and hegemonies no longer remained the building blocks of the society but specific instances. This approach created an opportunity to look at the phenomenon at a more comprehensive level pushing researchers to understand power not as an exercise carried out by interested agents, but a discursive process through which agents and their interests are produced in the first place (Digeser, 1992). Thus, theories of discourse, semiotics, textuality and framing have streamed through the field, influencing the practice of research.

This chapter’s aim is to distinguish between these approaches and provide a systematic conceptual framework that will organize this study. Section *b*, reviews the concepts of framing and counter-framing, highlighting how these are understood and applied in different fields of Social Science research, such as Communication, IR and Social Movements theory. This section highlights the conceptual and methodological drawbacks of these approaches and clarifies the conceptual distinctions between framing and frame analysis. Section *c* provides a systematic account of the key terms of discourse, narrative and frames that are operationalized in this study. In doing so, it presents a structural model that looks at discourse and narratives as situated at different levels of analysis. Section *d* presents the conceptual framework of this study, condensed in the multi-level frame analysis model. The section develops the concept of the dialogue and defines it as a key object of study, followed by the clarification of the methodological model as an analytical concept that can be applied across various paradigms in IR. Section *e* concludes this chapter.

b. Framing: A Theory or a Method?

Framing has been widely popular across various fields of Social Sciences, earning a truly interdisciplinary fame. The value of framing is often explained by its potential to provide links between conceptual and methodological perspectives (Reese, 2007). In particular, those between Sociology and Psychology, Communication and Political studies. At the same time, its critics often point to the fragmented understanding of framing, its theoretical and methodological grounds; and the possibility of integrating the pluralistic approaches into a systematic theory has been deemed problematic if not impossible. Other studies favour a broader approach to defining it rather than proposing a lump concept of framing (D'Angelo, 2002), pointing to the operational benefits of distinguishing between various types of frames (de Vreese., 2012).

I find that it is imperative to distinguish between *framing*, *frame analysis*, and *frames* in order to avoid conceptual ambiguities. Framing, on the one hand, is as an object of research that can be understood as part of strategic practices for constructing meanings. A large number of media studies choose this direction of research, which essentially highlights framing implications for journalists by exposing narration techniques. However, the abovementioned studies rarely take it forward to explain broader picture. Many communication studies scholars have pointed to the issue of the “theoretical and empirical vagueness” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 103) of framing (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Entman, 1993), with efforts to organize various approaches by an overarching theory, for example, of bias and power (Entman, 2007). These works tend to refer to framing as theory. However, with multiple attempts to integrate approaches, the field of communication studies still lacks a rigorous conceptual strategy that would allow framing to exist as a stand-alone theory. On the other hand, framing can also be understood in terms of structured and systematic methodology, within which researchers choose to employ qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Studies that point towards methodological value of framing often label it as an approach (Pan & Kosicki, 1993) or a multiparadigmatic research programme (P. D'Angelo, 2002). Sharing the concerns over framing as a stand-alone theory, this study leans towards understanding framing as analytical tool that has the potential to be applied within different methodological choices with ontological and epistemological bearings. At the same time, in a constructivist vein, framing here is understood both as systematic efforts of actors to advance their strategies (where the agency is clearly defined) and as a co-constituted process, where actors and receivers mutually determine each other's actions. Frame analysis is

therefore a particular research method that can be applied across various paradigms.

In general terms, framing can be defined as a process of singling out elements of knowledge and packaging them in a set formula that conceptualizes the event and is aimed at sustaining or promoting this interpretation (Entman, 1993; Snow et. al, 1986; Tarrow, 1998). For sociologists we all actively engage in classification, interpretation, and organization practices to make sense of our life experiences by employing “schemata of interpretation”, or “frames” that enable us to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” (Goffman, 1975, p. 21). Within this paradigm, frames can be used both for introducing radically new ideas as well slightly shifting already accepted ones, or to maintain and stabilize deep-seated understandings in the society. In other words, frames serve as a reference point to the already accepted social context. Therefore, employing framing allows its advocates to create resonance in target audience. The phenomenon is closely linked to justifying behavior at a strategic and comprehensive level. When an issue is framed, its context is determined.

Drawing largely on Goffman, social movements research has been focusing on framing as a central concept for highlighting participant mobilization strategies (Benford & Snow, 2000). In particular, framing here is applied as analytical tool with focus on ‘collective action frames’ to understand the character of social movement dynamics (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 613). This field of studies has significantly advanced the empirical application of frame analysis (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996) by integrating framing methodology within social movements theory and by developing novel analytical tools, such as counter framing (Benford & Snow, 2000; Peña & Davies, 2016).

Following the sociological turn in IR, there has been burgeoning literature on framing, predominantly within the constructivist research framework. While for sociologists the process of framing is linked to the process of any level of social interaction, much of media and political communications research have been primarily drawn to the utilitarian aspect of framing. In particular, such research often focuses on messages that shape interpretations and the way in which these techniques are being advanced by the advocates. Shortly put, these studies share understanding of frames as strategic devices that bring certain meaning and define significance of social events, and they provide recommendations on how to read events (Payne, 2001). Constructivist theorists distinguish between norms “as shared understandings that reflect

“legitimate social purpose” and frames that are defined as devices that link intersubjective knowledge within the communicative acts. While framing is a social phenomenon, great emphasis has been given to communication, persuasion in particular (Payne, 2001; Chayes and Chayes, 1995). The main reason for giving an important role to persuasion is that it is only when norm sponsors “persuade states to adopt” certain ideas, do these ideas transform into practice (Payne; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 893; Nadelman, 1990). As Finnemore and Sikkink put it, “*persuasion is the process by which agent action becomes social structure, ideas become norms, and the subjective becomes the intersubjective*” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 914; Klotz, 1995: 29-33). This notion inherently links framing to the field of communication, the platform where frames can be tracked. A frame cannot be perceived as a legitimate social knowledge in itself, but rather a shared formula of interpreting political events:

“The domain in which news discourse operates consists of shared beliefs about a society. These beliefs, despite the elusive nature of their content, are known and accepted by a majority of a society as common sense of conventional wisdom (e.g., “Equal opportunities are desirable”; “Opposing political candidates compete to win”; “Truth means something real”, etc.). They are pervasive and are often taken for granted. They set the parameters of a broad framework within which news discourse is constructed, transmitted, and developed”

(Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 57).

Most of the communication studies that work with framing make the theoretical link between framing and news/media discourse, which is defined as “the process by which individuals construct meaning” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Thus framing can be understood “*as a strategy of constructing and processing news discourse or as a characteristic of the discourse itself*” (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p.57). While this important theoretical link has been pointed out, the distinction between discourse and frames remains rather vague. This problem has manifested itself in the way frame analysis is performed and has been particularly problematic for international relations, where the notion of discourse bears multiple theoretical facets.

For example, constructivists tend to understand discourses as strategic tools:

“The habitual actions that emanate from these interpretations are often referred to as “practices” and the combination of language and techniques employed to maintain them as ‘discourses’”

(Klotz and Lynch, 2015, p. 8-9).

Thus, the key idea behind framing both in communication studies and international relations is strategic efforts to interpret social realities (Benford & Snow, 2000; C. de Vreese, 2004; Entman, 2007; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012). While some of the approaches point to the problematique of agency in framing research, none of the studies look at the levels of framing from the point of view of strategic vs. tactical dimensions. While strategic part is important, it is the tactical dimension in which the change manifests itself.

Recently scholars have started looking at the dynamics of frames, but it looked within the dimension of effects (Chong & Druckman, 2007a; C. de Vreese, 2004; Matthes, 2012). Little has been done to look at how counter frames may challenge the existing frames to transform or evolve. For example, Chong and Druckman (2007b) analyse which frames are stronger and more successful in promoting a strategic interpretation of frame sponsors. However, there are hardly any studies that take it forward and look at the relations between competing narratives internationally and how these relations are influenced by frames and counter frames. Unlike the dominant understanding of framing as a strategic effort to promote interests I maintain that it is imperative to also look at framing as a process. And although it is often referred to as a process, this has not been applied conceptually. This work looks at the co-constitutive elements of framing process. Thus, framing here is understood not only as a strategic effort, but also as a mechanism, where frame sponsors, frames, subjects of framing, counter frames, all define each other in the process.

c. Defining the Key Terms: Discourse, Framing, Narrative

Following the growth of disappointment over the established and mainstream positivist approaches in IR the emergence of poststructuralism, hermeneutics, and critical theory has led to the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ in the broad field of Social Sciences (Dallmayr & McCarthy, 1977; Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1981; Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979). Subsequently, there has been an explosion of interest in discourse analysis, the leading methodology of the interpretivist approaches in IR. Studies that employ discourse analysis have enriched the field, allowing to theorize on the variables that had not been recognized as legitimate objects of study in IR for a long time, uncovering deep-seated social conflicts internationally.

Discourse has a variety of meanings and connotations, from a narrow understanding of it as simply conversation between two people, to an ontological interpretation that discourse is an entire system that is ubiquitous in social reality¹¹. The definitions of discourse start from the linguistic conceptualization of it as ‘*language in use*’ (Cameron, 2013). In this respect, discourse refers to the linguistic supra-structures and the focus of discourse analysis is therefore directed at ‘*talk and text in context*’ (van Dijk, n.d.). Thus, discourse analysis is focused on structure beyond the sentence. An area of linguistic research, pragmatics, pioneered research that was not only preoccupied with meaning in abstract terms, but also looked at the ‘meaning in use’ (Thomas, 1995, p. 21). In particular, linguists started looking at meaning in context rather than abstract meaning, the specificity of which cannot be identified without looking at the larger structure of meaning. Linguists who work in pragmatist vein thus treat discourse as ‘meaning in interaction’:

“Making meaning is a dynamic process, involving the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance (physical, social and linguistic) and the meaning potential of an utterance”

(Thomas, 1995, p. 22).

¹¹ This notion in poststructuralist IR has been informed by the works of such thinkers as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Jean Baudrillard to name a few.

This led to the notion of discourse as a space for the dynamics of meaning creation. Foucault (1972, 1979) took the notion of discourse forward and proposed a series of conclusions about the relationship between power, knowledge, and subjectivity which ultimately lead to the idea of constituting reality. Scholars who adopted this notion began treating discourses as ‘*practices that systematically form the objects of which we speak*’ (Foucault, 1972). In this understanding, the key feature of the discourse is the intersubjectivity of meaning that manifests itself in the realm of social communication. This ontological contention has informed the theory of IR, in particular the poststructuralist subfield. Thus, the purpose of poststructuralist discourse analysis is to denaturalise the long standing truths in social reality (Der Derian & Shapiro, 1989).

“The legitimacy of tradition is undermined, the unifying belief in progress fragments, and conventional wisdom is refused to one of many competing rituals of power used to shore up a shaky (international) society”

(Der Derian & Shapiro, 1989, p. x).

This denaturalisation is inherently linked to discourse. In particular, practitioners aim at investigating how ‘subject-matter’ and ‘subject-actor’ are co-constituted in the texts of international politics. Thus, poststructuralist maintain that there is no “extra- or non-discursive realm of explanations from which one might construct competing explanations” (Hansen, 2006).

However, thus far there is no consensus in the field of International Relations over the exact definition of discourse, nor is there a consensus over “what are the best ways to study discourse” (Milliken, 1999, p. 226). This is partly due to poststructuralist research being somehow marginalised in IR, or as Ashley and Walker(1990) put it, due to the ‘dissident’ nature of discourse theory (George, 1994; Milliken, 1999). Another limitation of poststructuralist research is that although discourses are often understood as both relational and dynamic, there is a principal focus on monologue that is studied one by one. By this I mean that discourses are rarely studied in relation to counter discourses. For example,

“What a deconstructive analysis leaves in place is a confirmation that the “meaning” of a term or concept comes into being only relative to at least one other term. However, while meaning is utterly dependent on the presence of at least one other signifier, that second or third term by which we can know the meaning of the first is not given by nature. <...> Meaning is then a dynamic process, much more like an interaction between particles – a spark, a field of conductivity, the play of signifiers – than a steady light emitted from a solitary beacon”

(Gregory, 1989).

Thus, within this approach, the analysis looks at how different terms of the discourse are conceived in relation to each other. For example, when researchers focus on the *Us* vs. *Them* dichotomy, their goal is to identify which of the two aspects is preferential within the discourse. But this is rarely taken forward to look at how these internal discursive dynamics are influenced by counter discourses, the methodological limitation that this study will address.

There are a number of more recent developments in constructivist and post-structuralist research broadly defined that propose a research design that is more inclusive of various text analysis methods. For example, Hansen (2006) in her analysis of the Bosnian war proposes a methodology in which intertextual analysis is key for understanding the roots of the discourses in foreign policy. In her words,

“Official discourse should, however, be situated inside a larger intertextual web that traces intertextual references to other texts, thereby bringing in sources that are constructed either as supporting influences or as texts in need of repudiation.”

(Hansen, 2006, p. 60)

This suggest a way to include a wider number of communicative genres into the focus. Moreover, within this methodology, she argues for the analytical value of studying oppositional discourses. In the empirical example of the Bosnian context, Hansen shows, in depth, how the various discourses of the ‘self’ and ‘other’ intertextually construct national identity that ultimately affects foreign policy choice. Drawing on Kristeva (1980), this methodology allows Hansen to establish the extra and intra-discursive links that are invisible for traditional discourse analysts. A number of analyst have continued working in a similar vein, looking

at, for example, how post-9/11 discourse has been influenced by prior historical contexts of American foreign policy (Dunmire, 2009). In large part related to this approach, the following section of this chapter will take a further look into the epistemological roots of intertextuality, Bakhtin's dialogism, and expand the dialogic nature of discourse.

Another point which is often disputed in IR is whether it is possible to find casual patterns through discourse analysis (Banta, 2013; Kurki, 2008) or not (Campbell, 1998; Hansen, 2006). For example,

“Within PDT¹² it is contended that to study discourse one must avoid any pretence to claims of having found some relatively vital causal relationship within a phenomenon, or any meaningful role for extra-discursive ‘reality’. It is this aspect of PDT that I wish to challenge, with the hope of opening up the study of discourse to scholars not willing to adopt a discourse perspective on the social world. To do so I propose a foundation, and some tools, for which discourse might be studied as but one causal thing among myriad possible others”

(Banta, 2013).

I agree with the understanding of discourse as the reality that researcher cannot find themselves outside of. However, it is indeed true that there is the possibility to find some casual mechanism when we interpret ideational phenomena. In this respect, we could understand causal in narrower terms as “something that is important for bringing about an outcome” (Jackson, 2011, p. 232; Kurki, 2008). My contention is that while it is inaccurate to attempt to study influence merely in discursive terms, it is possible to interpret narratives¹³ (Table 2.1).

The above-mentioned limitations may be partly due to the definition of discourse that is rather broad and therefore difficult to employ in a systematic manner. For example, discourse is often defined as both “an interrelated set of texts” and “the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, which brings object into being” (Parker 1992). Within this broad conceptualisation it is seen as both, a process and an object of research, which results from the multiple attempts to create the practice of discourse research based on the ontological

¹² “poststructuralist discourse theory” (Banta, 2013)

¹³ For an elaboration of this point see the next section of this chapter.

advancements proposed by Foucault. Indeed, his treatment of discourse is rather broad and all-encompassing, the very point that he admits in the following statement:

“Instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word ‘discourse’, I believe I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements”

(Foucault, 1972, p. 80).

No doubt, this treatment has allowed to take the linguistic notion of discourse forward by opening up discourse research to critical social inquiry, but this bulky definition also created a state of research where discourse as a term is complicated and often difficult to operationalise. For example, Sara Mill problematizes:

“What makes the process of defining discourse even more complex is that most theorists when using the term do not specify which of these particular meanings they are using”

(Mills, 2004, p. 7).

To address this problem, here I propose to disentangle this all-encompassing concept by taking a step back and narrow the definition of discourse to a more operational concept. Thus, in this research I treat discourse as a set of interrelated narratives, both textual and visual. The elements of discourse thus work together in order to convey a particular meaning by constructing actors and interpreting their actions. In this respect, discourse can be understood a set of assumptions that frame particular interpretations. For example Norman Fairclough defines discourse as: “the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 56). I adopt this definition but, in this research, I would extend Fairclough’s use of the word ‘language’ in this definition to the notion of ‘the text’. In particular, text here is understood in broader terms than language and is treated as “any coherent complex of signs” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 103), so that the purely textual can be extended into the realms of audio-visual, or in fact anything that can be “read” for meaning. Drawing on Hartley’s (1982) work on news discourse, this study points to the importance of inclusion of both linguistic and visual codes as the constitutive elements of interpretations within discourse. Thus, in this study discourse is understood as a larger system of either

cohesive, but also often contradictory “ideas, concepts, and categorizations” (Epstein, 2008). Thus, if discourse analysis is focused on language in use or includes any or all facets of semiotic activity that is meaningful (e.g. film, music, painting, performance art, visual art), a text can also be understood in terms of an “objectified unit of discourse” (Gal 2006: 178). As Adam Hodges comprehensively summarises:

“In this way, fragments of discourse from one setting seemingly take on a life of their own as they are turned into texts (entextualized) and enter into social ‘circulation’”

(Hodges, 2015, p. 43).

Discourse is therefore an umbrella term that embraces all these facets of signs that convey meaning. Thus, the important distinction of this definition from the dominant understanding of discourse in IR is the focus on broader semiotics rather than treating only linguistic forms of text as the key component for analysis. As mentioned in the review of the discourse research above, there is often an ambiguity around whether to treat discourse as dynamic or a static entity. As Foucauldian approach insightfully proposes, the discourse carries both of the features within itself. However, in order to understand better the dynamics and statics of the discourse, I propose to separate the analysis in two levels. Thus, the static characteristic of discourse is best understood at the macro-level, that condenses the multiplicity of interpretations under an umbrella structure (See Table 1). The lower level, micro-level is the space where the dynamic manifests themselves ¹⁴.

<i>Level of Abstraction</i>	Macro-Level	Discourse	Meta-frames
	Micro-Level	The Multiplicity of Communicative Genres (e.g. narrative)	Sub-frames

Table 2.1. The Levels of Framing

¹⁴ For an elaboration of this point, see the following section of this chapter.

Thus, this study understands discourse not as a process of constructing meaning but rather as a stream of meaning that conveys interpretations. In this respect, discourse is indeed monologic, a fixed structure. In order to study discourse at this level, I thus propose applying the structural frame analysis to identify the meta-frames, the methodological model of which will be proposed in the following section of this chapter and will be practically applied to the case studies in Chapters 5 and 6. The various communicative genres, such as, for example, narratives are smaller structures that are found at a micro-level of the discursive stream. These necessarily entail telling a story with a certain plot. For example, Klotz and Lynch provide the following clear-cut definition:

“Narratives highlight the agency of particular individuals or groups by telling a story with a plot and main characters”

(Klotz & Lynch, 2015, p. 44).

In other words, it can be understood as a “storyline” with a beginning and an end. These end points are important characteristics of stories. Unlike discourse that does not have an ending, genres of communication, such as stories necessarily have a preface and closing (Jefferson, 1978). As Fairclough puts it:

“Genres can be described in terms of their organizational properties”

(Fairclough, 1995, p. 56).

In fact, Fairclough distinguishes between discourse as an “abstract noun” and discourse(s) as a count noun. Discourses and genres are thus the elements of a broader network, the “order of discourse”. In my interpretation for the conceptual purposes of this study, the discourses are more concrete representations of social phenomena correlates to what in my study is defined as sub-frames, which will be unpacked in the following section of this chapter.

Thus, frame analysis “attempts to disentangle this complex relationship between actors, goals, and behavior by concentrating on the production of meaning as a type of influence” (Klotz & Lynch, 2015, p. 48). However, this is not say that by doing framing analysis we can study the influence. Rather, it is possible to interpret how the meaning is created and what underpins this

strategy from the ideational perspective. Thus, in a way it does provide causal explanation and answers to the questions, such as why an agent made this particular discursive choice and not the other. Discourse and frame analysis both belong to the group of interpretive approaches that study social interaction that manifests itself through constructing meaning (Lindekilde, 2014). However, the two approaches are not exactly identical. Although there are different variants of discourse analysis, here I would refer to an overarching feature of critical approaches to discourse that is the focus on emancipatory potential of such studies that are mainly preoccupied with influence construction. Framing, as often seen as a “sub-variant” of discourse analysis assumes a higher degree of agentic rationality (Lindekilde, 2014). However, here I proposed a more structured approach to frame analysis that can be applied at the macro-level, while textual and visual analyses are used to find textual patterns to identify frames and counter frames.

d. The Concept of Dialogue and the Multi-Level Frame Analysis Model

As opposed to the monologic approach to discourse that analyses the way in which strategic representations are constructed, I chose to focus on its dialogic orientation. This aspect is best understood in terms of the notion of dialogism that was coined by a prominent Russian literary theorist and philosopher Michail Bakhtin, who recognized that the different communicative genres contain a multiplicity of dialogic nuances. By dialogic he does not mean the manifestations of discourse that are externally structured as dialogue but rather the “internal dialogism” that constitutes even those manifestations of discourse that are externally structured as monologue (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). In fact, Bakhtin argues that the “dialogic orientation of discourse” is natural to any form of discourse. This notion derives from an abstract understanding of discourse as a phenomenon that results from a relationship with other discourses. As Bakhtin put it:

“On all its various routes toward the object, in all its directions, the word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in a living, tension-filled interaction. Only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs in the object. Concrete historical human discourse does not have this privilege: it can deviate from such inter-orientation only on a conditional basis and only to a certain degree”

(Bakhtin, 1981, p. 279).

Bakhtin then goes further to propose a research goal to look deeper into the internal structure of meaning that constitute the word. In this Bakhtinian vein, any form of creative work exists within the environment of prior instances of discourse. Therefore, meanings that are produced through discourse are never created in isolation but are rather a result of complex ideational relationship, both with the prior texts and with the anticipation of the responses from the future discourses (Bakhtin, 1981; Hodges, 2015; Tannen, 2007). In other words, the receiver of a monologue and their response are often taken into account in the everyday conversation, but any other type of discourse is in fact oriented “toward an understanding that is “responsive”” (Bakhtin, 1981). This constitutes the internal juxtaposition, resistance or support that saturates the discourse. As Bakhtin put it:

“Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other”

(Bakhtin, 1981, p. 282).

It is this responsive aspect of discourse and the focus on the internal relationship that constitutes meaning that has informed the conceptual framework of this research. In fact, this notion has been applied to media discourse. For example, Fairclough (1992, 1995) illuminates this notion through presenting the phenomenon of “conversationalization” of news programs, where official speeches are often packaged together with less formal, private conversations (Fairclough, 1992). Fairclough expands this by showcasing how the other hybrid genres are born on television. However, my research is focused on the mere relationship between the discourses that is seen within the space of the dialogue. And framing and in particular counter-framing, in this respect, are the methodological tools that are particularly helpful for understanding this relationship.

While scholars commonly refer to culture (Entman, 1993) or the context as frame pools, I insist that at the *dialogue* between various news channels that can be seen as another dimension of framing. I propose the notion of the dialogue which, in this study, is not equal to the public discourse. Although many scholars embrace the idea that media discourse is a good representation of the public discourse (Gamson, 1992; Klandermans and Goslinga, 1996), in this study this understanding of the linear relationship between the media and the public would have been problematic. It would bring in the problems of the normative dimensions of media functioning. Media discourse here is considered a ‘tip of the iceberg’ and the representation of the ‘dominant discourse’ on the one hand. On the other hand, moving beyond an understanding of the media as an exemplification of the social agenda, this study looks at the media discourse and public discourse as mutually constituted.

In this sense, the international *dialogue* can be understood as a separate structure that determines its participants’ narratives and, at the same time, is being subject to the frame sponsors’ interpretations. In this respect, the dialogue is an environment in which *counter frames* operate. This framework is informed by Risse’s ‘logic of arguing’ in political communication, who emphasized that

“<...> argumentative rationality appears to be crucially linked to the constitutive rather than the regulative role of norms and identities by providing actors with a mode of interaction that enables them to mutually challenge and explore the validity claims of those norms and identities”

(Risse, 2000).

While Risse(2000) goes as far as arguing that the actors are ready to shift their ‘view of the world’ and even their ‘identities’, I would predominantly focus on the readiness of the actors to be subject to ideational challenges and the shift in tactical interpretations. Thus, the space of the dialogue becomes the manifestation of the social process that explains framing. Within this environment, communicative ‘*distortions*’ affect frame sponsors behavior in the way that determines which context they mobilize while covering a particular event. The distortions in this research refer to the several aspects of the dialogue. An example of such a distortion would be an appearance of a particular context in one channel’s discourse that in turn forces the rival channel to engage with the same context that had been initially enacted by their discursive opponent. As soon as this is intertextually traced, these virtual responses are seen as countering efforts. In fact, these distortions are the existential elements of the dialogue in the sense that they enrich the narratives of the discourse by suggesting the ideational data that can be readily enacted. In other words, the dialogue can be understood as a shared pool of contexts that various TV channels resort to in order to stay tuned to each other.

Foucault argued that we must imagine the world of knowledge as ‘a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies’ (Foucault & Hurley, 1979). In anthropological and sociological studies, there were attempts to confirm empirically that communicative elements cannot be recognized without a reference to a “metamessage”. For example, we cannot identify an element of the game without having been briefed on the rules of this game (Tannen, 1993). These rules thus organize the meta-structure within which we temporarily agree to exist. In other words, interpretations are crucial elements of communication that organize social reality by constructing the overarching structures of discourse that organize communicative practices.

Drawing upon this conception I propose to expand the presented in section c of this chapter model of discourse and add the two levels of framing to it, *strategic* and *tactical* (see *Table 2.2*).

The distinction of strategy and tactics, although drawn from military terminology, here is used rather figuratively. In military theory, tactics and strategy bear a hierarchical relationship with a clear distinction between the later referring to the overall objectives:

“If tactics solve immediate problems and strategy pursues goals defined by the political leadership, then operational art governs tactical creativity and links together tactical actions into a campaign to achieve the strategic goal. ‘We call an operation an act of war if the efforts of the troops are directed towards the achievement of a certain intermediary goal in a certain theater of military operations without any interruptions”

(Olsen & Van Creveld, 2011, p. 66).

Tactics thus refers mainly to the particular methods of achieving the strategic goals. As such, tactical elements are more flexible and thus dynamic in nature. In this respect, tactics are organised around combinations and structures of moves that may that may be aimed at hiding the strategic intentions of actors. In relation to meaning construction and persuasive practices, this notion can be expanded to represent the discursive space when interpretations communicated through frames are dynamic and reactive.

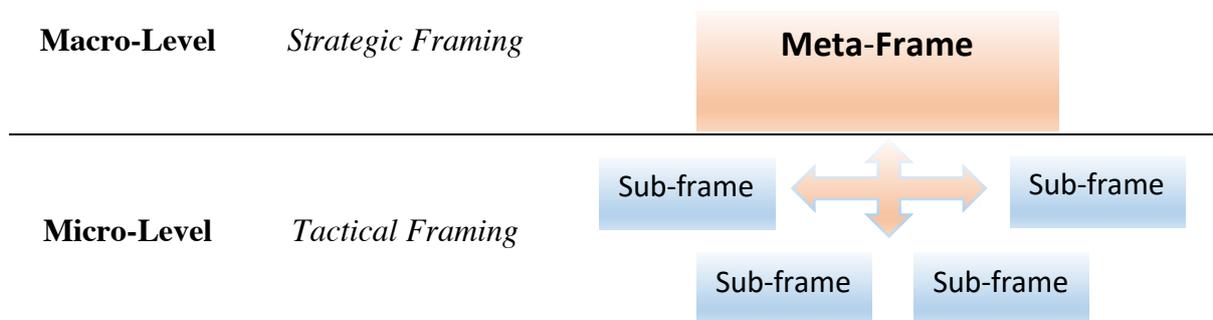


Table 2. 2. The Levels of Framing. Expanded

While the importance of strategic discourse has been in focus of constructivist research, the tactical facet has been overlooked. I argue that it is imperative to look at the tactical level due to its dynamic nature. Thus, tactical framing operates at the micro-level of framing. This is where the discussed above dialogue manifests itself and can be thus studied through applying textual, visual and intertextual analysis in order to trace the travel path of the various contexts and understand how these sub-frames relate to the stable structure of the discourse.

Strategic framing, on the other hand, is as an effort to construct an overarching formula for the discourse within which actors are central for the construction of these formulas. At this macro-level discourse are constructed through ‘meta-frames’- “the overarching frames of a higher level of generality” that “can be operationalized as normative aspects of issue frames” (Dombos et al., 2009). These meta-frames, in turn, are held by the structural pillars, or ‘metaphors’ (these are indicated as M in *Table 2.3*) at the macro-level. Other researchers refer to these structural pillars of frames as ‘archetypes’. For example, Van Gorp notes:

“Specifically, a number of archetypes may function as a frame. If the archetype of the villain is used, then poverty can be viewed as the result of certain individuals who make use of, or abuse, the social welfare system to which they do not financially contribute. The poor lack the will to work and that is why they live in poor conditions. A more positive usage of this frame results in a stereotypical portrayal of the jolly vagabond who feels very strongly about complete freedom and opts for voluntary poverty”

(Van Gorp, 2010, p. 86).

Thus, while framing and counter-framing, at a tactical level, is a set of dynamic contexts and metaphors, the structural building blocks of the meta-frame, at the macro-level, remain fairly stable, regardless of the multiplicity of communicative distortions that may target them. The two levels, however, are not separate realms but are rather closely intertwined. Thus, the micro-level interpretations, although reactive and tactical, are nevertheless continuously aimed at constructing the actors within the overarching meta-formula of discourse (see *Table 2.3*).

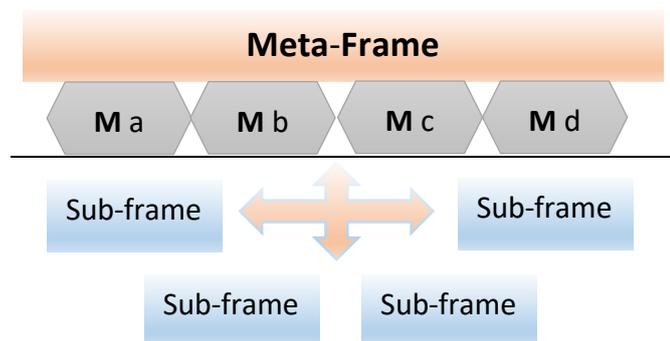


Table 2.3. Meta-frames and Sub-frames

Unlike strategic framing, counter-framing, at a tactical level, may appear as a more diffuse process but requires a closer look at its elements that need to be traces intertextually. In other words, counter frames are never stable elements of the discourse but rather come across as purpose-serving blocks that contribute to the construction of an overarching frame. Moreover, a frame ceases to exist as a unit of discourse when it has lost even a single of its elements, the structural metaphors(M) of its formula. In other words, when these contexts are not applied together they maintain to exist as unsystematic topics rather than a treatment to action which frames ultimately are. This skeleton that is a defining property of frames is therefore so central to understanding the statics of framing. Thus, each meta-frame of the discourse contains the structural blocks, or metaphors (M) that organize the representations at the strategic level. For example, in order to construct an image of an enemy (M a), frame sponsors may enact various sub-frames at a tactical level, some of which would be original contexts, other may be references to the prior contexts of the discursive rivals. This mechanism will be unpacked in greater detail in the Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of this dissertation.

