

Al Jazeera in American Media

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## Abstract of Thesis

### “Al Jazeera in American Media”

This study examines the portrayal of Al Jazeera in American media over the course of the decade since 9/11. By conducting an in-depth content analysis of the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *CNN Newsroom*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *Fox Special Report* the study identifies the factors and indicators that shaped the framing of Al Jazeera. The author hypothesizes Al Jazeera was predominantly featured in stories involving war, terrorism, and conflict and that the positive or negative portrayal of Al Jazeera’s coverage correlates to their perceived agreement with American policy positions. The study looks specifically at the War in Afghanistan, the War in Iraq, Terrorism, Al Qaeda and bin Laden, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, and the Arab Spring. The study concludes that framing of Al Jazeera was largely negative, event-driven, and unchanging over time.

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## Introduction

In March 2011, while testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the United States was losing the “information war”. She attributed this, in part, to a common frustration with American cable news – that it’s not really news at all. As she described it, cable networks are “a million commercials...and arguments between talking heads...which is not particularly informative to us, let alone foreigners.” Instead, she cited the Arabic network Al Jazeera as “real news,” calling it the leader of a set of global networks that are changing people’s minds and attitudes. “Like it or hate it, it is really effective,” she professed.<sup>1</sup>

The American journalism community would seem to agree. If the assignment of prestigious awards is any indication, Al Jazeera had a breakout year in 2011. In May 2011, Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism bestowed upon Al Jazeera English its top prize, the Columbia Journalism Award, recognizing an individual or organization for “singular journalism in the public interest”. Al Jazeera English was named the winner for “the overall depth and quality of its peerless coverage of the ongoing developments in the Middle East.”<sup>2</sup> Another award from Columbia would follow in December 2011, the Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia University Award for excellence in broadcast and digital reporting. Al Jazeera English was honored for a report on the recovery and reconstruction in Haiti.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stanglin, Douglas. “Clinton Calls Al-Jazeera ‘Real News,’ Glenn Beck Doesn’t.” *USA Today*. 07 March 2011. <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ondeadline/post/2011/03/sec-clinton-calls-al-jazeera-real-news-not-pundit-chatter/1#.T0FQzfGPWSo>

<sup>2</sup>“Al Jazeera English to Be Honored with Columbia Journalism Award.” Columbia Journalism School News. 04 May 2011. <http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/news/406>

<sup>3</sup>Stelter, Brian. “Al Jazeera English Among Winners of DuPont Broadcast Awards.” *New York Time*. 21 December 2011. <http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/21/al-jazeera-english-among-winners-of-broadcast-awards/>

The new year brought more awards, including the George Polk Award for a documentary on the uprising in Bahrain<sup>4</sup> and in the UK, Al Jazeera was named the RTS News Channel of the Year.<sup>5</sup> In April of 2012, Al Jazeera English won a Peabody Award, the oldest honors in broadcasting, for its coverage of the Arab Spring.<sup>6</sup> And demonstrating its successful embrace of new media, the Al Jazeera English program *The Stream* won a Webby Award in May.<sup>7</sup> Al Jazeera had seemingly arrived.

The road had been a long one. Founded in 1996, the network was funded by the Emir of Qatar as the cornerstone of his liberalization process. It recruited staff from the defunct BBC-Arabic service and in 1999 became a 24-hour news channel. Today, the network has bureaus in 65 countries, a staff of 3,000 including 400 journalists from 60 countries, nine different networks including Al Jazeera English, and is the most popular channel on YouTube.<sup>8</sup> Since its inception, however, Al Jazeera has teetered between its Arab and western impulses. The network's home state, Qatar, is a small peninsular country abutting Saudi Arabia, neighboring Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. To the north, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan precariously monitor the airwaves. Al Jazeera has been banned from more than a few countries while its reporters have been threatened, detained, harassed, tortured and even killed. In a region where state-controlled media had long been the norm, Al Jazeera's editorial independence and coverage of controversial conflicts threatened the relative information monopoly of dictatorships and military regimes.

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<sup>4</sup> "Al Jazeera's Bahrain Documentary Wins Award." *Al Jazeera*. 21 February 2012.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/02/201222184931745785.html>

<sup>5</sup> Conlan, Tara. "Al-Jazeera English Wins RTS News Channel of the Year." *The Guardian*. 23 February 2012.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/feb/23/al-jazeera-english-rt-s-news-channel>

<sup>6</sup> "Peabody Awards 2012: CNN, Al Jazeera, NPR, Colbert Among Winners." *Huffington Post*. 04 April 2012.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/04/peabody-awards-2012-cnn-al-jazeera-npr\\_n\\_1403185.html?ref=media](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/04/peabody-awards-2012-cnn-al-jazeera-npr_n_1403185.html?ref=media)

<sup>7</sup> "Al Jazeera's The Stream Wins Webby Award." *Al Jazeera*. 01 May 2012.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2012/05/20125119319196718.html>

<sup>8</sup> "About Us: Facts and Figures." *Al Jazeera*. 23 February 2012.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/aboutus/2010/11/20101110131438787482.html>

Simultaneously, the network has complicated Qatar's diplomatic ties with the United States. The U.S. has a military base in Qatar, from which it launched the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. But when Al Jazeera began broadcasting tapes of Osama bin Laden in October 2001, tension between the U.S., Qatar, and Al Jazeera escalated. The relationships would remain strained throughout the duration of both wars, as Al Jazeera's coverage was regularly reprimanded by Bush administration officials. On top of it all, the network has been accused of overly sympathizing with Palestinian suffering, much to the chagrin of Israel supporters in the United States. And while the network has been lauded for its reporting in the Arab world and other regions, critics accuse Al Jazeera of largely ignoring issues within Qatar, or tempering its coverage of important regional allies at the behest of the Emir. These issues have come to a head during the Arab Spring where its coverage of the uprisings in Bahrain, an important ally to Qatar, has been called biased. While Al Jazeera denies such editorial arm-twisting, the actual extent of its independence is often called into question.

Since 9/11, the Arab world has received intense scrutiny from the United States and other western countries. Perhaps unbeknownst to American audiences, a notable amount of information from the Arab region comes from Al Jazeera via content-sharing deals with American networks, such as CNN. In the infant stages of the War in Afghanistan, Bush administration officials readily gave interviews and made appearances on the network. But after the bin Laden tapes and critical reports on American war efforts, especially in Iraq, the Bush administration began to demonize Al Jazeera on the same programs and in the same newspapers that depended upon Al Jazeera for reliable information. How is it that the American media undermined its own source? How readily did they echo or internalize the administration line? And how long before they questioned the administration's wisdom? To what extent did they anticipate or play to perceived public perceptions of Al Jazeera? And when did they change? Fast-forward and today Al Jazeera English is breaking into some of America's largest media markets, like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Secretary Clinton has essentially asserted American

news would be better if it looked more like Al Jazeera. Where and how did this shift occur? Examining the portrayal of Al Jazeera in American media throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an interesting case study of framing during wartime, globalization, and the new media environment.

### Research Question and Hypotheses

The aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive content analysis of the portrayal of Al Jazeera in six major American news sources over the course of the decade, 2001 to 2011. The guiding question behind this research is as follows:

*RQ:* How is Al Jazeera portrayed in American media?

American interest in the Arab region over the past decade stems from a number of critical issues: the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the wider war on terror; the alliance with Israel and its implications for Palestinians; the range of tensions with Iran; and most recently, the Arab Spring. It is thus my first hypothesis that American media will largely feature Al Jazeera in instances of war, terrorism, or conflict. These representations will alternately be positive or negative depending on how closely Al Jazeera's coverage of events aligns with U.S. policy toward those issues. Specifically:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Presence/Absence of Al Jazeera:* Al Jazeera will be present in American media coverage of stories involving war, terrorism, and/or conflict.

*H<sub>2</sub>: Nature/Valence of Portrayal:*

- a) Al Jazeera will be portrayed in a negative manner when their coverage of an event/issue is discordant with American policy positions.
- b) Al Jazeera will be portrayed in a positive manner when their coverage of an event/issue is concordant with American policy positions.

The second hypothesis makes two assumptions. First, we must define American policy positions. In order to make direct comparisons between U.S. foreign policy, Al Jazeera's coverage of that policy, and the results of my content analysis, I have identified six major stories. These six stories are all likely to be covered by Al Jazeera and important to American foreign policy. I will outline how Al Jazeera covered the story and review the U.S. policy position. With this information, I develop my expectations on the nature of coverage I will find in the content analysis. I defined American policy positions as those enunciated by the President at the time, with information on the presidential position taken from State of the Union addresses, major speeches, and national security strategies. The six stories are:

- 1) Al Qaeda operations and the activities of Osama bin Laden
- 2) The War in Afghanistan
- 3) The War in Iraq
- 4) The Israeli-Palestinian conflict
- 5) Terrorism, including but not limited to the War on Terror
- 6) The Arab Spring

Second, we must establish the characteristics of Al Jazeera's coverage on these U.S. foreign policy initiatives. Because I do not speak Arabic and cannot examine Al Jazeera's reports firsthand, I have reviewed relevant studies that do complete this task. Information on American policy positions and Al Jazeera's coverage of events and reputation in the U.S. are presented in the literature review.

### Literature Review

#### **The Availability of Al Jazeera in the United States**

The history of Al Jazeera as a news organization and its availability in the United States provides the context from which this study evolves. Before 9/11, Al Jazeera was little known in the U.S., but the

attention it did receive was largely positive. *Time* called it “the toast of Western media,”<sup>9</sup> and Thomas Friedman, the noted *New York Times* columnist, said it was “not only the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab world since the advent of television, it is also the biggest political phenomenon.”<sup>10</sup> Al Jazeera appeared to be a kindred soul of American reporting in the Arab world – committed to western standards of journalism and creating a critical dialogue. What truth there was to any of these assertions was subjective – the station was only available in Burlington, VT, Toledo, OH and Washington, D.C. Media commentators and Middle Eastern specialists were the only ones who could speak to the legitimacy of the channel, elite sources by any standard.

