**Covering Libya: A Framing Analysis of Al Jazeera and BBC Coverage of the 2011 Libyan Uprising and NATO Intervention**

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**Abstract:**

*This article examines the broadcast coverage by Al Jazeera and the BBC of the 2011 uprising in Libya and the ensuing NATO intervention in the country. Through a comparative analysis of Al Jazeera Arabic, Al Jazeera English, BBC Arabic, and BBC World News, the article evaluates the impact of these two network’s political contexts on their coverage. Both Al Jazeera and the BBC are based in countries that were active participants in the 2011 NATO intervention, Al Jazeera in Qatar and the BBC in the UK. Thus, the 2011 Libyan uprising and NATO intervention presents a prime opportunity to evaluate how the political contexts of these two networks affected their coverage. The sample under study covered a period of roughly four weeks and was analysed by means of a framing analysis, whereby framing refers to the way a news story is packaged, organised, and narrated. Ultimately, the study found that the coverage of both these networks was aligned with the national and foreign policy interests of their home countries, making their political contexts the main influence on their news agendas. News frames across the sample reflected coverage that was largely supportive of the aims of opposition and the intervention.*

**Key Words:**

*Al Jazeera, Arab uprisings, BBC, framing analysis, Humanitarian Intervention, Libya, Qadhdhafi, Qatar, UK*

In February 2011, Libya experienced anti-government protests that eventually culminated in an armed uprising that removed former Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The movement, which started on 17 February 2011, led to the formation of the opposition National Transitional Council (NTC), and ultimately, to the foreign NATO-led military intervention, which NATO claimed was based on humanitarian aims. This military intervention officially started on 19 March 2011, following the UN passage of Resolution No. 1973. This article analyses how each of four broadcast channels framed the 2011 Libyan uprising, which eventually became militarised, and the ensuing military intervention. These channels are Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA), Al Jazeera English (AJE), BBC Arabic (BBCA), and BBC World News (BBCW). Through a comparative analysis of the four channels, this article draws comparisons and analyses the differences with respect to how each of these channels, and their larger networks, covered both the uprising and intervention. This analysis examines a sample of roughly four weeks. Week one of the sample involves the first week of the uprising; 17 - 24 February 2011. Week two of the sample involves the week prior to the commencement of the NATO intervention in Libya on 19 March, 2011, and thus, week two of the sample begins on 12 March, 2011 and ends on 18 March, 2011. The third week of the sample involves the first week of the NATO intervention in Libya, and thus begins on March 19, 2011 and ends on March 25, 2011. I also assessed broadcasts during the last 11 days of the NATO intervention, starting with the day Muammar Gaddafi was killed (20 October 2011) and ending with the day NATO officially announced the end of its military operations in Libya (31 October 2011). I chose these weeks to reflect and represent particular discussions that are relevant to this analysis, namely the Libyan “revolution” and subsequent intervention. Thus, the first week of the sample was chosen to include discussions and commentary relevant to the birth of the movement and the progression of the Libyan government crackdown, while the second and third weeks of the sample were chosen as representative of pre-intervention debate and debate surrounding the progress of the intervention. Additionally, weeks two and three of the sample were also very relevant to this study since they contained the majority of the pro and anti-interventionist debate within the sample. As for the final ten days of the sample, I chose them to represent discussions and analysis regarding the death of Qadhdhafi, the successes of the opposition, and the end of the NATO mission. Through the exploration of these two networks’ coverage of this uprising and intervention, this article considers the impact of the political context on international news networks, especially when their funding is closely related to government, as is the case with both Al Jazeera and the BBC.

The political context here is defined as the context of how these channels are funded, in addition to the national and foreign policy interests of where they are based. As stated above, this article considers the impact of political contexts on networks, especially when their funding is closely related to government. This is especially the case with AJE and AJA, which are directly funded by the Qatari royal family. It is also the case with BBCA, which is funded by the UK Foreign Office, and BBCW, which is owned by BBC Global News Ltd, and funded by subscription and advertising revenues. However, while BBCW might be commercially funded, it still relies almost entirely on resources available through the license fee funding of BBC News, in addition to government-aided BBC World Service.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The 2011 Libyan uprising and ensuing NATO intervention present an excellent opportunity to evaluate these influences on the news agendas of Al Jazeera and the BBC. This is because each of these networks are based in countries that were active participants in the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya, and the comparison was especially appropriate since both countries shared similar foreign policy aims in Libya. Al Jazeera might be more restricted by its political context (as an Arab network based in an Arab country) than the BBC, which might be viewed as independent, by virtue of its Western and democratic political context. Thus, in the case of the BBC especially, one would assume coverage to be largely independent; acting as a watchdog rather than a mouthpiece of national or foreign policy. Here a discussion of Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s “propaganda model” is valuable.[[2]](#footnote-2) They argued that commercial news media produce propaganda rather than impartial news, especially in times of war, through a system that more or less spontaneously follows the interests of the state. Their work is part of a tradition of critical scholarship that supports this view, with theories ranging from Daniel Hallin’s “sphere of legitimate controversy”, to W. Lance Bennett’s theories on elite indexing, among many others.[[3]](#footnote-3) For critics within this tradition, state influence over the media, in Western democratic societies especially, might be indirect, with relatively little interference from governments.