To integrate framing and counter-framing within the levels of discourse discussed above, I propose the multi-level frame analysis model (see *Figure 2.1*).

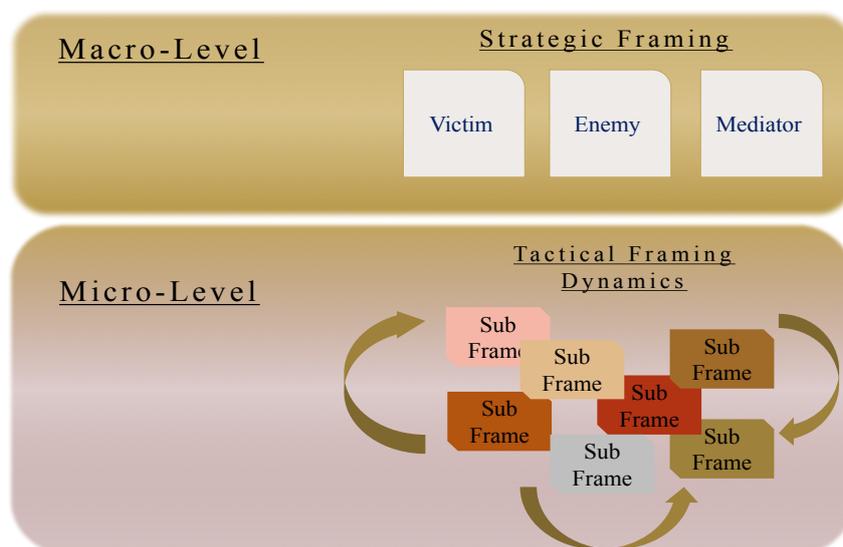


Figure 2.1. Multi-Level Frame Analysis Model

Within this model, strategic and tactical framing are mutually constituted processes that work in synergy but differ from the structural perspective. Applying this concept to the analysis of

opposing discourses will allow me to track both, the strategic and monologic persuasive efforts by looking at structurally stable pillars that constitute meta-frames, and, at the same time, will open up the analysis to the more dynamic and responsive process of counter-framing at the tactical level.

In other words, at a tactical level framing is always a subject and an object of change. *Dynamics*, in this respect, refer to the way in which interpretations originate in discourse. Unlike the static framing, when a frame is determined by sponsor's preconceptions and/or rhetorical aims, counter frames are always a response to opponents' narratives. Therefore, the process is not stable in its nature but is constantly subject to change or transformation, depending on the volatile context. Therefore, focusing on the dynamics of the context, at the same time, reveals exactly how stable are the elements of the overarching frames.

Hence the traditional definitions of frames such as that "frames define what is meant by certain social events and how significant we consider them to be, and they provide guidelines on how to interpret events" (Lepistö-Johansson, 2012, p. 404) , within the proposed above framework refers to the macro-level of the discourse. In this respect, strategic framing can also be defined as a process of singling out elements of knowledge and packaging them in a set formula that conceptualizes the event and is aimed at sustaining or promoting this interpretation (Benford & Snow, 2000; Entman, 1993). Thus, meta-frames can be used both for introducing radically new ideas as well slightly shifting already accepted ones, or to maintain and stabilize deep-seated understandings in the society. Sub-frames, at the micro-level of discourse, serve as the reference points to the already accepted social contexts. Therefore, employing tactical framing allows its advocates to instantly create resonance in target audience. These tactical efforts are closely linked to the so-called 'ad-hoc' justifications that will be further explored in the following chapters.

e. Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of literature on framing across the various disciplines of Social Sciences. It argued that framing has traditionally been considered in terms of strategic and conscious efforts to construct meanings. However, this research makes case for expanding this limited focus on strategy to include the tactical dimension of framing. Communication space is therefore the most legitimate space to look at ‘what’ and ‘how’ of framing with a particular focus on dynamics of interpretations that can be traced by studying the dialogue between the rival discourses. This research focuses on how messages of framing shape understandings in a communicative environment. However, it argues that the content of framing, or the social knowledge, which underpins it, are less relevant than the way framing formulas are used in order to achieve tactical outcomes.

This chapter also clarified the key terms of this study, in particular it highlighted the differences between the process of framing as an object of study and frame analysis as a methodological tool of analysis; it clarified the conceptual approach of this study towards discourse that is understood in more narrow terms than the all-encompassing but difficult to operationalize definition that dominates the discipline of IR and towards narrative that is seen as a structural element of discourse that constitutes frames. Most importantly, this chapter presented the concept of the communicative dialogue that is for the first time recognized as the realm where counter-framing operates, followed by proposing the systematic multi-level frame analysis model. This chapter argued that framing and counter framing if applied within the proposed model provide methodological means for studying the discourse within the ontology the complex theory of truth and falsity of cases’ that is relative to a framework of meaning (or paradigm) within which problems are identified and analyzed.

The following Chapter 3 will further discuss how the proposed here conceptual framework can be applied in practice. It will thus present the methods of analysis that can penetrate the discourse at both levels and thus allow both to understand the dynamics and the statics of discourse.

Chapter 3.

Case Selection and Methodology

“The shot, considered as material for the purpose of composition, more resistant than granite. This resistance is specific to it. The shot's tendency toward complete factual immutability is rooted in its nature. This resistance has largely determined the richness and variety of montage forms and styles – for montage becomes the mightiest means for a really important creative remolding of nature”

(Eisenstein, 1977, p. 5).

a. Introduction

The dynamic nature of media stage has been gaining greater attention among IR scholars in recent years than in the previous decades. This is, in part, due to the burgeoning cross-disciplinary literature on Political Communication (Semetko & Scammell, 2012). Indeed, media is an inherent element of the international political realm not least because it informs people of what political actors wish to say. In fact, several empirical studies have argued that media is the primary supplier of political knowledge in societies (Everland & Scheufele, 2000; Robinson & Davis, 1990). As argued in this dissertation previously, neglecting media discourse means neglecting a ubiquitous phenomenon that constitutes societies in the international. Thus, the previous sections of this dissertation have argued for the value of discursive media studies for the IR discipline; in particular, for the ability of such research to grasp often contradictory foreign policy messages that can be theorized by looking at the dynamic media stage and the volatility of context.

By delving into the processes of framing and counter-framing, the particular types of meanings with which specific events have been constructed can be exposed and opened up to discussion and analysis. In order to assess such processes, this study focused on the analysis of news interpretations that are conveyed via the audio-visual media. To apply my analytical framework of framing and counter-framing, I scrutinized the content of news interpretations promoted by

RT, which, as I argue in this chapter, is an amplified voice of Kremlin. Unlike other studies on Russia that interpret the country's identity promotion from a strategic point of view, my work was focused on the tactical meanings that allowed me to expose the reasons behind Russia's defensive rhetoric. This, in turn, allowed me to further theorize on the nature of the countering techniques that are used in political communication.

The previous chapters looked at the theoretical aspects that underpin this study and provided the conceptual framework that organizes this study. Here I will tackle more precisely the logic behind the methodological choices applied to cases of theoretical interest. This chapter is divided into two parts. Section *b* explains the rationale behind the case selection by taking the reader through the process, explaining the context and the methodological underpinnings. The second part *c* is concerned with the applied methods of analysis and argues that it is imperative to look at the content intertextually within one analytical framework to be able to extract sub-frames and identify meta-frames. Thus, section *c* will present a step-by-step breakdown of the practical methods, such as visual analysis, linguistic and textual analysis respectively, followed by section *d* that outlines the data collection and coding strategies employed in this study. Section *e* introduces the secondary data collection method that was performed in order to gain background interviews and discusses its limitations. Section *f* concludes this chapter.

b. Case Selection

The purpose of designing research around case studies is usually twofold: on the one hand, the approach allows to provide descriptive and contextual information; on the other hand, it suggests theoretical relevance that ‘facilitates the emergence of concepts that can shape theory’” (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010, p. 771). This approach is therefore in big part concerned with theory generation. In particular, the focus is on revelatory nature of the cases that expose a relationship or mechanism that cannot be studied by other means. Thus, such cases provide a ‘crucial experiment’ in which certain variables of interest happen to be present in a special way” (Halperin & Heath, 2017). The premise from which such inquiry starts is that the act of research is inseparable from the social reality and thus analysts and their evidence are in most cases coming from the shared ideational environment. As Gerring insightfully notes in his work:

“Usually, a hypothesis arises from an open-ended conversation between a researcher and her evidence. Indeed, one may have only a rough idea of an argument until one has carried out considerable research. Social scientific study is often motivated by a suspicion; the researcher’s qualified hunch that something funny is going on here or there. Puzzles are good points of departure. Even so, issues of research design cannot be fully addressed until that initial hunch is formulated as a specific hypothesis”

(Gerring, 1962, p. 72).

Thus researchers take advantage of the resemblances and disparities they come across in the real world and look whether the arrangement of the observed multiplicities of reality are consistent with the abstract patterns (Eckstein, 1975; Halperin & Heath, 2017).

The purpose of the study, however, was not to analyse the actual events that took place during the chosen case periods but to investigate how these events were interpreted. As I outlined in the first parts of this dissertation, the primary focus of my research was on the discourse that Russia promoted through its official channel of international communication, RT.

Since its launch in 2005, RT has been explicit about its Kremlin funding and the intentions to promote Russian take on international current affairs. For example, the official *About RT* page on the channel's website states:

“RT covers stories overlooked by the mainstream media, provides alternative perspectives on current affairs, and acquaints international audiences with a Russian viewpoint on major global events”

(RT, 2017).

Moreover, RT is often included into the official Kremlin's foreign policy strategies that often view the channel as part of Russia's soft power. And while the Russian government recognises soft power as becoming an *‘indispensable component of modern international relations’*, the purpose of RT is often understood in terms of challenging the Western exercises of public diplomacy that are often labelled aggressive and are perceived as a threat:

“<...> increasing global competition and the growing crisis potential sometimes creates a risk of destructive and unlawful use of “soft power” and human rights concepts to exert political pressure on sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs, destabilise their political situation, manipulate public opinion, including under the pretext of financing cultural and human rights projects abroad”

(The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013).

The paradox that triggered this investigation was that despite Russia's outspoken desire for other countries to consider it a superpower (Kiseleva, 2015), it often utilises defensive rhetoric, being more focused on protecting itself from Western policies, rather than promoting its own unique ideology. Bearing this paradox in mind, the preliminary investigation, in turn, unravelled that the *‘defensive rhetoric’* goes beyond the meaning of protecting or shielding from the opponents' rhetoric. The observations led me to theorize that *‘defensiveness’* can be taken to a higher level of abstraction by understanding it in terms of continuous efforts of one discourse to delegitimize the discursive rival. At that point, I decided to approach the phenomenon from a counter-framing perspective, which allows me to theorize the concept of *‘dialogue’* between different discourses. In my particular case, the mechanisms of framing cannot be fully separated from counter-framing. Therefore, it seemed crucial for the study to

utilize comparative methods in order to understand where meanings originate and how understandings are shaped.

As often noted by scholars who study framing effects, framing as a method of political influence is specifically challenging to deploy towards the audience that is subject to another agent's framing (Scheufele, 1999). Unlike similar studies, which look at objectivity and bias in media framing, this research focused on how opposing discourses create new meanings by deconstructing opponents' rhetoric. In this respect, I noticed that RT indeed often chooses Western styles of reporting. As the channel's editor in chief, Margarita Simonyan (2012), confessed, RT's output strategies were designed to outweigh CNN and BBC. Thus, despite the lack of examples of such studies in existing literature on framing, I made the methodological choice to parallelly analyse both, the primary discourse and the response to it. The decision to look at CNN's coverage of the same events was therefore not based on the mere assumption that these channels are similar in several respects but it was rather rooted in the instrumental need dictated by counter-framing methodology.

My particular research design has not been conceived in an abstract realm but rather was a result of continuous exposure to a highly contextualised ideational environment. From that point onwards, the logic of empirical inquiry was applied. Thus, the selection of the case is informed by the Most Similar Systems Design's (MSSD) logic to choose a minimum of two cases that share many important characteristics but differ in one or two crucial respects related to the key outcome of interest (Gerring, 1962). As mentioned above, my research looked at RT's and CNN's coverage of the alleged chemical attack in Ghouta in 2013 as the first case study (Case I) and analysed the channels' coverage of the 30 days preceding the Annexation of Crimea in summer 2014 as the second case study (Case II). These two conflicts are similar in many contextually structural respects (see Table 3.1).

Case I	Case II	
<i>Syrian Crisis 2013</i>	<i>Crimean Crisis 2014</i>	
A	A	
B	B	Overall Similarities
C	C	
X	Not X	
Not Y	Y	Crucial Differences

A – a matter of international law; B – revolutionary events; C – Russia, USA, and the UN discursive involvement; X – Meta-frame I; Y – Meta-frame 2.

Table 3.1. Most-Similar Case Design

First, these two political conflicts triggered an international law debate. For example, Case I represents the situation when several Western members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), including the United States put forward an argument for humanitarian intervention into Syria against the country’s government forces. Russia spoke in strong opposition to this policy, pointing to the illegitimacy of such move. Case II also characterized by heated debates over the legitimacy of Crimean Referendum (A), when the United States were strongly opposed to the Russian involvement in Ukraine (C). Both cases also happened against the backdrop of revolutionary events (Syrian Revolution in the Case I and Euromaidan Revolution in the Case II) (B). However, the two cases mirror each other when it comes to the way in which the events were framed. Thus, RT used the intrinsic superpower World Police meta-frame when referring to Russia’s protective role for the piece in international community (X), while CNN used such framing to interpret the events of the Case II (Y).¹⁵

While the choice of the cases for this study has been reasoned by the MSSD, it does not aim to make robust generalisations, especially those based on the sample of just two cases. Thus, the purpose of this work is rather to theory generation than theory testing. In particular, the inductive method of inquiry allowed me to look at the structure of the discourse and generate the model that can further be applied to different cases. Thus, this work’s approach to causality differs from the dominant in Comparative Politics empiricist style of conducting research based

¹⁵ For an elaboration of this point see case study Chapters 5 & 6 and the discussion Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

on positivist methods.¹⁶ In other words, it follows the argument that ‘conceptual meanings’ are not set in an abstract realm, but are rather inseparable from their context (Schaffer, 1998). Within this approach, the mechanisms by which meanings are constructed are tightly linked to the unique instances and experiences that are specific to time, space and culture. Thus, my study represents an instance in which meanings mattered and offers a methodological tool for looking at other instances of such kind that may emerge in different contexts. The value of such research therefore does not lie in the generalisability of the case studies’ internal validity but rather in shedding light on theoretical particularities that have not been studied before and therefore opens up a new layer for future inquiry (Gerring, 1962).

With its interpretivist approach, my research does not aim at explaining causal mechanisms in a positivist sense but focuses on interpreting the meaning that is produced through discourse. Thus, it is not aimed at explaining, for example, why Russian government annexed Crimea but rather provides insights into what this act meant and why they invoked the particular contexts to justify their behaviour. Although this approach does not seek to make causal claims in its traditional sense, certain causal elements can be identified. This concerns constitutive claims that this study generates. For example, foreign policies may ‘constitute’ meanings by prescribing particular interpretations of the events. These meanings further narrow the scope of likely options. Thus, meanings, in a sense, make certain options more likely than other choices, which is, in essence, a ‘causal’ role (Klotz, 2008). The arguments proposed within such framework are not formulated as strictly causal claims but are nevertheless not entirely explanation-free. In this respect, both case studies are the examples of an international conflict, where Russia and USA declared to have national interest. The main goal was thus to focus on countering techniques and explain the reasons behind Russia’s defensive rhetoric.

¹⁶ In fact, case study derives its meaning from the Chicago School approach that structured its analysis around the human to be performed inductively. The logic behind such approach is to understand multiple social realities that characterize the setting and its “actors” (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). In this vein, case study is the primal form of a qualitative interpretive research method. The period of “single-site” case studies has come to decline as qualitative analysts faced the pressure of Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba's 1994 *Designing Social Inquiry* publication’s argument for the large “n” studies. Thus, contemporary IR case study research is rather heavily dominated by the logic of quantitative inquiry (Yin, 2009).

c. Methods of Analysis

“We are <...> produced by the environment of signification that we have collectively produced. Part of that environment comprises the constant stream of ‘secretions’ that emanate from the small screen. However, we cannot merely ‘ingest’ those secretions, any more than we can merely ingest food. Just as our metabolic processes transform what we eat into material that can be assimilated, so our culturally learnt codes and conventions transform what we watch from mere external stimuli into actual communication, where the message is not only received but also decoded, understood and responded to”

(Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. XYZ).

Fiske and Hartley’s thought-provoking metaphor suggests that the relationship between the language in the broad sense and actors of communication is co-constitutive. In this respect, the process of broadcasting analysis puts the researcher at a distance from the actual television realm, but at the same time the analyst cannot fully escape television experience. Hence doing frame analysis of international news conveyed in audio-visual format researchers find themselves in the situation when they essentially combine their analytical and news consumer roles. Framing analysts quite commonly work with a number of assumptions that presuppose the analysis but at the same time, as Reese (2010, p. 28) put it in his recollection of framing analysis process, “a striking pattern or result emerges that can spur the imagination for a larger analysis”. In this respect, despite the overarching desire to frame studies in this way, the process of research is hardly a weighed choice between the inductive vs. deductive method, but it rather is a subjective and dynamic inquiry into the content that is subject to tactical distortions at the performative stage of research. But this type of investigation can be particularly fruitful from the analytical point of view because it allows to combine the abstract analysis with a more immersive experience.

Using television news as the source material, it may not be always possible to separate between the textual and the visual information flows in a straightforward way. However, for the purposes of this research it seemed crucial to identify how the visuals and linguistic structures collaborate in order to create specific interpretations. A 24-hour broadcaster is a rather specific format of conveying information. Unlike domestic TV channels, these networks need to fill every minute of their broadcast with the journalistic content on current affairs that are of

interest to the international audience. This mission, however, is often challenged by the reality of news gathering process. For example, unlike radio, print, or online news, television is highly dependent on the images at the disposal of journalists. The visuals, in fact, are the starting point of a TV package.¹⁷ In other words, writing scripts for television news differs from any other form of writing. For example, broadcast journalists have a limited number of shots that they receive from the news agencies. Based on the number of elements that they have, reporters need to build a sequence of these shots together to convey a story, visually. Once the visuals are packaged together, a journalist writes the text that speaks with the pre-edited sequence of shots. Of course, television is not limited to the news packages as an ultimate way of conveying news with plenty of new formats, including studio programmes, live transmissions, etc., filling the broadcast schedule, but the central role of images remains the focal point of the TV news production. In this respect, there is a dominant intersubjective conception of television news that the images that we see on TV represent the reality. However, as often noted by critical media analysts:

“Television is one kind of reality, and the culture to which we belong is another. But we perceive both of them in a similar way, and as a result they interact with each other”

(Fiske & Hartley, 1978, pp. 66–67).

In other words, television uses the conventions of reality in order to convey the effect of the real experience. In this sense, it is a highly subjective medium of communication. Images are thus the documents of actual events, and in its pristine form they are, in fact, message-free. It is the arrangement of these visuals into a constructed sequence of shots that creates an interpretation of the facts. This happens through the process of video editing.

Narrowly put, video editing is the strategy for condensing the lengthy raw footage into a shorter and coherent sequence of shots. Traditionally, editing is often understood as the process that is entirely determined by the script’s narrative. Starting from D. W. Griffith, the Hollywood’s pioneer of the filmmaking techniques, the film editing that is structured around the space and time continuum is commonly referred to as *continuity editing* (Bordwell & Thompson, 2015;

¹⁷ Television package, in the broadcast journalism jargon, refers to a “complete self-contained report” with the edited together visuals (moving and/or static), sound (natural or/and the voiceover), interviews, computer graphics (such as charts or maps), etc. In other words, it usually takes form of a story that has a pre-written script and is told by the journalist who wrote it.

Fabe, 2004). This differs entirely from the principles of *montage* developed by the Soviet filmmakers and theorists of the 1920s, the concept that emphasises the association between the shots (Maclean, 2012). Thus, for Eisenstein,

“{M}ontage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots - shots even opposite to one another: the ‘dramatic’ principle”

(Eisenstein, 1977, p. 49).

It is best understood in terms of the conflict between the two concrete elements (“a denotation”) that produce an abstract concept, much like in the Chinese and Japanese languages: “where a material ideogram can indicate a transcendental (conceptual) result” (Eisenstein, 1977, p. 50). Eisenstein theorized his concept of intellectual montage within the Marxist framework. Thus, the collision of the montage elements is understood as a dialectic between hypothesis and antithesis that yields a synthesis, that of ideological density. Montage may still include the elements of continuity editing, such as narration, for example, but it is not determined by the space or time. Rather, the driving force of this type of visual arrangement is the very meaning that the author aims at conveying. In practice, this may include the parallel montage of various actors in different locations that are not logically linked together in the script. These indexical images create new meanings of collectivism of action that in the Soviet filmmaking, for example, was ideologically charged.

These concepts have influenced the theory and practice of film across the world. In turn, television, being the medium that was fostered by the film industry, has not escaped the formats of montage. In fact, the way in which the information is conveyed visually in broadcast news, primarily relies on the principle of association between the shots. However, this ability of the TV video editing to produce meaning is largely overlooked both in communication studies and in IR.

i. Visual Framing

In IR word is often privileged over image as objects of analysis. This linguistic bias is challenged by some of the Cultural Studies intellectuals who argue that images and words are ‘co-texts’ that do not need to directly connect to each other but work in synergy to translate meaning (Bal, 1991; Emmerson, 2012). In fact, images and written text have little difference if they are both looked at as forms of ‘graphic signification’ (Olson, 2003). Images have been one of the key objects of propaganda studies (Welch, 2013), and in the recent decade media framing research has been pointing towards the value of visual research (Coleman, 2010; Graber, 1990; Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). In fact, Entman acknowledges that frames are constituted by various devices:

“News frames are constructed from and embodied in the key words, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images emphasized in a news narrative. Since the narrative finally consists of nothing more than words and pictures, frames can be detected by probing for particular words and visual images that consistently appear in a narrative and convey thematically consonant meaning across media and time”

(Entman, 1993, pp. 6–7).

Visuals densify textual information and construct narratives by adding another dimension to the storytelling processes. In particular, they evoke levels of association that complement linguistic structures. It has been acknowledged, for example, that in media images play a role in constructing stereotypes which has a significant impact on communicating identity and forming representations (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000). Similar to linguistic structures, visual structures suggest particular understanding of events by conveying interpretations; and the way in which things are communicated visually is thus meaningful (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). As Rodriguez and Dimitrova argue in their review of visual frame analysis,

“Images are powerful framing tools because they are less intrusive than words and as such require less cognitive load. Therefore, peripheral rather than central processing may be activated and audiences may be more likely to accept the visual frame without question”

(Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011, p. 50).

In other words, images construct meaning with *iconic* (figurative) rather than *symbolic* (contextual) signs (Emmerson, 2012). Although visuals work within a different system of signification, similarly to textual framing, images evoke metaphors that further translate into frames. In this sense, the codes conveyed through visual information channel facilitate the contextual density of the messages, in particular in the audio-visual genre. Visual frames follow several scenarios in media narration: they either correlate with the linguistic frames with the help of contextual cues or they are juxtaposed with the textual frames in order to counter frame the initial interpretation.¹⁸

Unlike other framing studies that look either at textual framing or visual frames, in this study I would emphasise the importance of combining both approaches into one analytical framework. The basic premise from which this analysis starts is that the choices of news producers—including the camera work, selection of images, and postproduction such as graphics—create visual codes that transmit social meaning (Fiske & Hartley, 1978; Tuchman, 1978). In the audio-visual realm of television, images and text constantly work in tandem to convey a story. Thus, in order to deconstruct this semiotic narrative, researchers need to study both of them in a systematic qualitative analysis. As Coleman argues,

“<...> too often visual framing research neglects theory building. In addition to complementing textual studies, visual framing studies can add unique theoretical statements to framing analysis”

(Coleman, 2010, p. 242).

Within the analysis of media there have been number of studies that focus on both linguistic and visual aspects of news stories (Fiske & Hartley, 1978; Griffin, 2004; Grimes & Drechsel, 1996; Hartley, 1982; Tuchman, 1978). My study draws heavily on the methodological advancements developed by the semioticians such as, for example, the attention to visual codes. Unlike semiotic analysis, however, which is predominantly concerned with visual material that is ideologically charged and looks at layers of symbolic meaning from a cultural perspective (Barthes, 1973) (Barthes, Edgar Wind, Erwin Panofsky and Meyer Schapiro), the analysis of current events reporting from the framing perspective does not necessarily require a detailed examination of archetypes and the symbolic density of images, but the focus is rather on the internal dialogism between the image and the text. My choice of this method was determined

¹⁸ For an elaboration of this point with practical examples see Chapters 5 & 6 of this dissertation.

by the specifics of news content that often deals with a limited number of moving and static images due to the pace of international live news reporting.

Based on the classification of visual framing analysis approaches proposed by Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011), this study will adopt two levels of visual analysis, the *denotative systems* approach and *connotative* visual analysis. The first approach draws from Barthes's (1973, 1977) concept of "denotation" that refers to the primary meaning in the analysis of visuals. The main focus of this analysis is on "who and what" of the events in its literal meaning. An important element of this analysis is the concern with the prominence that is given to actors of the news and which visual mechanisms have been applied in order to achieve this representation. Thus, pictorial styles are important elements of analysis, such as, for example, the difference between a close-up and a general shot in relation to the meaning that the choice of photographic frame conveys. It also looks at the visual intertextuality by identifying the images that were used by the channel's discursive opponents in the past or by identifying visual quotations from in the discursive dialogue between the news broadcasters. The data gained at this level, however, does not yet allow to determine the sub-frames.

The second-level analysis employs the *connotative* method of studying visuals and looks beyond the literal meaning that images convey to extract a more deep-seated imagery of the visual messages:

"At this level, persons and objects shown in the visual not only denote a particular individual, thing or place, but also the ideas or concepts attached to them. In this content-driven tier, news visuals are analyzed as signs, and their relationships with other signs within the sign system are assessed (i.e., Schapiro, 1996)"

(Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011, p. 56).

This level takes into account video editing of the news and how meaning is created as a result of analytical efforts of journalists or directors (Belyaev, 1982). Due to the focus on moving images rather than static photography, the visual analysis of television news needs to take into account the principles of screen motion. Television is the space that is especially well-equipped for generalising specific "iconic signs" like a photograph or a still shot from another channel into a "broader sign". This process is particularly important to deconstruct in order to understand how signs are being re-interpreted or re-framed and thus gives a new level of contextual meaning. The exact same image will convey different interpretation, depending on

the way in which it is packed with other signs, both visual and textual. As this study will focus in particular on the processes of counter-framing, visual information will not be dismissed during the practical analysis. The juxtaposition of captions on screen with the exact images, the use of graphics and stills in relation to the ‘voice-over’, will be the elements of study.

In particular, the sequences of video will be looked at as signifying units that translate meaning. Sequence is like a sentence that constructs the so-called visual text. Thus, the process of video editing or *montage* has a lot of similarities with the process of linguistic narrative construction (Henderson, 2012), with the only difference that it works with a different system of signs. For example, the way in which shots are put together in a coherent signifying structure to convey a story can be analysed as unit of visual meaning.

“Sequences are shots grouped together to form meaning based on the relationship between the shots. The whole sequence, then, becomes something greater than the sum of its parts”

(Henderson, 2012, p. 69).

Video editors select shots and frames to create these short visual stories. In relation to linguistic sentences, sequences are shorter messages but may consist of more signs. Juxtaposing seemingly unrelated images, for example, can create a certain meaningful effect and contribute to sub-frames. Thus, only about ten percent of the filmed reality is usually included in a television piece. The movement of the author's thought causes the appearance on the screen of visual and sound compositions created by the intra-frame movement and movement arising during the installation: from the letters-frames words-plans are formed, from words-sentences (editing phrases), then paragraphs-episodes and, finally, composition. The rhythmic and melodic patterns of assembly constructions determine the origin of space-time structures. The movements in time and space, conditioned by the semantic essence of the work, allow us to consider various forms of editing.

Thus, the focus of analysis in this study will be on visual signs and the way in which these signs correlate with the textual interpretations. Images, within this approach, are analysed in relation to the textual cues. All that will be looked at within the system of framing coding sheet to be combined with the textual sub-frames and then counter-framing analysis.

The distinctiveness of looking at images in news broadcasting is that, unlike fiction writers, storytellers of current affairs have grand claims on factuality and objectivity of the events' interpretations they convey. However, the narrative techniques that are used to communicate reality to the masses are borrowed from those of fiction genres. It is this rationalisation strategies that this study will focus on deconstructing.

ii. Textual Analysis

As I have indicated in Chapter 2, this study adopts a multifunctional understanding of text that is seen not only as a combination of linguistic elements bound together in a coherent structure but as “any coherent complex of signs” (Bakhtin, 1986). Although this broad definition can be extended into the fields of any form of “creative work that can be ‘read’ for meaning” (Hodges, 2015, p. 43), the focus in this study is on visual and language signs. The analysis of these elements includes the following methods: *linguistic*, *visual* and *intertextual* analysis that work at different levels. Textual and visual methods are applied at a denotative level to describe what is seen and how it is portrayed by the news outlets. Unlike linguistic and visual analyses that are rather explanatory in nature, intertextual study is more focused on the interpretive aspect of evaluation. As Fairclough puts it,

“The linguistic analysis is, in an obvious sense, closer to what is ‘there’ on paper or the audio- or video-tape, whereas the intertextual analysis is at one remove in abstraction from it”

(Fairclough, 1995, p. 61).

Thus, a researcher that employs intertextual analysis is drawn heavier to social and cultural interpretations that are conveyed in the text. This method of analysis began with the works of Russian literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's on dialogism. He emphasized that even monologic flows of language are, in fact, filled with other people's words, speech, assertions, interpretations and opinions that are either reported, recalled or re-interpreted. From this perspective, no text can be truly brand new, but is rather a result of direct and explicit or implicit dialogic relationship with another text. As Bakhtin put it,

“Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with other’ words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of ‘our-own-ness’, varying degrees of awareness and detachment”

(Bakhtin, 1986, p. 89).

Julia Kristeva, who introduced Bakhtinian concepts to French academia, metaphorically refers to text as a “mosaic of quotations” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 66) . In this vein, intertextuality is an arrangement of messages by a number of prior contexts. Thus, intertextual analysis is especially important for understanding counter-framing. In particular, it looks at quotes, both visual and verbal and the way in which they are interpreted or reinterpreted to produce meaning.

There are two types of intertextuality that scholars identify in slightly different words. Kristeva (1980) differentiates between *horizontal* and *vertical* intertextuality, the classification that Fairclough (1995) denotes as *manifest* vs. *constitutive/interdiscursive* intertextuality. Horizontal or manifest characterize the type of intertextuality when the relationships between the text take a form of specific references from one text to another. In other words, it can be seen as a direct response from one actor to another actor within the dialogue. These direct cues include specific marks, such as citations both in written or oral texts, or visual quotations that may be edited into a sequence with the help of graphic effects—for example, when RT channel explicitly shows images from CNN’s broadcasting and gives them a new interpretation.