It was not until Al Jazeera repeatedly received and broadcast exclusive taped messages from Osama bin Laden after 9/11 that the network even factored in to the American dialogue. And when it did, the reaction was at best confused, at worst scathing. After the release of the tapes, Al Jazeera was labeled a mouthpiece of Al Qaeda, glorifying bin Laden. Secretary of State Colin Powell said it gave “an undue amount of time and attention to some of the most vitriolic, irresponsible kinds of statements.”<sup>11</sup> Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called the network “vicious, inaccurate and inexcusable.”<sup>12</sup> The White House National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice requested American networks not to air Al Jazeera’s bin Laden footage, claiming it could contain coded messages to sleeper cells in the US, despite obvious other avenues of communication.<sup>13</sup> In such an antagonistic review it deserves to be quoted at length, Zev Chafets in the *New York Daily News* opined:

Al Jazeera is far from legitimate. It is an Arab propaganda outlet controlled by the medieval government of Qatar that masquerades as a

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<sup>9</sup>Zaharna, R.S. “Al Jazeera and American Public Diplomacy: A Dance of Intercultural (Mis-)Communication” in *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon*, ed. Mohamed Zayani, p. 188.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 188

<sup>12</sup>Fordham, Alice. “Up Next on Al Jazeera: Donald Rumsfeld.” *Washington Post* 30 Sep. 2011.

<sup>13</sup>Bessaiso, Ehab Y. “Al Jazeera and the War in Afghanistan: A Delivery System or a Mouthpiece?” in *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon*, ed. Mohamed Zayani.

real media company. For years, it has inflamed the Arab world against the United States and its allies. Its occasional interviews with Western statesmen...are designed to provide it with a fig leaf of objectivity. Dealing with Al Jazeera is a job for the military. Shutting it down should be an immediate priority because, if left alone, it has the power to poison the air more efficiently and lethally than anthrax ever could.<sup>14</sup>

In a wartime environment, after the unprecedented attacks on the World Trade Center, the assertions of the Bush administration were hard to ignore. It was an unusual time for those in the media – caught between their patriotism as Americans and their professional standards of journalistic integrity. Dan Rather, the anchor at the time of the *CBS Evening News*, pledged his allegiance to the President saying, “wherever he wants me to line up, just tell me where, and he’ll make the call.”<sup>15</sup> While American media was not permanently paralyzed, the dominant picture of Al Jazeera formed during this time is expected to be defined by skepticism and negativity.

As the years passed, the Bush administration began to lose its grip on the foreign policy narrative, though not until after winning re-election. The latter half of the decade saw increased criticism of the war efforts in Afghanistan and especially Iraq. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict saw renewed violence as the West Bank and Gaza Strip were continually disputed. Terror attacks gripped the London and Madrid subway systems along with attacks in Bali and Chechnya, among others. Osama bin Laden was still at large. Even with the inauguration of the Obama administration, many of the foreign policy issues carried over, though at times overshadowed by the economic crisis of 2008. But 2011 would prove a remarkable year in foreign affairs. Most notably, bin Laden was killed and the Arab Spring took hold throughout the Middle East and North Africa. And what of Al Jazeera?

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 156

<sup>15</sup> Pintak, Lawrence. *Reflections in a Bloodshot Lens*. Pluto Press: Ann Arbor, MI (2006). p. 44.

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for Al Jazeera was marked by an incredible amount of expansion. With the launch of Al Jazeera English in 2006, the network reached an entirely new segment of the global population. While widely available in Europe, Canada and Latin America, most cable and satellite companies in the United States did not carry the channel. Yet popular demand was brewing. By the time Tahrir Square was swarming with protestors, Al Jazeera English's website was receiving more than 22 million visitors per month.<sup>16</sup> Its YouTube channel was the most popular on the web, with over 2.5 million monthly views.<sup>17</sup> Between February and October of 2011, cable and satellite providers had received more than 70,000 emails requesting a carriage deal with Al Jazeera English.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the network broadcast to over 250 million households in 120 countries.<sup>19</sup> Slowly but surely, the channel was breaking into American markets. In June 2011, the channel was carried in Los Angeles.<sup>20</sup> By August, Al Jazeera English had cut a deal with Time Warner Cable and was available in New York.<sup>21</sup> New York provided more traffic to the Al Jazeera English website than any other city in the world.<sup>22</sup> Finally, in October the channel became available in Chicago on WTTW, the most-watched public television station in America.<sup>23</sup> As of this writing, Al Jazeera English is available in Vermont, Ohio, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. And of course, a live stream is available 24-hours a day to anyone with an internet connection or the newly-minted iPhone application. Access points continue to multiply as the news becomes less dependent on traditional mediums.

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<sup>16</sup>Gustin, Sam. "Al Jazeera's Spring." *Time* 26 Oct. 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Healey, Jack. "I Want My AJE!" *Huffington Post* 15 Sep. 2011.

<sup>18</sup> "Al Jazeera English Comes to Chicago on WTTW, America's Most-Watched Public Television Station." *PR Newswire* 19 Oct. 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Irvine, Don. "L.A. Station That Dumped PBS Now Broadcasting Al Jazeera English." *Canada Free Press* 27 June 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Flanagan, Ben. "Al Jazeera Seeks to Conquer the US." *The National*. 2 August 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Gerhart, Bryan. "Does Al Jazeera's American Debut Give Hope for Media Diversity?" *Color Lines* 3 Aug. 2011.

<sup>23</sup> "Al Jazeera English Comes to Chicago on WTTW, America's Most-Watched Public Television Station." *PR Newswire* 19 Oct. 2011.

## Al Jazeera's Position as a Source

But does the wider availability of Al Jazeera English indicate the old fears about Al Jazeera are gone? John Mark King and Mohamed Zayani asked a similar question in 2008.<sup>24</sup> They wondered if Al Jazeera's expansion into English-language programming repositioned it as a global broadcaster and affected the image of the network. They were skeptical and hypothesized that newspapers published in countries located in or associated with the West would portray Al Jazeera more negatively and associate it with terrorism, violence and anti-Western sentiments more often. They found that while Al Jazeera was associated with violence and terrorism, the attribution had more to do with the topics Al Jazeera covered than any conscious effort on the part of the network to ally itself with terrorists. In short, Al Jazeera's credibility on these topics explains the correlation with terrorism and/or violence better than any conspiracy theory. Overall, the authors concluded Al Jazeera English was beginning to gain a somewhat broad, if fragile, acceptance as a "credible" source.

Al Jazeera's importance as a source would only be magnified by the events of the Arab Spring two years later. Its network of bureaus produced almost non-stop coverage. It consistently broke the news, including the now infamous pictures and footage depicting the death of Moammar Qaddafi. The reporting earned Al Jazeera a number of prestigious awards and drew comparisons to CNN's breakthrough during the Gulf War. The coverage spurred demand for the network in the U.S. while captivating an audience watching online.

While this would seem to indicate an increasing acceptance of the channel among American audiences, a study by William Youmans and Katie Brown found otherwise.<sup>25</sup> In light of Al Jazeera's popularity surge during the Arab Spring, they set out to determine if this could be leveraged into a

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<sup>24</sup>King, John Mark and Mohamed Zayani. 2008. "Media, Branding and Controversy: Perceptions of Al Jazeera in Newspapers Around the World." *Journal of Middle East Media*. 4(1): 27-43.

<sup>25</sup>Youmans, William and Katie Brown. "After Egypt: Can Al Jazeera English Leverage Its 'Moment' Into an American Audience?" *Arab Media & Society*.

consistent American following. They conducted an experiment in which audience groups watched the same Al Jazeera English news clip. One group watched the clip correctly attributed to Al Jazeera English, while the other was told the clip came from CNN International. Their findings suggested that evaluations of CNN International improved after watching the clip, while perceptions of Al Jazeera English were not only negative, but stable. The authors concluded that “a considerable segment of Americans is cognitively predisposed against the channel” and unable to fairly evaluate Al Jazeera English.<sup>26</sup>

Like so much else concerning Al Jazeera, these results seem contradictory. While King and Zayani concluded Al Jazeera was increasingly being viewed as a credible source, Youmans and Brown found perceptions of Al Jazeera to be negative and hard to change. Perhaps this is due to the old adage “what is learned first is learned best.” Anecdotal evidence, as reviewed above, seems to indicate that Al Jazeera was quickly targeted by American elites after 9/11 as subversive and untrustworthy. If elite cues initially informed negative frames of Al Jazeera, how quickly could the stereotypes they perpetuated really be shaken? We turn first to a conceptual discussion of framing and then to specific examples of Al Jazeera’s coverage of events to better understand the processes at work in shaping Al Jazeera’s reputation over the decade and its potential for change.

## **Framing**

In *Projections of Power*, Robert Entman introduces the cascading activation model of framing. He defines framing as “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution.”<sup>27</sup> Frames cascade down from the administration to other elites through the media and to the public, with a certain degree of feedback. The more culturally congruent a frame - i.e., the greater ease with which a

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>27</sup>Entman, Robert M. *Projections of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. P. 5.

frame travels through the levels - the more widespread and successful its adoption. The opposite is also true – if events are culturally incongruent the President is looked toward for unity and direction. Other actors readily adopt the favored frame. Only when events or issues are ambiguous enough is the President’s frame at risk. The ambiguity presents opportunity for elite dissent and competing frames. Cultural congruence is also related to schema, the clusters or nodes of connected ideas and feelings stored in memory. The more easily a frame fits into existing schema, the more readily it is adopted.