 Although Herman and Chomsky primarily are concerned with news media in the United States, it is worth noting that they do draw on examples from the British media and their argument that the media “manufacture consent” for elite policies could also be applicable to the BBC.[[4]](#footnote-4) As for Al Jazeera, it may be argued that its position as a broadcaster in a region characterised by restrictions on news coverage makes it even more susceptible to the influence of its political context. Moreover, both Al Jazeera and the BBC are networks with funding that is directly related to the state (clearly more so in the case of Al Jazeera), making them more liable to subtle or coercive influences from their political contexts than are commercially owned or funded networks.

In the same vein, it is also important to consider how indirect mechanisms, such as shared beliefs between journalists and political elites might encourage self-censorship among journalists themselves.[[5]](#footnote-5) Such shared beliefs may involve nationalism, but might also involve dominant cultural understandings that stem from similar backgrounds.[[6]](#footnote-6) Preconceived dominant moral frameworks also might play a role in self-censorship; ultimately giving rise to what Martin Bell labeled “the journalism of attachment”.[[7]](#footnote-7) The presence of these indirect mechanisms of influence aids in formulating an understanding of how networks such as Al Jazeera and the BBC might forward narratives that fit with the needs of their respective political contexts, without assuming a top-down chain of command, where state enforcers dictate news.

**The Al Jazeera and the BBC Networks**

Both AJA and AJE belong to the Al Jazeera network, with AJA being the Arabic language broadcast, which was launched in 1996, and AJE being the English language broadcast, aimed at an international audience. AJE was launched in 2006, ten years after AJA. The Al Jazeera network is based in Qatar, with numerous international bureaus. Upon its inception in 1996, Al Jazeera’s coverage revolutionised the Arab media landscape through its provision of counter-narratives to government-controlled media.[[8]](#footnote-8) It also has been credited with creating a new Arab public sphere, and providing a space for previously marginalised voices in the Arab world.[[9]](#footnote-9) AJE’s impact, for its part, has been described as “conciliatory”, particularly through its capabilities in discrediting cross-cultural stereotypes and “injecting a multicultural knowledge into the public sphere.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

 However, following the Arab uprisings, Al Jazeera’s coverage began to shift with each uprising and mainly according to Qatari foreign interests. This was the case with regard to its coverage of the 2011 Syrian uprising, which was highly supportive of the disorganised opposition, thus echoing Qatari political and economic support of the opposition to the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad.It was also the case with regard to coverage of the 2013 popular coup that removed former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi from power, although in that case the network’s coverage was supportive of the deposed president and his party, the Muslim Brotherhood.[[11]](#footnote-11) Ultimately, the fluctuating Al Jazeera news agenda led to resignations from Al Jazeera’s newsrooms, with staff citing bias as one of the main reasons behind their departures.[[12]](#footnote-12) Research investigating the impact of Al Jazeera’s Qatari political context on its coverage has found a correlation between Al Jazeera’s coverage and Qatari foreign policy interests.[[13]](#footnote-13) However, there is a gap with regard to systemic and rigorous content analysis of Qatar’s influence on Al Jazeera’s coverage of the Arab uprisings. Qatar’s emergent role in the Arab political landscape following the 2011 Arab uprisings highlights the need for a systemic analysis of Al Jazeera’s coverage for a proper understanding of the implications of the Qatari political context on the network’s coverage, and subsequently, its credibility.

With regard to the BBC, BBCA is the network’s Arabic language channel, while BBCW is the BBC’s English language service aimed at an international audience. As with Al Jazeera, research has focussed on the implications of the UK’s national and foreign interests on the BBC’s agenda, and some of these studies have found that the BBC is affected by its political context.[[14]](#footnote-14) Because of the direct British involvement in the NATO intervention in Libya, the Libyan case is significant for developing further understanding of the impact of the BBC’s political context on its coverage of the Arab uprisings.

While NATO launched its the 2011 mission with stated humanitarian aims, it is important to consider the political machinations that gave rise to and continued throughout the operation. Hugh Roberts, the North Africa Director of the International Crisis Group (ICG) in 2011, holds that during the uprising the ICG sought to provide non-violent alternatives to war, including a ceasefire forwarded by the Libyan government, but both the opposition and certain Western governments (including the UK) dismissed over five ceasefire initiatives.[[15]](#footnote-15) Roberts highlighted that it was impossible for Western governments to allow ceasefires because they would involve negotiations, which ultimately would have sabotaged any of possibility of regime change.[[16]](#footnote-16) Roberts’s statements are central to understanding the coalition’s aims behind the Libyan mission, chiefly regime change. It is worth noting that throughout the sample, a common theme across all channels was the dismissal of any Libyan government calls for a ceasefire.