On the other hand, these allusions do not always appear in texts, but intertextuality often happens “in the space between texts” (Fiske, 1987, p. 108), or what is called vertical and constitutive intertextuality. This type is characterized by integrating prior texts into news pieces without cuing them directly in the new text. This notion is often taken to another level of abstraction to reveal a broader cultural context. In this vein, intertextuality refers to the complex webs of texts in culture that are inescapable (Barthes, 1974). Although informed by this figurative notion, my study will rather focus on the more practical manifestation of constitutive intertextuality in the news—for example, the instances when RT responds to CNN without directly citing them. Intertextual analysis will thus allow me to uncover the relational tactical moves within the dialogue between the channels by highlighting how these responses are “textually enacted” (Fairclough, 1992). Thus, intertextual analysis unravels texts that are

articulated together in a discourse and highlights the process of counter-framing. In order to identify these intertextual links, I will closely study written, oral and visual manifestations of text in a systematic manner.

d. Data Collection and Coding

The starting point of any interpretive study is with what is actually there on paper, or in my particular case, on the screen. I collected data by selected news monitoring over the defined in this chapter case study periods. The data collection was organized around the news points, an important methodological choice that allowed me to apply intertextual analysis by utilizing a more precise analytical lens. This entailed identifying signifying news events that were reported on within the case study period followed by monitoring the output on these dates on both channels, excluding the topic-impertinent content of the news bulletins. This almost parallel news watching allowed me to track the dialogue between the news channels.

The study was performed in two stages, first *denotative (i.)* and *connotative (ii.)* stages. Data collection and the manual qualitative coding were part of the first stage, the further analysis included interpretation to unearth nuances and intertextual links that provide cues for identifying sub-frames that construct the overarching meta-frames.

i. Denotative Stage

In order to apply the framing and counter-framing analytical framework outlined in Chapter 2 to the chosen case studies, I combined and readjusted some of the coding methods used by framing scholars, in particular those who favor a systematic approach. I draw on the Gamson and Modigliani's (1989) approach to perform research by identifying framing devices, which refer to the discursive structures, such as metaphors and catchphrases that construct frames. These served as the focal points for classifying sub-frames.

In this respect, adopting this method allowed me to track precisely every component of information flow, which served a useful record form for further interpretation of the discourse. The list of signifying structures for analysis needed to be accommodated to fit my study. Thus, the extraction of the framing devices from the news stream included the following structures: headlines, keywords, visuals and conclusions¹⁹ (see *Table 3.2* for an example form of analysis).

¹⁹ This refers to conclusions of the news packages. For example, each television narration follows a structure that necessarily contains a concluding element. This is particularly important for analysing framing as these sections often contain clues for sub-frames.

Headlines	Keywords/ Key phrases	Intra- frame Signs	Extra-Frame Sequences & Min	Conclusions	Sub- Frames
RT 22 June 2014 (12:00MSK) <i>“Double Standards: The UN calls for an investigation in Ukraine.”</i>					
CNN 22 June 2014(12:00NYC) <i>“Ukraine at crossroad: Ousted Pres. Yanukovich accused.”</i>					

Table 3.2. Example Record Form for Data Collection

At this stage, pertinent linguistic and visual data is extracted from the news flow and recorded in the form. Although this stage could be referred to as descriptive, it is important to note that a form of selection is presupposing this method of data collection. Thus, an element of analysis is already embedded into the data collection stage. In particular, here researchers subjectify themselves to the news stream in order to cue signifying elements of discourse. Therefore, the structures of the news flow that land in the record form are never objective but rather intuitively extracted by the researcher.

ii. Connotative Stage

The approach outlined above allowed to collect evidence that could be interpreted using both quantitative and qualitative analyses. I argue that the study of discourse can benefit from a quantitative method to unravel different trends, dynamics as well as to identify the salience of certain structures over others that ultimately provide clues for studying meaning construction. Although this type of analysis is not interpretive in its nature, it can nevertheless facilitate the further interpretive inquiry by providing the background basis for it. Moreover, integrating visual and linguistic data helps a researcher to see a wider picture of the framing process. Thus, quantitative elements of analysis include counting the frequency of frames as well as analysing what the amount of time devoted to each topic can tell about the discursive mechanisms.

As I mentioned in the previous sections, connotative stage of this study included intertextual analysis. This is also the point at which sub-frames as elements of broader meta-frame are identified and interpreted. The record form (Figure 4) allowed to track how sub-frames migrate from one discourse to another and unraveled the links between these texts. In addition, it helped to identify not only explicit dialogism between the narratives of the two channels but also to look at the implicit conversation, the point that will be explained in greater detail in the following chapters.

Unlike scholars, who draw their frame identification and analysis from Jungian archetypes (Shaw, 2010), I see framing as a process which operates with a set of dynamic contexts and metaphors. In other words, the same metaphors are often used to create opposite meanings, which makes it irrelevant to analyze the roots of imageries in order to understand framing mechanisms. Therefore, my study does not require a deep analysis of the imageries and metaphors which are used for the construction of meanings, but rather an analysis of how they are used. Thus, the aim of this study is to deconstruct how the issues are organised in such a way that they create certain meanings in the society by looking at the structural aspects of framing.

e. Qualitative Interviews

Apart from the interpretive text analysis, this thesis uses some background data obtained with the help of qualitative interviews. This was performed in order to collect the relevant background information on the particularities of RT's function as a network and its role in Russia's public diplomacy. Thus, the data that will be presented in the following chapter merely serves as a context to the empirical analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

Unlike structured interviews and survey methods, in-depth qualitative interviews allow the researcher a certain degree of flexibility and adaptability to the environment in which the interview is taking place. In other words, "*interviewed is more a participant in meaning making than a conduit from which information is retrieved*" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). In this respect, qualitative researcher rarely takes the answers at a face value. Rather, the post-interview analysis entails an interpretation of the meanings derived during the questioning process. This important limitation of the method is worth reflexing upon, especially in relation to the particularities of this research. Interviewing elite practitioners of a rather controversial news production network has a particular bearing both on the process of collecting data as well as on evaluating these materials *post-factum*. In other words, researchers cannot find themselves outside the broader context in which they were gathered. Thus, for example, when I was asking the employees of RT whether there is any form of censorship coming from the management, I was bearing in mind that the responses I would get could potentially be "*unreliable, impressionistic, and not objective*" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 12).

Moreover, it is important to discuss the phenomenon of self-censorship in relation to their journalistic practice. A number of studies that look at the influences of social discourses on the journalistic performance have identified the tendency for self-censorship. This is contingent on both the structural position of an employee vis-à-vis the management as well as the broader normative boundaries in the society. "*The reason to self-censor is always fear, though this fear can be provoked by many different factors*" (Mintcheva, 2016, p. 208) Thus, it could either be the interiorised anxiety of government intervention or the simple worry of job security. I reflexively acknowledge this limitation of the qualitative interview method and the claims that the following chapter makes are therefore arrived at as a result of an interpretive exercise.

f. Conclusion

In presenting the logic behind the case selection, this chapter revealed the object of the study and the practical ways in which the study was approached within the conceptual framework of this research. In particular, I argued how the multifaceted methodological approach that employs textual, visual and intertextual methods of analysis can illuminate the process of framing, both strategic and tactical. Correlating the application of this methods with the levels of discourse thus opens up the possibilities for understanding both the static elements of discourse and its dynamic nature. In highlighting how this approach is different to the traditional frame analysis, I argued the way in which methodological questions are posed heavily influences the nature of overall findings of the research.

Thus, the following Chapter 4 will present the detailed description of the object of analysis, the RT channel, followed by the Chapters 5 and 6 that will showcase how these methods of analysis were applied to the source material by presenting the two case studies.

Chapter 4.

RT Today and its Soviet Roots:

Context and Historical Links

“Every attempt to contain or counteract the Russian state-backed media’s influence simply validated it. Churkin, the ambassador, acknowledged as much at RT’s U.N. ceremony. As he stood to speak, he seemed to be almost bouncing on the soles of his feet, delighted at RT’s newfound prominence. ‘Everybody watches them,’ he said. ‘Diplomats do it, ambassadors do it, foreign ministers do it, heads of state and government do it.’ In an oblique allusion to the recent American intelligence report, he noted that some people had been criticizing the network, but perhaps this was not such a bad thing. Grinning, he said: ‘They sound as if they are P.R. representatives of RT’”

(Rutenberg, 2017).

a. Introduction

On 13 November 2017, the United States Department of Justice officially ordered RT America to register as a “foreign agent”. Under this law, the Russian network is required to disclose all the financial information. RT’s response to the move followed quickly, with the headlines, such as *“Meet ‘foreign agent’: Americans in America covering American news for Americans”*, sarcastically mocking the hype around the network (RT, 2017b). Meanwhile in Moscow, Western accusations are presented to the domestic public as little victories if not as the tangible examples of the channel’s effective operations in the US.

All the above happened amidst the hacking scandal of the alleged interference of Kremlin that disrupted the course of the elections in America (Baraniuk, 2016), but the concern over the Russian ‘propaganda’ threat to the stability in Western democracies has been dominating the discourse since the Syrian crisis in 2013. Several Western broadcasting corporations continuously raised concerns over the tools and methods that RT uses, criticizing that the liberal media are unable to contain this machine (Bidder, 2013; Halliday, 2014). For example,

The New York Times labelled RT “the most powerful information weapon of the 21st century” (Rutenberg, 2017). It is this kind of public diplomacy arms race on ideational level that informed this research.

This chapter will thus engage with such questions as what informs the practice of this highly controversial institution that is increasingly being vilified? Where do its methods come from historically and what is the context of its ‘mission’ today? And perhaps most importantly, can analysing the work of RT help us understand Russian foreign policy? The chapter suggests that in order to deconstruct this antagonism and thus understand Russia’s defensive rhetoric it is necessary to look at the elements of the Soviet propaganda school in contemporary framing practices of RT. This approach, in fact, will allow to shift the focus away from the dominant in IR focus on strategy, which is often informed by the ideological emphasis, towards the tactical elements of influence that manifest themselves through the mechanisms of communication.

This chapter continues as follows: section *b* presents a historical overview of the Russian broadcasting abroad and tells the story behind the creation of RT. Section *c* shows today’s organizational structure of RT and where it evolved from. Section *d* traces the elements of Soviet broadcasting style and presents these parallels within the framework of *kontrpropaganda*²⁰. Section *e* concludes this chapter.

²⁰ Russian: counterpropaganda

b. The Soviet Roots and the Creation of RT

International news broadcasting is not a new phenomenon for Russia. It started from the the October Revolution in 1917 with the first attempts of Bolsheviks to inform the working classes in Europe about the affairs in the Soviet country via telegraph. In fact, Russia was the first country in history to start broadcasting in foreign languages. In the 1930s, Radio Moscow would target not only communists in the West, but also anti-fascists, workers and other layers of the European society (Buyanova, 2011). During WWII, the reach of Soviet propaganda considerably increased, raising hope for the USSR's elite that the state ideology would help the country on the military front. Driven by the need to counter the enemy, USSR launched the war-time propaganda agency *Sovinformburo*²¹, which was followed by a more systematic approach to spreading communist ideology during the second half of the 20th century, network *APN*. Much like the Western international broadcasters of the time, the Soviet *inoveshanie*²² involved radio broadcasting in 78 world languages to 150 countries with program output of more than 200 hours a day (Gurevich & Ruzjnikov, 1976; Silina, 2011). The programs were aimed at promoting and countering 'capitalist' and anti-Soviet propaganda of the rivals, such as *The Voice of America*, for example (Fantalov, 1974).

During the Cold War, the success of US propaganda incentivized other states to keep up with the obvious leader on the informational front. But the problem that Soviet broadcasters faced in the US was that they reached very few Americans. Compared to the Voice of America's 23 percent reach in the Soviet Union in early 1970s, only about 2 percent of the US population were listening to Radio Moscow (Winek, 2009). Some researchers have even found that "the USSR was spending more on jamming²³ than on broadcasting its own programs" (Roth-Ey, 2011, p. 131). Moreover, Radio Moscow's broadcasting effectiveness at the time was significantly affected by the poor quality of the shortwave broadcasting technology (Winek, 2009). Nevertheless, it is often argued that Soviet propaganda worked effectively enough on the audience that it reached (Smith, 1970). Thus, in the very midst of the Cold War, Soviet

²¹ "Soviet Information Bureau". The network existed from 1941 until 1961 (Rossiya Segodnya, 2017).

²² A literal translation from Russian is "international broadcasting".

²³ Jamming refers to communication technology strategies to disrupt the signal of another radio station, such as, for example, broadcasting on the frequency that is already in use by another network. The idea behind these efforts was to prevent the 'voices of the West' to be heard in the USSR (Winek, 2009).

broadcasting targeting audiences abroad became an area of great concern for the West. The British government, for example, was receiving reports on the content and strategies of Moscow's information services from its official 'propaganda watch', the BBC News Monitoring.²⁴ Some studies performed by American scholars in the 1970s discovered that USSR's Radio Moscow listeners in the USA were more likely to favor the Soviets than the control group (Smith, 1970). At the time, the study did not claim that these public opinion study results were due to the ingenious communication strategies of Radio Moscow. On the contrary, it rather pointed to the low quality of its content compared to the American broadcasters. Despite the weakness of Radio Moscow's journalistic offering, the Soviet broadcaster was found to help the American audience, in their own words, to "see the other side of the story" and "provide a broader perspective of international events" (Smith, 1970, p. 540). The essential point that the survey argued was that viewers' perceptions were mainly affected by the degree of opinion differences that were broadcast on local American media, compared to those promoted by Radio Moscow. As one of the respondents put it:

"When they {Radio Moscow} say something that is different from what you read in American newspapers you begin comparing, and sometimes what they say makes more sense"

(Smith, 1970, p. 545).

Thus, although the viewers were aware of the fact that the information they were receiving from the Soviet broadcaster was propaganda-based, they nevertheless found it valuable, not least because it opened up the other side of the story better than the domestic media. This important finding is notably pertinent to the aims and objectives of the contemporary Russian international broadcasting, the point that will be gradually unfolded through the course of this chapter.

The Perestroika period was not free of international broadcasting either. In 1993, Russia launched a state radio channel *The Voice of Russia* that broadcasted in 32 world languages.

²⁴ The service was formed in 1939 to report information on foreign media agenda and propaganda to the British Government. The researcher at BBC Monitoring translate news in 100 languages from 150 countries. See book at home. ("MPs raise fears over BBC Monitoring," 2016).

However, after the dissolution of the USSR, Russia seemed to be losing its influence abroad, which some experts in Russia claim was due to the lack of resources (Roth-Ey, 2011). Notably in the early 2000s in Russia, it was the narrative of ‘Western hegemony’ or ‘neocolonialism’ that led to the decision to launch an international 24-hour broadcaster. In particular, the dominant positions of CNN, BBC, Euronews and Sky News on the international news landscape was perceived by Russia and some other countries²⁵ as cultural imperialism, aimed at propagating the Western interpretation of current affairs. Hence, the creation of RT in itself was an act of countering the West.

RT was conceived in 2005 in the midst of an unprecedented economic growth period of the country due to the strong oil price (World Bank, 2017). Thus, Kremlin’s press apparatus, headed by Alexei Gromov, secured the state funding to launch the first 24-hour news network in the country. To manage and set the agenda for the new media enterprise, the network hired a 25-year old broadcast journalist with some experience in international news reporting, Margarita Simonyan.²⁶ As she recollects:

“When we were launching {the channel}, we were mainly broadcasting news about Russia. But we rather soon realized that this is a path to nowhere, because there are not that many English-speaking people, who would be interested in watching Russia-related news on a daily basis. There may be ten thousand of such people in the world, maybe fifty, or even hundred. But this is still not enough for the {Russian} government to spend such money on this” ²⁷

(Simonyan, 2012).

The early RT’s journalists, although informed by the network’s aim to promote Russia’s point of view, had rather optimistic views on their role as journalists. They were able to run stories that would be somewhat critical of domestic policies of the government at the time. One of the main tasks of the early-career ‘defensive’ journalists was to monitor the output of CNN and

²⁵ For example, Qatar also launched its *Al Jazeera* to counter this misbalance (Figenschou, 2017).

²⁷ This is the author's translation of the original text in Russian below:

«Когда мы запускались, то делали только новости о России. Но очень рано поняли, что это путь в никуда. Потому что англоязычных людей, которым интересно было бы в ежедневном режиме смотреть новости о России, немного. Таких людей в мире ну десять тысяч, ну пятьдесят, ну пусть даже сто. Это количество не стоит того, чтобы государство тратило такие деньги.»

the BBC (Interview 1), to take notes on the broadcasting style and strategies that would soon be borrowed and re-directed back at the rival channels. Most of the journalists were dreaming to be recognised in the West and truly strived for creating a high-quality international TV network that, in terms of the quality of the journalistic output it produced, could compete with the BBC and the CNN (Interview 2). Those Western channels were, at the time, very difficult to compete with due to the substantially greater funding that the big world corporations were receiving. As some of the network's employees at the time recall, there was very little funding and the salaries were low (Interview 3). The period of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency in general revived the kind of Perestroika spirit in the Russian media field. RIA Novosty and RT were hiring Western journalists to work for the country's broadcasting abroad with an explicit disclaimer that the kind of coverage that would be expected from them should not be, in any way, assumed to be Russian propaganda. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] At the time, Moscow required from their journalists to ensure the best quality journalistic output. Thus, according to the employees, there was no direct editorial control from Moscow, at least not to the extent such outlets were controlled during the Soviet period. As Simonyan disclosed when she was asked if she ever receives calls from Kremlin:

“You, in Kommersant²⁹, are apparently way more interesting for the {Kremlin} administration than we are. We do not broadcast in Russian, and therefore we are not viewed by that many people who could potentially ‘call’ us. And if they do watch {us},

■ [REDACTED]

²⁹ A leading Russian newspaper.

they do so seldom. During the six years {that I work here}, I have never received a single call with a request to take something down from the air or with the ‘why did you show something like that’ kind of remarks”³⁰

(Simonyan, 2012).

Following the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008, the channel changed its marketing strategy and hired an American PR firm McCann³¹ (Rutenberg, 2017). The result of this contract was twofold: on the one hand, the channel was rebranded from *Russia Today* to *RT*; on the other hand, it substantially revisited its news selection strategies. The reason why the network’s name was changed into an abbreviation was to prevent the viewers from perceiving the network as strictly Russian, thus aiming to be recognized as a rather independent and international news broadcaster. As Vladimir Putin admits in his conversation with the editorial board of RT:

“I would like to emphasize, it is very important: we were never guided by the premise that this {RT} would be an information service or a channel that would engage in apologetics of Russian politics. We wanted to give the {global} media stage an absolutely independent news channel”³²

(Putin, 2013).

However, unlike BBC and Al-Jazeera which despite their financial links with the British and the Qatar governments respectively managed to brand the networks as the international role-models of independent journalism, RT to date is predominantly perceived in the West as Russian ‘propaganda’. This paradox can be explained by the high degree of inconsistency between Kremlin’s statements, claims of RT’s editors, and the journalistic output of the channel. For example, Putin’s statement, cited above, uncovers Kremlin’s desire to legitimise

³⁰ This is the author's translation of the original text in Russian below:

«Вы в «Коммерсанте», видимо, гораздо интереснее звонящим, чем мы. Нас, поскольку мы не вещаем на русском, судя по всему, мало кто смотрит из тех, кто мог бы звонить. А если смотрят, то редко. У меня за шесть лет ни разу не было истории, чтобы был звонок с просьбой снять сюжет с эфира или зачем вы какую-то фигню показали».

³¹ A US-based international advertising agency (<https://www.mccann.com>).

³² This is the author's translation of the original text in Russian below:

«И хотелось бы сразу подчеркнуть, это самое главное: мы никогда не исходили из того, что это будет информслужба или канал, который будет заниматься апологетикой российской политики. Нам хотелось, чтобы на информационной арене появился абсолютно независимый информационный канал.»

its authority on the global discursive environment. With this strategy in mind, McCann gave RT its slogan “Question More” that urges the audience to develop a critical eye on Western mainstream media and to seek alternative news sources. Thus, the channel was created to outbalance the mainstream dominance of the Western broadcasters by countering their established agenda-setting strategies. What the creators of RT particularly criticized was the 24-hour broadcasters’ highly consistent with each other and predictable news stories selection. For example, BBC’s and CNN’s choice to give substantially more prominence in their broadcasting stream to certain events, while dismissing other stories, that are, from the Russian perspective, equally relevant for the global community:

“When CNN and the BBC see a NATO drone crash in Libya, and this story is headlining their bulletin all day, we {RT} see that 13 people from one family died the same day in Libya, six of which were children. We cannot compete with the BBC and CNN on the ground. In any case, they will have more foreign correspondent bureaus there, and their cameras will be more expensive. Why would the audience choose to watch us {RT} with our smaller studios and cheaper cameras? Only in the case we show them something that CNN will never show”³³

(Simonyan, 2012).

Thus, RT insist that they prioritize the topics that do not fit into the agenda of the mainstream ‘liberal’ media. In this respect, RT admits that it is guided by the normative ideal of pluralism of opinions and the strive to provide an anti-hegemonic take on the world affairs. The stories on RT’s agenda are thus critical of US foreign and domestic policies, they cover different angles of the conflicts in the Middle East, and pay particular attention to the topics of financial crisis, violence, social and environmental problems of the Western countries. Moreover, RT explicitly counters the preoccupation with objectivity that is dominant in the Anglo-Saxon journalistic community. RT’s editorial board unambiguously denies this ethical norm when it comes to conducting journalistic work by claiming that “objectivity does not exist” in the real

³³ This is the author's translation of the original text in Russian below:

«Когда CNN и BBC видят, что в Ливии разбился беспилотник НАТО, и весь день у них это главная новость, мы видим, что в этот же день в Ливии погибли 13 человек из одной семьи, среди них шестеро детей. Мы не можем с CNN и BBC конкурировать на одной поляне. У них все равно будет корпунктов больше, и камеры будут дороже, и ведущие будут сидеть в более просторных студиях. Зачем же людям смотреть нас, где студии поменьше и камеры похуже? Только если мы покажем то, что CNN никогда не покажет.»

world and therefore reporters who strive for it are simply deluding themselves if not compromising the quality of their work (Simonyan, 2012). A good 24-hour news network, in RT's understanding, should not try to present a balanced reporting based on the logic of objectivity but should rather be transparent on their political views. Within this policy, Kremlin has never suppressed the funding sources of RT. As Putin notes:

“Of course, it {RT} is funded by the government and it will more or less reflect the position of Russian officials on domestic and international affairs. But I would nevertheless like to emphasize again that we did not conceive the idea of this channel's editorial policy as a way to justify Russian policies, both domestic and international”³⁴

(Putin, 2013).

However this is inconsistent with the official documents of the presidential administration that often refer to international broadcasting as a tool of soft power (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016). Moreover, the state's spending on this rather high-maintenance enterprise is often justified by the country's need to have a strong weapon of mass information. As the channel's editor in chief argues when asked why taxpayers need to support the network:

“Well, {the country needs it} for the same reason as it needs The Ministry of Defence. That is why you, as a taxpayer, need it”³⁵

(Simonyan, 2012).

The narrative that informs this editorial agenda is that of Russia losing the ideational battle that took place during the Georgian War in 2008 (Simonyan, 2013). Thus, perceiving the global media stage as a battlefield of information war RT, as an enterprise, is not entirely organized around the logic of commerce. In fact, the strive for broadening the audience is informed by the need to influence and change public opinion abroad rather than by the ethical norm to ‘hold

³⁴ This is the author's translation of the original text in Russian below:

«Конечно, он финансируется государством, и так или иначе не может не отражать позицию российских официальных властей на то, что происходит в нашей стране и за рубежом. Но всё-таки я хочу это подчеркнуть ещё раз: мы не задумывали этот канал – RT – как какую-то апологетику российской политики – и внешней, и внутренней.»

³⁵ This is the author's translation of the original text in Russian below:

“ – Ну, примерно затем же, зачем стране нужно Министерство обороны. Вот зачем оно вам как налогоплательщику?»

power to account'.³⁶ In fact, the channel's target audience, as the editors admit, is not the broad public in the countries where RT broadcasts. The network has a more targeted approach that appeals to the so-called opinion-generating elite in the West who could potentially trigger the policy change towards Russia (Interview 3). RT also targets the younger audience, which explains its media convergence strategy with strong social media presence, receiving around one million views a day (Simonyan, 2013). In fact, the network's YouTube.com channel is often ahead of the main international news outlets, including CNN International, Fox News, Sky News, Al Jazeera (PwC UK, 2016). Thus, its audience spectrum is the people, who are "tired of mainstream", the so-called "lefties" and other "fighters of the system" (Simonyan, 2013). Notably, this pattern is fairly consistent with the targets of the Soviet broadcasting abroad at the time of the Cold War, the parallel that will be explored in greater detail in the following sections of this chapter.

³⁶ Holding power to account is one of the dominant ethical norms that organizes Anglo-Saxon journalistic practice (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

c. The Contemporary Organizational Structure of RT

Russia considers the use of international broadcasters a part of the country's soft power strategy that operates within the structure of public diplomacy. Thus, this section will explore the way in which this structure is organized. In fact, the confusion around the exact aims and objectives of RT can be also clarified through tracing the organizational change and reforms that surround the network. As briefly mentioned above, the current system of Russian international broadcasting has evolved from Soviet international broadcasting. I will provide a brief timeline of this re-organization below:

In 1961, Sovinformburo is restructured into the Agency for Press "Novosty", *APN*. The agency was predominantly focused on printed press, publishing more than 4,3 copies as issue of 60 newspapers and magazines in 45 world languages.

In 1990, the USSR created an Information Agency "Novosty", *IAN*. The work of the agency now included not only spreading printed press abroad but also international broadcasting, both TV and radio. The agency also researched public opinion abroad, mainly in relation to the USSR's domestic and foreign policy.

In 1991, the Inoveschanie network was reformed to become "International Moscow Radio" that was soon rebranded again into "The Voice of Russia" (VoR).

1991 also marked the year when based on IAN structure, the country launched Russian Information Agency "Novosty", *RIA Novosty*.

In 2005, RIA Novosty launches RT.

In 2013, President Putin's administration orders the merger of the Russian Information Agency "Novosty", RIA Novosty, and The Voice of Russia Radio under an umbrella organization, International Information Agency "Russia Today"³⁷ (*Rossiia Segodnya*, 2017).

³⁷ Not to be confused with RT, the TV network.

It becomes evident from the timeline presented above that the contemporary system of Russian public diplomacy was, in large part, built on the developments of Soviet media abroad. Moreover, a large number of the editorial staff of *RIA Novosty* and subsequently *Rossiia Segodnya* were groomed for the Soviet communication services. A notable example is the head of *Rossiia Segodnya*, Dmitriy Kiselyov. He began his career in 1975 as an APN clerk. He also worked for *Inoveschanie* before continuing his career in television (*Rossiia Segodnya*, 2017). Today, Kiselyov is the host of one of the most influential news analysis programmes on Russian TV and the head of *Rossiia Segodnya*, which makes him the key figure of Kremlin's media apparatus. He is often referred to by the Western media as Putin's propagandist in chief, who sets the tone for the country's international broadcasters aimed at foreign publics ("Russia's Chief Propagandist," 2013). *Rossiia Segonyia* has six services under its umbrella:

1. The news agency *RIA Novosty*, which primarily targets the Russian-speaking audience and focuses on the news of domestic interest.
2. *R-Sport*, the leading agency in the country that delivers international and Russian sports news to the audience.
3. *RIA Nedvizjnost'*, an information and analysis service about the real estate market in Russia and internationally.
4. The financial news agency *Praim*.
5. The online project *Ino SMI*, specialising on translation of the foreign media publications into Russia.
6. The online multimedia platform Sputnik, which is primarily specialised in radio broadcasting in over 30 world languages.

Although RIA Novosty founded the Autonomous Non-profit Organization "TV-Novosty", Russia Today (later, *RT*), the channel's affiliation with the agency remains unclear. Although officially these are separate organizations, the connections between the two are difficult to deny (Surganova, 2014). Before RIA Novosty and the Voice of Russia linked-up, RT's headquarters in Moscow were sharing the roof with RIA Novosty. And soon after the merger, Margarita Simonyan became the editor in chief of *Rossiia Segodnya*, while remaining in her chair at RT. In fact, due to her experience with running an international broadcaster, Simonyan was appointed to oversee the rebranding of *The Voice of Russia* radio that from 2013 is called *Sputnik News*. The choice of 'sputnik' as a brand name is another point that showcases how contemporary media is influenced by the Soviet legacy. For example, from the 1960s, the

Soviets were producing a weekly magazine in English language, *Sputnik Junior*, which was targeted at younger audience abroad. The aim of the publication was to promote Lenin's ideas among children (Mitrokhin, 1985). The editors of the network disclosed in an interview conducted as part of this research that the choice of the brand name was guided by the notion that 'sputnik' is one of the few Russian words that is understood in many foreign languages with a positive overtone (Interview 4). Moreover, it is the word that carries the meaning of national pride as part of the country's Soviet legacy.

The editorial correlation between the output of Sputnik and RT enterprises is very strong. The broadcasting policy, as manifested by the board, is to focus on the local news of a target country and to promote Russia's interpretations when it comes to foreign affairs (Surganova, 2014). As Kiselyov presented during his keynote speech at the launch of Sputnik News, the audience in the world is exhausted from the exposure to US 'propaganda' promoting hegemonic narratives of 'unipolarity', and seeks out for alternative sources of information that would challenge this misbalance (Kiselyov, 2014). Thus, *Rossiya Segodnya* and RT are not exactly siblings but are the two autonomous networks that share one editor in chief and, subsequently, the editorial policies. For example, after the merger, RT launched a Russian version of RT, which is not a full version of the channel but contains selected translated news from RT English. This website launched a section called *Ino TV*, which is essentially a twin of the already existing RIA Novosty's project *Ino SMI*. As the former editor in chief of *Ino SMI* said in an interview to Forbes Russia:

*"It is practically the only source of information about the outside world for the government of the country, a way more effective {source} than the monitoring service of MID"³⁸*³⁹

(Surganova, 2014, p. 2).

This service is also a revived Soviet ideological tool. For example, during the Cold War the Department for Ideology the Central Committee of the CPSU had a monitoring service for analysis of foreign press. The aim of this unit was not only collecting and translating the news

³⁸ The Ministry for International Affairs.

³⁹ This is the author's translation of the original text in Russian below:
«Это практически единственный источник информации о внешнем мире для руководства страны, гораздо более эффективный, чем служба мониторинга того же МИДа», — считает Ковалев.»

as they are broadcast in the West but also to prepare special memos with propositions on how to counter foreign messages (Silina, 2011). A very important characteristic of Soviet international propaganda was its targeted character, its focus not only on political organizations and state structures, but also on various social, sociocultural, religious and sex-age groups (Solodkova & Nesterova, 2018). Bearing this strategy in mind, throughout the years, RT has expanded its network of TV channels by launching new and more country and sociocultural-specific outlets. Below is the timeline of this transformation ⁴⁰:

Launched in 2005, the flagship TV channel, initially called “Russia Today”, is *RT International*. This version is the most internationally oriented in their news broadcast and covers the wider English-speaking community. The headquarters are based in Moscow, but it uses the content produced by RT’s bureaus in other world cities, such as London, New York, New Delhi, Paris, Baghdad, etc. The first case study of this dissertation was performed using the audio-visual output of this channel.