Public opinion, as reported by the media and as presented to elites, provides an element of feedback to the cascading activation model. This brings in the passage of time as an agent of change. Baum and Potter examine the relationship between time and information levels in the longevity of a successful frame during an international conflict.<sup>28</sup> They propose that at the beginning of a conflict, elites have near exclusive access to the relevant information. The media, and thus the public, depends on them to explain and situate the conflict within the American psyche. As time passes, however, the media becomes less dependent on elites as information becomes more readily available and other opinions formulated. If the media finds incongruence between the elite account and their own findings, they may produce counter-frames. The same is true of other elites, whose access to information also expands. As time continues to pass, the knowledge gap between the public and government shrinks and the public is better equipped to pass judgment on its elites. Baum and Potter's model fits nicely into cascading activation as it helps to explain when and why the dominant frames promoted by the administration may fall out of favor.

The role of elites in presenting foreign policy goes beyond their relationship with the media. Discounting special interest groups or dramatic events, the public interest in sustained foreign affairs is low. Adam Berinsky advances an “elite cue theory” that claims citizens determine their position on war

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<sup>28</sup>Baum, M.A. & Potter, P.B.K. (2008). “The Relationship Between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 39-65.

only so far as the elites they trust inform them. Berinsky asserts that “the mass public is rational only to the extent that prominent political actors provide a rational lead”.<sup>29</sup> In essence, citizens delegate the process of forming an opinion on a complicated policy matter to the elites that they trust. Indeed, after conducting an experiment in which groups received varying degrees of new information on a cost or benefit of the Iraq War, there was no statistically significant difference between respondents in the different treatments. Berinsky concluded, “Citizens discounted new information in favor of more important considerations – their attachments to particular political leaders.”<sup>30</sup> This seems to confirm the old adage that “old habits die hard” and supports the findings of Youmans and Brown that perceptions of Al Jazeera were negative and unchanging. It also seems to compound the importance of diverse and competing information, or frames. Al Jazeera is an alternative information source, but one largely absent from the U.S. until recently. Yet their material was newsworthy enough to regularly receive attention in American media and from elites. Will Berinsky’s theory hold true? Will the framing of Al Jazeera follow elite cues throughout the decade? The media’s ability to independently assess Al Jazeera will prove an interesting point of framing theory.

Two aspects of framing theory are especially relevant to this study. First, elite dialogue should play an important role in introducing, defining, and changing Al Jazeera’s frame in American media. Given the lack of accessibility to the network in America over much of the decade, it is possible that elite framing will dominate media portrayals well after events initially occur. Secondly, the issue of time will be an important factor. Because this study spans a decade, I suspect Al Jazeera’s frame will evolve with shifting public opinion on events. How directly will Al Jazeera’s representation be related to various events throughout the decade? How long will the initial frame sustain itself? Will Al Jazeera benefit

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<sup>29</sup>Berinsky, Adam J. 2007. “Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict.” *The Journal of Politics*. 69 (4): 975-997.p. 976

<sup>30</sup>Ibid, p. 984.

from a narrowing time-information gap, or will elite cues dominate the discussion? The portrayal of Al Jazeera in American media should prove a compelling framing timeline.

### **Foreign Policy Outlines**

We must now define U.S. foreign policy on each of the six topics in order to consider the second hypothesis. These summaries were constructed from State of the Union addresses, major speeches, and national security strategies. They reflect the policy of the administration at the time. They are by no means exhaustive, but serve to standardize comparisons in the content analysis.

#### *i. - War on Terror (Terrorism)*

On the night of September 11, 2001 President Bush addressed the nation and outlined the beginning of what would soon be known as the “Bush Doctrine.” He stated that the U.S. would “make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.”<sup>31</sup> This included nations and non-state actors alike, divided simply into two camps – “Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.”<sup>32</sup>

The Bush Doctrine defined the national security strategy of the United States over the next eight years. Its hallmarks include: a policy of preventive war to depose foreign regimes that represent a potential or perceived threat to U.S. security, even if that threat was not immediate; a policy of spreading democracy around the world, especially in the Middle East, as a strategy for combating terrorism; and a willingness to unilaterally pursue U.S. military interests. It justified the war in Afghanistan and the preventive invasion of Iraq. It also influenced the use of torture as an interrogation technique, holding accused terrorists without charge at Guantanamo Bay, and a broad interpretation of

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<sup>31</sup>Text of President Bush’s Address to the Nation, September 11, 2001.[http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-11/us/bush.speech.text\\_1\\_attacks-deadly-terrorist-acts-despicable-acts?\\_s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-11/us/bush.speech.text_1_attacks-deadly-terrorist-acts-despicable-acts?_s=PM:US)

<sup>32</sup>Text of President Bush’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress, September 20, 2001.[http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-20/us/gen.bush.transcript\\_1\\_joint-session-national-anthem-citizens?\\_s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-20/us/gen.bush.transcript_1_joint-session-national-anthem-citizens?_s=PM:US)

executive power to bring a nation to war. It stimulated the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, a unified military command, and a fundamental reordering of the FBI. But the guiding principle was clear – “The United States of America is fighting a war against terrorists of global reach. The enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology. The enemy is terrorism – premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents.”<sup>33</sup>

*ii.- Al Qaeda Operations and the Activities of Osama bin Laden*

Responsible for the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden became the most wanted man in America. His Al Qaeda network was similarly targeted as a top enemy of the United States. While bin Laden eluded the Bush administration, many of his accomplices were captured, held, and interrogated. But Al Qaeda as a network proved more resilient than initially imagined, taking refuge in the mountainous region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many foreign policy efforts designed to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda were carried out in this region. These included efforts to target insurgents and establish stability, improve Afghani governance, and strengthen Pakistan’s capacity to target violent extremists within its borders. The dismantlement of Al Qaeda and the hunt for bin Laden would rightly prove a hallmark of post-9/11 American foreign policy.

*iii. - War in Afghanistan (Bush)*

Throughout the tenure of the Bush administration, the war in Afghanistan was defined by three enemies: Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and an ideological battle against terrorism. Military action in Afghanistan was swift – on October 7, 2001 Operation Enduring Freedom was launched as a direct campaign against the perpetrators of 9/11. In his first State of the Union address, President Bush declared the reasons for war – the hijackers of September 11 were trained in Afghan camps and the Taliban regime provided safe harbor for terrorists. But it was also framed as an ideological battle.

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<sup>33</sup>United States National Security Strategy, 2002. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>

President Bush outlined it as such in his 2007 State of the Union Address: “This war is more than a clash of arms...The great question of our day is whether America will help men and women in the Middle East to build free societies and share in the rights of all humanity. For the sake of our own security, we must.” The war in Afghanistan was further justified by support from an international coalition and NATO military forces. Afghanistan became known as the “right” war.

#### *iv. - War in Afghanistan (Obama)*

The Obama administration maintained the justifications for war in Afghanistan – the terrorist networks of Al Qaeda and the Taliban must be dismantled. But the methods of war were changed. In his first State of the Union address, Obama announced his intentions to close Guantanamo Bay and declared unequivocally that the United States does not torture. “There is no force in the world more powerful than the example of America,” he said, “Living our values doesn’t make us weaker, it makes us safer and it makes us stronger.” These twin policies were a departure from those of the Bush administration, which justified expanded methods of intelligence at the expense of civil and human rights. After a series of congressional battles, the closing of Guantanamo would not come to pass. But the episode remains an important indicator of the changed strategic mentality from the Bush years.

In a speech on Afghanistan at West Point in 2009, President Obama announced a renewed effort in the war. To break the Taliban’s momentum and effectively train Afghan forces, he committed an additional 30,000 troops at an estimated cost of \$30 billion.<sup>34</sup> Satisfied with the progress two years later in June 2011, President Obama announced that 33,000 troops would leave Afghanistan. The current timetable hands full security control to Afghan forces by 2014.

#### *v.- Iraq War (Bush)*

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<sup>34</sup> Remarks by the President in Address to the National on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan, United States Military Academy at West Point, 01 Dec 2009. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>

In his second State of the Union address in 2003, President Bush dedicated a large section to the threat posed by Iraq to the United States and the world. He reviewed Saddam Hussein's failure to comply with disarmament agreements, his ongoing efforts to rebuild an arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, and his ties to Al Qaeda and other terrorist cells. In building his case for war, President Bush rejected waiting for an "imminent" threat, saying, "Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option." He appealed to the United Nations Security Council, but made it clear America would act alone if necessary. On March 19, 2003, just 49 days after this speech and without the backing of the United Nations, President Bush announced the United States' entry into war with Iraq.

As the war waged on, it became clear that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction, its ties to Al Qaeda were limited, and it bore no responsibility for the 9/11 attacks. Yet the military campaign continued. While the first phase of war was justified because of the threat Saddam Hussein and Iraq posed, the focus shifted in later years to spreading and defending democracy. In his 2004 State of the Union address, President Bush proclaimed, "Our aim is a democratic peace, a peace founded upon the dignity and right of every man and woman...We understand our special calling: This great Republic will lead the cause of freedom." President Bush relentlessly defended the war as a just mission for democracy.

The later years of the Iraq War were marked by changing goals. In 2006, President Bush outlined new pillars of his Iraq strategy – reconstruction, self-governance, and training Iraqi forces to take over security responsibilities. In 2007, however, in the face of mounting violence, President Bush announced a surge of 20,000 additional American troops. The surge did achieve some level of success, although it is hard to assign direct cause-and-effect. In 2008, as his administration faced its last year in

office, President Bush returned his focus to the transition to self-government and security. The war would soon be handed over to the new Obama administration.

*vi. - Iraq War (Obama)*

President Obama's policy toward Iraq was clear – withdraw on a responsible timetable. Indeed, in his first State of the Union speech, he addressed the situation in Iraq in one sentence – “We are now carefully reviewing our policies in both wars, and I will soon announce a way forward in Iraq that leaves Iraq to its people and responsibly ends this war.” In his next State of the Union address, President Obama announced plans to withdraw combat troops by the end of August 2010. This deadline was later extended, and the last troops were sent home in December 2011. The U.S. maintains an advisory role in Iraq, training Iraqi security forces and supporting the peaceful transition to self-government.