However, while these networks’ political contexts might influence the general direction of their coverage, differences can exist between channels within the networks themselves. For example, with regard to Al Jazeera, several studies have noted differences between AJE and AJA, which have been attributed to their different organisational structures, audiences, and goals.[[17]](#footnote-17) These studies have also found that AJA is more affected by its Qatari political context, and Qatar’s national and foreign interests, than is AJE. Other influences that might affect these channels’ news agendas include the impact of language. Barkho has found that while AJA and AJE might have the same owners, they remain editorially independent from one another.[[18]](#footnote-18) He contrasts the Al Jazeera network with the BBC network, and in doing so he draws on the example of Al Jazeera’s and the BBC’s Middle East Glossaries.

Barkho’s analysis found that AJE and AJA were two distinct channels with two editorial guidelines and Middle East Glossaries that detail nomenclature associated with covering conflict in the Middle East, most especially the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.[[19]](#footnote-19) In contrast, in the case of the BBC, all channels under the network operate under a unified Middle East Glossary, and news workers at all BBC channels are instructed to report on the Middle East conflict in a very similar manner.[[20]](#footnote-20) The BBC’s Middle East Glossaries, titled *Guide to Facts and Terminology on Israel and the Palestinians: Key Terms*, have come into being only following a power struggle and lobbying from inside and outside the corporation.[[21]](#footnote-21) These glossaries have been compiled by four BBC editors: Senior Editorial Adviser Malcolm Balen, Head of Africa and Middle East Jerry Timmins, Middle East Editor Jeremy Bowen, and Head of Arabic Service Hosam el- Sokkari.[[22]](#footnote-22) Through these glossaries, it becomes clear that each of these channels has a particular way of viewing the Middle East, and news workers are instructed to report on the region accordingly.

The audience is another influence on these channels’ news agendas, and this is also evidenced through their different language glossaries. For example, while the BBC’s glossaries reject the use of emotional, value-laden, and judgmental words (such as terrorists) unless directly quoted or attributed, it does allow the use of equally loaded words such as insurgent, Islamist, or militant, particularly in descriptions of Palestinians and Iraqis.[[23]](#footnote-23) AJA, for its part, would not apply such descriptions to the Palestinian resistance, as such coverage in unlikely to appeal to the channel’s Arab viewers, due to the centrality of the Palestinian cause to Arab/Muslim publics. Thus, along with the political context, other influences might come to affect these channels’ news agendas, such as language (as with the Middle East Glossaries) or cultural norms, as is the case with AJA’s sympathetic coverage of Palestinians. Here, it is worth noting that sympathetic coverage of Palestine might also be due to biases of staff who may be pro-Palestinian by ideology or national origins; thisis particularly common across networks/channels that staff Arab journalists.[[24]](#footnote-24)

**Method-Framing Analysis**

*Research Question: To what extent did Al Jazeera’s and the BBC’s political contexts influence their coverage of the 2011 Libyan uprising and ensuing NATO intervention?*

To address the extent to which the political contexts of Al Jazeera and the BBC affected their coverage of the Libyan uprising and NATO intervention, I analysed the sample by means of a framing analysis. Stephen D. Reese identifies framing as “the way events are organised and made sense of,” and he finds framing analysis a very appropriate method in understanding the media’s role in political life.[[25]](#footnote-25) Robert Entman theorises that framing consistently provides a way of identifying the power of a communicating text.[[26]](#footnote-26) This makes framing analysis a suitable method for analysing the Libya sample and understanding these networks’ role in forwarding the agendas of their political contexts.

The significance of framing lies in the fact that it can affect both the individual and society as a whole. On the individual level, news frames may result in changed attitudes after exposure; while on the societal level, news frames may have an impact on issues such as politicisation, socialisation, or collective action.[[27]](#footnote-27) This makes news frames important to study, especially during times of social upheaval and political change that is largely dependent on collective action, as with the 2011 Arab uprisings. Paul D’Angelo finds that “framing shapes public dialogue about political issues”[[28]](#footnote-28), and, in doing so, he locates the role of the journalists in shaping public dialogue. This highlights the necessity of locating the influences that affect journalists, chief among them the political contexts within which their organisations operate.

A certain frame’s ability to dominate the news agenda is very much dependent on “the economic and cultural resources of its sponsors,”[[29]](#footnote-29) and as the largest global exporter of natural gas, Qatar, and the media frames it might promote through Al Jazeera, present a unique opportunity for framing research. Al Jazeera’s funding is solely dependent on the Qatari royal family, and a close study of advertisements on both AJE and AJA showed that their only advertisers were companies closely related to the royal family and its resources. In the case of the BBC, as detailed above, its source of funding also is connected closely to its political context, thus highlighting the suitability of the network’s coverage for framing analysis. The above points regarding ownership, and its implication on coverage, allow Herman and Chomsky’s “propaganda model”, in particular its first filter of ownership, to be applicable to Al Jazeera’s and the BBC’s coverage of the Libyan uprising.[[30]](#footnote-30)