Rusiya Al-Yaum, *روسيا اليوم*, is the version of RT in Arabic language that broadcasts programmes 24/7 with the focus on the audience in the countries of the Middle East. It was the second channel to start broadcasting in 2007, following the launch of Russia Today (RT, 2017a).

RT en español was launched two years later, in 2009, to cover the Spanish-speaking audience. With the channel’s headquarters based in Moscow, the version does have its own programming and journalists but it also offers its viewers the selected translated content of RT in English. Its operations are located in Los Angeles, Buenos Aires, Miami and Havana (*RT en español*, 2017).

In 2010, the network extended its Washington bureau into a targeted RT America channel. It provides its viewers in the USA with an exclusive content from 4pm to 12am on the days of the week, and re-broadcasts RT International at all other times on air (RT, 2017a).

In 2014, the London bureau of the network announced the launch of the UK version of the channel. Similar to RT America, RT UK provides its audience with the UK-specific news

⁴⁰ It is important to point out that throughout the course of my research, the internal organization of the network changed, with new versions of the channel emerging. Also, the access to the channel’s content changed, which is further unpacked in the presented timeline.

offering from 6pm to 10pm, Monday through Thursday, with a 10pm Friday bulletin, and turns into RT International at all other times on air (RT UK, 2017). This channel's content was used to collect data for the second case study of this research, due to the inaccessibility of RT International's online archive that was used while conducting the Case Study I.

Since 2011, the network has the channel specializing solely in the 24-hour documentary broadcasting, RT Doc that predominantly airs long format films on Russia-specific topics and offers live online streaming (RT Doc, 2017).

Although RT announced the launch of the two more country and language-specific channel versions in French and German, the economic crisis in the country forced the network to suspend these plans (Shuster, 2015).

RT also has the three other language online versions of the channel: RT на русском⁴¹, RT Français⁴², RT Deutsch⁴³, and all the the cable network channels also have their YouTube channels (RT, 2017a).

RT's news distribution is operated by its news agency *Ruptly*. In terms of its programming, the separation between the channels listed above is not strict, with the main programmes appearing on all channels. However, the news bulletin structure can vary. For example, RT UK and RT America will prioritize the news that are important to the British and American viewers respectively, while some of the stories that appeal to the Spanish-speaking or Arabic-speaking audience will get side-lined.

⁴¹ "in Russian"

⁴² "French"

⁴³ "German"

d. The Roots of RT's Countering Techniques: The Concept of *Kontrpropaganda*

As the previous chapters argued, in order to understand Russia's defensive rhetoric, it is important to delve into the mechanism of the country's persuasive communication and to analyse what underpins its contemporary strategies. As I have portrayed above, the influence of Soviet propaganda school can be traced through looking at the organization of the contemporary public diplomacy system. In this section, I will present the operational particularities of contemporary strategies.

The term *kontrpropaganda* originated in the practice of military propaganda (Nozjin, 1984). The measures of political propaganda would be used to neutralise if not completely eliminate the effects of the enemy's information and psychological operations (PSYOP). In the 1960s and 1970s, due to the ideological battle between the USSR and the USA, *kontrpropaganda* changed its targets, developed new technologies and acquired new meanings and connotations. In the Soviet Union, *kontrpropaganda* was thought of as an integral part of ideological affairs. Thus, the military and intelligence services, journalists and diplomats were working together to contribute to the development of methods for countering the PSYOPs of the enemy. The starting point for such strategies was collecting and analysing anti-Soviet messages promoted by the US through science and education sectors, art and entertainment, the activities of foreign missionaries and distribution of anonymous leaflets (Silina, 2011).

All these data were carefully collected and systematised in the propaganda and agitation section of the CPSU Central Committee to address the issue of concrete counterpropaganda actions. Operational information in the Central Committee of the CPSU was provided primarily by the State Security Committee in the form of internal memos. For example, one of the recently declassified KGB memos of the time states that there is a necessity to create an operational body that would "instruct systematic observation of the plans and practical actions of the United States in the field of psychological warfare and ideological sabotage in various regions of the world and prepare proposals for organizing our counterpropaganda" (RGANI. F. 5. Op. 55. D. 56. L.).⁴⁴ Since the second half of the 1970s, the Department of Propaganda of the Central Committee of the CPSU began receiving information prepared by independent sociological services. Thus, the strategy of countering can be defined as "carefully prepared answers to false propaganda with the purpose of refuting the disinformation and undermining the propagandist"

⁴⁴ As cited in (Silina, 2011, p. 54).

(Romerstein, 2008, p. 137) . Notably, some American analysts note that in the mid-20th century the USA was lagging behind the USSR on the counterpropaganda front. As Romerstein states:

“Although the Cold War provided an excellent laboratory to study, develop and refine techniques of counterpropaganda, the U.S. started to lose its knowledge, and the practice of it, in the late 1960’s and 1970’s. By the 1980’s it was possible, by examining the experiences of the past, to develop an effective counterpropaganda campaign against the Soviets’ strategic propaganda offensives. In a repetition of history, however, this ability atrophied in the 1990’s after decision-makers saw no more need to retain the knowledge or ability”

(Romerstein, 2008, p. 138).

Indeed, since 2013 RT’s countering techniques have regained its status of the great public concern for the USA. Thus, for example, the Chairman of House Foreign Affairs Committee, Eliot Engel, invoking war-time rhetoric, alarmed the public that Russian propaganda “may be more dangerous than any military, because no artillery can stop their lies from spreading and undermining US security interests in Europe” and that this state of affairs requires “a robust response from us”, prompting the deployment of counterpropaganda techniques (Royce, 2015). The members of Russian media apparatus, in turn, make explicit references to the Soviet propaganda techniques, comparing the current state of affairs in the information sphere to the battleground of messages. For example, one of the former APN and RIA Novosti editors points to the “necessity of constructing a positive image of our country. Otherwise we will not be able to win the information war” (Maksimov, 2016). The usage of military metaphors indicates how readily the two countries have fallen into the familiar pattern of the Cold War discourse. In fact, the pre-soft power discursive frame of public influence abroad was structured around the concept of psychological warfare, which, as the number of KGB documents indicate, was conceptualized by the US strategist shortly before and during Kennedy’s presidency (RGANI. F. 5. Op. 55. D. 56. L. 118).⁴⁵ According to this concept, the "behaviour" of foreign states can be effectively influenced by strategic measures to directly or indirectly influence the interpretations of the situation of statesmen of this country from afar or on the foreign soil. Thus, the overall intention of the Soviet *kontrpropaganda* techniques was to prevent any form of Western influence on the public opinion in the USSR. Notably, similar to the way in which

⁴⁵ As cited in (Silina, 2011, p. 54).

USA strategists raised concern over the ineffectiveness of American counterpropaganda compared to the Soviet effort, Russian analysts today point to the failure of the ideological apparatus to formulate a consistent strategy to counter USA's PSYOPs, which was, in large part, due to the overemphasis on the Marxist-Leninist ideology that structured such practices (Silina, 2011). However, as this research will demonstrate in the following chapters, the overarching ideological strategy may not be as pertinent to analysing the discourse as the tactical mechanisms. In particular, looking at the structural aspects of discursive mechanisms allows to track a number of similarities that are otherwise overlooked.

Much like the ideological justifications proposed by the contemporary Russian 'propagandists', as showcased in the above sections of this chapter, the basis for Soviet counterpropaganda was the notion of American hegemony and cultural imperialism (Silina, 2011). Thus, one of the main tools for delegitimizing the enemy was to criticise, discredit foreign journalists (Fateev, 1999). One of the unique countering techniques that was developed then was the explicit countering of the Western press.⁴⁶ Thus, foreign journalists would be satirically referred to as 'slanderers' which could be backed by directly citing their 'untrue' quotes to then deconstruct and ridicule such statements ("Klevetniki," 1947). The every-day reality of Soviet journalists working abroad was structured around this approach. For example, Baygushev, who worked for APN at the time recalls one of the usual working days:

"... locked up in my office, I would begin the day with a fresh 'specperehvat' ⁴⁷, that is all these Freedoms and Voice of Americas. And then a thick pack of the so-called 'white TASS' – with quite detailed and exceptionally fresh reviews of the 'sharp' foreign press. And only then would I go on reading all the anti-Soviet émigré newspapers and magazines – solid Russkaya Misl', Russkoe Slovo, Russian-speaking pro-European Novoe Russkoe Slovo, Noviy Zjurnal, Posev, Kontinent, Chasovoy ⁴⁸, etc., etc., etc. We had everything! And only as a desert, exhausted, would I read the mainstream foreign

⁴⁶ The detailed example of the usage of such technique on RT will be presented in the following chapter.

⁴⁷ Russian: "special interception" (author's translation).

⁴⁸ Russian: "Russian thought", "Russian word", "New Russian word", "New magazine", "Sowing", "Continent", "Sentinel".

(Baygushev, 2005, p. 61).

The routine depicted above is very similar to the day of an RT employee. For example, one of the programme editors at RT describes her day at work:

“We read all the foreign newspapers and watch the TV output of the CNN, the BBC, SKY news, etc. When we organize talk shows, we seek for the guest speakers on the basis of their political views. In particular, we look for those who explicitly show their anti-Western positions and/or are somewhat supportive of Russian foreign policy. <...> When we prepare {TV} packages, we know that it would be more effective if we show what kind of inconsistencies are there in the Western reporting, because our aim, as journalists, is to be critical”

(Interview 1).

The result is thus the news coverage that discusses world events in the way that challenges the Western, American, in particular, legitimacy over the international affairs. The overall output character of RT, if compared to the Soviet broadcasting abroad, is very similar. The following bit of USSR’s radio broadcasting from 1985 is an explicit example of this phenomenon:

“...the hourly newscast was followed by ‘The Way We See It’ A Look at the Soviet Union and the World Today, devoted to contrasting U.S. missile deployment with Soviet policy ⁵⁰. Later commentaries dealt with supervisors of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima visiting Moscow and thanking the government, ‘for their tremendous efforts to ease world tensions’ and the denunciation of the United States’ negative attitude toward arms

⁴⁹ This is the author's translation of the original text in Russian below:

«...запершись в кабинете, начинал свой рабочий день с чтения свежего “спецперехвата”, то есть всех этих “Свобод” и “Голосов Америки”. А затем толстой пачкой так называемого “белого ТАСС” – с довольно подробными и исключительно свежими обзорами всей “острой” зарубежной прессы. А уж только потом переходил к чтению всех антисоветских эмигрантских газет и журналов – солидных “Русской мысли”, “Русского слова”, русскоязычного проевропейского “Нового русского слова”, “Нового журнала”, “Посева”, “Континента”, “Часового” и т. п., и т. д. Мы имели все! И только уже на закуску, выдохнувшись, читали наиболее авторитетные зарубежные газеты...»

⁵⁰ Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 273-274.

negotiations by a British labour union”

(Winek, 2009, p. 107).

This framing of the Soviet Union as the ‘peacekeeper’ in the international with an emphasis on the US ‘aggressive’ policies is notably similar to the way in which the Syrian crisis was framed by RT, the point that will be further unpacked in the following Chapter 5. Today, the editor in chief of RT is confident that Russian television needs to focus closely on the American TV channels, where the anchors are not balanced ‘referees in a football match’ but are rather heavily promoting their point of view. In fact, RT today “effectively” (Rutenberg, 2017) turns the accusations from the Western media, such as the Economist, for example, into their own advantage, which essentially helps the channel to sustain its image of the “fighter with the establishment” (Simonyan, 2013).

e. Conclusion

This chapter depicted the controversial role that RT is ascribed to in the Western context and problematized the difficulty of analytically grasping the role of RT within the country's public diplomacy structure. In turn, it engaged with the intentions of the network's founders, as communicated by the officials, which was in turn juxtaposed with the strategies to develop a distinct Russian voice against the dominance of Western mainstream media. Hence the key argument that this chapter made is that RT developed out of a distinct Soviet tradition of counter-propaganda. This analysis was based on secondary literature as well as semi-structured interviews with former journalist working for RT. Bearing in mind this distinct present and history of RT, with its origins and contemporary setup, the next chapters will apply the understanding of counter-framing developed in Chapter 2 to the case studies. Thus, Chapter 5 focuses on the way the flagship channel RT International framed the Syrian crisis, in particular focusing on the responsive elements of counter-framing through the intertextual tracing of the discursive dialogue between RT and CNN.

Chapter 5.

Case Study I: Framing Syrian Crisis

“{T}he coverage of the Syria story in the last five years has shed doubts on the relation between reality, truthfulness and news in remarkable ways”

(Al-Ghazzi, 2017, p. 12).

a. Introduction

On the 21 August 2013, two areas near Damascus were struck by at least a dozen rockets, containing one of the deadliest chemicals, sarin gas. This most devastating event in the history of the Syrian conflict⁵¹ killed, according to different sources, from 281 to 1729 people, causing an international furor over who was responsible for the attack. By coincidence, the strike happened a week after the UN investigators arrived in Syria to inquire into allegations about the previous chemical attacks in the area. Upon Syrian government’s permission granted to the UN several days after the attack, the inspectors headed to the Ghouta site and confirmed that the attack had indeed taken place. However, it remained a mystery which side of the conflict was to be held accountable.

From the very start, the White House communications claimed in ‘high confidence’ that the Syrian government was responsible for the chemical strike, making the case for an intervention in Syria. Kremlin, a historically loyal friend of Assad, stood opposed to the US pro-retaliation calls, pointing to the likeliness of the rebels themselves carrying out the massacre. This head-to-head of the two stubborn powers was ultimately resolved by the UN-brokered plan to dismantle Syria’s chemical weapons. However, it remained controversial who the perpetrator of the sarin gas attacks was, with dozens of opposing interpretations continuing to emanate from different media outlets. While several bloggers and citizen-journalism initiatives, such as

⁵¹The wave of the 2011 Arab Spring protests against the Al-Assad family who had been in power since 1971 put a start to the ongoing humanitarian crisis, displacing about a half of the country’s population (Al-Ghazzi, 2017). For an account of the pretext to the Arab Spring, see (Hollis, 2012)

Bellingcat, attempted to conduct independent investigations of what *actually* happened in the conflict zone, based on the open-access photo and video-sources that became available through social media, the majority of the international broadcasters, including RT and CNN, preferred to maintain distance to the war-zone and focus instead on the blame game between the US and Russia.

This chapter scrutinizes this conversation between the two channels by applying the analytical lens of framing and counter-framing. It will detail the mechanisms of framing and counter-framing that entails constant referencing to the original narratives that took place in the dialogue between the channels. By applying textual, visual and intertextual analysis to the Syria-related news in the broadcast of RT and CNN, I was able to trace the way in which frames are produced, re-produced, countered or borrowed by different channels on the tactical level to then contribute to the construction of the overarching meta-frame of the discourse.

The chapter proceeds as follows: section *b* presents the overview on the conducted case study, followed by section *c* on RT's and CNN's strategic level framing by studying the meta-frames that the channels promoted in their coverage of the Syrian crisis. Section *d* addresses the tactical level and showcases how the two channels interacted with each other through the use of sub-frames. This section presents a detailed analysis of the textual and visual material. Section *e* concludes this chapter.

b. Case Study Overview

This case study examines RT’s rhetorical response to CNN’s coverage of the Ghouta attack and the international events that took place shortly after the deadly incident. As outlined in Chapter 2, this study treats framing and counter-framing as operating at different levels of discourse. In this respect, the aim of the Syrian crisis analysis was to identify the meta-frame of the discourse by extracting sub-frames from the coverage of RT and CNN. Sub-frames are seen to operate at the tactical level and are often very responsive and rather targeted units of meaning. Thus, unlike scholars who draw their frame identification and analysis from Jungian archetypes (Shaw, 2010), I see framing as a process which operates with a set of dynamic contexts and metaphors. In other words, the same metaphors are often used to create opposite meanings, which makes it irrelevant to analyse the roots of imageries in order to understand framing mechanisms. Therefore, my study does not require semiotic analysis of culture, but rather focuses on the structural aspects of discourse (see *Table 5.1*).

		<i>Method of Analysis</i>		<i>Methodology</i>	
				Denotative Stage	Connotative Stage
<i>Object of Analysis</i>	Macro-Level	RT’s Discourse CNN’s Discourse	Meta-frames		
	Micro-Level	RT’s and CNN’s Communicative Genres (e.g. narrative)	Sub-frames	Textual Frame Analysis Visual Frame Analysis	Intertextual Frame Analysis

Table 5.1. Discourse and Frame Analysis

The aim of this study is to deconstruct how the issues were organised within the discourse in such a way that they created certain meanings by analysing the structural aspects of framing. As some scholars of communication studies have noted, in journalistic practice, frames are known to also guide journalists who often construct their narratives based on ‘common sense’,

without thoroughly questioning where this ‘commonality’ originates. The argument is that the frame-building process is often a result of constant communicative exchange between journalists and elites (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012; Tuchman, 1978). In other words, the work of frame promoters, that is journalists, is influenced by a number of internal and external factors that include the day-to-day editorial policies, informed by the culture within which reporters function, as well as the procedural factors such as the search for the news content that can be broadcasted (Scheufele, 1999). In particular, getting access to political speeches often requires less journalistic effort than getting access to the site of a military attack. Informed by this notion, frame analysis allowed me to demystify the deep-seated character of political narratives transmitted through media, with its multiple rationalising components at the tactical level of discourse (see *Table 5.1*). The performed Case Study I allowed me to uncover these structural elements of the frame-building process by showing the way in which the coverage of the crisis was structured by RT and CNN.

The time-frame for this Case Study I analysis was from 22 August to 29 September 2013. On the one hand, I scrutinized 39 half hour news bulletins on RT, which could be accessed through the network’s online archive⁵². To attain the relevant source material, I applied sampling methodology and selected rotating 12:00 and 17:00 bulletins every second day. On the other hand, I examined 27 one-hour news bulletins on CNN, excluding weekend news, rotating morning and afternoon issues, which could be accessed via the British Library’s Multimedia Archive. Overall, my analysis comprises 46,5 hours of video material. This approach was applied to the Syria-related packages only.

I collected data using the *list of frames* method⁵³ that allowed me to track precisely every component of the discourse, creating a useful record form for further analysis. In other words, the textual and visual methods entailed extraction of the framing devices from the information flow. These framing devices are not only linguistic structures, such as metaphors and catchphrases, but also visuals, which communicate frames: headlines, keywords, captions, conclusions, and sources.⁵⁴ Such an approach allowed me to unveil different trends, dynamics

⁵² RT limited public access to its access shortly after I finished the data collection.

⁵³ See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for the details on this method of data collection.

⁵⁴ For the example of the record form see Chapter 3.

that contributed to the construction of the meta-frames. The combination of the textual, visual and intertextual frame analysis allowed me to expose the similarities in the ways in which RT and CNN framed the issue.

In summary, 99 per cent of the bulletins aired on RT and CNN throughout the chosen timeframe included at least one Syria-related package. However, the prominence given to the topic fluctuated considerably. I determined the general pattern (see *Chart 5.1*). For example, RT has not developed a model of framing the issue in the beginning of their coverage. Therefore, the number of devices as well as the time dedicated to broadcasting the Syrian crisis was limited. On 27 August, the first peak point happened when the length of the Syrian crisis coverage hit 16 minutes of the airtime, which is more than a half of the whole news bulletin, a notable and unusually long reportage in television broadcasting.

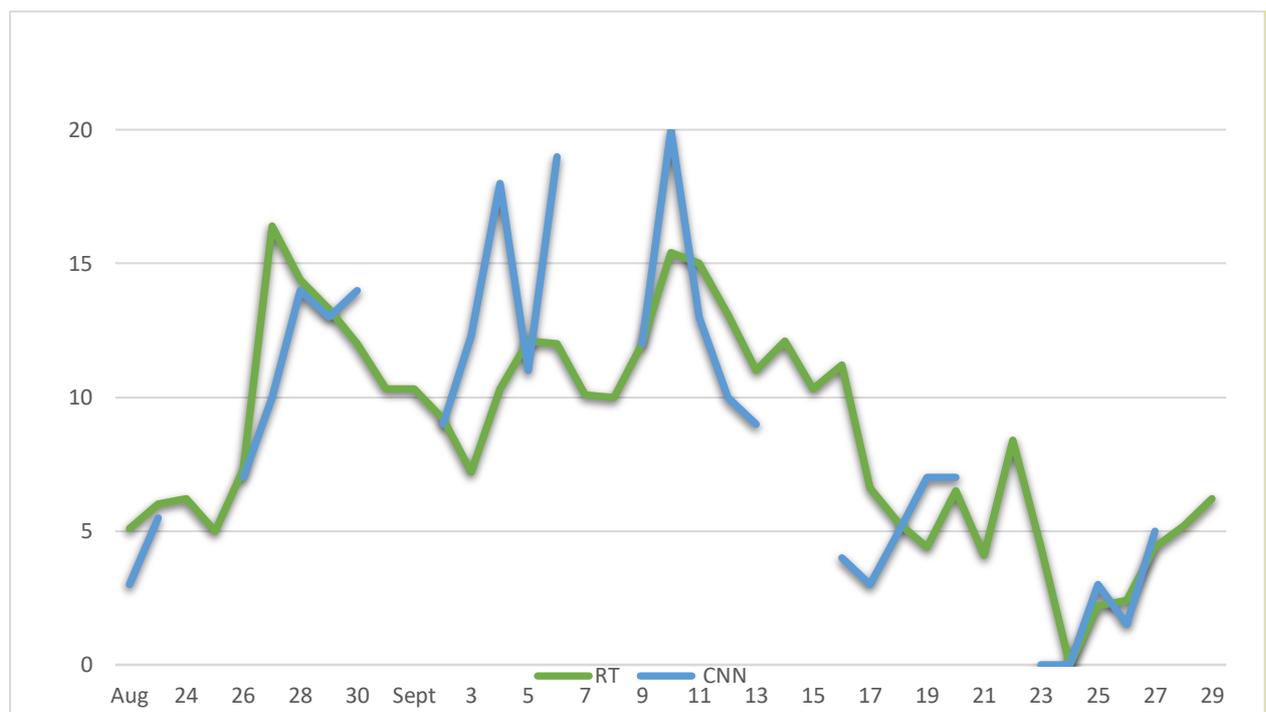


Figure 5.1. Duration of Syria-related News on RT

Due to the limit of archived footage of CNN's coverage (only weekdays were available), there are gaps in the data. It was, nevertheless, possible to determine the general pattern of CNN's coverage duration, as Chart 5.1 highlights. Notably, the peak points of Syrian coverage on RT and CNN often overlap. This analysis suggests that the two channels chose to give the same level of prominence to their coverage of the Syrian crisis, indicating the similarity in their

agenda-setting strategies. Moreover, both channels would broadcast Syria-related stories in the beginning of the news bulletin, which allows to interpret this editorial choice as the example of the channels chiming in with the rhetoric of the elite. In particular, President Obama's and President Putin's words were the most frequently cited source materials for both channels.

In traditional journalistic practice, reporters tend to follow the unspoken rule of presenting sources in such an order that the most prominent speaker appears on air first. Bearing this communication strategy in mind, I was expecting RT to introduce the Russian official side first, followed by the point of view of the rivals, the US in this particular case. However, RT consistently refrained from employing this technique. In fact, the channel's coverage was predominantly structured around the narratives of the Western officials (see *Table 5.2*). For example, in their coverage of the Syrian crisis, RT often starts the news by delivering US official statements followed by independent commentators and reports from the ground. The number of Russian sources was surprisingly small (23 per cent), while American and those who supported their position on intervening in Syria appeared live or were cited in the news packages 36 times (30 per cent). The largest prominence was given to independent sources which supported the Russian non-intervention position on the chemical crisis in Syria (35 per cent). In only 11 per cent of the broadcasts, Syrian officials and citizens were mentioned. The amount of time dedicated to broadcasting opposing points of view, thus, was notably higher than the direct promotion of Russian stance on the issue. This quantitative comparison highlights that RT's coverage strategy is primarily organised around counter-framing Western interpretations, sustaining the notion of Russia's defensive rhetoric. CNN, on the other hand, utilised a more traditional style of direct communication (see *Table 5.2*). For instance, President Obama and members of his administration were cited or appeared live in 60 per cent of the broadcasts, while spokespeople of the UN or other independent sources were only present in the 30 per cent of the broadcasts.

RT	Framing Sources	CNN
23%	Russian Sources	15%
30%	Experts from USA	60%
11%	Syrian Government and Pro-Assad Groups	1%
35%	Independent Sources	30%

Table 5.2. The Proportion of Sources Appearance on RT and CNN

In practice, the commentators on RT usually appeared in the middle or towards the end of a news package and often deconstruct US frames. As I briefly mentioned in Chapter 5, RT is the international broadcaster that explicitly represents ‘Russia’s point of view’ on international affairs. In fact, the network’s employees confess that their invitations to participate in the programmes are often refused by experts in the West (Interview 2). Hence, the channel often tries to prove its credibility in the eyes of Western viewer. For example, RT makes a clear emphasis on “independent guest speakers”, mostly English-speaking pundits. RT’s guest producers deliberately select commentators according to their anti-Western political position (Interview 1). Aiming at the Western audience, RT thus picks speakers who are relatively close to the public environment, which makes them a more trustworthy source for delivering the meanings than representatives of the Russian government. CNN, as a well-established international news outlet, mostly relies on its own correspondents’ reports rather than guest speakers or even original sources. Moreover, they often (7 times throughout the case study) introduce their reporters in Syria as “the only Western correspondent on the ground”. It is possible to interpret this phrasing as implicitly suggesting to the audience that non-Western media are less reliable sources of information than the liberal media.

c. Meta-Level Framing

Overall, both channels structured their coverage around a similar framing formula, which, within the conceptual framework of this research, is the structural level of discourse. Thus, meta-frame contains a number of structural elements that organize the discourse within it. For example, RT and CNN structured their interpretation of the situation in Syria and the international conflict around it through assigning four dichotomous metaphors, *peacemaker/mediator*, *aggressor(rival)*, *victim*, and *enemy*, to the actors that were involved in the conflict: Russia, USA, Syrian Government and Pro-Assad Groups, Rebel Groups (see *Table 5.3*). Thus, within RT’s interpretation, Russia appeared as *protecting* the Syrian nation from the *aggressive* American invasion. Within this discourse, Syrian Government and the supporters of the Al-Assad family are treated as *victims* of the potential strike by the US. The rebel groups fighting the regime are thus labelled terrorists and are put on the discursive side of the *enemy*.

RT	Framing Subjects	CNN
<i>Mediator</i> →	Russia	← <i>Rival</i>
<i>Aggressor</i> →	USA	← <i>Peacemaker</i>
<i>Victim</i> →	Syrian Government and Pro-Assad Groups	← <i>Enemy</i>
<i>Enemy</i> →	Rebel Groups	← <i>Victim</i>

Table 5. 3. Meta-level Framing. Case Study I

CNN, on the other hand, vilified Assad by consistently suggesting that his administration should be held responsible for the chemical attack, which put him at the *enemy* spectrum of the discourse. The rebel groups, within this framing, are portrayed as the *victims* of the unending regime. By discursive legitimization of the humanitarian intervention, CNN constructed the USA as the world’s ‘policeman’. Thus, Russia appeared to be a *rival* that, pursuing its own interests, which are not aggression-free, is doing all in its power to prevent

the White House's benevolent activities. In other words, both channels framed their Syria-related stories, albeit a small minority, around the world security crisis, the meta-level framing.

These dichotomous categories, or the pillars that metaphorically hold together meta-frames, were crystallized as a result of connotative analysis.⁵⁵ These are, of course, the result of my 'subjective' interpretation of the discourse. However, the employed methodology that followed several stages of analysis, including data collection, coding as well as the connotative stage, allow me to present these as rather stable structures of discourse. The detailed intertextual examination of RT's and CNN's discourse that will follow in the next sections of this chapter will present the linguistic and visual evidence to support my identification of the meta-frames.

Examining RT's output during the chosen period crystallised the following sub-frames, all of which contributed to the construction of the meta-frame that organized the channel's coverage of the Syrian crisis. These sub-frames are the dynamic units of meaning that in practice imply that the channels invoked certain contexts to construct particular tactical interpretations of the events, either to frame or counter-frame the rival discourse. Some of these contexts were thus appealed to by RT only, other sub-frames also appeared on the CNN:

- ❖ Humanitarian
- ❖ Legitimacy
- ❖ Chemical Controversy
- ❖ Threat
- ❖ Diplomacy
- ❖ War as Business
- ❖ Historical Mistakes
- ❖ Terrorism
- ❖ Multiculturalism

The coverage of the Syrian chemical crisis was notably dense in sub-frames, which is clearly an indication of the level of evaluation that was given to the issue of Syria. However, in this analysis, I am not interested in these nine sub-frames per se, but rather how they are used to

⁵⁵ For the details on methodology see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

construct the overall meaning of the events – in other words, how these frames work in delivering the general message of RT. Examining CNN’s coverage of the same issue allowed me to identify the following sub-frames:

- ❖ Humanitarian
- ❖ Legitimacy
- ❖ Chemical Controversy
- ❖ Responsibility
- ❖ National Security
- ❖ War as Business
- ❖ Credibility

These sub-frames work as the discursive anchors that implicitly link the particular events to the contexts desired by the frame sponsors. The following Tables 5.4 and 5.5 demonstrate which particular sub-frames worked to construct separate elements of the meta-frame. In particular, these building blocks allowed the frame sponsors of RT and CNN to define abstract challenges as more concrete ones by attributing the metaphors of *protector*, *victim*, *enemy* and *aggressor/rival* to the actors involved in the conflict. For example, RT would consistently invoke the context of US involvement in Libya and Iraq, labelling these as the *historical mistakes* of the superpower, downplaying the White House’s argument for the humanitarian intervention in the country. By utilizing this frame, RT thus evokes the metaphor of an *aggressive* power that is pursuing its own political interests in the region. This is further enhanced by pointing to the corporations in America that could potentially benefit from such an involvement by supplying arms to help the rebel groups fight against Assad, invoking the *war as business* frame ⁵⁶.

Table 5.4 demonstrates that RT mainly focused on the creation of the *protector* component of the meta-frame. This was also the dominant focus of CNN’s coverage that used the same number of sub-frames to construct the positive image of the US that perceives the situation in terms of *national security* and thus promoted the *pro-intervention* frame. CNN seemed to be less concerned with the *victim* imaging, while emphasising that Russia’s stance on Syria as

⁵⁶ More examples will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

well as the UN are *obstacles* on the way to ensuring peace for the world, the sub-frames that contributed to attributing the *rival* metaphor to Russia (see *Table 5.5*).