*vii. - Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Bush)*

American presidents do not so much form new policies on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as they revise inherited ones. Each president is faced with the same three challenges to a sustained peace: claims to Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, and the lines of a new state. America also categorizes Hamas, the Palestinian Liberation Front, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine as terrorist organizations. Finally, American pro-Israel lobbies and congressmen hold power over the diplomatic maneuverings of a president.

Historically, America has been strong allies with Israel, and the administration of President Bush was no different. What defines an administration is the negotiating parameters they support. President Bush supported a two-state solution and the removal of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. He also supported many of the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee, including a stop to Israeli

settlement activity in the occupied territories.<sup>35</sup> In his final State of the Union address in 2008, President Bush outlined a lofty goal to achieve a peace agreement that defined a Palestinian state by the end of the year. The year would run out without such an agreement.

*viii. - Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Obama)*

The Obama administration's strategy in Israel was largely similar to that of the Bush administration. President Obama advocated a two-state solution and a freeze on Israeli housing settlements. Additionally, as a precondition for negotiations, Obama announced that the pre-1967 borders should be restored.<sup>36</sup> This policy had never been supported before by any president, as the Israelis do not accept these lines as historically legitimate. The future of Jerusalem and the fate of Palestinian refugees, also traditional negotiating points, were acknowledged as more challenging because of their historically emotional nature. Israel's right to self-defense, however, was unequivocally supported. Finally, the announcement of an agreement in 2011 between Fatah and Hamas caused serious concern in re-starting negotiations. The two groups hold sway in Palestine but do not recognize Israel's right to exist. Negotiations are currently at an impasse.

*ix. - Arab Spring*

The United States under President Obama has largely supported the Arab Spring, as its central tenets call for the removal of dictatorial regimes and the installation of lasting freedom and democracy. There are, however, necessary variations in policy between countries. A little more than a month after the first uprising in Tunisia, President Obama said in his 2011 State of the Union address, "The United States of America stands with the people of Tunisia, and supports the democratic aspirations of all people." Two months later in March, the United Nations authorized a no-fly zone over Libya. France,

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<sup>35</sup> National Security Strategy, 2002 <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>

<sup>36</sup> National Security Strategy, 2010 [www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/.../national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/.../national_security_strategy.pdf)

the United States and the United Kingdom initiated an airstrike campaign against pro-Qaddafi forces two days later. Despite calls for similar action in other countries, particularly Egypt then Syria, the United States has not taken any other military steps.

In May of 2011, President Obama addressed the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, more specifically outlining U.S. policy concerning the Arab Spring.<sup>37</sup> As he said, “We have the chance to show that America values the dignity of the street vendor in Tunisia more than the raw power of the dictator...After decades of accepting the world as it is in the region, we have a chance to pursue the world as it should be.” President Obama compelled the transitional governments in Tunisia and Egypt to “set a strong example through free and fair elections, a vibrant civil society, accountable and effective democratic institutions, and responsible regional leadership.”

In Libya, President Obama justified the military action taken against the Qaddafi regime at the prospect of “imminent massacre”. In Syria, while no military action has been taken, the United States condemned the actions of the Assad regime and stepped up sanctions. Concerned that Iran would take advantage of too much turmoil in Bahrain, President Obama maintained support for the ruling government. He insisted, however, that mass arrests and brute force were not only unacceptable, but would not silence legitimate calls for reform. The Obama administration continues to closely monitor and support the Arab Spring movements, currently using diplomatic channels to form coalition groups should further intervention be necessary. But the message is clear – “If you take the risks that reform entails, you will have the full support of the United States.”<sup>38</sup>

Since the Arab Spring began, elections have been held in Tunisia and Egypt. In these and other countries, there is concern that extremist or antagonistic groups may be democratically elected. This

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<sup>37</sup> Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa, State Department, 19 May 2011  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

poses a challenge for the United States which is trying to support the democratic process without aiding enemy groups in their ascension to power. The Arab Spring continues to greatly affect the foreign policy strategy of the United States in the region.

### **Al Jazeera's Comparative Coverage of Events**

We now turn to a review of Al Jazeera's coverage of events in comparison to other outlets, the reasons for which are twofold. First, we must establish the characteristics of Al Jazeera's coverage on each of the six U.S. foreign policy initiatives, the focus of the American media content analysis. Secondly, such a review will contribute to our understanding of the frames assigned to Al Jazeera over the course of the decade. Again, the events of interest are as follows: (1) Al Qaeda operations and the activities of Osama bin Laden; (2) the War in Afghanistan; (3) the War in Iraq; (4) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; (5) Terrorism, including but not limited to, the War on Terror; and (6) the Arab Spring. While the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Arab Spring have been independently assessed in the literature, Al Qaeda/bin Laden and Terrorism are more often interwoven themes. Where quantitative studies have not been conducted, anecdotal or qualitative evidence is used to establish the nature of Al Jazeera's coverage.

A number of studies have compared war coverage by Al Jazeera to other news organizations. Amy Jasperson and Mansour El-Kikhia examined coverage of the War in Afghanistan on Al Jazeera as compared to CNN.<sup>39</sup> The study looked not only at the competing frames on each network, but also how Al Jazeera was treated by CNN considering the network's usage of Al Jazeera footage. They found that coverage on CNN was widely positive and supportive of the actions taken by President Bush and the military. Military frames were employed for a majority of stories, focusing on technical language and

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<sup>39</sup>Jasperson, Amy E. and Mansour O. El-Kikhia. 2003. "CNN and Al Jazeera's Media Coverage of America's War in Afghanistan." In *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public*, ed. P. Norris, M. Kern, and M. Just. New York: Routledge.

weapons capabilities. The frames employed by Al Jazeera, on the other hand, more often highlighted a humanitarian perspective rather than military prowess. The civilian toll was a focus of Al Jazeera's coverage and the network reinforced the popular perception among Arabs that the war in Afghanistan was not against the Taliban, but against Islam and Arabs. The authors assert that while nothing in Al Jazeera's coverage was blatantly supportive of bin Laden or Al Qaeda, the network did convey America's animosity toward Arabs and Muslims to the region. Thus, the notion that Al Jazeera's coverage of Afghanistan was contrary to U.S. policy is reinforced.

Turning to the Iraq War, Sean Aday, Steven Livingston and Maeve Herbert asked if the media performed its "duty" of objective reporting during wartime.<sup>40</sup> They examined broadcasts from ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, and Al Jazeera to assess both what topics were covered and the tone each network took during its coverage. They found that the American networks were much more likely to ignore dissent in the U.S. or abroad along with stories on international diplomacy and postwar reconstruction. Also largely absent from American media was coverage of U.S., British, Iraqi or civilian casualties. Considering tone, the vast majority of coverage from ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN and Al Jazeera was neutral (the exception here being Fox News). But the authors noted that the question of objectivity was more complex. While Al Jazeera did not air many stories on civilian casualties, criticism of the network also concerned the luridness of such reports. Upon closer consideration, more than a third of Al Jazeera's stories covering civilian casualties were critical in tone along with 40.5% of stories that showed civilian casualties. This is even more telling considering that in total only 11% of stories aired during the period studied was deemed "critical". So while overall criticism of Al Jazeera's bias was found to be unfair, its coverage of civilian casualties failed to be objective and carried an antiwar or even anti-American tone.

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<sup>40</sup>Aday, Sean, Steven Livingston and Maeve Herbert. 2005. "Embedding the Truth: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War." *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*. 10(3): 3-21.

Hartmut Wessler and Manuel Adolphson also examined coverage of the Iraq War. They focused on to what extent and for what purposes western news channels utilized information and footage provided by Arab satellite broadcasters (ASB).<sup>41</sup> Further, they examined the evaluations of Arab satellite broadcasters presented by western news. Nine topics were identified where ASB footage or verbal information was regularly used ranging from Iraqi war victims to Allied military failures and statements by Iraqi officials. They found that nearly half of all the airtime on CNN dedicated to the nine specified topics utilized ASB footage or information. Despite its high use of ASB material, the frame most often employed by CNN in describing ASB was “willing mouthpiece of the irrational”. Thus there is a disconnect between the utilization of material and the presentation of ASB journalistic standards. As a major Arab network, this study highlights the disconnect between Al Jazeera’s influence with American outlets and its broader (and negative) reputation in American discourse.

To the best of my knowledge, an empirical analysis of Al Jazeera’s coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not yet been conducted. There is, however, much anecdotal evidence on this ever-controversial topic. In a report conducted by the Congressional Research Service in 2003<sup>42</sup>, Al Jazeera’s coverage is described as using vivid, violent montages of Palestinian suffering, employing controversial language, and personalizing the news to emphasize Arab and Muslim victimization. On the other hand, Al Jazeera is cited for regularly interviewing and airing statements by Israeli officials – a practice otherwise shunned by many Arab channels. In essence, Al Jazeera receives criticism from all sides, accused of both acting as an extension of Israeli intelligence while simultaneously propagating anti-Semitic material. From a strictly journalistic point of view, the network draws praise for its strong presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The report concludes, “Although images of Al Jazeera

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<sup>41</sup>Wessler, Hartmut and Manuel Adolphsen. 2008. “Contra-flow from the Arab World? How Arab Television Coverage of the 2003 Iraq War was Used and Framed on Western International News Channels.” *Media, Culture & Society*.30: 439-461.