While the impact of organisational influences on framing have been thoroughly considered, the sample under study most especially has been examined and assessed within the context of political and social power. Indeed, the examination of media texts in relation to their political and social contexts has been neglected within recent framing research of the last decade.[[31]](#footnote-31) The impact of Al Jazeera’s Qatari political context on its news production also has been enhanced by the developing Qatari geopolitical role (and goals) in the region, most especially in Libya. Qatar, as stated previously, was an active participant in the NATO intervention, through its provision of war planes, its funding of the opposition and the training of its fighters.[[32]](#footnote-32) Indeed, some of these Libyan fighters even were flown to Doha for special military training[[33]](#footnote-33). The UK was also an active participant, and its role was not merely limited to airstrikes or Royal Navy ships in Libyan waters, as it later became apparent that British Special Forces were deployed on the ground in order to aid the Libyan opposition.[[34]](#footnote-34) Through their efforts, both the UK and Qatar contributed to the final collapse of Qadhdhafi’s government. Thus, both Al Jazeera’s and the BBC’s Libya samples have been examined through the method of framing analysis, which is suitable for an investigation that considers the affect of a number of social actors, including politicians, social movements, and various organisations, on news production.[[35]](#footnote-35)

**Types of Frames**

I used two types of frames throughout the framing research; generic frames and issue specific frames. Claes H. De Vreese established the distinction between pre-packaged frames, also known as generic frames, and issue-specific frames.[[36]](#footnote-36) According to De Vreese, generic frames are defined as those that “transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics and some even over time and in different cultural contexts.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Issue specific frames, in contrast, are those that are associated with and are significant only to specific events or topics.[[38]](#footnote-38) For this study, issue-specific frames were found to be most useful for accurately representing the differences between these channels in terms of their coverage. Defining the frames in this manner gave insight into the intricacies of how the military operation and the uprising were covered, especially since differences between these channels were relatively small.

In order to locate the frames found across the sample, two questions were defined, and according to these questions, frames were divided into two categories: *Revolution Frames* and *Intervention Frames.* The two questions were are follows,

1. *How were the Libyan uprising and ensuing armed conflict defined and understood?*
2. *How were the intervention and foreign response defined and explained?*

Frames that were related to the first question-- how the Libyan uprising was defined and understood, fell into the *Revolution Frames* category. With respect to the frames that were related to the second question--how the intervention was defined and explained, they fell into the *Intervention Frames* category. Through the *Revolution Frames*, it was possible to determine how each of the channels framed the uprising, the protesters, the opposition, and the opposition fighters and their progress on the battlefield. Through the *Intervention Frames,* it was possible to determine how each of these channels framed the intervention, its limitations as per the UN mandate, and the response of the larger international community.

**Sample**

The sample covered a period of roughly four different weeks from across four channels, and the data were collected from across four daily news programmes. Each of these programmes aired in the evenings, and focussed on a recap of the day’s news along with analysis of the most prominent stories of the day. There were variations in the formats of each of these programmes, and these differences were kept in consideration when comparing the coverage. AJE’s *Newshour* aired at 6 pm GMT and lasted for an hour. AJA’s *Hasad Al Youm* followed the same format, and aired at 8 pm GMT. BBCW’s *World News Tonight* aired at 7 pm GMT on weekdays and involved three editions, each lasting 25 minutes. Each of these editions covered the same top stories, with slight variations in content. Additionally, since *World News Today* only aired on weekdays, a regular news bulletin that aired at 7 pm GMT on weekends was considered the unit of analysis for weekend programming. BBCA’s programme, also titled *Hasad Al Youm,* only aired on weekdays and at 8 pm GMT. The same method was followed, whereby the 8 pm GMT weekend news bulletins were considered as the unit of analysis. BBCA’s *Hasad Al Youm* format was similar to that of AJE’s *Newshour* and AJA’s *Hasad El Youm*, as it aired as an individual programme over one continuous hour, rather than following the three editions format that was unique to BBCW. Since BBCA’s *Hasad Al Youm* was taken off the air in mid-2011, this meant that for the final ten days of the Libya sample, the news story was located in the 8 pm GMT news bulletin. Thus, for BBCA’s last ten days of its Libya sample, the unit of analysis was the 8 pm GMT news bulletin.

AJE contained the highest number of stories about Libya, with 50 stories in its sample, because AJE’s *Newshour* occasionally aired two or more stories on Libya as part of its programme. BBCW contained the second highest number of Libya stories, with a total of 44 stories in its sample. The higher number of BBCW stories might be attributed to its programme *World News Today* broadcasting three consecutive editions as part of its daily programme, and stories might be repeated on each edition, with slight variations regarding analysis or commentary. For example, BBCW’s *World News Today* might run a certain story on the Libyan uprising on each of its three consecutive editions, and each of these stories might vary slightly in terms of content. AJE, on the other hand, might include three stories on Libya in its *Newshour* programme, and each story would discuss a different issue, for example, one might discuss the uprising and another might discuss migrants fleeing the violence in Libya. AJA came in third with 39 news items, while BBCA had 36 news items. Additionally, AJA had the longest news stories, with the average daily news story on Libya spanning nearly an hour of coverage. Since BBCA’s *Hasad El Youm* was cancelled in April 2011, the final ten days of BBCA’s sample were composed of very short news bulletins of around a minute or a minute and a half in length. Story length was considered when assessing coverage, as more time devoted to a news story indicated that it was high on the news agenda. Moreover, longer stories also allowed for more analysis and discussion, and implied the presence of several intersecting frames in one story.