Meta-Frame	Mediator	Victim	Enemy	Aggressor
<i>Sub-Frames</i>	<i>Diplomacy</i>	<i>Humanitarian</i>	<i>Humanitarian</i>	<i>Threat</i>
	<i>Legitimacy</i>	<i>Terrorism</i>	<i>Chemical Controversy</i>	<i>Historical Mistakes</i>
		<i>Multiculturalism</i>	<i>Terrorism</i>	<i>War as Business</i>
				<i>Chemical Controversy</i>

Table 5. 4. Meta and Sub-frames relationship in RT’s coverage of the Case Study I

Meta-Frame	Protector	Victim	Enemy	Rival
<i>Sub-Frames</i>	<i>National Security</i>	<i>Humanitarian</i>	<i>Humanitarian</i>	<i>Credibility</i>
	<i>International Law</i>	<i>Terrorism / Enemy</i>	<i>Chemical Controversy</i>	<i>Obstacle</i>
	<i>Pro-Intervention</i>		<i>Terrorism / Enemy</i>	<i>War as Business</i>
	<i>Responsibility</i>			<i>Chemical Controversy</i>

Table 5. 5. Meta and Sub-frames relationship in CNN’s coverage of the Case Study I

The following sections of this chapter will further unpack how these contexts were not only used to directly promote the interpretations desired by the frame sponsors but were also invoked in order to counter the rival narratives at the tactical level of the discourse.

d. Tactical Level Framing

As I outlined in the Chapters 2 and 3, the linguistic and visual frame analysis make it possible to extract frames from the discourse. This section applies the structural framing lens to unpack the tactical level of framing. In particular, it shows the tactical mechanisms of counter-framing through the intertextual analysis of the visual and textual data to track the contexts of the sub-frames discussed in the previous sections of this chapter that form the meta-frame. Within this framework, the mechanisms of framing cannot be fully separated from counter-framing. Therefore, it is crucial for the study to trace framing devices within the two discourses as part of the dialogue. In particular, I applied intertextual analysis to identify the contextual responses of RT's narratives to CNN's narratives by looking at how these contexts were textually and visually enacted.

i. Textual Framing and Counter-Framing

Counter-framing is traditionally understood in IR and Communication Studies as the process of deconstructing opponents' 'frames' by "shining new light on the events" (Squires, 2011, p. 33). In other words, journalists or officials explicitly identify initial frames of the opponents, make audiences aware of them and invite the public to question their understandings of the events. Counter-frame sponsors do it through applying a number of new frames and therefore shifting the understandings.

I approached the initial stage of my empirical research with the above definition in mind. However, I quickly noticed that the process of counter-framing can also take very different shapes. In particular, by tracing the links between the contexts that RT and CNN appeal to, it became evident that conceptualizing counter-framing as a linear process substantially limits our understanding of the process in practice. The trend that crystallized was that counter-framing does not necessarily include substituting the initial frame with a radically new one, but is rather often practiced in the following ways: At the meta-level of the discourse, counter-framing can be understood as the practice of one channel to employ the same meta-frame that is used by its discursive rival, but to reattribute the structural metaphors within the formula to the different actors of the conflict.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ See Section *c* of this chapter for more details on the meta-level framing.

At the tactical level of discourse, counter-framing can entail explicitly identifying frame sponsors' countering intentions by employing specific references to the initial frame. Within the intertextual methodology, this type of countering is defined as the *vertical* intertextuality (Fairclough, 1995).⁵⁸ RT, for instance, uses this technique rather explicitly, making it a useful example for the analysis. In particular, the channel often directly quoted US officials' statements followed by a response of the channel's anchor. For example, the following extracts from RT's coverage show how the channel's journalist directly engaged with the proposal made by US Secretary of State John Kerry to intervene in Syria:

US Officials	RT
<i>"According to Kerry, extremists would not benefit from the strike."</i>	<i>"Reports on the ground and the great many experts suggest the opposite."</i>
<i>"There is no other way but to bomb Syria and Russia blocked the condemnation of the chemical attack."</i>	<i>"In fact, Russia blocked only those resolutions that attributed the blame to Assad without clear evidence."</i>

(RT, 4 September 2013).

Thus, RT directly responds to Kerry's statement, suggesting that there is a potential attempt to deceiving the public and suppressing the real situation on the ground. At the same time, RT denies the White House's allegations that Russia is deliberately blocking US attempts to solve the situation. Employing similar discursive techniques, CNN, giving their own interpretation of the events, also often tends to deconstruct Russia's countering:

"The counter-narrative that Russia has been propagating is <...> while this report will potentially undermine this argument"

(CNN, 5 September 2013).

With this statement, CNN essentially claims to counter RT's counter-frame. Consequently, the virtual dialogue between the discourses becomes almost explicit. For example, in order to downplay and counter the official Russian perspective on the situation in Syria, CNN uses the

⁵⁸ See Chapter 3 for the elaboration on the methodological approach to this study.

following tactic: An anchor in CNN's studios brings in the Russian arguments by virtually asking questions with an implicit request to their colleague on the ground to disconfirm these statements:

CNN's Anchor in Studio

CNN's Foreign Correspondent

"How do we know that the evidence is so strong if it hasn't been shared with the public?"

"Many members of congress, many of those who wanted to vote 'no' said that they are actually 'comfortable' with the evidence, which was presented to them about the fact that Al-Assad is responsible for the attack, considering that many are weary after the Iraq war."

"Why would Assad do this?"

"Here people are convinced that Assad is a tyrant, so no one is surprised."

"There is a frustration that many don't support the US."

(CNN, 2 September 2013).

Thus, the presenter in the studio gives room for the Russian framing by structuring the interview around the main points that were raised by Kremlin. For example, the correspondent invokes the Iraq war context that within the case study period had initially been brought up by RT reporters. In other words, the extracts cited above showcase how the *historical mistakes* sub-frame was countered by CNN. However, instead of explicitly introducing these topics as the Russian official point of view, CNN chose to suppress the source of information. In fact, such countering tactic was only possible to track intertextually. Thus, drawing on the classifications of Kristeva (1980) and Fairclough (1995), I identify this type of counter-framing as *constitutive*, or *inter-discursive*.⁵⁹ Although both types of counter-framing were employed by CNN and RT, the latter inclines toward direct countering. This is, perhaps, the most distinctive feature of its broadcasting style. Thus, for example, at the tactical level, RT counter-framed CNN by bringing in the direct quotation of Obama (the same extract was also broadcast on the CNN) and explicitly deconstructed in on air by pointing to the rhetorical nature of his statement:

⁵⁹ See Chapter 3 for the review of intertextual method of analysis and Chapter 7 for the comparative discussion on how these two kinds of counter-framing were employed in practice.

Barack Obama:

“I believe that the US has responsibility to engage in affairs of other states”

RT’s correspondent:

*“But it doesn’t guarantee that the **US will act responsibly.**”*

Eric Draitser, an “independent geopolitical analyst”:

*“Obama uses this rhetoric to put himself **above everyone, above Putin, above China....**”*

(RT, 28 September 2013).

As shown in the above extract, RT engages with the initial frame that was initially promoted by the US political elite and then adopted by CNN. In turn, RT deconstructs it, making the audience aware of the underpinnings of the American rhetoric. Hence, RT delegitimizes the authority of the US president by pointing to his rhetorical agenda to promote an interventionist narrative that is interpreted by RT as an attempt to forward America’s hegemony in the world. At a meta-level, this sub-frame process contributes to a shift in the reconstruction of the USA from a benevolent peace *protector* to an *aggressive* “warmonger” (see section **b** of this chapter).

As I argued in Chapter 1, the value of focusing the research on the tactical elements of discourse lies within its ability to expose the dynamics of interaction. In other words, this work sees counter-framing as a strictly relational process, which emerges as a response to opponents' framing. In this respect, tracking sub-frames as the contexts that migrate from one narrative to another allows us to also see the evolution of the tactical approaches of the frame sponsors. By analysing the sub-frames, I noticed that the channels often changed their tactical approach as part of the reaction to the sub-frames appeared on the rival channels. For instance, the question of responsibility for the chemical attack in Ghouta was the main point of contention between the discourses of RT and CNN. Within CNN's coverage, the *chemical controversy* frame evolves over time. In the beginning, there is scepticism of whether the evidence of the 'alleged chemical attack' is relevant at all, suggesting that the truth will never be unveiled and therefore this fact should be dismissed. In all of his speeches, President Obama was strongly pushing for an immediate intervention. According to the White House, the UN investigation could slow down the process:

“[Waiting for] *UN findings may not be an option for the military planner as they might take weeks*”

(CNN, 27 September 2013).

Another relevant argument CNN was sponsoring was that “a lot of evidence could be destroyed,” suggesting that “loyal to Assad forces” could be responsible for the attack, “some of which operate very independently” (CNN, 29 September 2013). This argument evokes a demarcation between the US as stable, predictable force and Assad's government as the *enemy*, or in this particular case, an authority, which lacks legitimacy and control over their own military forces.

This type of framing was mainly used in the first part of the case study (from 22 August to 15 September). On 16 September, when the UN was ready to announce the investigation results, CNN shifted its rhetoric. Rather than opposing the UN investigation, CNN, following the US's official narrative, used the news as a confirmation of Assad's blame, undermining the credibility of Russia's statements. Hence both channels engaged into the discursive 'blame game', which upon comparison, took shape of the following cross-talk:

“US have been quick to blame Assad”

“...The rebels might be responsible, how embarrassed Russia will feel?”

“US blame game over UN Syria chemical attack report”

(CNN, 16 September 2013).

“Chemical war crime controversy”

(RT, 17 September 2013).

“Russians strongly reject any suggestion that the Syrian government was responsible for the chemical weapons attack in Damascus, but this isn’t how other world powers see it”

“Russia’s evidence is not being taken into account”

(RT, 18 September 2013).

(CNN, 17 September 2013).

“Some of the Russian anger will be tempered by the fact that the UN investigators are going back in”

(CNN, 18 September 2013).

The extracts cited above show how CNN changed its initial approach to covering the responsibility for the Ghouta attack. In particular, the channel first chimes in with the official discourse of the White House and argues that the attempts to investigate the attack will delay the US’s rapid retaliation. Then, CNN adopts the approach originated on RT to the issue, the *chemical controversy* sub-frame. This discursive tactic started from CNN subtly suggesting that Assad’s regime might have benefitted from the attack to treating the Syrian government’s responsibility for the attack as a common place.

These interdiscursive dynamics highlight the tactical nature of counter-framing. The example discussed above shows how both channels chose to use the sub-frames according to the short-gain effectiveness⁶⁰ of the framing devices employed by RT and CNN. Thus, within a very short period of time, the sub-frames get adopted by the rival channel to then be forwarded back to the initial frame sponsor.

⁶⁰ Here I do not refer to the overall framing effects but to the frame-sponsors tactical aims.

The following section will unpack the way in which this was achieved through a detailed interpretation of the sub-frames.

Historical Mistakes Sub-Frame

In order to counter President Obama's pro-intervention narrative, RT often evoked historical mistakes sub-frame that was briefly mentioned above. By doing so, the channel shifts meanings towards portraying the US as an aggressor and a threat rather than a guarantor of the World's security. Thus Russia, within RT's framing, unlike America, does all in its power to protect the world from another disaster caused by the American "warmongering". CNN's correspondents, on the other side of the discourse, often tend to undermine Russia as a global power, while maintaining US legitimacy as the only superpower that is able to resolve the conflict in Syria and thus save millions of lives. In particular, the *historical mistakes* sub-frame links the chemical conflict in Syria to the war in Iraq, or the "American invasion" in Iraq. Within this sub-frame, RT also often evokes Yugoslavia bombing and even the context of the Vietnam War, the latter is mentioned in two news pieces. The comparison is usually achieved by the combination of the linguistic structures and images. In terms of the linguistic structures, RT often uses the following catchphrases in order to evoke the desired image in the audience, which are usually used within one TV piece:

"America's murky past",

"US painting Syria-Iran-Hezbollah axis of evil",

"Bush's mistakes",

"Syria: War Similarities",

"Iraq US led invasion",

"US might be embarrassed",

"western finger pointing",

"unintended consequences",

"US double standards" (RT, 2013).⁶¹

⁶¹ As these phrases appeared repeatedly in the broadcasts throughout the case study period, the following references will not further detail specific dates but refer to the analysed material collectively.

Replying to the arguments which RT raised in their coverage almost in every Syria-related piece, CNN's anchors and correspondents emphasise President Obama's promises that it would not be a '*full-scale intervention*' but rather '*limited strikes*' (CNN, 3 September 2013). Thus, CNN counters RT's *historical mistakes* frame and defends Obama's pro-intervention rhetoric by suggesting that this time the evidence of the chemical attack is real:

On-screen quote: "*People want to see proof*",

Background voice of a correspondent: "*US will issue their report that will prove that Syrians did use chemical weapons*", which will include: "... *intercepted communications*" and "*forensic data*" (CNN, 30 August 2013).

While covering the Syrian crisis, CNN thus seemed to have been prepared for the discursive attacks, and immediately countered the sub-frames of RT that invokes the war in Iraq and other "US failures in the Middle East" (RT, 2013).

New Threat Sub-Frame

Apart from framing the Syrian crisis as an issue of a recurring 'American mistakes', the meta-frame component of *aggression* was enhanced by the continuous usage of the *new threat* sub-frame. The feeling of a looming disaster, which is coming from the West, was mainly created by the linguistic structures within the headlines, which would usually appear in the subtitles to the news pieces. The results of the analysis allow me dividing the identified frames into groups according to the linguistic intensity of the vocabularies. For instance, expressions such as 'war weary' would be rated 3 on a scale from 1 to 5, while phrases such as "Obama is ready to bomb Damascus" would be rated 4. This classification is helpful in assessing the evolution of the narrative within the chosen time frame:

"... *aggressive language of US administration*" {2},

"*Syria: Trigger Timer*" {2},

"*Syria: Countdown to War*" {4},

"*Syria: Fumes of War*" {4},

"*Obama ready to strike*" {5},

"*US war machine*" {5},

"*US officials bang the drums of war*" {5} (RT, 2013).

While RT was aiming to link the metaphor of threat to the US intervention as a new horrific treat, CNN's "Western correspondent on the ground" portrays the situation in Damascus as a "mood of uncertainty rather than fear" (CNN, 2013). This hidden counter-narrative intensifies when CNN's correspondents reply to Russia's "fears of the regime change" in Syria. They emphasise that Obama's administration's strike would not aim at regime change, but would be a rather rapid military intervention, which will only hit local targets "aimed at perpetrators to make sure the attack doesn't happen again" (CNN, 2013).

Obstacle Sub-Frame

CNN devoted a significant amount of its broadcasting time to constructing the image of Russia as the blocking element for solving the crisis in Syria. While RT used the "countdown" metaphor to create an image of a looming US attack as a threat of disaster, CNN appealed to the time-related metaphor to evoke the feeling of time slipping through the global community's fingers, suggesting that if the World does not act now, it might be too late. The following catchphrases were often spotted in CNN's headlines:

"You Cannot Wait Forever",

"The Bar Has Been Raised On When You Could Intervene" (CNN, 2013).

The UN and Russia in CNN's narrative appear as slowing down factors, the system that has to be bypassed by the reactive "world police", which, within CNN's framing, is represented by the US.

War as Business Sub-Frame

For the construction of the US as an *aggressor* at the meta-level of discourse, RT employed the *war as business* sub-frame. In particular, the channel emphasised that America cannot be trusted when it comes to the evidence. But unlike the *historical mistakes* sub-frame, the *war-as business* framing device is employed to suggest that someone might benefit from another US invasion. Textually, this is achieved by the combination of different references. For example, RT creates a colourful presentation of the US weapons and military equipment, naming the companies which produce it, assuming that these corporations would benefit from the military solution. The following catchphrases are also often used in order to encourage the public to think of the issue in terms of *war as business*:

“The talk may be about saving the world from tyrants, but the actions and figures also point to big money”,

“US struggles to sell strike” (RT, 2013).

Similarly, CNN also enacts this sub-frame by emphasizing, for example, the ‘friendship’ between Russia and Syria, uncovering that it dates back to the Soviet period. The following catchphrases frequently appeared in the news headlines as well as were mentioned by anchors and correspondents:

“Russia’s factor”,

“Countries have been in a tight embrace since Soviet times”,

“Syria has been buying military weapons from Russia”,

“Ties of blood” (many Russians married to Syrians),

“Ties of religion” (CNN, 2013).

The channel then suggested that these ties are also business-related, which contributes to the reconstruction of Russia as an agent that has a strategic interest in the region. Thus, CNN countered the RT’s narrative of Russia’s non-involvement in the conflict.

Diplomacy Sub-frame

In this particular case, RT’s main intention was to promote the image of a diplomatic and peacekeeping Russia. The *diplomacy* frame, for instance, is usually created with the means of headlines and catchphrases, such as the following extracts:

“[Russia’s] focus on talks, not strikes”,

“last diplomatic push”,

“... diplomatic marathon to avoid possible strikes”,

“constructive meetings” (RT, 2013).

Once the desired outcome was achieved and the countries signed the UN chemical weapons convention, RT explicitly praised Russia’s diplomatic achievements:

“A Landmark Deal on Syria”,

“Diplomatic Breakthrough” (RT, 2013).

However, even then RT did not claim that this was solely Russia's achievement, emphasising collaborative diplomatic work of several countries. This proves RT's attempt to distance Russia from the issue, while focusing on the rightfulness of its political position. All this is aimed at constructing Russia as a great power at the meta-level of the discourse. Tactically, this is achieved by the continuous emphasis on Russia's "influential" position in the world that is able to counter the "American aggression" in Syria by the means of diplomacy rather than force.

Legitimacy Sub-frame

The *legitimacy* sub-frame was another framing tactic aimed at constructing Russia as a *protector* in RT's discourse. CNN also employed this technique to achieve a rather similar effect, except for an opposite meta-aim, that of constructing USA as a powerful *protector*. Thus, RT identified Russia with a global policeman whose responsibility is to ensure that all countries comply with the international rules and regulations, which in the Syrian case conveniently worked in favour of Russia's intentions. The West, in RT's discourse, was attempting to break the rules of international law and thus posed a severe threat to global security. This message was delivered through the words of commentators who would often bring up the following linguistic structures, accusing Obama of non-compliance:

"illegal under international law",
"Russian president warns against bypassing UN",
"international alarm" (RT, 2013).

CNN, on the other hand, was consistently promoting the argument for an immediate strike. Within this framing, the quicker the US gets involved in the conflict, the quicker the situation would be resolved. The following catchphrases appeared on the channel:

"Limited strikes are legal",
"it could change things on the ground" (CNN, 2013).

By invoking the context of legitimacy, CNN adopted the official frame of the White House, emphasizing that the administration has the legal right to sanction an intervention without the approval of the UN:

“Going alone is an option for America, according to the US official, but the US would prefer to work with international actors” (CNN, 2013).

At the same time, it insisted that despite its legal right to intervene without the international approval, it would prefer to have the support of other countries. This point textually positions the US within the International Law discourse.

Humanitarian, Terrorism, and Multiculturalism Sub-frames

Framing the victim is often an important tactic due to its ability to evoke *“resignation, passivity, subordination, weakness, powerlessness and dependence”* (Mardorossian, 2014, p. 31) and therefore proclaiming the dominance of a powerful *protector*. Thus, this framing works towards evoking an emotional response in the audience. *Humanitarian, terrorism, and multiculturalism* sub-frames were often employed together within the news pieces and contributed to the creation of the *victim* and the *enemy* elements of the meta-frame. Unlike the coverage of the crisis on CNN, the large proportion of the Syria-related bulletins on RT included reporting from the ground, often from the village of Maaloula, which was, according to RT’s reports, occupied by terrorist-linked groups at the time:

Headlines:

“Al Qaeda linked rebels oust army from ancient Christian sanctuary”,

“Ravages of Jihad: Army liberates Christian village” (RT, 2013).

While RT’s report appealed to compassion in the audience, the focus on this village being predominantly inhabited by the Christian population links the situation to the context of multiculturalism. Thus, along with the emotional reports from the war zone, with images of people in pain and grief after losing their homes and loved ones, RT pieces also emphasize that the “terrorists” destroy what used to be a unique and multicultural society:

“Syria is a land of history and of love” (RT, 2013).

Therefore, the US who support rebel groups within RT’s framing are on the same side as the “evil forces”. RT also put plenty of effort in identifying the “enemy”, which in their understanding were rebel groups and terrorists fighting together. To confirm this, RT’s Maria Finoshina, the foreign correspondent on the ground who was embedded with the Syrian army,

interviewed Syrian citizens who would blame the opposition groups and emotionally condemn their violent actions against the nation. The following headlines and catchphrases were often used to support this image:

“Syria ends the extremists’ reign of terror in Maaloula/Rebels linked to Al-Qaeda”,
“War of God: Mapping Syria’s Jihad and the flow of religious mercenaries”,
“Global Jihad chose Syria as a battlefield”,
“Jihadists’ aims go far beyond just toppling Assad” (RT, 2013).

Thus, the victim framing contributes to constructing Russia as the protector that, within RT’s discourse, aims to save the democratic society in Syria, which is under threat. This resulted in the defensive response from the CNN correspondents, 60 % of which remained ‘pro-intervention’ throughout the coverage of the crisis. In order to reconstruct President Assad as an evil force, the channel employed the following linguistic structures:

“The US strike may be more dangerous than the regime because Assad will blame America for the massacre”

“The more they (the regime) are backed into a corner, the more vicious they become”
(CNN, 2013).

Thus, the fact that the chemical strike took place is treated as a proof of President Assad’s responsibility for the attack, portraying him as a ruthless ruler who acted against his own people. Such framing once again invites the audience to think about the issue in terms of Syrian government as an evil force and the US as a protector and the guarantor of the world’s security.

Pro-intervention and Anti-Intervention Sub-frames

The *anti-intervention* sub-frame was one of the most common in the RT’s output messages throughout the coverage of Syrian crisis. Notably, RT’s correspondents as well as commentators hardly ever mentioned explicitly that the US should not intervene, but in order to achieve this effect, RT employed the proof by contradiction logic. In other words, RT was continuously unveiling all the risks and possible damages, which the US intervention in Syria might trigger. For example, the warning that Israel might suffer from a provocation attack due to the new threat of US intervention was in RT’s headlines three times:

“Chemical Reaction: Provocation attack warning. Direct threat to Israel” (RT, 2013).

Moreover, by avoiding direct non-intervention statements, RT focused on reporting opinion polls of the US public instead, which were contradicting President Obama’s position. RT repeatedly mentions Obama’s lack of support from the other Western countries, yet again isolating Russia’s bias in the situation. The following catchphrases are often used in headlines and by RT reporters:

“fatally flawed Syrian intervention”,

“Has Obama lose his appetite for war or not? Amid lack of support from home and abroad”,

“Obama struggling to gather international support”,

“Obama isolated”,

“Divided war leaders”,

“Obama failed” (RT, 2013).

Within CNN’s discourse, the above-mentioned sub-frames of RT were continuously being dismissed, and the channel was promoting the pro-intervention narratives throughout the coverage. The following phrase is an example of the kind of linguistic framing tactic the CNN employed to achieve this meta-level aim:

Josh Earnest, Deputy White House Press Secretary: *“Other totalitarian dictators around the globe should see that the international community will not tolerate the use of chemical weapons”* (CNN, 2013).

ii. Visual Framing and Counter-framing

In most of the broadcasts, the visual and linguistic cues do not directly speak to each other but rather covertly communicate with the audience through association. Hence, in order to extract the meaning from the visual information, the research was conducted in two stages: denotative and connotative.⁶² In other words, I looked both at the primary level of meaning in the visual, and the ‘added’ meaning resulted from the arrangement of this image within the structure of TV packages through editing. As I argued in Chapter 3, the combination of audio and visual framing material often works at enhancing the meaning of messaged. At the same time, employing visual material tactically allows the frame sponsors to obscure the very intentions of promoting ideas. In other words, persuasion has a more powerful effect on the audience if it integrates both flows of information.

For example, RT often edited together the Syria-related footage and the archived videos of the conflicts with the American involvement in Iraq and Yugoslavia. Thus, on 28 August 2013, RT broadcast John Kerry giving a speech that justified the US viewpoint on the Syrian chemical crisis. The footage was immediately followed by the archived interview with then US Secretary of State Colin Powell and the sequence of shots capturing the US invasion in Iraq. Hence, RT created a clear link between the potential US strike in Syria and the war in Iraq, suggesting to the audience that the solution proposed by the US will lead to the similar devastating consequences. In this respect, the particular interpretation is constructed through juxtaposing unrelated visuals in such a way that draws an associative parallel between the current situation and the historical one. The visuals thus enrich the textual framing by metaphorically serving *RT* as the ‘proof’ that enhances Russia’s argument that the US is repeating the *mistakes* of the past.

Another example of RT employing this montage technique to create an emotional effect in its audience was the tactical effort to construct the US as an *aggressor*. For example, a humanitarian TV piece shows Syrian citizens who are clearing the basements in preparation for the US strike. RT immediately cuts from those Syrian citizens to President Obama’s pro-intervention speech (RT, 2 September 2013). With this, RT is delivering the message that the US threat is even more frightening than the on-going civil war.

⁶² See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for the detailed methodology.

CNN, for example, often uses similar techniques, while aiming at creating an opposite effect. For example, CNN often emphasised the Russia-Syrian friendship. In order to enhance this visually, the channel showed multiple images of President Assad and President Putin shaking hands or having an entertaining conversation, while their anchor is reading the news about Russia's position on Syria and their anti-intervention proposals. This montage tactic adds another dimension to the argument that Russia supports Assad due to the economic and political ties with the country rather than their genuine peace-making interests. By choosing to deliver this notion through the visual channel, CNN is able to convey the message in a less direct manner.

Another example of CNN's visual framing tactics is demonstrated in Captions 1 and 2. In the news analysis piece headlined *Russia Watching Syria's Back*, the correspondents provide possible scenarios of how the American strike could unfold. In order to complicate the targeted strikes of the US, the state "we know that the Syrian government" are moving the deposits of chemical weapons close to the hospitals (CNN, 2 September 2013). This narrative is accompanied by sequence of shots in the background that begins with an image of the Syrian chemical weapons stockpiles (Caption 1), followed by the video of an explosion (Caption 2).



Caption 1. Montage on CNN (CNN, 2 September 2013)



Caption 2. Montage on CNN (CNN, 2 September 2013)

This embeds the implicit message into the narrative that President Assad's regime would be responsible for all the potential civilian casualties after the US strikes. Framing the *enemy* thus dominates both the visual and the textual tactics of the channel. It is important to note that the example discussed above is not a conventional TV package but rather a synthesis of an interview, a piece-to-camera, and a report that is enriched by the use of computer graphics.

RT also extensively utilises graphics in order to enhance the clarity of the message to the audience. It is particularly noteworthy how RT uses video material within its tactical counter-framing. In broadcasting, graphic material is often aimed at simplifying the textual information and ensuring that the most important elements of the message are salient. Thus, in order to enhance the tactical effort to sub-frame the US as the threatening force that is able to act 'unilaterally', RT employs visual framing by visually separating the blocks that are in support of strikes against Syria and the countries that are against the intervention (Caption 3). This technique enhances significantly the interpretation by drawing the metaphorical 'us' and 'them'.



Caption 3. Graphics on RT (RT, 7 September 2013)

Caption 4 is another example worth elaborating on due to its powerful graphics, tantamount to the war-time propaganda posters. In particular, it plays with the icon of American freedom by transforming the figure of freedom into the symbol of war. The fire element signifies tragedy, set against the background of the Syrian nation, denoted by the flag of the country, that is unable to win this lingering and bloody war.



Caption 4. Graphics on RT (RT, 5 September 2013)

The use of the Statue of Liberty in order to subvert the original symbolism of the icon may have been borrowed from the Soviet posters, such as, for example, the famous propaganda

print of the 1970s *Svoboda po-Americanstyle*⁶³ (Prorokov, 1971) that portrays the statue as unhappy and crying as opposed to the traditional glorious connotation. The juxtaposition of the image and the headline as depicted in Caption 4, adds another dimension of meaning to the visual, that encourages the audience to think in terms of a media war in which the US is a clear ‘villain’, in RT’s discourse. A similar pattern can be traced in Caption 5. Similar to Caption 4, this visual worked within the *threat* sub-framing and enhanced the image of the potential US strike as a looming disaster, a ‘time-bomb’ that is uncontrollable and can go off at any moment.



Caption 5. Graphics on RT (RT, 9 September 2013)

Importantly, both examples, Captions 4 and 5, showcase how the textual and visual information on television work in synergy to convey meaning. Unlike words that have the ability to provide detailed explanations and add concreteness to phenomena, images work with resemblance and similitude, engaging with the practice of figuration. In this respect, visuals are less connected with the rationalising component of framing but more focus on familiarising the audience with the new information through bringing in the contexts they are accustomed to. Moreover, apart from the rare *no comment* streaming, television images are predominantly supported by the textual comments that contextualises the visual information. In this respect, journalists engage in several layers of framing. First, the image is framed through the choice of camera focus; second, the images are packaged within a news piece through the selection of shots; third, the

⁶³ Russian: *Freedom American-style*.

text/scenario further arranges these images by adding another layer of interpretation. In fact, the textual sub-frames often explicitly manifest themselves in the visuals. For example, Caption 6 demonstrates how RT pushed the narrative that Russia aims to solve the problem peacefully. Here, the protest sign is juxtaposed to the on-screen caption “Russia wants Syria Chemical Demilitarisation in Four Stages”, which brings an added meaning to the visual frame. In particular, the caption works as a confirmation of the US public anger with President Obama’s push for strike and helps construct the international support of Russian anti-intervention policy. This is enhanced through the symbolic elements, such as the peace sign enclosed in the “o” letters. In fact, it is unclear whether this protest is in any way connected to President Putin’s calls for diplomatic solution, but the skilful selection of this particular image and packaging it together with the caption creates the effect of public approval.



Caption 6. Word and Image on RT (RT, 12 September 2013)

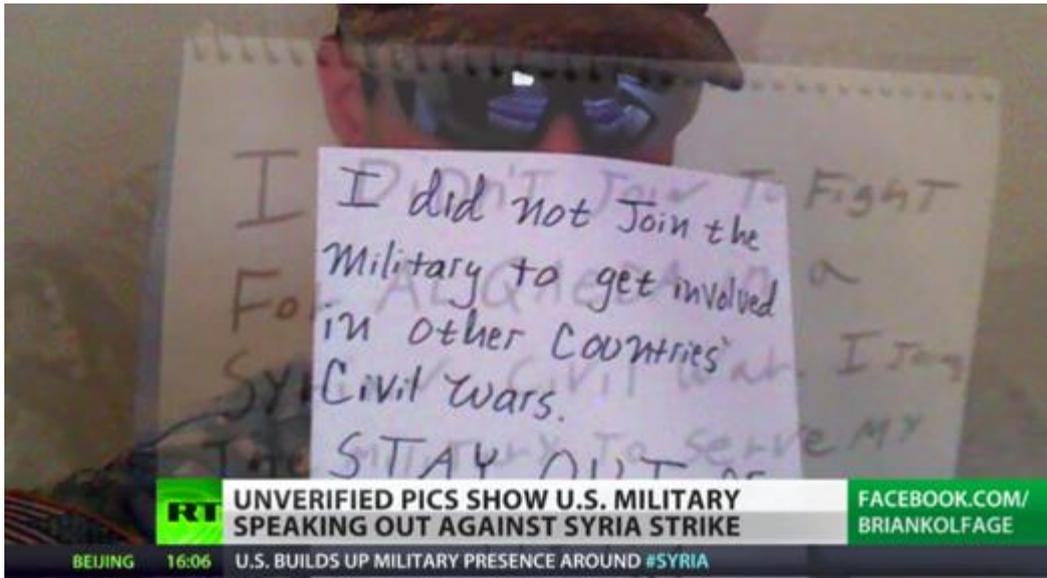
CNN also employs the combination of visual and textual meaning construction. In Caption 7, the presenter reports on the possible scenarios and the nature of the US military strikes in Syria. Here, the image of the US military is titled “Command and Control”. Although this is an official US army term, it gains a rhetorical undertone in CNN’s hands. In particular, the channel’s sub-framing was structured around the idea that the potential US strikes would take form of fast, precise, victim-free attacks, specifically targeting Assad’s chemical weapons deposits. Thus, with the help of pictorial tools CNN constructs the image of the US as a skilful *peacekeeper* that is able to achieve quick and ‘clean’ conflict resolution.