<sup>42</sup> Sharp, Jeremy M. “The Al-Jazeera News Network: Opportunity or Challenge for U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East?” *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*. 23 July 2003.

broadcasts are often disturbing beyond the norms found on U.S. television, proponents of Al Jazeera claim that they present a more realistic picture of the day-to-day hardships of life in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the present conflict.”<sup>43</sup>

Most recently, Al Jazeera has received attention for its coverage of events during the Arab Spring. Again, to the best of knowledge there are as yet no systematic studies of Al Jazeera’s coverage of the Arab Spring. There is, however, much anecdotal evidence that Al Jazeera largely portrayed the conflict in a manner consistent with U.S. policy interests. The *Miami Herald* called it the network’s “CNN moment”.<sup>44</sup> The network also demonstrated its adeptness at straddling the old and new media environments, using Twitter feeds, YouTube videos and mobile footage by protestors to convey a story through television. Its coverage, however, did draw some criticism accusing the network of “cheerleading” the protests rather than objectively reporting on them. Former US ambassador to Morocco Marc Ginsberg said in the *Huffington Post*, “Through internet and Twitter feeds, Al Jazeera sees itself less and less as exclusively a news gathering organization and more and more like a ‘Wizard of Oz’ type instrument for social upheaval in the region.”<sup>45</sup> Other critics noted that Al Jazeera did not cover uprisings in Bahrain, a strategic partner of Qatar, to the same degree as it had other protests in the region.<sup>46</sup>

Taken together, the literature shows Al Jazeera’s coverage of events was not always in agreement with American foreign policy priorities. Further, it shows Al Jazeera was often critical of the foreign policy priorities of the United States. The kind of inflammatory language used by elites to frame Al Jazeera, however, seems out of proportion. The difference in tone and coverage was one of degree and often limited to specific aspects of reports, such as casualties or civilian concerns. The literature

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> Gornall, Jonathan. “Arab Spring Brings Al Jazeera to Full Bloom.” *The National*. 24 June 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ghazi, Jalal. “Al Jazeera Wilts in Arab Spring.” *New American Media*. 26 June 2011.

shows more nuance in Al Jazeera's coverage than the popular impression would suggest. Still, the difference is there and must be considered.

### Topic-Specific Hypotheses

Now that we have a better understanding of Al Jazeera's tenure in the United States, defined foreign policies, and reviewed Al Jazeera's coverage of them, we can make specific guesses as to Al Jazeera's portrayal on the six topics outlined above. These six topics serve as yardsticks to make a conclusion on Hypothesis 2: portrayals of Al Jazeera will alternate depending on their perceived agreement with American foreign policy. It is important to remember that much of this perception was constructed from elite dialogue and commentary on Al Jazeera and its coverage. Thus, in developing the specific topic hypotheses, we take elite anecdotal evidence into consideration.

- a) *Bin Laden and Al Qaeda* – Al Jazeera will receive a negative portrayal when associated with bin Laden and/or Al Qaeda. While the literature does not suggest Al Jazeera was blatantly supportive of the terrorist group, the frequent association of the two by elites will pervade American media coverage.
- b) *Afghanistan* – Al Jazeera will receive a neutral or slightly positive portrayal during the War in Afghanistan. While the literature suggests Al Jazeera conveyed American animosity toward Arabs and Muslims, we must consider its favored position inside Taliban-controlled Afghanistan during the beginning of the war. We expect American media to depend on Al Jazeera for information and relay its reports. It is only this dependence that may lead to a slightly more neutral or positive portrayal. Afterward or otherwise, as the literature suggests, Al Jazeera may fall into a negative frame.
- c) *Iraq* – Al Jazeera will receive a negative portrayal when associated with the War in Iraq. Its coverage was shown to be biased toward Iraqi suffering. Paired with repeated criticism from the Bush administration, American media will reflect these negative frames.
- d) *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* – Al Jazeera will receive a negative portrayal when associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Anecdotal evidence characterizes the network as overly-sympathetic

to Palestinian positions. Given the American alliance with Israel, associating with the Palestinian cause will reflect poorly in American media.

- e) *Terrorism* – Al Jazeera will receive a negative portrayal for broadcasting terrorist tapes and replaying interviews with terrorists.
- f) *Arab Spring* – Al Jazeera will be portrayed positively as it was commended for its coverage of pro-democracy protests and anti-regime uprisings. Anecdotal evidence suggests Al Jazeera’s portrayal was consistent with American support of the revolutions taking place in these countries.

### Methodology

To assess these hypotheses, I took a sample of all the stories mentioning “Al Jazeera” in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *NBC Nightly News*, *CNN Newsroom*, and *Fox Special Report* between September 11, 2001 and September 30, 2011. “Al Jazeera” refers only to the Arabic network in my content analysis, not Al Jazeera English or any other Al Jazeera affiliates. For the newspapers, only stories appearing in section A or editorials were included. The total universe of newspaper stories, editorials, and television reports was 3,025. For newspaper stories appearing in section A, I took a one-quarter sample (528 stories). For editorials, I took a one-half sample (163 editorials). For television, I included all stories. Because of the continuous and repetitive nature of 24/7 cable television, transcripts for cable news programs did not always have a clear transition between stories. As traditional segments were absent, I can only tally the references made to Al Jazeera as a whole, although not associated with specific stories. As a network news program, however, *NBC Nightly News* does distinguish clearly between stories. But because the rest of the sample was only on the “mention” level, I treated NBC the same way. In all, there were 402 mentions of Al Jazeera in the television sample. Taken together, there was a total of 1,093 newspaper, editorial, and television stories, or roughly one-third of the universe. All of the stories were sampled from the LexisNexis database, with the exception of the *Wall Street Journal* which was sampled from the ProQuest database.

Newspaper and television stories were assessed according to slightly different coding schemes that took into account the inherent differences between the mediums.

It should be noted that there is no data for television before 2004. The database returns transcripts for CNN before 2004, but once the search terms are narrowed to *CNN Newsroom* there are no results. The same was true of Fox and *Fox Special Report*. *NBC Nightly News* returned results before 2004, but none that mention Al Jazeera. While it is possible there were no mentions of Al Jazeera before 2004, this seems unlikely. Rather, I do not think the LexisNexis database carried the relevant transcripts prior to 2004. This likely has an effect on the results of this study. However, I took this data gap into account and assessed the results accordingly. The missing data is referred to where appropriate in the data analysis.

It is also important here to make a note on the coding of Arab Spring stories. The sample only extends to September 2011, while the fallout from the Arab Spring continues to this day. Because of this shortened time span, the sampled coverage was affected in two ways. First, while all the other topics spanned the decade (or beyond), stories on the Arab Spring were limited to the first nine months of the uprisings. Secondly, Egypt and Libya dominated this early coverage as their protests were the largest and held more ramifications for the regional order. So, while the coding scheme differentiated between the various countries, the actual results mainly concerned these two. Thus, while recognizing the differences among uprisings and subsequent differences in the American policy response, results were collapsed into one overall “Arab Spring” category. References to the Arab Spring should thus be understood as only examining these early nine months and reflective of the dominant coverage in Egypt in Libya. Where appropriate, country-specific coverage will be discussed.

My coding scheme tracked the portrayal of Al Jazeera along four dimensions. First, I considered the broad event or issue that is the topic of the story in which Al Jazeera was included to examine

Hypothesis 1. There was no valence attached to topics at the article level. To satisfy Hypothesis 2, I considered the information *immediately surrounding* Al Jazeera at the paragraph or “mention” level. This was to monitor how Al Jazeera was presented or used in American media and which events or issues were directly associated with it. This is done at the mention level because Al Jazeera may be cited for a topic that differs from that of the article. There were 781 mentions in newspapers, 163 in editorials, and 402 in television.<sup>47</sup> Next, I considered the context provided about Al Jazeera by the story in order to distinguish between explicit and implicit portrayals. I considered context as any description of Al Jazeera beyond simple taglines like “the Arab news network”, or comparisons to western news organizations (e.g. to the BBC or CNN, etc). Mentions were only coded as explicit if context was provided. Negative, positive, or neutral valences were then assigned based on the content of the context quote or the affiliated news organization.

In the absence of context or comparative references, the mention was assigned an implicit valence. A negative implicit valence was assigned if: (1) Al Jazeera was cited for a tape it broadcast from bin Laden, Al Qaeda, or other terrorist groups; (2) The mention was about inciting violence or action, claiming responsibility or commenting on a terrorist attack, Osama bin Laden or Al Qaeda, a hostage or prisoner situation, anti-American sentiments, or violence; (3) Persons associated with Al Jazeera were officials from a U.S. enemy state, officials or affiliates of Al Qaeda, officials or affiliates of a different terrorist group, an unaffiliated “radical”, the content of a quote from an otherwise neutral source (e.g. man-on-the-street) was biased against the United States; or (4) Al Jazeera was directly associated with violence or terrorism. If any of these criteria were met in the absence of context, the mention was assigned a negative implicit valence because it is assumed all of the above would be read negatively by an average American.

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<sup>47</sup> Multiple mentions of Al Jazeera in an editorial were coded altogether and assigned one coherent valence. Due to the narrative voice of editorials, it was hard to code all mentions individually while still maintaining meaning for each. Thus, they were considered as one.

A positive implicit valence was assigned if: (1) Persons associated with Al Jazeera were U.S. administrative or military officials, officials from a U.S. allied state or the United Nations, or the content of a quote from an otherwise neutral source (e.g. man-on-the-street) was biased in favor of the United States; or (2) NBC, CNN, or Fox replayed visual footage from Al Jazeera or featured an Al Jazeera segment in part or in full. A neutral implicit valence was assigned if: (1) the content of a quote from an otherwise neutral source (e.g. man-on-the-street) had no bias one way or another toward the United States; or (2) a valence had not already been assigned. It is assumed all of the above would be read positively by an average American.

The criteria for valence assignment were considered in conjunction with U.S. foreign policy priorities. Once valences were assigned, the results were compared with the expected coverage across the issues, as reviewed above. Taken together with the coding scheme and content analysis, this approach should satisfy Hypothesis 2.