**Libya’s Frames**

I designed a codebook in order to determine the presence of frames, and I based it on the codebook utilised by Robinson et al. (2010) in their framing analysis of British broadcast and print media coverage of the 2003 Iraq War.[[39]](#footnote-39) Robinson et al. was relevant to this research on several levels. First, the codebook appeared to be appropriate to this study, especially since both studies focussed on military operations, and the manner with which they were framed across the media. Second, there were several parallels between the cases of Iraq and Libya specifically. Both involved two long serving Arab leaders who eventually became the targets of military operations at the ends of their lives. Most importantly, the nature of these two operations was similar. While the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya was launched on the premise of a humanitarian mission, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, dubbed *Operation Iraqi Freedom* by the US government, also justified in part on the basis that it would free the Iraqi people.

I determined three key story elements in this study to establish the frames found across the four channels. These frames were issue specific and were determined specifically for this sample through coding and analysis. These three key story elements were story tone, presenter/correspondent tone, and explanations and arguments that went toward legitimising the “revolution,” delegitimising the Libyan government, or legitimising the intervention. The presenters, correspondents or guests forwarded these explanations and arguments. By coding and analysing these three key story elements, I found several frames to represent trends in coverage across the four channels. The *Revolution Frames* and *Intervention Frames* found across Libya’s sample are listed and described below.

**Revolution Frames**

***The Revolution Frame:*** This frame defined the uprising in Libya as a legitimate revolution with legitimate demands to remove an illegitimate leader. It referred to the uprising explicitly as a “revolution,” and described the protesters as “revolutionaries.”

***The Protest Frame:*** This frame identified the uprising primarily as a protest movement that was spreading rapidly. It did not refer to the uprising explicitly as a “revolution” and nor did it describe the protesters as “revolutionaries.”

***The Qadhdhafi Demonization Frame:*** This frame portrayed Muammar Qadhdhafi as an illegitimate leader who was killing his own people. It generally portrayed him in a demonic manner, through commentary and footage, and often focussed on his frequent public addresses that were shown on Libyan state television in the first two months of the uprising. These addresses often were described or depicted as rambling, incoherent, or terrifying in news stories. This frame also involved the demonization ofQadhdhafi following his death, using descriptions such as tyrant or dictator.

***The Government Offensive Frame:*** This frame portrayed the conflict as a one-sided government assault against an unarmed population. News stories generally contained footage of government attacks and focussed on civilian casualties, sometimes showing footage from hospitals and morgues.

***The Battle Frame****:* Here, the uprising (which later became militarized) was framed as a battle. Framing could have a positive or negative tone depending on how opposition performance on the battlefield was portrayed. If opposition performance was framed as high and positive, then the tone toward the uprising was positive. Alternatively, if opposition performance was framed as low, and rebel losses on the battlefield were discussed, then the tone toward the uprising was low.

 ***Critical Analysis post-Qadhdhafi Frame****:* This frame involved criticism of the NTC/opposition fighters post-Qadhdhafi and post-intervention. This frame also occasionally involved discussion of the controversial killing of Qadhdhafi and criticism of how the opposition fighters went about doing it.

**Intervention Frames**

***The Humanitarian Intervention Frame*:** Here, the NATO intervention was framed as a legitimate humanitarian mission with the aim of liberating the Libyan population from an illegitimate and violent leader.

 ***The Cheerleading the Intervention Frame*:** This frame involved positive portrayal of intervention gains and positive portrayal of the role of the intervention in aiding opposition development on the ground. This frame always displayed a pro-interventionist news agenda.

 ***The Exceeding the Mandate Frame*:** News stories under this frame discussed issues involving NATO exceeding the UN Mandate, such as boots on the ground, regime change, civilian casualties of NATO’s airstrikes, and the limitations of NATO’s role in Libya as per United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973. Stories coded under this frame were characterised by a high level of analysis and discussion of the legality of these issues under the UN mandate. This frame was divided into two categories, according to tone. These tones were Supportive and Negotiated. Frames in the Supportive category were supportive of issues that might exceed the UN mandate, while those in the Negotiated category involved a nuanced approach to and critical analysis of these issues. A third category, titled Critical, which involved criticism of issues that exceed the UN mandate, was also established. However, none of the channels displayed a critical approach to exceeding the mandate, thus signifying a highly pro-interventionist approach by the channels, and ultimately, no stories were coded under the Critical category.