Caption 7. Word and Image on CNN (CNN, 27 August 2013)

Captions 8 and 9 further highlight how the channels combine their textual and visual framing techniques to counter the rival interpretations at the tactical level of discourse. For example, RT often operates with the so-called ‘citizen-journalist’ materials, obtained through various social media platforms, which is, in fact, an important component of conflict reporting today (Ahva & Hellman, 2015). An example of this is depicted in Caption 8. Interestingly, the channel does not have the authenticity claims regarding this image. On the contrary, the caption states that these photographs are “unverified pics”. This journalistic technique allows to safely run the visual material without the risk of being accused of lies.

However, in the case of the Syrian crisis, this was also tactically used to achieve a rather different persuasive target. Bearing in mind that RT continuously doubted the fact that chemical strike took place in reality, by using the “unverified footage” caption that accompanied almost every visual of the chemical attack victims, RT reinforces this suspicion in the audience, suggesting that the footage is a ‘fake’, ‘disinformation’. In fact, the channel chose to focus on its own report from the ground in order to construct the



Caption 8. Citizen Images on RT (RT, 3 September 2013)

enemy. Thus, RT aired the stories of devastated areas in Syria, reported by its correspondents, embedded with the Syrian army (Caption 9). These pieces bring the violence of the terrorist groups that fight against Assad into the focus.



Caption 9. Reports from Syria on RT (RT, 15 September 2013)

CNN, on the other hand, used 30 per cent more disturbing images than RT, sourced from the social media platforms of the Ghouta chemical attack footage as well as other attacks in Syria. CNN thus utilised a method which usually evokes an emotionally negative response in the audience and devoted long-time pieces to the analysis of the chemical attack's effects on the

victims (see Caption 10). These are used as proof that the chemical weapons were used, the blame for which, in CNN's framing, was automatically attributed to President Assad's regime.



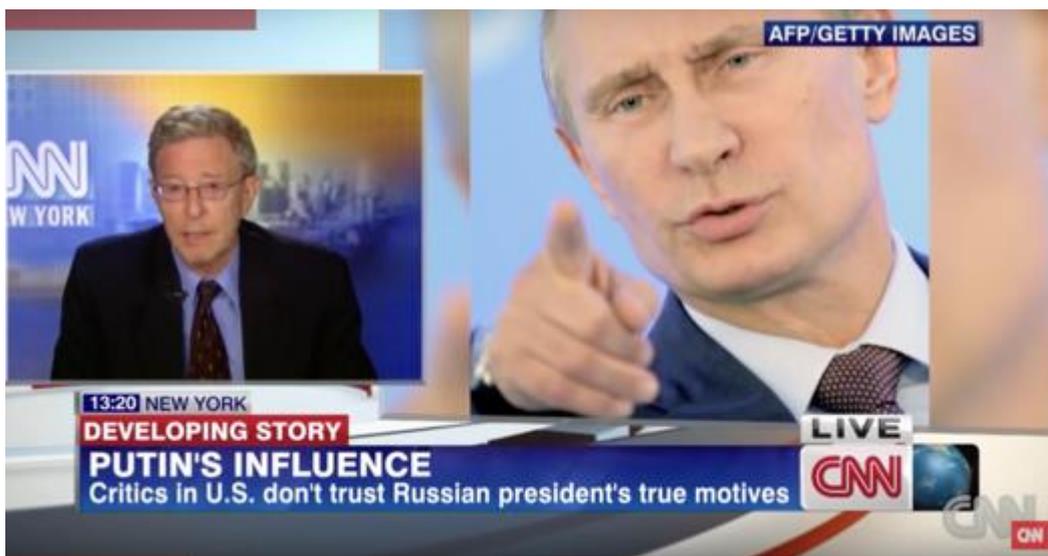
Caption 10. The Use of Citizen Images on CNN (CNN, 29 August 2013)

An important dimension of visual framing is the depiction of political leaders. Notably, President Putin appeared on RT only three times throughout the period under scrutiny in the case study, while President Obama was shown five times as much. In part, this can be explained by Putin's PR tactic. Unlike Western politics that values rhetorical speeches, Kremlin's relations with the press is based on the smaller frequency of public appearances. This technique makes public addresses to be perceived as more substantial, inducing the public to discuss one speech for longer periods of time. The fact that RT reduced the appearance of President Putin on air, while keeping showing Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, who is more associated with diplomacy than Putin, might also suggest that it was RT's deliberate tactic. Putin has an image of a powerful ruler, and RT might have been wary of the unwanted association they could have invoked if they broadcast the Russian president too often. Even when RT was reporting Putin's letter to the American citizens, which was published by the New York Times, his image was never shown. Instead, the graphics on the screen displayed bits of the letter, where Putin expresses his concerns and mentions international law. RT used the following headline for the news: "*Putin's 'Plea for caution' warns of diminished role of international law*" (RT, 2013). In turn, RT directed its attention to depicting Sergey Lavrov (Caption 11).



Caption 11. Depiction of Political Figures on RT (RT, 15 September 2013)

CNN, by contrast, extensively broadcasted images of Obama and Putin in their coverage of the Syrian crisis. The example in Caption 10 depicts one of the cases in which the channel employed three forms of discourse: visual, verbal, and written. Here, the selection of this particular image of Putin, which portrays him as an assertive personality, reinforced by the caption on screen “Putin’s *Influence*” and supported by the commentator’s narration, evokes associations of an assertive if not aggressive leader, driven by self-interest rather than the genuine (“true”) motives (Caption 12).



Caption 12. Depiction of Political Figures on CNN (CNN, 14 September 2013)

This contrasts substantially to the relaxed, conversational tone of Obama's interview (Caption 13), bringing the US president closer to the audience and subtly detracting the viewers' attention from the constructed aggressiveness to a more familiar image of a calm and responsible leader.



Caption 13. Depiction of Political Figure on CNN (CNN, 9 September 2013)

Another noteworthy element that Caption 11 contains is the “message” metaphor in the headline. This feeds back to the idea of the ability of international broadcasting to serve as an implicit platform for political conversation. This example represents the case when the space of the dialogue transcends the borders of official communications, reinforcing the argument of this dissertation that television is an important facet of international relations that should not be dismissed in the discipline.

e. Conclusion

By analysing the linguistic and visual structures surrounding RT's and CNN's narratives, this case study exposed the various tactical framing techniques that in turn contributed to the construction of the meta-frames promoted by the two channels. Overall, the overarching message of RT's and CNN's coverage was that of non-intervention and pro-intervention, respectively. Interestingly, the metaphorical formula for constructing the actors involved in the conflict was the same on both channels. Thus, as illuminated through the analysis of the Syrian case study, in order to gain rapid political outcomes, states tend to appeal to similar normative arguments directed to essentially the same audience, which allows me to conclude that Russia and the USA exist within one normative environment.

The argument that originates from this is that the ideas that underpin the tactical messages conveyed through sub-framing are less relevant for the frame sponsors than the meta-level formulas, which are the ultimate units of discourse. This notion counters the argument that Russia promotes a distinctive ideology that is based on opposing the West's ethical norms.⁶⁴ Rather, it shows that the discursive manifestation of Russia's desire to be perceived as a great power is often reflected in rather contradictory discursive messages that are reactive and defensive. Moreover, paying particular attention to the tactical framing mechanisms allowed me to unveil the dynamic nature of the discourse that manifests itself through the contagious nature of sub-framing and is often subject to various communicative distortions.

The following Chapter 6 will continue looking at the levels of framing to further unpack the relationship between the strategic and tactical elements of discourse by analysing a different conflict of international politics, the Crimean Crisis.

⁶⁴ See discussion in Chapter 1.

Chapter 6.

Case Study II: Framing the Crimean Referendum

“Vladimir Putin has put boots in the ground – over the airwaves, he is taking the west on a tour of the propagandist’s playbook”

(Yuhas, 2014).

a. Introduction

The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 has been and remains a point of contention between Russia and the West. Despite President Obama’s warnings, the events on the ground – including escalating mass upheaval, President Yanukovich’s flight from Ukraine and the emergence of separatist movements in Crimea – led to a rapidly coordinated referendum on whether the republic should join Russia or remain part of Ukraine as an autonomous republic. The result on 17 March in favour of joining Russia was followed the second day by President Putin’s signing of a bill integrating Crimea to the Russian Federation. While Kremlin stated that it was guided by its genuine interests to protect compatriots and acted within international law, the West, including Ukraine, considered the referendum illegal (Sengupta, 2014). Similar to the Ghouta attack coverage, an international political crisis resulted in a heated tactical game between the two rival broadcasters to promote their interpretation of the events. Both networks prioritized interpretation over investigation when reporting the conflict.

This chapter exposes this discursive battle by applying the analytical lens of framing and counter-framing to the audio-visual output of RT and CNN. It showcases the trends and dynamics at the tactical level of framing, the process that entails continuous cross-referencing between the rival channels. By applying textual, visual and intertextual analysis to the Crimea-related news that RT and CNN broadcasted, I was able to trace the sub-frames that were tactically enacted by the channels within their strategic attempts to construct meanings on the meta-level.

This chapter follows the same structure as the previous case study. Thus, section *b* presents the overview of the RT's and the CNN's coverage, followed by section *c* on meta-level framing that unveils strategic aims of frame sponsors when covering the Crimean referendum. Section *d* deals with the tactical level and showcases how the two channels exchanged sub-frames throughout the case study. This is presented through a detailed analysis of the textual and visual data. Section *e* concludes this chapter.

b. Case Study Overview

In order to examine RT's rhetorical response to CNN's coverage of Crimean crisis and vice versa, I applied textual and visual analysis to the 30-minute extracts from the news broadcasting of both channels. The data collection within the Case Study II employed sampling methodology based on the news points selection. The news points refer to the signifying events that have an information value that triggers a new TV package to appear on air. In other words, the specifics of 24-hour news broadcasting, scheduled to run news bulletins every hour, often requires the channels to repeat pre-broadcasted stories with very little proportion of the added news material appearing on air. Thus, structuring the analysis around those points allowed me to pinpoint issue-specific and thus pertinent audio-visual material. The time frame for the case study covered the period between 20 February and 19 March 2014. According to the chronology of the events, I picked the following news points:

23-24 February 2014, pro-Russian demonstration are held in Sevastopol, the capital of autonomous republic of Crimea.

27-28 February 2014, unidentified groups of people take over the Supreme Council of Crimea and other sites across Crimea, which leads to the Aksyionov's appointment to the government in Crimea.

1 March 2014, Russian parliament approves the use of force in Ukraine; Putin hasn't signed it off yet.

11 March 2014, Crimea declares independence from Ukraine.

16 – 17 March 2014, Crimean people vote in the status referendum with 96,77 per cent supporting integration with Russia.

These news points correlated with the chronologically nearest daily news programmes. Thus, I watched 26 half hour news bulletins, rotating between 12:00 and 17:00 bulletins on RT with the focus on Crimea-related stories only. These were accessed through the British Library's Multimedia Archive⁶⁵. Similarly, I watched 21 one-hour news bulletins on CNN, excluding weekend news, rotating morning and afternoon issues,

⁶⁵ RT limited public access to its online archive access shortly after I finished the data collection for the Case Study I.

also accessed via the British Library’s Multimedia Archive. Overall, 33.5 hours of the issue-specific audio-video material were analysed.

Case Study II scrutinised rhetorical justifications surrounding the Crimean crisis by exposing the textual and visual structures through which the events were framed and counter-framed by RT and CNN. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to illuminate both how framing and counter-framing are employed as persuasive tools and with which particularities they are functioning. This is highlighted by studying two different levels of discourse: the macro-level, where strategic framing and counter-framing operates, and the micro-level, where the tactical sub-frames can be identified and intertextually traced. Strategically, both channels employed framing and counter-framing in order to promote their interpretations of the events in Crimea.

Analysing the sources that RT and CNN used in their coverage, the study exposed that both channels were predominantly focused on discussing Russia’s moves and the US role in the crisis, while paying considerably less attention to the wishes of the Crimean people. In particular, RT often aired interviews or directly cited the speeches of Russian officials (54 per cent). The second most frequent source of information for the Russian broadcaster were officials and experts from the US, whose statements would often be countered by the channel (22 per cent). The channel devoted nearly the same broadcasting space to the representatives of Ukrainian Interim Government (19 per cent) and only 10 per cent to Crimean citizens (see *Table 6. 1*).

RT	Framing Sources	CNN
54%	Russian Sources	39%
22%	Experts from USA	28%
19%	Ukr Interim. Govt	24%
10%	Crimean People.	4%
	Other Sources	

Table 6. 1. Sources on RT and CNN

A rather similar prioritizing model was used by CNN. Thus, the channel very often cited or directly interviewed Russian sources (39 per cent), particularly focusing on Kremlin apparatus. At the same time, the channel broadcast the official statements of the White House (28 per cent) and very commonly cited the speeches coming from the Ukrainian Interim Government (24 per cent), devoting as little as 4 per cent of their reporting to interviewing Crimean people.

c. Meta-level Framing

As the analysis revealed, RT structured its meta-frame around the notion that Russia has legitimate geopolitical interests in the Crimean region and, therefore, Crimea joining Russia is the only truly just way of resolving both the identity and governance crisis on the peninsula. Kremlin and Crimean Russians, within RT’s coverage, appear on the “right” and “democratic” side of the conflict, while both the Ukrainian interim government and the US, stirring turmoil in the country, are labelled “nationalistic” and, consequently, “evil” forces. CNN, by contrast, focused on Russia’s aggressive mood and its efforts to “intervene” in the conflict, constructing USA as a mediating force. Thus, Yatsenyuk’s government, within CNN’s discourse, is portrayed as democratic and peaceful as opposed to pro-Russian forces in Crimea.

Both channels employed identical framing strategies for their coverage of the Crimean crisis. Similar to the previous case study, CNN and RT focused on providing the audience with the guidelines on how to understand the events through assigning three metaphorical dichotomies of *protector/aggressor*, *provocateur/mediator*, *victim/enemy* to the structural framing subjects of the issue: Russia, the US, the Ukrainian interim government, and the Crimean people (see *Table 6. 2*).

RT	Framing Subjects	CNN
<i>Protector</i>	→ Russia	← <i>Aggressor</i>
<i>Provocateur</i>	→ USA	← <i>Mediator</i>
<i>Enemy</i>	→ Pro-Maidan Kiev	← <i>Victim</i>
<i>Victim</i>	→ Pro-Russian Groups	← <i>Enemy</i>

Table 6. 2. Meta-level Framing. Case Study II

In CNN's coverage, for example, Russia appears as an aggressive force that destabilises Eastern-Ukrainian region. The US in this discursive space is portrayed as mediator between the *democratic* and *peaceful* Ukrainian government and the *violent* separatists in Crimea under the control of Russia. In RT's narrative, America is labelled *provocateur* which aims at destabilising Ukraine and supports the *illegitimate* anti-Russian government. Russia, in this case, is assigned a role of the *protector* that looks to shield the population of Crimea from Kiev's *aggressive* policies.

These 'labels' were crystallized during the coding process that took place at the connotative stage of this research and combined linguistic and visual materials.⁶⁶ It is important to disclaim that these labels, which some framing scholars define as "archetypes" (Van Gorp, 2010), are the result of interpretive investigation that does not aim to provide objective claims but rather to highlight the dominant patterns of the representations. In this respect, it is possible to suggest that another researcher would have labelled these elements of the meta-frame differently. Despite the boundaries of subjectivity that frame-analysis operates within, the inferences generated through this method of inquiry allow deconstructing elements of discourse to highlight the processes of meaning construction. The chapter thus will continue to unfold these patterns through presenting detailed discursive evidence, both textual and visual.

The findings of the case study suggest that both channels mainly focused on justifying Russia's and the US's actions rather than providing their audience with the detailed reportage from the ground. In order to construct these four pillars that organize the structure of the meta-frame, both RT and CNN employed a number of sub-frames that the following section will unpack in greater detail. These sub-frames, operating at the tactical level, are thus the building blocks of the strategic structure of discourse that is aimed at promoting a particular interpretation of the event. However, they are applied in a more targeted way, compared to meta-framing, and thus are better able to deal with reactive reporting that is characteristic of the daily news genre. Thus, examining RT's output during the chosen period crystallised the following sub-frames:

⁶⁶ For the details on methodology see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

- ❖ Threat
- ❖ Legitimacy
- ❖ Illegitimacy
- ❖ Democracy
- ❖ National Security
- ❖ Double Standards

Similar to the previous case study, I identified these sub-frames as rather broad contexts that were invoked by the channels in order to promote a tactical interpretation of the events within the chosen time frame of the case study. Most of the sub-frames enacted by RT were also employed by CNN; however, the way in which the two channels used these contexts differed starkly. Thus, the focus of this study was less on the normative nature of these contexts but rather on the structural relationship between these sub-frames and the overarching meta-frames of the discourse. Examining CNN's reporting of the Crimean crisis, I extracted the following sub-frames from the discourse:

- ❖ Threat
- ❖ Legitimacy
- ❖ Illegitimacy
- ❖ Democracy
- ❖ Diplomacy
- ❖ Responsibility

As highlighted in the previous chapters, my methodological approach does not aim at unpacking each of these sub-frames as stand-alone elements of discourse but rather at analysing how these contexts work together to shape an overarching meta-frame. In this respect, I looked at the way in which the units of visual and textual meaning implicitly link together the contexts to the particular actors of the context. In other words, the channels guide the audience to make an intuitive association between an issue and the tactical interpretation that is promoted by the frame sponsors. For example, RT consistently invoked the Russo-Turkish Wars,⁶⁷ the bloodiest battles that

⁶⁷ This refers to the series of Russo-Turkish Wars, which took place in 1676-81, 1687, 1689, 1695-96, 1710-12, 1710-12, 1735-39, 1768-74, 1787-91, 1806-12, 1828-29, 1828-29, 1856-56 (the Crimean War), and 1877-78. As a result of these wars, Russia extended its territory southward, which included the Annexation of Crimea in 1783.

carried lives of hundred thousand elite troops of the Russian Empire and were eulogized by the poets of Russian Golden Age. Thus, the reference emphasised the symbolic meaning of Crimea for the Russian identity. This tactical sub-frame, in turn, works both to vilify the Ukrainian interim government, portraying them as violently anti-Russian, and at the same time constructs Russia as a benevolent protector of its compatriots in its closest geopolitical neighbourhood. Thus, at a meta-level, this frame contributes to the building the structural elements of protector, victim, and enemy (see Table 6.3).

Meta-Frame	Protector	Victim	Enemy	Provocateur
<i>Sub-Frames</i>	<i>National Identity</i>	<i>National Identity</i>	<i>National Identity</i>	<i>Double Standards</i>
		<i>Threat</i>	<i>Threat</i>	<i>Threat</i>
	<i>Democracy</i>	<i>Democracy</i>	<i>Democracy</i>	
	<i>Legitimacy</i>		<i>Illegitimacy</i>	

Table 6.3. Meta and Sub-frames relationship in RT’s coverage of the Case Study II

Table 6.3 also illuminates how RT actively engaged in enemy framing by invoking a large number of sub-contexts to construct the image of the “violent” and “anti-democratic” government in Kiev. At the same time, the channel employed the *national identity* sub-frame that was aimed at constructing *protector*, *victim*, and *enemy* elements of the meta-frame. Also, the *double standards* sub-frame was used to downplay the USA’s arguments that Crimean referendum is illegal, the tactical framing aimed at constructing America as a destabilising the Eastern Europe region *provocateur*. Within CNN’s coverage, appeals to *violence*, *legitimacy* and *illegitimacy* were among the most frequently enacted sub-frames that worked towards constructing an image of *aggressive* Russia that forced Crimeans to vote for joining the country “under a barrel of a gun” (CNN, 2014). Less sub-frames were utilised to construct the USA, which indicates that the channel insisted on the USA’s distant role as mediator

of the conflict rather than a role of an actively involved and thus interested actor (see Table 6.4).

Meta-Frame	Aggressor	Victim	Enemy	Mediator
<i>Sub-Frames</i>				<i>Responsibility</i>
	<i>Democracy</i>		<i>Democracy</i>	
	<i>Threat</i>	<i>Threat</i>	<i>Threat</i>	<i>Diplomacy</i>
	<i>Illegitimacy</i>	<i>Legitimacy</i>	<i>Illegitimacy</i>	

Table 6. 4. Meta and Sub-frames relationship in CNN's coverage of the Case Study II

Overall, looking at the strategic formulas of RT's and CNN's discourses allows me to understand their strategic framing. In other words, these formulas show the primary discursive terms within which the channels operate to provide the public with their explanation of the events. The following section of this chapter deals with the tactical level of this process. Although the two are tightly interlinked, as showcased in the tables above, looking closely at the way in which tactical sub-frames contribute to the construction of the overarching discursive structure allows me to trace dynamics and thus understand certain controversies and inconsistencies that manifest themselves through the various genres of communication.

d. Tactical Level Framing

As this study has argued earlier, counter-framing is common in today's communicative space due to its tactical, rather than strategic efficacy. This notion allows to revisit the traditional understanding of persuasive practices, which is thought to operate through a set of lies and deceptions. Notably, the factual information that the two channels operated with – in particular the images from the Crimean Peninsula and the quotations of the official representatives – had very little margin of difference. However, the way in which this material was used expressed rather polar interpretations. This section will present the results derived from the linguistic and visual frame analysis and the intertextual examination. In particular, the focus of the three methods of analysis was on producing a detailed picture of how the contexts migrate from one discourse to another and thus create an inter-network dialogue. In turn, this affected the way in which sub-frames and thus tactical interpretations were subject to communicative distortions of the rival discourse and thus evolved throughout the time frame of the case study.

i. Textual Framing and Counter-framing

As discussed in the previous Chapter 5, framing and counter framing are part of one process of meaning construction. In this respect, intertextual analysis allowed me to take a better look at the dynamic nature of this process. Firstly, the findings of the second case study illuminated that the dialogic relationship between the discourses can manifest itself in several ways. The classification of the two types of counter-framing proposed in the previous chapters applies to the Crimean crisis as much as it applied to the Syrian crisis. Firstly, I will focus on the explicit referencing of the context that was initially enacted by the rival channel, or the *vertical* intertextuality.⁶⁸ This type of explicit countering employs efforts to identify the opponent's framing and encourages the audience to question these meanings. Commonly encountered in RT's narratives technique included pointing, often unambiguously, to CNN's coverage of the Ukrainian crisis, showing captions from the reports of their discursive rival. Linguistically, RT often defends President Putin's role in the crisis:

⁶⁸ See Chapter 3 of the dissertation for the details on the methodological framework of this research.

Headline: “*Western coverage of Ukraine crisis blames Putin for all the turmoil*”,
“*Blaming Russia for the chaos has become a recurring theme in mainstream coverage even though president Putin clearly distanced himself from the situation*” (RT, 23 February 2014).

This was commonly complemented with labelling Western news outlets as being hostile towards Russia. For example,

“*Hate-driven media coverage of the events*”,
“*America having Cold War attitudes about Russia*”,
“*blame game*” (RT, 23 February 2014).

Condemning the way in which Western media covers the events, therefore, demonstrates RT’s efforts to play down the impartiality of the news outlets. By doing so, such counter-framing seeks to win over the rival’s audience and consequently prepare the ground for instilling their interpretations of the events. Moreover, this reveals that framing is a reversible process. To be more precise, the same framing mechanism can be received, deconstructed and forwarded to the opponent. In fact, re-evaluation of stereotypes and promoting alternatives, as its determinant components, can be exercised via direct as well as indirect channels.

Intertextual analysis allowed me to trace a more implicit form of reinterpreting the events in a way that is *constitutive* or *interdiscursive* counter-framing. Unlike the vertical tactic, interdiscursive technique works with hidden cues. In particular, it refocuses the narrative from the opponent’s interpretation by providing an alternative view, but the source of original framing remains suppressed in this case. An important example of this phenomenon, encountered in the Crimean crisis case study, was RT’s and CNN’s contextual choice in their coverage of Yanukovych’s flight from Ukraine, followed by the citizens wandering around his expensive house. Importantly, RT did not show Yanukovych’s ‘palace’ on screen, refocusing audience’s attention from his lavishness, while emphasising that ‘extremists’ threatened him. Therefore, the images of Ukrainians wondering around his house, had an opposite effect from the one, created by CNN. In particular, the wondering public is no longer seen as demos, but rather seen as threatening to the country’s peace element. For example,

“*Ruptured Revolution: Yanukovych asks Russia to protect him from extremists*”,

“Yanukovych: Decisions on Ukraine’s new parliament not legitimate”

(RT, 27 February 2014).

Compared to CNN:

“Ukraine at a crossroad: Ousted Pres. Yanukovych accused of mass killings”

(CNN, 24 February 2014).

Hence, in RT’s narrative, Russia is given the structural role of a *peacemaker*, while the interim government of Ukraine along with unidentified supporters is regarded “extremists”. CNN, on the other hand, structures its discourse around the personality of the pro-Russian president, focusing on his near-criminal style of ruling Ukraine. Thus, countering processes involve an evident demarcation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, or ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (see *Tables 6.3* and *6.4* for meta-level framing). Tactically, RT links this story to their report from Simferopol on “the rise of ultra-nationalists”. In this vein, groups of ‘pro-Russian’ activists that took over the local parliament and raised the Russian flag on top of it are constructed as protecting force against the backdrop of “nationalists coming to power”, as narrated by RT. This preventive countering tactic illuminates that in anticipation of the “blames” that would emanate from the ‘rival’ sources, the channel is ready to take the defensive stance. Thus, such mechanism of implicit countering is limited to an event with a well-defined time frame, actors involved, and operates through the use of ‘concrete’ contexts and references with a limited number of metaphors.

Another example of such parallel counter-framing is RT’s and CNN’s coverage of the Referendum day. On 16th March 2014, vast crowds gathered on Simferopol’s Lenin Square in celebratory mood, showing an unambiguous picture of pride and victory, as portrayed by both channels. There were fireworks, emotional speeches, and patriotic songs. Interestingly, the happiness of people, looking forward to joining Russia wasn’t a matter of contention between the two discourses. It was rather the nature of this contentment that was at question. Thus, instead of denying or suppressing Crimean people’s excitement to join Russia, CNN’s narrative focused on the predictability of the referendum’s results, denoting them as “no surprise to anyone”. Such phrasing made it difficult to recognise the rightfulness of these celebrations. Moreover, their coverage emphasises that the voting was ‘controversial’ and ‘hastily organised’ in a very limited political process. For example,

“... there hasn't been any political space for the pro-Ukrainian votes to actually be heard by voters here” (CNN, 16 March 2014).

Such sceptical analysis of the seemingly cheerful events enables CNN to portray an event as a mockery of a democratic process instead of the victorious manifestation of people's choice, as RT interpreted it. In order to enhance such effect, CNN employs generalisations which link the voting to all political processes in Russia. For example,

“Like many political decisions made in Russia, it is about endorsing political decisions made by people considered to be their leader and not by giving a choice between two competing sides” (CNN, 16 March 2014).

What is noteworthy is that such phrasing unveils the underlying assumption that Crimea, while not technically part of Russia, is already being ruled by Kremlin, even before the voting process is completed. While focusing on the lack of legality in the voting process, CNN also highlighted the role of Russia's hard power in influencing the referendum's outcome:

“Completely manufactured referendum with the barrel of a gun, with Russian troops present” (CNN, 16 March 2014).

RT, by contrast, covered that day in all the traditions of glorious war-time rhetoric, labelling the event a “historical referendum”, emphasising that it was “democracy in action”. Moreover, the channel often employed cultural and social links with Crimea:

“We feel like we are going home!” (RT, 16 March 2014).

Apart from focusing on the referendum's outcomes, the major point of discursive contention between RT and CNN was the essence of the choice given to the people. In particular, the wording of the question in the ballot paper, although never explicitly shown in CNN's or RT's coverage, was interpreted by both channels in rather different manners. Thus, CNN's correspondents kept mentioning that Crimean people did not have an opportunity to stay in Ukraine. For example,

“{T}he choice was to become part of Russia or virtual independence”
(CNN, 16 March 2014).

While, for example, Vladimir Pozner – a prominent Russian journalist – in his interview to CNN states:

“No, you are wrong. The choice was to become part of Russia or to stay in Ukraine” (CNN, 16 March 2014).

This implicit assumption that the Crimean people are not given even a formal choice to stay in Ukraine points to the rhetorical tactic of CNN. According to the ballot paper, the first question asked the voters in three languages whether they “support reunifying Crimea with Russia as a subject of the Russian Federation”, while the second question indicated an option to restore “the 1992 Crimean constitution and the status of Crimea as a part of Ukraine” (BBC News, 2014). However, none of the channels provides extensive details on what either of these options would mean for the Crimean people, but rather simply imply one or another interpretation of the fact. Employing this persuasive technique, therefore, both encourages the audience to view the situation in terms of unambiguous realities and normalises the frame sponsor’ narrative. This reframing strategy thereby demonstrates the tactical efforts of both channels to construct meanings in the discursive space of a single undeniable fact.

Below I will further unpack the way in which the sub-frames were used by looking at the sub-frames.

National Identity Sub-frame

The findings of this research demonstrate how RT structured its coverage of the Crimean crisis within the context of Russia’s historical and cultural ties with the region. In other words, the focus on the Crimean people who identify themselves as Russians discursively places the peninsula within Russia’s geopolitical space. At the same time, such rhetoric, invoking heroic framing in the tradition of American presidential oratory (Shaw, 2010), implicitly positions contemporary Russia at the power level of the US. CNN, on the other hand, continuously countered this sub-frame.

In RT’s textual space, Russia appears as key to maintaining stability and therefore resisting Western aggressive efforts in Eastern Europe. RT’s correspondents, employing countering techniques, often emphasise the USA’s lack of knowledge about the region. For example,

“<...> hate driven media coverage of the events, especially when it involves events so far from the US and so close to Russia” (RT, 23 February 2014).

Moreover, commonly emphasising that 87 per cent of Crimean population are ethnically Russian, RT links this to the idea of national identity. In this respect, the peninsula is metaphorically detached from Ukraine in RT's discourse, which is often reinforced by references to the "nationalist" threat that the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine is facing since the Maidan events. The following linguistic structures were employed to achieve this effect:

*"People are more and more concerned about nationalists coming to power and they will stand here to protect their **national identity**"* (RT, 27 February 2014).