In order to assess the reliability of my coding scheme, I ran two inter-coder reliability tests. For the final reliability test, the results of the coding variables in hard news, editorials, and television were each run separately. In hard news, the results of each category were the same between 55% and 99% of the time. In editorials, the results were the same between 58% and 98% of the time. And in television, the results were the same between 43% and 91% of the time. In all three mediums, the valence assignment was the least reliable (55% in hard news, 58% in editorials, and 43% in television). This is likely due to irregularities in the categories that then determined valence. A detailed breakdown of the reliability of each variable can be found in the appendix.

There are three main reasons why reliability was not as satisfactory as desired. First, two answers to a question could logically be correct. For instance, a story about the Iraq War may include a significant section on soldiers taken hostage. In coding the topic, both the answers "Iraq War" and

“hostage situation” could presumably be correct. Because coders were forced to choose only one answer, this could have affected inter-coder reliability. If multiple answers were allowed for one question, however, the data would be too detailed to categorize usefully. This issue was true at both the article and mention level. Lastly, the “context” category can be very subjective. Coders have to decide what language counts as context, or how much other information in the surrounding paragraph to include as context. Because context was such a significant category and by nature open-ended, this error had to be included. While the reliability results certainly leave room for improvement, some error was unavoidable.

### *Importance of This Study*

It is easy to predict that Al Jazeera will initially be framed negatively given the bevy of anecdotal evidence available since 9/11. I am most interested, however, in how, why, and when this frame changes. Al Jazeera as an organization today commands much more clout as a leading news source than it did as the supposed “mouthpiece of bin Laden”. So what happened in between? I also hope this study can contribute to our understanding of media practices during war, conflict, crisis, and in foreign affairs generally. Al Jazeera had news-sharing relationships with American media outlets, or at least was a source where no formal relationship existed. I hope this study will inform our understanding of American media’s own standards and practices with international counterparts. If the media serves to inform the public and plays an unequivocally important role in a democracy, American media’s treatment of Al Jazeera - or any international counterpart - is telling. What information is included and what is missed if political prerogatives affect news-making decisions? Are voters fully informed if the media’s decision-making is influenced by elite characterizations? Finally, by examining a broader time period, I hope to inform the dialogue over framing. Previous work on framing has evaluated more limited case studies. By investigating the framing of one news organization over time and through

ongoing simultaneous events, I hope to provide a more comprehensive picture of the mechanisms at work.

Data Analysis

We now review the results of the content analysis. We begin with Hypothesis 1:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Presence/Absence of Al Jazeera: Al Jazeera will be present in American media coverage of stories involving war, terrorism, and/or conflict.*

To address the first hypothesis, we consider the topics covered in articles mentioning Al Jazeera. The analysis answers the question, “What issue or event was the article covering?” By looking at Table 1, we can determine which topics in American media were most likely to include mention of Al Jazeera.

Overall, we see that Al Jazeera was most often cited in stories involving war, terrorism, and conflict, thus confirming Hypothesis 1.

<b>Table 1 - Article Topics, by Category</b>			
*unit of analysis = “article” except for television which is “mention”			
	<b>NEWSPAPERS</b>	<b>EDITORIALS</b>	<b>TELEVISION</b>
<b>War</b>	166 (31.4%)	55 (33.8%)	68 (16.9%)
<b>Terrorism</b>	129 (24.4%)	21 (12.9%)	158 (39.3%)
<b>Conflict</b>	17 (3.2%)	4 (2.5%)	7 (1.7%)
<b>Related</b>	13 (2.5%)	3 (1.8%)	3 (0.7%)
<b>Sum</b>	325 (61.6%)	83 (50.9%)	236 (58.7%)
<b>Other</b>	203 (38.4%)	80 (49.1%)	166 (41.3%)
<b>Total</b>	528 (100%)	163 (100%)	402 (100%)

- War = Iraq, Afghanistan, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
- Terrorism = terrorist attack, terrorism, bin Laden, Al Qaeda, hostage situation, 9/11
- Conflict = conflict between two Arab states
- Related = Iran, nuclear weapons, U.S. military
- Sum = War + Terrorism + Conflict + Related
- Other = All other categories

These results have significant implications for Al Jazeera. Featured in such a select menu of topics, the barriers to entry in the American market are set especially high for Al Jazeera. American media presents Al Jazeera in only a sliver of the topics and regions they cover. And while this focus makes sense – featuring stories relevant to American policies and actions – it gives Al Jazeera a very limited range of exposure. The consistency across mediums featuring Al Jazeera in such a select group of topics reinforces the challenge for the network. What is the likelihood that Al Jazeera will be treated fairly, or even positively, when they are subscribed to only the most controversial and wrenching topics? We turn now to a more detailed breakdown of topics in newspapers, editorials, and television.

### **Newspaper Articles**

The war category garnered the largest share of hard news articles that mention Al Jazeera, with 166 out of a total 528 articles, or 31.4%. The Iraq War was the most readily covered topic in newspapers, with 19.3% of stories on the topic. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict was considered a “war” in this study because of its sustained violence and historical impact. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the topic of 8.3% of stories in the study. Finally, the War in Afghanistan accounted for 3.8% of stories.

The terrorism category included six possible responses: terrorist attack (not 9/11), terrorism (as a subject), Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, hostage situations, and 9/11. This was the second-most popular category of story topics, accounting for 24.4% of all stories. Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda received the most coverage within this category, with 6.4% and 6.6% of stories, respectively. Hostage situations were the subject of 4.9% of stories, terrorist attacks were 4.7%, terrorism accounted for 1.1% of articles, while 9/11 was the least popular at 0.6%.

The conflict category consisted of those stories featuring a conflict between two or more Arab states. While the category was not originally intended to be so narrow, other conflicts were either diplomatic in nature and coded under “western/Arab relations”, or were already accounted for in other

response options (e.g., the Iraq War, War in Afghanistan, etc). Conflict was the subject of 3.2% of all stories. Israel was often at the center of conflicts with Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran.

Finally, there were a few other response options that did not fall easily into “war”, “terrorism”, or “conflict” categories, but nonetheless were related and thus included in the examination of Hypothesis 1. Three stories (0.6%) concerned Iran, a major U.S. enemy state and one-third of the “axis of evil”. Another three stories (0.6%) concerned nuclear weapons, while the U.S. military was the focus of 1.3% of articles (7).

Taken together, 61.6% of all newspapers articles concerned war, terrorism, or conflict (325/528). This is a clear majority and supports Hypothesis 1.

## **Editorials**

Turning now to editorials, we find similar, if slightly less definitive, results. The war in Iraq once again dominated story topics, the focus of 36 out of 163 editorials (22.1%). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict accounted for 9.2% of editorials, while the war in Afghanistan came in at 2.5%. Overall, war was the focus of 33.8% of all editorials.

The terrorism category again attracted a decent amount of attention, accounting for 12.8% of editorials. Seven editorials were written on terrorism as a subject (5.5% of the total), making it the most popular of this category. Al Qaeda accounted for 1.8% of editorials, while terrorist attacks rounded off the category with 2 editorials (1.2%). There were no editorials written on hostages or 9/11 that included Al Jazeera.

A similar percentage of editorials (2.4%) and hard news (2.9%) concerned conflict. This translates into four editorials. The conflicts in focus were between Israel and Egypt, Israel and Turkey,

and Syria and Lebanon. There were only three editorials in the related categories of Iran (1) and the U.S. military (2).

In all, war, terrorism, and conflict account for a slim majority of 50.9% of all editorials. The topics, however, were among the most popular overall. The War in Iraq was written about most often, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the third most-cited topic, while terrorism had a relatively high percentage (5.5%). While not as definitive as the hard news sample, the results from editorials also confirm Hypothesis 1.

### **Television**

The results from television also endorse Hypothesis 1, almost as strongly as hard news. War was the topic of 45 out of 402 mentions, or 16.9%. The War in Iraq accounted for the majority of this, with 41 reports or 10.2% of all stories. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict made up the rest, with four stories and 6.7%. Surprisingly, the War in Afghanistan was not the topic of any of the television reports.

Terrorism was the most popular topic in television, accounting for 39.3% of all reports. Osama bin Laden was of the greatest interest. 72 stories (17.9%) concerned the terrorist, representing the plurality of all television reports. Al Qaeda was the next most popular terrorism subject, with 9% of all stories. Hostages were close behind, with 8.2%. Terrorist attacks and terrorism as a subject made up the remaining numbers, with 2.2% and 2%, respectively. 9/11 did not account for any of the stories, but this is likely because data was unavailable before 2004.

Conflict was not a major focus of television, with only 1.7% of stories. This was entirely accounted for by the conflict between Israel and Lebanon, of which there were 7 stories. Nuclear weapons and the U.S. military were also not heavily featured (0.2% and 0.5%, respectively). The “situation in one country” response, however, was notable in television. 7.9% of stories, or 32 of them,

concerned individuals countries. These covered 11 countries from Kyrgyzstan to Nigeria and the United States. While “situation in one country” does not necessarily denote conflict, in most cases it did. It is mentioned here only because of the significant level of coverage it received.

In total, 58.6% of all television stories concerned war, terrorism, or conflict– a certain majority. Paired with the results from hard news and editorials, Hypothesis 1 is unequivocally confirmed.

We turn now to Hypothesis 2:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Nature/Valence of Portrayal:*

- a) Al Jazeera will be portrayed in a negative manner when their coverage of an event/issue is discordant with American policy positions.
- b) Al Jazeera will be portrayed in a positive manner when their coverage of an event/issue is concordant with American policy positions.

To best assess Hypothesis 2, we examine what topics immediately surrounded Al Jazeera in a story at the paragraph, i.e. “mention”, level. There were 781 mentions in newspapers, 163 in editorials, and 402 in television. Multiple mentions of Al Jazeera in an editorial were considered altogether to assign one coherent opinion. The narrative voice of editorials made it difficult to accurately code each individual mention and otherwise would have made such mentions meaningless. If context or comparative references to a western news organization were given, an explicit valence was assigned according to the content. In the absence of such context, an implicit valence was assigned. Three factors influenced the implicit valence. First, what materials or information was Al Jazeera cited for? Second, what people or groups were associated with the network? And lastly, was violence or terrorism directly associated with Al Jazeera?