***The International Interests Frame*:** This frame focused on the international community’s gains and losses as a result of the intervention. For example, stories discussed US interest in deposing Qadhdhafi or Italy’s interests in keeping him in power. Stories discussed issues such as Libyan oil or migration from Africa to Europe, which Qadhdhafi claimed to have been able to control.

 ***The Critical Analysis of NATO post-Qadhdhafi Frame*:** Framing involved critical analysis of the role of NATO in Libya following Qadhdhafi’s death. This critical analysis was very limited, and only found on AJE, thus signifying a pro-interventionist agenda on all channels.

**Findings**

The tables below detail the figures and percentages related to *Revolution Frames* and *Intervention Frames* found across the four channels*.* The percentages refer to the percentage of each of these frames in the total number of stories for each channel. It is noteworthy that the majority of these stories contained various intersecting frames.

Table A: *Numbers and Percentages of Revolution Frames in the total number of stories*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | AJA | AJE | BBCA | BBCW |
| *The Revolution Frame* | 29 **/ 74.3%** | 3 **/ 6%**  | 2 **/ 5.5%** | 4 **/ 8%**  |
| *The Protest Frame* | 3 / **7.7%** | 2 / **4%** | 5 / **13.9%** | 3 / **7%** |
| *The Government Offensive Frame* | 4 / **10.2%** | 6 / **12%** | 4 / **11.1%** | 1 / **2.2%** |
| *The Qadhdhafi Demonization Frame*  | 15 **/ 38.5%**  | 7 / **14%**  | 4 **/ 11.11%**  | 7 **/ 18.4%**  |
| *The Critical Analysis Frame of NTC/Rebels Frame* | 7 **/ 17.9%** | 3 **/ 6%**  | 3 **/ 7.9%**  | 4 **/ 11.11%**  |
| *The Battle Frame*  | 5 **/ 13.1%** | 4 **/ 8%** | 8 **/ 22.8%** | 12 **/ 27.2%** |

Source: Compiled by author.

**Table B:** *Numbers and Percentages of Intervention Frames in the total number of stories*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | AJA | AJE | BBCA | BBCW |
| *The Humanitarian Intervention Frame* | 18 / **46.1%** | 19 **/ 38%**  | 10 **/ 27.7%** | 14 **/31.8%** |
|  *Cheerleading the Intervention Frame* | 10 **/ 25.6%** | 10 **/ 20%**  | 7 **/ 19.4%**  | 13 **/ 29.5%** |
| *The Exceeding the Mandate Frame* | 3 **/ 7.7%**  | 6 **/ 12%**  | 2 **/ 5.5%**  | 5 **/ 11.4%**  |
| *The International Interests Frame* | 4 / **10.2%** | 7 / **14%**  | 1 / **2.7%**  | 1 / **2%**  |
| *The Critical Analysis of NATO post-Qadhdhafi Frame* | 0 | 2 / **4%**  | 0 | 0 |

Source: Compiled by Author

Tables A and B display that each of these channels had a specific approach to covering the Libyan uprising and intervention. With *Revolution Frames,* Table A displays that the biggest difference among the channels was in relation to how often they utilised *The Revolution Frame*: 74.3 per cent of AJA’s stories contained this frame, while stories on AJE, BBCA and BBCW contained this frame a significantly lower per cent of the times*.* In order to understand the variations between the channels with regard to this frame, it should be noted that *The Revolution Frame* in particular represented a direction of coverage that was the most pro-revolutionary of all frames in the *Revolution* category. Thus, the high number of *Revolution Frames* in AJA’s sample indicated that it was the channel that was most supportive of the Libyan uprising and its aims. Another pro-revolutionist frame, *The Qadhdhafi Demonization Frame,* was also most common on AJA. The findings in table A strongly indicate that AJA was the channel with the most pro-revolutionary framing out of the four channels included in this analysis.

 *The Revolution Frame* involved an explicit description of the uprising as a “revolution” by presenters and correspondents, and an explicit description of the opposition fighters as *thuwwar* [revolutionaries]. AJA was the only channel out of the four that consistently and explicitly used these two descriptions. Its presenters and correspondents continued to use these descriptions until the end of the NATO mission, on 31 October 2011. Moreover, AJA aired mobilising “promos” to introduce each news story on Libya as part of its daily news hour. “Promos” involve a compilation of footage and images that defined and labelled the uprising explicitly as a revolution, through headlines such as “Libya…the Revolution Continues.” AJA always explicitly identified the Libyan uprising as a revolution through its headlines, such as “Revolution in Libya.” This explicit framing was especially significant, since it gave legitimacy to the movement and the demands of the protesters. Moreover, through this framing, the Libyan government itself would be delegitimised, thus paving the way for a humanitarian military intervention aimed at saving the Libyan people from an illegitimate regime. This framing can be compared with AJA framing the 2011 Egyptian uprising as a legitimate revolution on its third day, thus legitimising the protests as a an authentic, grassroots movement that encompassed most of the Egyptian society.[[40]](#footnote-40) In contrast, BBCA, AJE, and BBCW hesitated to identify the uprising explicitly as a legitimate revolution. None of these three channels used the word “revolution” in their headlines, and both AJE and BBCW opened their stories with the headline “Libyan Uprising.*”* BBCA rarely opened its stories with headlines; however, it did occasionally use the headline “Libyan Intifada,” the Arabic word for uprising.