In fact, RT explicitly points to the issue of identity and often elaborates on the meaning that Crimea constitutes for Russian citizens. References to Russia being "close" to the Ukrainian conflict have several dimensions of meaning. On the one hand, this emphasises Russia's geopolitical sphere of influence; on the other hand, it implicitly refers to the country's cultural unity. The key to understanding this ideological structure is that *united Russia*, for example, apart from being the name for the ruling party, is also a symbol that has been historically linked to the war context. Starting from the Kievan Rus, the idea that Russia can only withstand foreign aggression by uniting its entire people, erasing the peaceful time differences and tensions, has been embedded in war-time narratives (Fedotova, 2007). Crimea, in this respect, has been central for Russian identity, pervading political and academic discourses (Kiselev, 1994; Starikov & Belyaev, 2015). This notion provides explanation for why RT commonly invoked historical background for the events, particularly focusing on the events surrounding Crimea becoming part of Ukraine and the reasons behind the high share of Russian population on the peninsula. Within the *national identity* sub-framing, RT often implicitly links the situation in Crimea with the concept of 'the right side of history'. This commonly used phrase in contemporary Russian political discourse is an interesting linguistic structure. Encountered in almost every debate about Ukraine, Crimea and sanctions, this formula serves as an absolute argument to support essentially any claim. In the case study, this structure was rarely encountered coming from RT's journalists but was often introduced by quotes of witnesses on the ground, commonly accompanied by the following linguistic elements:

"Historic referendum!" (RT, 16 March 2014).

"It's time for justice to prevail!" (RT, 27 February 2014).

Coming from a source directly involved in the conflict, the latter phrase intends to evoke compassion towards the Crimean people who are on the verge of a ‘historically right’ change. *National identity* framing, therefore, both encourages the public to view the crisis in terms of unambiguous moral truths by appealing to justice with elements of praise. Significantly, the same phrasing was used by President Obama, as appeared on CNN, in his rhetorical efforts to condemn Russia’s moves in Crimea:

“Russia is on the wrong side of history on this”,

“we are strongly supportive of the interim Ukrainian government”

(CNN, 3 March 2014).

This counter-framing example indicates that the same linguistic structure is used to promote a polar evaluation of the situation. Moreover, both channels, explicitly appealing to the public’s sentiment, neglect substantiating their claims. This indicates that such linguistic structures, being commonly employed by various public figures, have entered the international realm of ‘common sense’. In this respect, the normative dimension of frames transcends the ideational borders indicating that the global media communication that manifests itself in the discursive conversation between channels dictates its codes to its users.

Within RT’s *national interest* framing, the channel often villainises the role of the West in the Eastern Europe’s turmoil, emphasising that Ukraine is inherently Russia’s sphere of concern. The discursive strategy, often utilised to deliver this notion, employed citing pro-Western ‘experts’. For example,

Headline: *Western Influence*

Gorbachev: *“Issuing recommendations is unacceptable”*

(RT, 24 February 2014).

These words, coming from the former President of the Soviet Union and today a renowned critic of President Putin, seemingly instil the audience with an impression that the content is less partial than the one delivered by Kremlin’s officials, which exemplifies an attempt to legitimise this tactical interpretation. Far from being an empty rhetoric, this statement also condensed the deep-seated belief in Russia’s distinctive, non-Western path. The Ukrainian revolution, in this respect, is seen as an epitome of

American expansionist efforts and unwillingness to respect Russia's geopolitical interests.

Headline: *Russia responds to West **Threats***

"West helped create crisis; people are priority" (RT, 3 March 2014).

CNN, by contrast, denies that Russia has the ability to act according to a consistent and overarching strategy. The channel portrays the country as being driven by sentiment rather than logic – be it irrational moods or Putin's egomania. In particular, CNN deconstructs the genuineness of Russia's national interests in the region by focusing on Putin's 'fears' that Maidan revolutionary spirits can migrate to Russia. For example,

Headline: *Understanding Vladimir Putin*

*"Putin is **paranoid** about the **uprising**",*

"He is not going to let it go easily",

*"Putin is in a very **assertive** mood"* (CNN, 23 February 2014).

Evoking this context metaphorically shifts Putin's image from a peacekeeper to a possessive and self-righteous political figure that would not allow Ukraine to be separate from Russia, neither geopolitically nor economically. Such framing also implicitly links his character to hard power. In other words, portraying Putin as an unpredictable political figure works at instilling anxiety in the audience. Moreover, by equating Putin to Russia, the channel employs a metonymy, a particularly common tactic on CNN. This linguistic device reinforces the representation of Russia as highly homogenous, reinforcing the emphasis on the authoritarian element of Kremlin's 'rule'.

Threat vs. Diplomacy Sub-frames

Apart from disputing about whether Crimea should belong to the Russian or Western sphere of influence, RT's and CNN's narratives discursively clashed over the role of protector and aggressor. This brought up a threatening 'them' versus peaceful 'us' dichotomy. Within this dialogue, both channels commonly employed enemy imaging. In particular, the West in RT's narrative appears to be 'cynical' provocateur, stirring turmoil in the country. For example,

“The West has been taking advantage of Ukrainian's fragile politics”

(RT, 27 February 2014).

Victimisation of Ukraine in this case serves as a threat constructing element. In this discursive space, the West appears a calculating villain who would not hesitate to exploit the unstable situation in the region. The more explicit point of contention between RT's and CNN's narratives was the presence of Russian regular troops on the peninsula or the absence thereof.

*“Moscow's explanations are that they are **unarmed regular forces** serving at the local Russian navy base that has been permanently stationed at Sevastopol for decades”* (RT, 27 February 2014).

Moreover, RT labels these forces as “self-defence groups” who united to protect their land and its citizens from the “right wing radicals”, who, according to the channel's interpretation of the events, overtook the government in an “armed coup”. In their enemy imaging, therefore, RT links the US to the Ukrainian far-right movements, explicitly stating that the US would support any extremist as long as they can facilitate “regime change”. The implicit connection between radicals and the US acts as a multivectoral technique. It plays down American authority on the one hand, and portrays pro-Maidan population of Ukraine as near-criminals, on the other. By contrast, in CNN's narrative, Crimea's “self-defence squads” appeared as Putin's troops, invading Ukraine, violating its sovereignty. The following phrases were used to identify these men:

*“**Gunmen** seize Crimean regional parliament”*,

*“A convoy of Russian **armed personnel** has been seen on roads beyond its regular limits [beyond the military base], according to the local [interim Ukrainian] PM”* (CNN, 27 February 2014).

Significantly, both phrases were used at the very beginning of the social uprising in Crimea, having little confirmed evidence of who exactly these people are and whose interests they represent. Therefore, the word choice made by both channels testifies the ideological nature of it. Interestingly, CNN seemingly admits their rhetorical efforts, emphasising that the instability in the region is alarming. For example,

“Whether the reports are true or not, the situation remains extremely volatile”
(CNN, 27 February 2014).

Thus, the escalating conflict dictates its discursive rules. Linguistic expressions evoke eerie feelings, which is reinforced by the sound effects. CNN also commonly focused on invoking military threat references in relation to the movements in the region:

*“**Risk of Russian boots on the ground**”* (CNN, 27 February 2014).

The idea of definitive danger coming from Kremlin was often promoted with the use of even stronger language, such as:

Headline: *“**Clear Threat: Conflicting reports about military threats from Moscow**”* (CNN, 27 February 2014).

Thus, CNN portrays the situation in unambiguous terms, continuously constructing the evil and threatening Russia. By contrast, RT’s narratives were surrounded by the metaphors of ‘protector’ and ‘peacekeeper’. In particular, RT emphasised Russia’s role in the crisis, focusing on its mediating strategies. For example,

“Russia has been a stabilising force in Ukraine since the beginning of the turmoil”,

“<...> calling on Russia to help”,

“Moscow trying to protect the lives of Russians” (RT, 1 March 2014).

Within CNN’s narrative, Russia’s ‘protective’ and ‘peacekeeping’ intents are deconstructed and reframed. For example,

*“We heard Moscow say earlier that they will protect Russian human rights in the region; **all sounds rather ominous**”* (CNN, 27 February 2014).

This clear invitation to doubt Russia's words is juxtaposed against the US seeking to “**diplomatically** encourage Russia not to [move troops to Ukraine]”. Therefore, the counter-framing that CNN utilises plays down Russia's peacekeeping intentions toward Crimea and promotes the idea that the US are acting as such instead. What is particularly interesting in CNN's discursive strategies is that they do not suppress Russian-Crimean historical links, but rather often provide an explicit explanation of the reasons of unrest on the peninsula. However, this often comes along with reports of Russia's internal military disposition. For example,

“Russia ordered surprise military exercises” (CNN, 27 February 2014).

This news was delivered out of context without further elaboration on the exact location of these military exercises. Given the context of the Ukrainian crisis, this unambiguously suggests the link between the war games and the situation in Crimea. This was amplified by relating the tensions between Russia and Ukraine to the US's security. For example,

“[Russian troops] could move so quickly, the US might not notice it is happening”,

*“<...> warning **time** is cut to zero”,*

*“last **minute** US **diplomatic** pressure”* (CNN, 28 February 2014).

Time related metaphors are aimed at evoking threat, implicitly linking it to the image of ‘aggressive’ Russia. At the same time, the US in this framing appears to be a mediating and consequently peaceful force. This effect is enhanced by the associative video editing. For example, focusing on the possibility of Kremlin's military aggression in Ukraine, CNN shows archived images of the Russian military war games. Such parallel montage metaphorically links military context to Russia's role in Ukraine. CNN, by contrast, countered RT's narrative:

“The West doesn't buy this sort of justifications, because they are unaware of these threats or any sorts of danger to Russian speakers in Eastern regions”,

“Obama is giving Putin a way out” (CNN, 3 March 2014).

Explicitly denoting Russia's arguments as ‘justifications’ to get involved in the region, CNN, implying the presence of Russian aggression on the peninsula, signifies the use of stereotyping technique. By increasing hostility towards Russia, CNN reinforces the

US's positive image through the references to the forgiving president who would not deprive Putin of a chance to cool down his temper.

Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and Double Standards Sub-frames

The concept of legitimacy has two semantic sides to it, both of which were employed by RT and CNN. On the one hand, the channels invoked this context when referring to the area of international law; on the other hand, it may also concern domestic politics. The international law context was a structural element of both channels' narratives from the moment reports about the upcoming referendum in Crimea appeared in their coverage of Ukraine's unrest. While CNN was mainly preoccupied with the illegitimacy of the referendum, RT commonly pointed out the hypocrisy of Western judgment when it comes to recognizing or not-recognizing the independence of states. For example,

“The West had nothing but praised Kosovo's independence, which set the precedent”, but “when it comes to Crimea, it is suddenly a very different story” (RT, 11 March 2014).

This framing, which is authentic for RT, is important not only because it allows to deconstruct opponents' rhetoric but also because it prepares the ground for promoting justifications for political acts. Double standards, in this discursive space, concern not merely the legal framework but also penetrate the realm of Western values. For example,

“But the US turns a blind eye when it comes to provocative statements coming out of Kiev” (RT, 1 March 2014).

By contrast, CNN was not involved in a direct countering of the 'double standards' frame but rather promoted the US's official stance on the situation in Crimea. The coverage was predominantly structured around Russia being on the wrong side of the international law. For example,

*“UNSC stressed importance for countries to exercise restraint”,
“West warns Russia: Slow down and back off”,
“UN, NATO, White House urge calm in Ukraine”* (CNN, 1 March 2014).

Marrying UN, NATO and the US in one sentence implicitly links them to the territory of international law, which is responsible for sustaining peace and stability. This associative link evokes imageries of a strong and just US as opposed to the uncontrollable Russia, which is essentially focused on gaining influence through military power rather than abiding by the rule of law. In legitimacy discussions prior to the referendum, RT emphasised the idea that the Kiev government is not only illegitimate but also takes advantage of its powerful position by hastily introducing legislation which is not serving in favour of all citizens of Ukraine. For example,

“The gap between East and West is growing and some of the legislation passed by Kiev is not easing the situation” (RT, 28 February 2014).

Here, RT refers to the language bill passed by the interim government shortly after the Maidan events. The bill repealing the law approved in 2012 cancelled Russian along with other regionally spoken languages as a second official language on the provincial level in Ukraine. This move by the Yatsenyuk government was labelled by RT as ‘nationalistic’ and anti-Russian. Within this frame, Crimean people, perceiving it as a threat to their rights, were seeking to “move away from Kiev”, as reported by RT. Evoking law context functions on the one hand as a tool to reconstruct the opponent’s rhetoric. On the other hand, it frames the enemy which is identified as the interim government in the following example:

“An armed takeover of power does not easily fit into the framework of International Law, in fact, from the legal point of view it was a power grab”

(RT, 1 March 2014).

Moreover, the use of this framing device is not limited to the exterior of the narration, but also partakes in the implicit process when the notion of the illegitimacy of Kiev’s ruling elite is delivered through references to the public’s needs:

“South and East simmer with rebellion as public goes unheard by new government” (RT, 3 March 2014).

Consequently, the context of legitimacy naturally leads to the metaphor of anarchy to be invoked. For example,

“<...> great deal of uncertainty as of who actually holds the power here”,

“<...> *self-proclaimed leaders in Kiev*”,

“<...> *separation from Kiev’s rule*” (RT, 3 March 2014).

Therefore, international law references, appearing in RT’s coverage at the early stages of the unrest in Crimea, structured the narrative around the unwillingness of the West to admit the ‘lawfulness’ of the events when it does not serve their geopolitical interests. Invoking this context allows RT to play down Western authority on the one hand, promoting image of Russia as a touchstone for democracy, protecting and satisfying wishes of the local population, on the other.

ii. Visual Framing and Counter-framing

In line with the methodological strategy defined in Chapter 3, the analysis of the Crimean crisis included the assessment of the way in which the visuals contributed to constructing frames at the tactical level of discourse. Similar to the previous case study, the evaluation of visuals was conducted in two stages: *denotative* and *connotative*. Thus, it directed the focus of the research on both, the primary meaning that visuals denote and the ‘added’ connotation generated through the various techniques of arranging the images in TV pieces. Some of the tactics employed by the two channels, such as montage and graphic effects, were similar to the ones highlighted in the previous chapter. Other particularities are rather specific to the channels’ coverage of the unrest in Crimea. Below I will present how analysing visual information helped me identify frames due to the ability of images enhance interpretations. As insightfully noted by Fiske and Hartley,

“Television, a highly conventional medium, constantly uses signs that teeter on the brink of becoming clichés”

(Fiske & Hartley, 1978, p. 63).

In fact, the more frequently signs are used and re-used the deeper they become engrained into journalistic practice. This recurrence if not repetitiveness of certain images can often reduce the more complex and comprehensive representation of events on the ground. Applying intertextual analysis to television news allows us to take a better look at how the meaning construction is influenced by the normative dimensions of the journalistic practice and at the way in which the techniques of media competitors are borrowed and advanced as part of the dynamic and changing field. This, in turn, broadens our understanding of what informs meaning construction strategies and tactics. As Griffin (2004) contends, different media outlets often borrow and reuse photographs and video materials of their rivals. In this respect, broadcasters gather a significant part of their content from the same pool of news material. Of course, this is not to claim that channels operate with the identical images and interview the same people, but some patterns of representation are being continuously reinforced. This concerns both the ethical norms that are country and history-specific and the influences of rival discourses on the news output.

This was highlighted in the previous chapter by showcasing how RT employed elements of graphic design in the tradition of Soviet propaganda. The channel's coverage of the Crimean crisis is not dissimilar in this respect. RT's use of colourful means of expression is particularly noteworthy. The channel's broadcasting style often extends the boundaries of the neutral, detached manner characteristic of Anglo-Saxon news reporting, invigorating their stories with powerful pictorial tools. *Caption 14* is an example of such visual framing. Here, RT counters liberal media by insinuating that the interpretations emanating from CNN and BBC are tantamount to propaganda, inviting the public to think in terms of the "word war". Colours are shouting and associative; bullhorns, stop signs supported by the written titling are strongly charged rhetorical elements that bring conflict and ideology battle into stark focus.



Caption 14. The Use of Colours on RT (RT, 11 March 2014)

The Crimean crisis coverage on CNN was likewise dense in signifying elements, particularly with respect to the use of military imagery. Images of army equipment are highly emblematic in the way that defines the boundaries of meaning through their associative effects. Notably, the *threat* sub-framing is unambiguous in *Caption 15*. The emotional effect is enhanced through the connotative relationship between the image and the titling. As semioticians theorize, there are two types of images, depending on their ideational charge, "mimetic" picture and "artificial", or "expressive" image (Mitchell, 1986). The first one represents what it "captures"; the latter does not only signify what it shows but carries other, abstract meanings that can only be conveyed in

words. In this respect, written signs of this image add the interpretive dimension to the factual depiction, which is an essential purpose of television production. Thus, using the example in Caption 15, it is possible to break down the rhetorical elements that construct the *threat* sub-frame at a tactical level of discourse. Here, the mimetic picture of “the little green men”⁶⁹ is reinforced by the textual title “clear threat” that invites the audience to think in unambiguous terms of the Russian danger in the region. In fact, CNN continuously rebroadcast these images, creating a pattern of representation that emphasised the presence of troops rather than, for example, expanding the focus to include other facets of the situation on the ground.



Caption 15. Pictorial Expressiveness on CNN (CNN, 3 March 2014)

Another example of such visual framing is depicted in *Caption 16*. Here, the choice of footage showing President Putin in the company of army officers emphasises that Russia is in “operational control of Crimea.” The intra-frame sentences link the leader’s attendance of the “war games” to the Russian “ultimatum to the troops in Crimea”. By bullet pointing these statements, the channel intensifies the assertiveness of its argument. In doing so, CNN’s sub-framing is polar to RT’s attempts to construct Kremlin as protecting and peacekeeping force at the strategic level of discourse.

⁶⁹ This expression refers to the armed men with no insignia that were present on the Crimean Peninsula in the short period before the Referendum. In Russia, they are colloquially referred to as “polite people”.



Caption 16. Pictorial Expressiveness on CNN (CNN, 3 March 2014)

In order to counter the dominant on CNN *threat* sub-frame, RT engaged in explicit countering, or *horizontal* intertextuality.⁷⁰ In *Caption 17*, for example, RT directly engages with “western claims of Russian invasion”, suggesting that these are misinformation, part of Western deliberate efforts to delegitimize Russia.



Caption 17. Pictorial Expressiveness on RT (RT, 16 March 2014)

⁷⁰ See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for the definitions of intertextuality.

This is reinforced by the vivid textual graphics in the best traditions of Hollywood. Thus, the titling, which is moderate in tone, is reinforced by a highly rhetorical statement “Tanks, but no tanks”, referring to the news of Russian tanks heading towards Ukraine that previously appeared on CNN.

Thus, the dialogue between the channels manifests itself in the use of images. In the highly emotional report, depicted in *Caption 18*, the images play a crucial role in RT’s counter-framing efforts by visually enacting the response to rival discourse. Here, the correspondent theatrically points to the lack of credibility of the footage that appeared on CNN. Moreover, the channel deconstructs CNN’s reporting by indicating that these particular “phantom” tanks were captured “50 km away from the border”, adding, sarcastically, that the “Western” broadcaster “could have checked the location.” Thus, instead of promoting interpretations in a monologic manner, RT explicitly engages in the conversation with CNN.



Caption 18. Visual Counter-framing on RT (RT, 16 March 2014)

A further example of the way in which counter-framing worked at the tactical level visually has been briefly mentioned in the beginning of the textual analysis presented in this chapter. Here, I will further delve into the visual aspects of this case. Reporting on Yanukovich’s flight from Ukraine, the channels operated with the very different

visual materials. CNN, for example, focused on reporting of how the Ukrainian public “visited” the former president’s “palace”, highlighting the absurd, immense wealth that its walls hid, “while their country stagnated”. Textual interpretations that accompany images (*Caption 19*) clarify the ‘added’ meaning that CNN connotes. Here, the visual emphasis is the symbols that evoke association with ‘criminal’ mentality and corruption, while the citizens are portrayed as engaging in the rightful act of public justice.



Caption 19. Visual Counter-framing on CNN (CNN, 24 February 2014)

RT, on the other hand, maintained that Yanukovich was “kicked out” of Ukraine by the “nationalist” protestors in Kiev. Visually, this was enhanced through broadcasting the full version of the former president’s press conference, as depicted in *Caption 20*. The choice of images by RT journalist is thus dramatically different to the footage that appeared on CNN. The representative and presidential depiction of Yanukovich, reinforced by the presence of Ukrainian heraldic, emphasizes that Yanukovich is still the “legal” president of the country. This, in turn, contributes to constructing the interim government in Kiev as “illegitimate”, a result of an “armed coup”.

Later in their coverage, RT invokes military motifs as part of their tactical efforts to vilify ‘pro-Ukrainian’ Kiev. *Caption 21*, for example, depicts the channel’s emphasis on the aggressiveness of the interim government, which, in turn, contributes to



Caption 20. Visual Representation of Political Figures on RT (RT, 24 February 2014)

constructing ‘pro-Russian’ supporters as a peacekeeping force that is able to protect the non-violent Russian-speaking population of Ukraine from the “rule of nationalists”. Here, the depiction of tanks in motion serves as the symbolical support to the verbal voice-over that erases ambiguity or uncertainty.



Caption 21. Depiction of Armed Forces on RT (RT, 16 March 2014)

Some scholars have argued that images are worth attending to due to their ability to “symbolize generalities”, preparing “pre-existing interpretive schema”, evoking associations in a less explicit manner than linguistic structures (Griffin, 2004; Kuhn, 1995). In this regard, a noteworthy example is depicted in *Caption 22*. Here, the correspondent reports on the High Council of Crimea adopting the Declaration of Independence, presenting the event in the positive light, pre-emptively engaging in the potential conversation with the counter-discourses through references to the matter of Kosovo. The presenter, however, does not in any way comment the image that we can see on the screen. Thus, it implicitly supports the overarching narrative of the piece through promoting the notion of Russian-speakers in Ukraine asking Kremlin for help.



Caption 22. Image and Word on RT (RT, 11 March 2014)

CNN also uses the images from the streets of Simferopol, although the commentary that supports the visual depiction in *Caption 23* calls the truthfulness of this support into question, suggesting that the Crimean public’s desire to join Russia was manufactured by Kremlin’s “propaganda” efforts and the military “threat” on the peninsula. This interpretation overshadows the primary impressions of a happy and victorious event that the image originally denotes. In doing so, CNN contributes to the construction of Russia as a power-driven and aggressive force in Eastern Europe, which is part of the *threat* sub-framing.



Caption 23. Image and Word on CNN (CNN, 16 March 2014).

Similar to CNN’s coverage, RT did not provide much visual coverage of the ongoing situation in Crimea from the people’s perspective. Apart from interview fragments with the people, the visual reporting focused predominantly on celebrating the pro-Russian triumph. Thus, *Caption 24* demonstrates such an example. Enhanced by the symbolism of the Russian tricolour and a photograph of Sergey Aksyonov, the victorious Head of Crimea, the caption outlines a detailed plan of action for the newly “freed” republic, invoking the sentiment of hope and positive change.



Caption 24. Crimean Referendum Results Coverage on RT (RT, 17 March 2014).

Of course, the static and mute reproductions of the audio-visual material presented in these chapters cannot convey fully the emotional charge with which both channels report on current affairs. In fact, the expressive style of presenting that ‘performers’ master on air deserves particular attention. The characteristic that distinguishes RT’s presenters is their theatrical, near-grotesque way of delivering news. Passionate and assertive performance is often aimed at instilling suspicion in the audience in respect to the Western coverage. Thus, the performative style of the channel’s journalists reinforces substantially the meanings that are conveyed textually and visually, accompanied by an expressive use of sound and sometimes music. Similarly, anchors in CNN’s studios are highly assertive in their performance style, but the sarcastic overtone that constitutes a large part of RT’s ‘performances’ is less prominent on the “Western” broadcaster. In fact, CNN’s style is more monologic if not monotonic in the way they structure stories, both stylistically and performatively. The dramaturgic effect of CNN thus lies in the confidence of their reporters and the assertiveness of their statements.

e. Conclusion

By analysing the rhetorical structures surrounding RT's and CNN's narratives, this chapter exposed the use of various contextualisation techniques. As the analysis presented above demonstrates, it operated through the systematic approach to construct meanings. The visual analysis enriches frame analysis with the material that allows us to trace both the patterns of representations, achieved through the various pictorial tools and the associative montage, and the intertextual links that constitute the implicit communication between the channels.

By reproducing the frames promoted by the elites, the channels engaged in both legitimizing particular interpretations and eliciting the rival discourse. My approach allowed to demonstrate this through presenting the dynamics of sub-frames and their relationship with the meta-level frames. Thus, combining appeals to international law and history with the elements of 'us' vs. 'them' imaging, both channels' discourses aimed not only at shaping a particular image of Russia and the US, but also attempted to persuade their audience to view the situation in terms of the discursive dichotomies. Thus, in the global communicative environment, agents and frames can be seen as the co-constitutive elements of discourse. This allows to further theorise that the states' ideational resources are not always organized around a strict system of values or norms, but rather commonly employ a much subtler process of open reference between the various interpretations of the same facts.

Therefore, analysing RT as the Kremlin's voice for communicating its foreign policy to the world provided the empirical evidence for identifying both the origins of interpretations and the way in which the discursive practice is subject to change depending on the volatility of the contextual environment. In particular, it allows us to understand better such inconsistencies of foreign policy as, for example, Russia continuously promoting anti-Western ideas, and, at the same time, consistently appealing to liberal norms when it comes to providing justifications of its actions or providing analysis to current affairs. This very paradox will be the starting point of the discussion in the following Chapter 7.

Chapter 7.

Discussion: Framing and Counter-framing

“{T}he principle is timeless, and the construction of ‘enemies’, both real and imagined, is perennial; many of its incarnations have been employed on both sides in what, since 2001, the West has called the ‘war on terror’. A human tendency to think of ‘them’ and ‘us’ is always liable to be exploited by those with the means and the power to do so”

(Welch, 2013, p. 188).

a. Introduction

The objective of this dissertation has been to understand the way in which RT covers events that are politically relevant for Russia and to highlight how the communicative environment may help us better understand the relationship between various countries in the international system. As I argued in Chapter 1, the lack of detailed explanation of the often-contradictory foreign policy messages coming from Moscow as well as the significant gap in the literature on Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, and the fragmented Constructivist research can be addressed by delving into the tactical dimension of discourse. In order to do so, this study conceptualised the multi-level framing model that offers an analytical lens with the capacity to illuminate the mechanisms that constitute the meaning construction processes in international media broadcasting.

As the quote in the epigraph to this chapter insightfully notes, the organising principles of the persuasive practices are the constants that in large part sustain and reinforce these processes. This study argues that the structural pillars that constitute frames at the meta-level are the stable structures of discourse. In fact, informed by the theoretical assumption that no text can be defined as new in absolute terms, the persuasive techniques should not be assessed in the sterile environment of a monologue. By comparing the two case studies, this chapter fleshes out this notion through a detailed comparative analysis. This chapter thus highlights the empirical findings that were

generated through the application of the multi-level framing model conceptualised in this research.

Following up on the case studies, the chapter starts by presenting a detailed comparative summary of the findings in section *b*. The inferences discussed here concern both the theoretical and the empirical aspects of the dissertation. By comparing RT's and CNN's discourses of the two cases, the analysis on the one hand generates insights into Russian foreign policy, and on the other hand contributes to our understanding of the persuasive mechanisms in international politics. The subsequent part *c* restates the argument, followed by section *d* that highlights the role of these inferences as the contribution to the field of IR. Section *e* details the implications of the frame and counter-frame analysis approach and sketches potential avenues for further research. The part *f* pulls together the insights of this project and concludes the dissertation.

b. Comparative Summary of Case Studies I and II

As I have pointed out in the beginning of this dissertation, the two cases represent large scale global conflicts that not only triggered international legal debates but in large part influenced Russia’s relationship with the EU and the US (Ciolan, 2016). However, at a discursive level, these cases exemplify almost opposite situations, when the two channels virtually exchanged their discursive roles, mirroring each other’s discourses.

This is particularly notable when comparing the two case studies. For example, both channels’ discourses continuously focused on the four key actors involved in the conflicts: Russia, the US, the Ukrainian interim government/Syrian government and citizens (Crimeans/Syrians). By contrast, there are little references to the UN and other NATO countries (UK, France, Italy). For example, the coverage of the Syrian crisis showed that both channels were mainly preoccupied with justifying the country’s actions in global politics, while coverage of the humanitarian crisis in the country appeared less important in their narratives. In particular, RT devoted 45 per cent of their coverage on condemning the US’s aggressive intentions in the region, while promoting Russia’s democratic role in the crisis (40 per cent). 31 per cent of the coverage was focused on supporting Assad’s government, with only 14 per cent devoted to the situation on the ground. Similarly, CNN was mainly promoting Obama’s pro-intervention line (39 per cent), while portraying Russia as an obstacle (35 per cent), paying much less attention to Assad (27 per cent) and as little as 7 per cent to the citizens of Syria (see *Table 7.1*).

<u>RT</u>	<i>FRAMING SUBJECTS</i> Syrian Crisis	<u>CNN</u>
40 %	<i>Russia</i>	35 %
45 %	<i>USA</i>	39 %
31 %	<i>Syrian Government</i>	27 %
14 %	<i>Syrian Citizens</i>	7 %
2 %	<i>United Nations</i>	1 %
5 %	<i>France/UK/Italy</i>	4 %

Table 7.1 Frequency of Framing Subject Appearance. Syrian Crisis

The Crimean crisis coverage showed that both channels were predominantly concentrated on reporting Russia's moves and the US's role in the crisis, while paying considerably less attention to Crimean people's wishes or Syrian citizens. In particular, 53 per cent of RT's coverage was devoted to explaining Russia's interests in the region, being also largely preoccupied with the US's provocative behaviour in Ukraine (24 per cent), with 20 per cent of coverage focused on the new Kiev government, paying as little as 11 per cent to reporting the Crimean people's wishes. Similarly, CNN's eyes were on Russia (41 per cent) and the US (35 per cent) with 29 per cent focusing on the Ukrainian interim government, devoting only 5 per cent of their coverage to the population of Crimea (see *Table 7.2*).

<u>RT</u>	<i>FRAMING SUBJECTS</i> Crimean Crisis	<u>CNN</u>
53 %	<i>Russia</i>	41 %
24 %	<i>USA</i>	35 %
20 %	<i>Ukrainian Interim Govt.</i>	29 %
11 %	<i>Crimeans</i>	5 %
0,5 %	<i>United Nations</i>	2 %
0 %	<i>France/UK/Italy</i>	1 %

Table 7.2 Frequency of Framing Subject Appearance. Crimean Crisis

Strategically, the Syrian crisis was an example of Russia's active use of persuasion through its public diplomacy outlet, RT. In September 2013, Russia took a clear stance on the situation in Syria, attempting to prevent the potential US strike. Thus, through the use of public diplomacy, their short-term goal can be understood in terms of influencing the international public opinion through promoting sub-frames that would highlight the 'inconsistencies' in Washington's rhetoric. The Crimean crisis dictated very different discursive terms for RT's strategic framing. Thus, the goal was to justify Russia's interest in the region. However, in order to promote this interpretation, RT employed similar discursive instruments as in Case I. This mechanism was exposed through the detailed intertextual examination of the strategic and tactical levels of discourse.

i. Comparing RT's and CNN's Meta-frames

Although the two cases diverge in their issue-specific tactical interpretations, the overarching meta-frames contain similar structural elements that hold the discourses at the strategic level. In particular, the Syrian crisis demonstrates a situation in which Russia explicitly attempted to block the American intervention in Syria, acting as a *peacekeeper* against the *aggressive* US, as constructed by RT's strategic framing. The White House and CNN framed the events in terms of a humanitarian intervention, where the US is driven by the issue of *national security* and acts as the *responsible* world policeman. The Crimean crisis demonstrates an almost polar situation, in which the main actors – namely Russia and the US – virtually exchanged their discursive roles. Once the country's political ambitions have altered, the discursive aims changed accordingly. Thus, Russia takes over the aggressor's rhetoric, while the US is acting as a peacekeeper by *mediating* the conflict. As it will be presented in this chapter, the discursive tools both channels utilised are exceptionally alike.