The difference between explicit and implicit valences is an important one. Explicit valences should typically carry more weight – they indicate context, a direct pronouncement on the merits of Al Jazeera. Implicit valences are associations below the surface – they connect Al Jazeera with events or actors that already come with a pro- or anti-American bias. To borrow a phrase, implicit valences are “guilty by association.”

It is helpful here to review the expected portrayals of Al Jazeera for each of the major topics if Hypothesis 2 is correct:

- a) *Bin Laden and Al Qaeda* – Al Jazeera will receive a negative portrayal when associated with bin Laden and/or Al Qaeda. While the literature does not suggest Al Jazeera was blatantly supportive of the terrorist group, the frequent association of the two by elites will pervade American media coverage.
- b) *Afghanistan* – Al Jazeera will receive a neutral or slightly positive portrayal during the War in Afghanistan. While the literature suggests Al Jazeera conveyed American animosity toward Arabs and Muslims, we must consider its favored position inside Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. We expect American media to depend on Al Jazeera for information and relay its reports. It is only this dependence that may lead to a slightly more neutral or positive portrayal. Afterward or otherwise, as the literature suggests, Al Jazeera may fall into a negative frame.
- c) *Iraq* – Al Jazeera will receive a negative portrayal when associated with the War in Iraq. Its coverage was shown to be biased toward Iraqi suffering. Paired with repeated criticism from the Bush administration, American media will reflect these negative frames.
- d) *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* – Al Jazeera will receive a negative portrayal when associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Anecdotal evidence characterizes the network as overly-sympathetic to Palestinian positions. Given the American alliance with Israel, associating with the Palestinian cause will reflect poorly in American media.
- e) *Terrorism* – Al Jazeera will receive a negative portrayal for broadcasting terrorist tapes and replaying interviews with terrorists.
- f) *Arab Spring* – Al Jazeera will be portrayed positively as it was commended for its coverage of pro-democracy protests and anti-regime uprisings.

We look now to the results of the data analysis on each of these topics.

### Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden

	<b>NEWSPAPERS(N=64)</b>		<b>EDITORIALS(N=19)</b>		<b>TELEVISION (N=42)</b>	
	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>
<b>Negative</b>	5 (7.8%)	45 (70.3%)	6 (31.6%)	12 (63.2%)	6 (14.3%)	33 (78.6%)
<b>Positive</b>	2 (3.1%)	3 (4.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>Neutral</b>	3 (4.7%)	6 (9.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (7.1%)

Of the 781 mentions of Al Jazeera in newspaper stories, 64 of them concerned Al Qaeda and/or Osama bin Laden. The vast majority of these portrayed Al Jazeera in a negative manner (78%). Further, in 53% of these mentions Al Jazeera was cited for broadcasting a tape from bin Laden or Al Qaeda. Another 30% of mentions cited an interview or statement given to Al Jazeera by bin Laden or Al Qaeda figures. These numbers suggest Al Jazeera's access to Al Qaeda figures or willingness to broadcast their taped messages garnered much attention in American media. As the valence assignments show, this attention was overwhelmingly negative. But the majority of mentions were also implicit, indicating there was no positive context overriding the negative assignment of valences.

But the valence assignments tell a story in themselves. Of the 50 instances where Al Jazeera received a negative valence, only five of them were explicit. This means that Al Jazeera was not being lambasted every time it played a tape or showed an interview. Instead, Al Jazeera's association with bin Laden and Al Qaeda was enough to sully the news organization. No explicit judgment was made on Al Jazeera. Instead, implicit associations reaffirmed the notion that Al Jazeera was the "mouthpiece of bin Laden". Al Jazeera's association with Al Qaeda and bin Laden paired with the overwhelmingly negative valence suffice to confirm Hypothesis 2. Al Jazeera seems to have been portrayed negatively for the platform it afforded America's top enemies.

Turning now to editorials, we would expect to find negative portrayals of Al Jazeera prevalent because of the freedom opinion writing affords. Indeed, this is the case. Of the 19 editorials that associated Al Jazeera directly with Al Qaeda and bin Laden, all but one showed contempt for the network. None of the editorials portrayed Al Jazeera positively when discussing bin and Al Qaeda, whether explicitly or implicitly. About a third of the editorials explicitly portrayed Al Jazeera negatively (32%). Like hard news, editorials mostly featured Al Jazeera for its interviews or tapes of bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Hypothesis 2 is again confirmed.

Lastly, we turn to television. Television is an especially interesting case when considering the treatment of Al Jazeera. American networks often had the option of replaying the interviews or tapes originally broadcast by Al Jazeera through news-sharing agreements. Television networks faced some of the same editorial dilemmas as Al Jazeera. How did they respond? And how did they treat Al Jazeera considering their empathetic position?

Not so well. Of the 42 instances in which Al Jazeera was associated with bin Laden and Al Qaeda, fully 39 were negative. There were no instances where Al Jazeera was portrayed positively. Following the trend of hard news and editorials, 74% of the mentions either cited interviews or tapes. Interestingly, despite the option to replay Al Jazeera's footage or reports on al Qaeda and bin Laden, this only occurred once. This puts American networks' treatment of Al Jazeera into sharper contrast. Even when given the option of showing footage of these tapes and interviews, American television networks refrained. Bin Laden and Al Qaeda appear to be the third rail of television journalism, confirming Hypothesis 2 for a third time.

## War in Afghanistan

	<b>NEWSPAPERS(N=12)</b>		<b>EDITORIALS(N=2)</b>		<b>TELEVISION (N=1)</b>	
	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>
<b>Negative</b>	4 (33.3%)	5 (41.7%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>Positive</b>	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>Neutral</b>	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100%)

Al Jazeera held a unique position at the beginning of the War in Afghanistan as the only foreign news organization allowed inside Taliban-controlled territory. Considering this advantaged position, we might expect Al Jazeera to be treated in a neutral or positive manner more often. We also expect that coverage will be heavier between 2001 and 2003, before the launch of the Iraq War.

Looking first to hard news, it is shocking at how little attention Al Jazeera received for its coverage of Afghanistan. Of 781 total mentions in newspapers, only twelve concerned Afghanistan. As predicted, a majority of the mentions occurred between 2001 and 2003, with nine in those three years.

Of the twelve times Al Jazeera was associated with Afghanistan in newspapers, nine were negative. The split between explicit and implicit was almost equal, with four explicit valences and five implicit valences. Al Jazeera was deemed neutral twice and received one positive valence, although it was explicit. Interviews counted for a plurality of the material for which al Jazeera was cited. Al Jazeera's programming, footage, reporters, position in Arab media, and general information were all featured along with one mention of a bin Laden tape. Overall, the lack of volume on this topic and the fractured nature of responses do not strongly endorse Hypothesis 2 either way.

The results of editorials were equally obtuse. Only two editorials associated Al Jazeera with Afghanistan, and both gave the network an implicitly negative valence. One cited an interview and the

other a tape. Both editorials were written in 2001. Again, this is not an endorsement of Hypothesis 2 either way given the miniscule sample.

If possible, the results from television were even less conclusive than editorials. There was only one instance when Al Jazeera was associated with Afghanistan. The valence assigned was implicitly neutral. Data for television was unavailable before 2004. This is likely the reason there is not a greater sample here. Still, considering an American military presence lasted in Afghanistan until 2011, it is surprising there was not more coverage. Hypothesis 2 is left unconfirmed for a final time. The lack of data before 2004 combined with the inability to determine a trend from one piece of evidence makes for a very inconclusive analysis.

Judging from the results of hard news, editorials, and television, the War in Afghanistan did not significantly play into the portrayal of Al Jazeera in American media.

### Iraq War

<b>Table 4 - Content Analysis Results: Iraq</b>						
*Unit of analysis = "mention"						
	<b>NEWSPAPERS(N=101)</b>		<b>EDITORIALS(N=34)</b>		<b>TELEVISION (N=35)</b>	
	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>
<b>Negative</b>	15 (14.9%)	29 (28.7%)	14 (41.2%)	6 (17.6%)	10 (28.6%)	10 (28.6%)
<b>Positive</b>	11 (10.9%)	13 (12.9%)	2 (5.9%)	1 (2.9%)	1 (2.9%)	8 (22.9%)
<b>Neutral</b>	2 (2.0%)	31 (30.7%)	1 (2.9%)	10 (29.4%)	2 (5.7%)	4 (11.4%)

Early criticisms of Al Jazeera surrounded its coverage of the U.S. effort in Iraq. But the war also had critics at home, especially as the war endured despite the absence of weapons of mass destruction and redefined measures of success. It thus follows that the portrayal of Al Jazeera in relation to the Iraq War was a much more mixed bag.

Of all newspaper mentions, 12.9% associated Al Jazeera with Iraq (101/781). This was the second most popular association in newspapers. Of the 101 mentions, 33 were neutral, 24 were positive, and 44 were negative. This split is more balanced than anticipated on this topic, as the expectation was for a consistent negative portrayal. Positive portrayals were split almost evenly between implicit and explicit valences (11 and 13, respectively). Neutral and negative portrayals were more heavily implicit, with 31 neutral responses and 29 negative. To better understand any trends or shifts in portrayal, we look at the data on a year-by-year basis.