In a 2013 interview with BBCA Libya correspondent Mustafa El Menshawy, he stated that management and producers explicitly instructed all presenters and correspondents at BBCA not to describe the uprising as a “revolution” and not to describe the opposition fighters as *thuwwar* or revolutionaries, as did most Arabic media channels, including AJA.[[41]](#footnote-41) Instead, BBCA described them as opposition fighters, or as “those known as *thuwwar*,and often referred to the fighting in Libya revolution as an *intifada*,or an uprising. BBCW and AJE, in contrast, would not have had this problem relating to nomenclature, since the direct English translation for *thuwwar* across English-speaking media is the term ‘rebels’, which was the description both AJE and BBCW used. Upon being asked why BBCA management had instructed its presenters and correspondents not to refer explicitly to the uprising as a “revolution” or to describe the opposition fighters as “revolutionaries,” Menshawy repliedthat doing so would lead to bias and affect the BBC network’s neutral stance on the uprising and subsequent fighting in Libya. This particular issue with regard to the terms revolution and revolutionaries also brings forth issues of editorial independence at both BBC and Al Jazeera.[[42]](#footnote-42) The deviations between how AJA and AJE described the uprising and the opposition fighters indicate the absence of a unified Middle East language glossary that might have guided how to describe the Libyan uprising and its fighters. The fact that BBCA had deviated from Arab media’s generous use of the terms revolution and *thuwwar* to describe the Libyan uprising and its opposition fighters might also indicate that it was operating within the restrictions of the BBC network’s Middle East Glossaries.

 With reference to *Intervention Frames,* the *Humanitarian Intervention Frame* was the most common frame found on all channels, it primarily framed the NATO intervention as a humanitarian mission aimed at saving the Libyan population. It was more common on the Al Jazeera network than on the BBC network. The second most common frame was *The Cheerleading the Intervention Frame*,a very pro-interventionist frame that was most common on BBCW. However, the remaining three channels displayed similar numbers with regard to how often they employed this frame. As for the *Exceeding the Mandate Frame,* while it was present, it was not present as often as *The Humanitarian Intervention Frame* or *The Cheerleading the Intervention Frame,* which were arguably the two most pro-interventionist frames in the sample. While the *Exceeding the Mandate Frame* did involve a high level of analysis and debate with regard to NATO’s limitations under the UN Mandate, it is interesting that in the case of AJA, it mostly chose to employ this frame in its *Supportive* category.This also adds to AJA’s pro-interventionist coverage. In general, as the tables display, AJA’s coverage was the most pro-interventionist in the sample, since it contained the highest number of frames that supported the intervention, whether with regard to its humanitarian aims or to its ability to support the opposition on the ground. Moreover, AJA’s coverage did not focus on the negative aspects of exceeding the UN mandate. BBCW was not far behind in terms of its pro-interventionist agenda, as it also contained a relatively high number of *Humanitarian Intervention Frames* and the highest number of *Cheerleading the Intervention Frames.* AJE’s coverage fell in the middle, and while it attempted to provide critical analysis of the NATO mission following Qadhdhafi’s death, this critical analysis was limited at best. BBCA’s coverage was the most balanced out of the four, with regard to framing both the uprising and the intervention. It was especially balanced with respect to covering the progress of the opposition fighters on the ground, and it did not play up opposition gains, or gloss over opposition losses, as AJA tended to do through its pro-opposition coverage.

 The analysis also showed that none of the four channels under study took an oppositional stance toward the intervention, and this was clear through the absence of any *Exceeding the Mandate Frames* in the *Critical* category. Thus, while some discussion with regard to the limitations of the intervention was present on the two networks, it may be argued that this negotiation fell within Hallin’s “sphere of legitimate controversy”, which finds that news media’s coverage of controversial issues tends to reflect the interests of elites, and any critical coverage merely mirrors conflict among the elite themselves.[[43]](#footnote-43) The sample revealed that any controversial discussion surrounding the limitations of the NATO intervention as per the UN mandate merely reflected divisions among the elite. In the case of the Libyan intervention, the samples from both Al Jazeera and the BBC involved criticism, albeit minimal, that was mirrored within the governments involved in the intervention, such as the controversy surrounding foreign troops on the ground or regime change.In general terms, all four channels displayed a pro-interventionist stance, and this was clear through the most commonly utilised frame across the entire sample, *The Humanitarian Intervention Frame*. *The Cheerleading the Intervention Frame,* the most pro-interventionist frame found in the sample, was not far behind. Generally, the sample showed no large differences between the two networks with regard to how they framed the NATO intervention. Indeed, all four channels under study used the same frames to cover the intervention. This is not surprising, since both the UK and Qatar shared the same foreign policy aims with regard to Libya. Thus, what the findings demonstrate is that both the Al Jazeera and the BBC networks covered the 2011 NATO intervention in a manner that fell in line with the foreign policy aims of their home countries, Qatar and the UK, which were both active participants in the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya.