For example, CNN was constructing Russia as an aggressor in the Crimea-related coverage at a strategic level. In other words, these frame-building elements are indispensable to the existence of a frame. As the conceptual framework of this dissertation outlines, I see meta-frames as the formulas that are constituted by the structural elements. For example, the analysis of the two cases allowed me to identify two meta-frames that are organized by the structural metaphors of Peacekeeper – Rival/Provocateur – Enemy – Victim (Meta-frame 1) and Mediator – Aggressor – Enemy – Victim (Meta-frame 2) (see *Figure 7.1*). These elements were denominated by attributing the structural metaphors to the particular actors of a conflict. Within these formulas (meta-frames), the structural elements reinforce each other and thus sustain the discourse. In other words, the building blocks of these formulas are the stable pillars of the meta-frames. For example, if we remove the Victim framing, the country Peacekeeper would effectively lose its pacification mission – an essential element of legitimizing intervention. Therefore, the structural metaphors are contingent on one another.

That said, at a tactical level, framing is always a subject and an object of change. For example, in order to deliver the message that Russia is an aggressor in Crimea, CNN

did not limit their persuasive techniques to a single interpretation but rather continuously deconstructed and countered Russian officials at a tactical level.

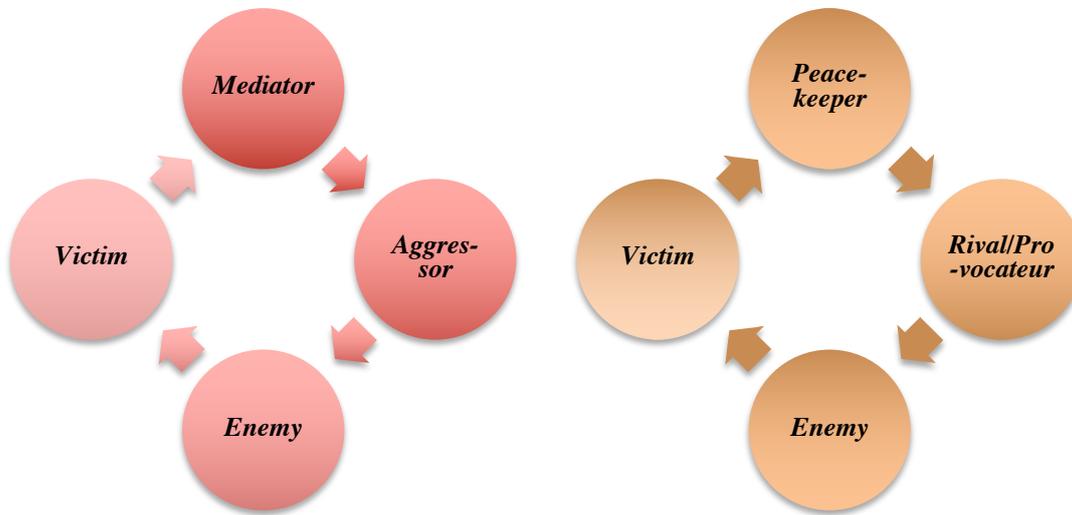


Figure 7.1. Meta-level Framing Process. Meta-frames 1&2

Figure 7.1 demonstrates how the two channels exchanged their discursive strategies at the meta-level. For example, while covering the Syrian crisis, RT employed meta-frame 1 through which Russia was constructed as *Mediator*, Assad and Syrian citizens as *Victims*, anti-government groups as *Enemy*, and the US as *Aggressor*. When the Crimean crisis began to unfold, the channel employed a meta-frame structure very similar to the one that was used by CNN to cover the Syrian crisis. However, the roles within it were reattributed to different actors. Thus, Russia was constructed as a *Peacekeeper*, Crimean people as *Victims*, the US as *Provocateur*, and the Ukrainian interim government as *Enemy*. In this respect, counter-framing can be and should be understood in terms of the discursive dynamics that it creates. For example, on the strategic level, reattribution of the discursive roles from one actor of the conflict to another is the dynamic process within the stable structure of the meta-frame (see *Figure 7.1*).

Moreover, a frame ceases to exist as a unit of discourse once it has lost even a single of its elements (structural metaphors). In other words, if these labels are not applied together within the discourse, they are rather unsystematic topics that do not provide a

specific treatment to action which frames ultimately are. This skeleton that is a defining property of frames is therefore central to understanding the statics of framing. Directing my research at the processes that take place in communication has enabled me to understand better the dialogue that is the standpoint of discourse. In other words, the production of meanings through discourse is a relational process. This particular study, by providing relevant evidence, shows that frames appear in the narratives if not as immediate but always as a strategic response to an opposing narrative.

ii. Comparing RT's and CNN's Coverage at the Tactical Level

The striking similarity of the prioritising model that channels use in their coverage of the seemingly different political situations demonstrates continuous attempts of both news outlets to construct meanings through providing polar interpretations of events. This becomes particularly vivid when comparing the sub-frames that the channels used in both cases. It shows that both channels used very similar framing strategies with a slight variation of sub-frames, which was mainly due to the contextual differences. By analysing this tactical facet, it is possible to understand the *functioning* aspect of framing better by looking at the dynamics in contrast with the stable normative structures. Table 7.1 lists the sub-frames used by both channels unveiled in the two cases studies.

For example, the most frequent sub-frames in CNN's coverage of the Syrian crisis were *national security* , *legitimacy*  and *illegitimacy*  with *responsibility*  as the second most frequent frame. Identically, RT's most frequent sub-frame in their coverage of Crimean crisis was *national security*  and *legitimacy/illegitimacy*  sub-frames, while *threat*  sub-frame, the dominant enemy constructing device, was the second most used (see Table 7.1). This comparison clarifies that channels adopt identical framing tactics in similar political contexts. In other words, when a channel adopts an 'interventionist' rhetoric, they frame the situation in terms of a national security crisis, justifying it by continuous references to international norms. Similarly, once the channels' discourse has altered its direction in almost polar political circumstances, the narratives adjust accordingly. For example, when Russia takes the

role of mediator in the Syrian crisis, RT mainly uses sub-frames of *threat*, *responsibility*, and *diplomacy*. In the similar case of Crimea in which the US becomes a mediator, CNN invokes the same contexts of *diplomacy*, constructing Russian *threat* in the region. This point will be further clarified by comparing the meta-level framing later on in this chapter.

I Case Study. RT	I Case Study. CNN
<i>Humanitarian</i>	<i>Humanitarian</i>
<i>Legitimacy</i>	<i>Legitimacy</i>
<i>Chemical Controversy</i>	<i>Chemical Controversy</i>
<i>Threat</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
<i>Diplomacy</i>	<i>National Security</i>
<i>War as Business</i>	<i>War as Business</i>
<i>Historical Mistakes</i>	<i>Credibility</i>
<i>Terrorism</i>	
<i>Multiculturalism</i>	
II Case Study. RT	II Case Study. CNN
<i>Threat</i>	<i>Threat</i>
<i>Legitimacy</i>	<i>Legitimacy</i>
<i>Illegitimacy</i>	<i>Illegitimacy</i>
<i>Democracy</i>	<i>Democracy</i>
<i>National Security</i>	<i>Diplomacy</i>
<i>Double Standards</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>

Table 7.3. Comparing Sub-frames

By comparing the two cases, it is possible to expose which contexts are dynamic structures and which elements of discourse remain rather stable. *Democracy*, for example, is a stable structure in RT's and CNN's narratives.⁷¹ Dynamics, in this case, refer to the way in which interpretations originate in a narrative. Unlike the static framing, when a frame is determined by the sponsor's preconceptions and/or rhetorical aims, counter-frames are always a response to opponents' narratives. Therefore, the

⁷¹ It is important to point out that stability here is not understood in absolute terms but rather refers to the discursive stability. Thus, stable is the structure of discourse that remains unchanged and resistant to the communicative distortions throughout the case.

process is not stable in its nature but is constantly subject to change or transformation, depending on the volatile context. Therefore, focusing on the dynamics of the context, at the same time, reveals exactly how stable the elements of the overarching frames are.

Specifically, the so-called ‘rule of the majority’, used by RT as a discursive element to justify and explain the situation in Crimea, meets CNN’s interpretation of the Maidan events as the just manifestation of citizen power. Here, the discursive stability manifests itself through both channels appealing to this liberal norm. The only difference is that it migrates from one actor to another actor, depending on the contextual goals of a meta-framing at the strategic level. Significantly, both instances mobilize a particular appraisal of the processes that maintains the realm of ‘common-sense’ in the audience both on RT and CNN. In other words, the stable normative structure of discourse is not subject to change (none of the channels attempted to dispute whether democracy is good or bad) but is used instrumentally in order to make a case.

Furthermore, the contexts of *legitimacy* and *illegitimacy* invoked in both cases by RT as well as CNN are another example of how the channels operate with the same normative ideas in order to achieve polar interpretations. For example, much of the Syria-related coverage on both channels discursively engaged with UN rules and regulations. Thus, the channels constructed Russia (in RT’s coverage) and the US (in CNN’s coverage) as the countries that highly value international law and therefore are willing to abide by it. Significantly, the narratives of both channels rarely contained detailed explanation of the normative specifics of the international rules but rather rhetorically appealed to international law as the vital ideal.

Another frame-building element that appeared particularly often in the narratives of both channels was the *threat* sub-frame. This sub-frame condenses the variety of the linguistic and visual codes within the connotative spectrum of violence. Thus, *threat* has an inherently negative overtone which is particularly amplified within the liberal discourse. This discursive element is rather explicitly linked to the soft power construct that focuses on non-violent and non-coercive influence through attraction rather than military power. In the case studies that this research explored, the idea of aggression does not limit itself to the military intervention as such but is also connected to the

realm of intentions. Thus, for example, RT in the Syrian crisis is deeply preoccupied with the possibility of American ‘boots on the ground’ (RT, 2013). Similarly, CNN in the case of the Crimean crisis expresses concern that Russia might intervene into mainland Ukraine. This anticipatory, precautionary sub-framing highlighted how the channels both headed towards painting an image of a peacekeeping country (be it Russia in RT’s coverage or the US in CNN’s coverage). The *threat* sub-frame thus provides a clear demarcation between the ‘violent’ and the ‘non-violent’ as the mutually exclusive actors. Thus, the audience is provided with two dramatically different options as the guidelines for thinking about the events. Such approaches show that frame advocates on both channels share the normative ideas that ultimately shape their strategic narratives as well as the tactical responses to each other.

Employing the methodology that allowed me to assess discourses of the two channels at two levels of abstraction has thus highlighted that norms, as the stable elements of discourse, remain relatively unchallenged by both channels. Rather they serve as orientation points to which both channels commonly appeal in order to promote a convenient interpretation. This goes in line with Morozov’s argument that as a subaltern empire Russia ‘re-acts’ the West in the space the term of which are defined by the Western normative subject (Morozov, 2015). In other words, the two channels share the same ‘pool’ of norms from which they can pick and choose which norm would serve best for constructing tactical explanations. Thus, although at a first glance it may appear surprising that RT employs similar framing mechanisms as CNN, bearing in mind that Russia’s explicit message to the world is traditionally underpinned by the idea of its unique, non-Western cultural path (Saari, 2014), the country’s ideational arsenal is in fact not as different.

This notion complements the arguments proposed by some identity scholars, who emphasise the dualism in Russia’s foreign policy, being on the one hand influenced by the pro-Western liberalist elite discourse and the anti-Western nationalism on the other (Tsygankov, 2016). Thus, the West has served as the defining object of Russia’s national identity, with the elite discourses being constructed around the understanding that liberal norms are the ideal to strive for or a threat against which the country needs to protect itself from. In any respect, the norms of the West have never been ignored.

This can further explain RT's deliberate orientation on the Western audience. In particular, RT's management has frequently stated that their target audience in the West is the opinion generating elite (Interview 2). Therefore, in order to persuade the foreign public to adopt the interpretation desired by the frame sponsors, the channel chooses to play by the normative 'rules' that are accepted in the West. Indeed, the analysis of the two cases highlighted that the two channels operate within the same normative space. In fact, much like in Europe, the ideals of civil society, human rights and the importance of international progress have been occupying the public discourse in the Russian society since the end of the Cold War (Sulashkin et al., 2013). Moreover, Russian liberalism is not strictly post-communist but has its roots in the political thought of the *zapadniki*⁷² group that dates back to the mid-19th century. It is thus fair to conclude that overturning the norms does not seem to be on Russia's foreign policy agenda. Instead, the country seeks to promote its own interpretation of the political actions within the existing normative boundaries. In fact, RT operates these norms instrumentally on the discursive level in order to legitimise its rightfulness and thus to be accepted within the liberal normative realm (Kuhrt & Feklyunina, 2017).

In fact, a number of scholars studying Russian foreign policy from a constructivist perspective have identified that Kremlin's messages are often contradictory. This is usually shown when comparing the 'ideal' image that the country is projecting abroad and Russia's actions in the near-abroad in practice, which is often explained by Putin's administration policy of pragmatism or more hard-line, depending on the geo-economic vision (Feklyunina, 2008). This shift, in fact, can also be seen in RT's discourses. Thus, there is a shift from a more 'laid back' and emotionally reserved reporting during the Syrian crisis to a rather intense and assertive coverage of the Crimean referendum. However, this research argues that RT should not be studied as the network that simply promotes a constructed image of Russia. Rather it aims to reconstruct the entire international set-up as it seen in the West. This does not, however, entail substituting

⁷² Russian: "Westernisers". This political and philosophical movement manifested itself in the discursive debates with slavophiles ("slavophiles"). This fragmented group of political thinkers of the 1840s and 1850s was highly influenced by ideas of Hegel, in particular the notion of progress. In this vein, they proposed a Western-style development for the Russian Empire through political reforms. Writers, journalists and publicists, from the moderate liberals Granovsky, T., Katkov, P., Annenkov P. to the more left-leaning, Alexander Herzen, were among the few who formed the social class of intelligentsia in the 19th century Russia (Poroshin, 1905).

the existing norms with entirely different ones. In fact, the idea of what is good and what is bad is never challenged. But the legitimacy of an actor, such as Russia, to freely operate with these norms, to decide what role to attribute to what actor is how the persuasion process of RT can be interpreted.

The findings of this research have thus demonstrated in detail how this tactical level framing allows the frame sponsors to produce the arguments without shifting the normative dimensions entirely. Moreover, the intertextual analysis that explains the process of framing highlighted that the choice of contexts (sub-frames) that are invoked at a tactical level is never random. On the contrary, the sub-level framing mechanisms entail constant referencing to the original narratives that come across in the dialogue between the channels.

Within this environment, communicative *distortions* affect frame sponsors' behaviour in a way that determines which context they mobilize while covering a particular event. The distortions in this research refer to several aspects of the dialogue.⁷³ For example, when covering the Crimean crisis, RT invoked the 'human rights' context by focusing on the intentions of Kremlin to protect Russian compatriots in the region. CNN chose to include this context to its narrative with a different interpretation – mocking the integrity of Russia's intentions ('all sounds rather ominous', CNN, 27 February 2014). This virtual reply to RT's narrative was evidently a shift from the direct framing to a countering effort. Also, the deconstructing strategies that RT commonly employs is an explicit example of such distortions. In fact, these distortions are the existential elements of the dialogue in the sense that they establish the virtual communication between the narratives.

⁷³ See Chapter 2 for the definitions of the key terms that are employed in this study.

c. Restating the Argument

In its quest to shed new light on understanding the mechanisms of meaning construction, this study has *first* developed and deployed the multi-level methodological model of frame and counter-frame analysis. *Second*, framing and counter-framing, as objects of research, have been analyzed through the conceptual prism of persuasion.⁷⁴ These intentional efforts to promote interpretations in order to achieve a shift in meanings are thus strategic discourses. *Third*, this study has also opened up to the tactical dimension of discourse in order to understand how strategic meaning construction may, to a certain extent, be subject to communicative distortions of rival discourses in the international ideational environment. Therefore, this project analyzed both *functioning*⁷⁵ and *instrumental*⁷⁶ frames.

With regard to the *instrumental* framing, my primary focus was on RT. In this strategic sense, Russia's focus on countering can be understood in terms of re-establishing its powerful status on the global arena. This discursive defense, largely informed by the Soviet tradition, is rooted in Russia's conceptual understanding of soft power that is seen to pose an inherent threat to the country's stability. Within this framework, RT continuously employed *counter-framing*. While direct framing is rather aimed at maintaining or confirming a state's prestige, counter-framing is focused on undermining the powerful status of a rival state, while re-establishing the legitimacy of the new interpretations by attempting to transform them into intersubjective understandings. The study argues that this process took various shapes. On the one hand, there is direct countering that explicitly references the discourse it is aimed at deconstructing. On the other hand, there is implicit countering that preemptively engages with the counter arguments that the rival discourses are anticipated to produce. In this respect, counter-framing is relational, dialogic process that is inward and outward oriented. Within this discursive practice, response and argument are dialectically merged and mutually constituted in the way that makes them existentially

⁷⁴ For an elaboration of the conceptual assumptions that organise this study refer to Chapter 2.

⁷⁵ This refers to the tactical level of framing.

⁷⁶ This refers to the first, the strategic, facet of framing.

dependent on one another. As a result of this juxtaposition, new interpretations are produced that are tactical steps on the way to construct strategic discourse.

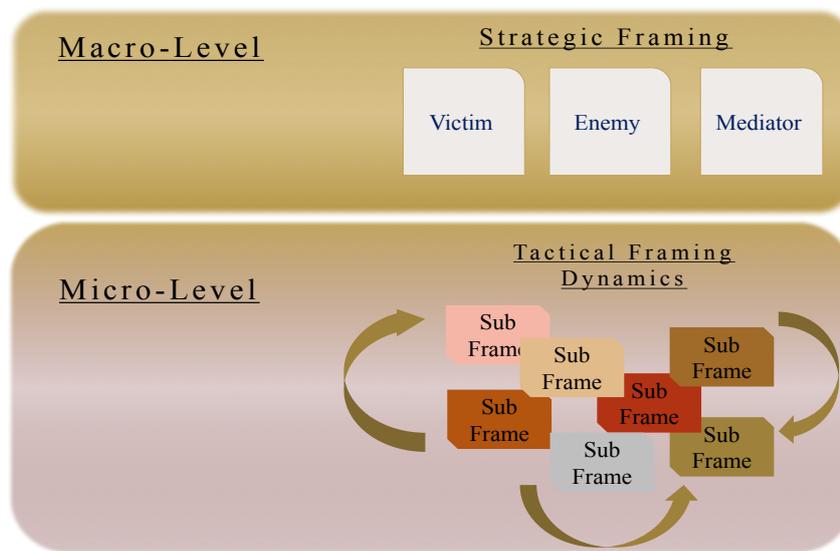


Figure 7.2. Multi-Level Frame Analysis Model

As Figure 7.2 demonstrates, strategic and tactical framing are part of the same discursive space. At the macro-level, meta-frames are rather stable elements that hold together the discourse. Persuasive strategies are thus directed at constructing the elements of the meta-frames. Counter-framing is a rather dynamic process that operates at the tactical level, operating with sub-frames that form *ad hoc* interpretations. It is due to this responsive nature of counter-framing that some foreign policy messages may not always seem to fit into the overall discursive strategy. Thus, for example, the paradox that despite Russia's 'special' power identity (Massari, 1998), it consistently appeals to liberal norms, can be explained by pointing to the instrumental efficacy of these norms to produce reactive responses to rival discourses. Thus, tactically, meaning construction is highly contingent on the contexts dictated by empirical circumstances, normative boundaries, and procedural factors of communicative practice. In this respect, sub-frames are not only instrumental but also functioning elements of discourse.

d. Filling the Gap: A Contribution to IR

The trends in IR reviewed in Chapter 1, although from different angles, all point to the importance of communication for enriching our understanding of global politics. However, few of these approaches provide practical solutions for studying it. This study's contribution to the field is, therefore, two-fold. On the one hand, it proposed a systematic *methodological* strategy that allows us to study the facets of discourse that were previously side-lined. In this respect, it offers an analytical tool that can be applied across the different approaches in the discipline. On the other hand, by presenting a detailed examination of the discursive processes that take place at the two levels of communication, this work exposed the various contextualisation techniques that shed the new light on the ideational elements that inform Kremlin's discursive practices. It thus contributes to the understanding of Russian *foreign policy*.

The theoretical inferences of this project are relevant to the field of International Relations not least because a better understanding of the strategy and tactics of the political communication process sheds new light on foreign policy. Challenging the traditional emphasis on strategy and monologue, this work insists that the dialogue between the discourses is an important object of analysis that unfolds the relationship in the international system. To use a metaphor, deconstructing the structure of the dialogue between two people in conflict and addressing these communicative mistakes may not save the relationship between the two individuals but will at least de-escalate tensions. Extending this notion to the social realm, understanding the mechanisms of international communication opens up the possibilities to move past certain conflict-sustaining fixations. With this in mind, this work represents an invitation to integrate the tactical level of discourse to the discussion of language as a social and intersubjective process. This, in turn, offers some insights into the ideational underpinnings of foreign policy. In particular, we are better able to understand the boundaries of discursive legitimacy. In other words, by tracking contexts intertextually, we can see which frames create resonance in target audiences and which frames are neglected. Here, the news broadcasting realm is particularly relevant for analysis due to its immediate nature. Unlike the official political communication that is highly formalized, the media sphere offers the analyst more proximity to the processes that are often understood beyond agency. Bringing together textual and visual analysis under

one methodological umbrella enriches the analysis from the one-sided understanding of strategic communication to the multifaceted picture where functioning elements and communicative procedures partake in the process. Putting it figuratively, it invites the researchers to read what they see and watch what is written.

The study, in a way, took a step back methodologically and re-introduced a notion of discourse that is possible to be operationalised effectively as an analytical tool. By doing so it does not strip the concept off its critical element, but rather locates it within a methodological model that can be effectively applied across theoretical paradigms. For example, unlike the normative liberal perspectives that the Public Diplomacy and Soft Power research often operate within, the framing and counter-framing concept that utilizes intertextual analysis offers a more neutral backdrop as a starting point for the scientific inquiry. In other words, tracing contexts moves us to a more accurate rendering of the complex mechanisms of international political communication that, in turn, sheds new light on the representations that underpin foreign policy strategies.

As the comparative summary of the two case studies presented in the beginning of this chapter, the performative aspect of international communication can provide insights into the dynamics and statics of normative ideas in world politics. In particular, framing and counter framing within the model proposed in this dissertation can showcase the relationship between normative ideas and the interpretations that are used for the purposes of persuasion. This allows moving constructivist research away from the meta-debates to engage better with the practical aspects of their theory. For example, the constructivists' claims about the co-constitutive nature of international relations is rarely highlighted in the necessary brightness due to the methodological limitations. By looking at the dialogue and analyzing the intertextual links between the discourses of the two channels, we are better able to understand how procedural factors of global communication are informed by the historical practice of the professionals and how ideational elements constitute each other. Thus, the Russian foreign policy inconsistencies that are often brought to the discipline's attention by the researchers who focus on meaning can be better explained by analyzing the tactical facet of communication in comparison to the strategic persuasive practices. However, unlike post-structuralist research that is inherently critical in its focus on discourses between

the dominant and the marginalized, the approach that is essentially aimed at uncovering the hierarchies in societies, the multi-level framing model of this research provides a rather neutral theoretical backdrop for the analysis of meaning from the strategic and functioning perspectives.

The analytical framework of framing and counter-framing that has been developed and applied to the case studies of this research, generated a range of theoretical and empirical insights about the mechanisms of persuasion, with its internal dynamics and statics. This approach, however, did not aim at testing the theory in a strictly positivist sense, nor can a researcher make absolute objective claims within this framework. However, within its interpretivist approach, the work strived to provide deeper insights into the mechanisms of persuasion and dig deeper to deconstruct the co-constitutive elements of the process. In particular, coding and the systematic methodological structure are what makes this approach more easily applicable and better fit as analytical tools for different approaches in IR.

e. Implications and Avenues for Future Research

Framing is often said to be the more rigorous method of textual analysis as compared to critical discourse analysis.⁷⁷ Indeed, it provides a more structured framework for evaluating text, and within the methodology proposed here also includes visuals. However, the inferences generated through this research cannot and are not being proposed as objective claims. On the contrary, the work adopts a critical lens within which post-structuralist approaches often operate. In this respect, the goal of frame analysis is to deconstruct the systems of signification. What deconstructive research means is that it separates the discursive dichotomies and reverses hierarchies. Frame and counter-frame analysis is thus most effectively employed to generate suppositions about the characteristics and processes that surround normative ideas and their relationship with persuasive practices. Ideas, manifested through contexts, may in fact transcend discourses and the analysis of frames can help explain the possibility. However, if the conclusions generated by frame analysis are offered positively as casual claims to explain change in international relations, the limitations of this approach should be carefully considered.

This work thus has proposed a systematic analytical lens through which different conundrums of international relations, in particular those that are related to persuasive practices of communication, can be studied. However, this does not imply that this methodology has no venues for further development and clarification. Building upon the results generated in this study, at least three venues for further research should be highlighted.

The first road that the researcher could embark on from this point is to dig deeper into the conceptual facets of the proposed methodology. In particular, the relationship between the *strategic* and *tactical* framing deserves to be in focus of the future research. Moreover, the further theoretical understanding of which frames are employed instrumentally and how this process correlates with the functioning aspect of the dialogue deserves greater attention.

⁷⁷ For the review of framing theory see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Second, the empirical expansion on Russian foreign policy is a fertile avenue for further research. Novel inferences can be generated within the analytical lens of framing and counter framing by applying the toolkit to the other objects of analysis. For example, in order to expand and further unpack the normative underpinnings of Russian foreign policy, it is often noted that researchers should analyze this in relation to domestic politics. In this respect, looking at the discourses produced by the domestic Russian media outlets and tracing the origins of contexts that are being counter-framed may provide a more detailed account of the state of Russian identity.

Moreover, the research can move in the direction of scrutinizing the actual political dialogues in international politics. In fact, any form of dialogue, be it rhetorical conversations that do not bear the formal dialogic structure or the long-lasting debates that have little hope for resolution, could all be approached from the systematic framing and counter-framing perspectives. Thus, the linguistic confusions can be deconstructed in order to shed new light on the mechanisms of political negotiations, in particular those that take place in the open discursive space. For example, the conundrums of climate change, Brexit talks, peace negotiations and territorial disputes can be potentially scrutinized for the normative clash and thus the communicative distortions that sustain or reinforce the gap of understanding between the actors of these conflicts.

The third route that this analysis opens up is the focus on social media as the object of analysis. The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine as well as the rising political tensions between Russian and the West are often reflected in the heated discussions over the Kremlin's social media manipulation. Academic research has been engaging in social media analysis that often employs tracing Twitter and Facebook posts or other forms of online activity from the perspective of these platforms' ability to challenge regimes (White & McAllister, 2013). Other studies look at social effects of media (Morris, 2012) or the impact of social media on the mainstream news in Russia (Simons, 2016). Less studied, however, is the extent to which the manipulation strategies of authoritarian governments are reinforced and amplified by the citizens actively participating, enhancing, and disseminating the dominant discourses that are imposed upon them through disinformation practices. The analytical lens of framing and counter-framing that employs intertextual analysis could help unravel, by analysing

conflicting narratives, the way in which the internet is controlled and, at the same time, the way in which the freedom that the internet offers can be used as a tool of manipulation. Tracing sub-frames intertextually in social media discourses, also from a dialogic perspective, could prompt theorizing on the co-constitutive aspect of actors and influences in social media.

f. Conclusion

“Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connexion. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be adequately described. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction”

(Marx, 1873, p. 14).

Indeed, the course of research is never fully reflected in the textual form, just as the reality cannot be fit in its absolute complexity into a single narrative. This work started with a number of guiding insights that presupposed the practice of inquiry. Upon confronting the object of research, these were adjusted and refined, the process that can be broadly referred to as theory generation. In this respect, it was an immersive journey into the discursive battle between the two channels that operate within the dialogic environment of global communication. The fruits that this research has yielded are of two kinds: methodological and theoretical advancements that can be applied to the future cases and empirical clarifications of Russian foreign policy.

As the Introduction to this dissertation problematized, the discursive construct that Russia is somewhat dichotomous to the West often defines the boundaries that organise the empirical research on the country’s foreign policy. This dissertation has challenged the existing normativity of the frameworks that is often implicit. By taking a closer look at the contradictions which are born in the discourse that is not isolated from the environment of the global communication but is responsive and dialogic, the dissertation addresses the lack of coherent explanations of the inconsistencies of Russian foreign policy that are often explained as solely dependent on the individuals in Kremlin’s apparatus.

By focusing on the countering efforts of RT within the inclusive multi-level framework, the research opened up another dimension of discourse. On the one hand, it allowed to highlight the underpinnings behind Russia’s ‘defensiveness’. Part of these reasons are hidden in the principles that organise the persuasive practices within the country’s

public diplomacy strategy. On the other hand, it allowed to see that at the tactical level of discourse the journalists of RT operate with *ad-hoc* justifications that are reactive towards the rival discourses are thus highly contingent on them. This allows to counter the traditional approaches to Russian foreign policy that portray the country's persuasive efforts as operating in a vacuum. Unlike the Soviet Union that was characterized by the high degree of isolation, Russia is highly embedded in the international ideational environment. In this respect, the fact that both channels, while intending to achieve the opposing outcomes, utilize identical framing mechanisms, both appealing to liberal norms, does no more seem as a paradox. The conclusions here, however, do not deny that there are normative elements that constitute Russia's rhetoric. Instead, by breaking down the normative ideas, meta-frames and sub-frames and exposing both the dynamics and statics of these elements of discourse, the analysis showed how they relate to each other within the process of persuasion.

This, in turn, sheds new light on our understanding of global interaction, broadening the strategic bias in IR that often overlooks both dialogue and media. As such, it pushes an agenda for a more-inclusive theoretical approach that does not side-line the various channels of communication but at the same time does not limit itself with normative critique.

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Interviews

Interview 1: Interview with a programme editor of RT, 6 July 2015, Skype Interview.



Interview 3: Interview with Yuriy Linkevich, former employee of RT International, 7 September 2016, Moscow.

Interview 4: Interview with a news editor of one of the services of Rossiya Segodnya in Moscow, 8 July 2015, Moscow.

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