**Conclusion**

This article has analysed the implications of the BBC’s and Al Jazeera’s political contexts on their coverage of the 2011 Libyan uprising and NATO intervention. The sample revealed that the Al Jazeera and BBC networks displayed a pro-interventionist agenda that was aligned with the foreign policy aims of their respective political contexts. Through this alignment, influence was demonstrated. However, out of all four channels under study, AJA displayed the most pro-interventionist framing. Additionally, its framing was also the most sympathetic to the opposition and its demands, as evidenced through its consistent framing of the uprising as a legitimate revolution. AJA was also the channel most likely to portray the opposition’s development on the ground positively. Thus, through the framing analysis, it becomes clear that AJA was the channel most affected by its Qatari political context. This in turn might indicate that AJA is more subject to the influences of its Qatari benefactors than its sister channel, AJE.

The findings of this analysis correspond to previous studies that attribute the direction of Al Jazeera’s coverage to its Qatari political context and its foreign policy aims.[[44]](#footnote-44) The findings also correspond to previous studies that theorise the BBC also is affected by its own political context and is subject to the UK’s national and international interests.[[45]](#footnote-45) Through coverage that corresponds to the needs of their political contexts, both Al Jazeera and the BBC are strong examples of how the news media in capitalist societies, particularly during times of war, produce coverage that more or less spontaneously follows the interests of the state.[[46]](#footnote-46) It is unlikely, particularly in the case of the Western BBC, that this influence is enforced by the state, through a top-down chain of command. Rather, this influence is likely indirect through mechanisms that promote their respective governments’ foreign policy aims- mechanisms that emerge from within as well as from outside the newsroom.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The findings of this comparative study of AJE and AJA also correspond to previous studies that compared the two channels, and which demonstrated that AJA was more affected by Qatar and its foreign policy aims than AJE.[[48]](#footnote-48) This study has attributed the differences between AJA and AJE to their editorial independence from one another and their different organisational structures, goals, and audiences.[[49]](#footnote-49) However, it is important to note that these influences are secondary to the impact of the political context, which is the main influence on the news agenda, since the differences between AJE and AJA are minor. This study recommends further research and analysis on these secondary influences to evaluate fully their impact on Al Jazeera’s coverage of the Arab uprisings. Further studies on the two Al Jazeera newsrooms could focus on how influences from within the newsroom might lead to differences in their coverage. Additionally, further analysis of Al Jazeera’s and the BBC’s coverage of different Arab uprisings, such as in Syria and Yemen, is necessary in order to ascertain whether the influence of the political context might be translated to their coverage of social and political upheaval in other Arab countries in 2011 and beyond.

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44. Ibiary, “Questioning the Al Jazeera Effect,” pp. 199-204; and Samuel-Azran, “Al Jazeera, Qatar, and the new tactics in state sponsored media diplomacy,” pp. 1293-1311; and Samuel-Azran and Pecht, “Is there an Al Jazeera-Qatari nexus?” pp. 218-232; and Fandy, “(Un)Civil war of words,”pp. 48-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Barkho, “The discursive and social power of news,” pp. 111-159; and Robinson et al. (2010) *Pockets of resistance,”* pp. 162-187; and Robinson et al. (2012) “Measuring media criticism of war and political elites,” pp. 177-185; and Kolmer and Semetko, “Framing the Iraq War,” p. 654. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See further Herman and Chomsky, “Manufacturing Consent,” pp. 2-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Robinson et al., “Pockets of Resistance,” pp. 164-167; Schudson, “News media as political institutions,” p. 251; and Hammond, “Celebrity culture and the rise of narcissistic interventionism,” p. 116; and Herman and Chomsky, “Manufacturing Consent,” pp. 2-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Samuel-Azran, “Al Jazeera, Qatar, and the new tactics in state sponsored media diplomacy,” pp. 1293-1311; and Samuel-Azran and Pecht, “Is there an Al Jazeera-Qatari nexus?” pp. 218-232; and Abdul-Mageed and Herring, “Arabic and English news coverage on AlJazeera.net”; and Youssef, “Their word against ours,” pp. 13–24. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Barkho, “The discursive and social power of news,” pp. 111-159; and Samuel-Azran, “Al Jazeera, Qatar, and the new tactics in state sponsored media diplomacy,” pp. 1293-1311; and Samuel-Azran and Pecht, “Is there an Al Jazeera-Qatari nexus?” pp. 218-232; and Abdul-Mageed and Herring, “Arabic and English news coverage on AlJazeera.net”; and Youssef, “Their word against ours,” pp. 13–24. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)