The majority of mentions associating Al Jazeera and the Iraq War occurred in 2003, when the operation was launched. There were 53 instances in this year, and of these 30 were negative, evenly split between implicit and explicit. 13 mentions were positive, also almost evenly split between implicit and explicit. Al Jazeera received a neutral valence slightly more often with 17 mentions. These results not only show balance in valence, but also in the split between explicit and implicit judgments. The material Al Jazeera was cited for was pretty evenly spread across a number of categories: interviews (10 times), footage (9), position in Arab media (9), programming (8), tape (6), reporters (6), and general information (5). Interestingly, the people cited as sources in this year were also well-spread across categories. 10 were associated with the United States, either as U.S. officials or spokesmen for an allied state. The opposite was also true, with 9 associated with an enemy state, terrorist, or radical. The remaining figures were unaffiliated – whether religious, media, or man-on-the-street. All in all, the variety of materials and people Al Jazeera was cited for reflect the range of valences present.

2004 showcased the second-most number of mentions concerning Al Jazeera and Iraq. The story here, though, is less complex. Of the 19 mentions, 9 were negative, 9 were neutral, and only one positive. Interviews and general information were the most cited material, but there was not a dominant source for these. This probably accounts for the relatively high level of neutrality. The

negative valence is likely due to case-by-case statements from unaffiliated sources, such as religious figures, media practitioners, and representatives from the transitional government. The results from 2004 demonstrate, however, that negative and neutral valences are more readily assigned. Even when sources were unaffiliated and each valence has a theoretically equal chance of being assigned, positive quotes were selected less often. Negative or neutral quotes were more readily selected. Positive valences are more elusive, while neutrality and negativity seem to be the default.

2006 is the only other year worth mentioning. There were 13 instances in which Al Jazeera was featured for its connection to Iraq. There were five negative mentions, five positive mentions, and three neutral mentions. This split can almost wholly be explained by the source of interviews given to Al Jazeera. Six instances cited a U.S. administrative or military official, accounting for the positive valences. The other five sources were unaffiliated, but judging by individual content were likely deemed negative. The neutral valences are accounted for by non-interview material, such as programming. The results of 2006 suggest an interesting trend that interviews often feature polarizing sources, or ones that fit easily into an existing frame.

While negativity was the most commonly assigned valence in connection to the Iraq War and thus confirms Hypothesis 2 in newspapers, the results were more varied than anticipated. At the beginning of the war in 2003, sources, cited material, and valences all had a high degree of variety. As the years wore on, interview sources determined valence and the texture of 2003 was lost. Valence remained varied to a certain extent, but the overall frame was negative. Still, the results were not as negatively polarized as expected.

Were editorials as complex? No - of the 32 mentions that associated Al Jazeera with the Iraq War, 20 were negative, 11 were neutral, and only three were positive. More importantly, almost half (14) of these mentions *explicitly* portrayed Al Jazeera negatively. A sample of the negative context:

“Iraqis who have cooperated with the new government have been publicly humiliated or beheaded, with TV tapes of the murders shown on Al Jazeera, the anti-American Arab TV network.”<sup>48</sup>; “Al Jazeera continues to spew anti-American propaganda”<sup>49</sup>; “Rest assured that if those dramatic TV shots of bombs bursting in Baghdad were killing civilians, Al Jazeera would show them all.”<sup>50</sup>; “Because although these stations have 21st-century graphics, they're still dominated by 1950s Nasserite political correctness - which insists that dignity comes from how you resist the foreigner, even if he's come as a liberator, not by what you build yourself.”<sup>51</sup> These quotes showcase a unique characteristic of editorials— they make general and sweeping comments on Al Jazeera’s position in Arab media more often than they cite a specific incident or interview. Editorials demonized Al Jazeera with little discussion or thought and confirm Hypothesis 2.

Television overall portrayed Al Jazeera negatively in relation to the Iraq War, but by a lesser margin and with more variety in cited material and sources. Of the 35 mentions, 20 were negative, nine were positive, and six were neutral. The negative valences were evenly split between explicit and implicit, while there was only one explicit positive valence. It is unfortunate here that data before 2004 was unavailable for television, because it would have been interesting to compare the earlier years when the Iraq War was in its infancy. Was the observed negativity on par with those years, or had it been tempered? Regardless, television should be commended for its wide variety of cited materials and sources. Interviews were featured 29% of the time, footage 23%, the association with Qatar or the Emir 14%, programming and position in Arab media 11% each, and general information accounted for 3% of all mentions. Pro-U.S. sources were featured 29% of the time, while anti-U.S. sources were covered 26%, and unaffiliated sources accounted for 14% of all mentions. It is especially interesting to note,

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<sup>48</sup>“Najaf and Fallujah.” *Wall Street Journal* 30 August 2004. A22.

<sup>49</sup>“State of Denial.” *Wall Street Journal* 09 September 2003. A28.

<sup>50</sup>“The Road to Baghdad.” *Wall Street Journal* 24 March 2003. A34.

<sup>51</sup> Friedman, Thomas L. “Telling the Truth in Iraq.” *New York Times*. 17 August 2003. A09.

however, that all nine of the positive valences Al Jazeera received were because of its interviews with American officials or allies. This suggests that despite the variety in its coverage, only one situation deemed positive portrayals from television. This follows the trend noticed earlier in newspapers, that negative and neutral valences come easy while positive assignments are more elusive. These results also support Hypothesis 2, as positive valences were received only in association with U.S. officials.

The Iraq War received a substantial amount of attention in regards to Al Jazeera. While newspapers, editorials, and television all confirmed Hypothesis 2, the results were less polarized than expected. Indeed, the variety of sources and cited material in newspapers and television was surprising. Even though the numbers suggest an overall negative frame, some unanticipated balanced results indicate the popular vilification of Al Jazeera was exaggerated.

### Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

<b>Table 5 - Content Analysis Results: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict</b>						
*Unit of Analysis = "mention"						
	<b>NEWSPAPERS(N=63)</b>		<b>EDITORIALS(N=18)</b>		<b>TELEVISION(N=28)</b>	
	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>
<b>Negative</b>	3 (4.8%)	25 (39.7%)	5 (27.8%)	5 (27.8%)	2 (7.1%)	4 (14.3%)
<b>Positive</b>	1 (1.6%)	20 (31.7%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (16.7%)	2 (7.1%)	4 (14.3%)
<b>Neutral</b>	0 (0.0%)	14 (22.2%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (27.8%)	2 (7.1%)	14 (50.0%)

The portrayal of Al Jazeera in American media surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is remarkably balanced. Of the 63 mentions, 28 were negative, 21 were positive, and 14 were neutral. There were only four explicit valences assigned – one positive and three negative. Thus, the majority of judgment was implicit with a relatively even spread – 14 neutral, 20 positive, and 25 negative. Further, looking at the split over individual years, the balanced portrayal is consistent year-to-year (see the corresponding table in Appendix II). There were only two exceptions, once in 2002 and once in 2011.

In 2002, 12 of the 16 mentions were negative. The period between January and May of 2002 was one of high violence in the conflict. In January 2002, a freighter carrying weapons from Iran believed to be intended for militant Palestinian use was captured. Israel alleged top officials in the Palestinian Authority, including Yasser Arafat, were involved. These accusations spurred a spate of suicide bombings and attacks in March 2002, culminating in the Passover Massacre, in which 30 civilians were attacked at a hotel while celebrating Passover. In March alone, more than 130 Israelis were killed. In retaliation, Israel launched Operation Defensive Shield that led to the apprehension of more than 4,000 Palestinian militants, many of whom were killed or injured. In April, the battle at Jenin occurred while a standoff at Bethlehem lasted through April to May.

In covering these events, Al Jazeera was often cited for its interviews with Palestinian officials and militants. Indeed, of the 13 mentions in these five months, all but two were interviews. Six of these interviews were with Palestinian officials or militants. There were only three positive valences during these months, and all are attributed to an interview given by a U.S. or Israeli official. Thus, the spike in negative coverage of Al Jazeera in 2002 is due to its interviews with controversial or enemy figures.

2011 was the only other year in which the steady split between valences was interrupted. But here, the blip was in the number of *neutral* portrayals Al Jazeera received. This was wholly accountable to a series of diplomatic cables received and made public by Al Jazeera that indicated Palestinian officials had offered to cede parts of Jerusalem as part of a peace deal in 2008. No judgment on Al Jazeera's actions in publishing the exchange was made in these stories. Thus, the results from 2011 were not a new trend, but an anomaly.

The results from hard news do not confirm Hypothesis 2 either way. Al Jazeera was expected to be vilified because of anecdotal evidence that indicated the network's promotion of Palestinian propaganda. The results, however, show neither Al Jazeera's Palestinian sympathies nor an

endorsement of American policies. Instead, we see a balanced and consistent attitude toward the network worthy of the conflict's complicated nature.

Editorials, as always, paint a more interesting – and stark – picture. Of the 18 editorials associating Al Jazeera with the conflict, ten were negative, five were neutral, and only three were positive. Of the five explicit valences, all were negative. Here we clearly see the vilification of Al Jazeera as promoting Palestinian propaganda. Two of the more striking indictments include this one from *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman: ““What's happening is that this Arab media explosion [of which he puts Al Jazeera in the lead] is feeding the images of this Israeli-Palestinian violence to this Arab population explosion - radicalizing it and melding in the heads of young Arabs and Muslims the notion that the biggest threat to their futures is J.I.A. - 'Jews, Israel and America.'”<sup>52</sup> In another condemnation of the network, Fouad Ajami suggests Al Jazeera glorifies suicide bombers, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, “For the Palestinians the choice couldn't be clearer: It is either a starring role on the broadcasts of AJ, or a patient political process that brings the Palestinian world back to the compromises and patience of political life.”<sup>53</sup> We again see that Al Jazeera's general role- and not specific actions – are the feature of these characterizations. The plurality of editorials (7) commented on the network's position in Arab media. Overall, editorials confirm Hypothesis 2 given their blunt and accusatory commentary.

Television, on the other hand, predominantly featured Al Jazeera neutrally. Of the 28 total mentions, 16 are neutral, while six each are positive and negative. As has been shown previously in this study, certain cited materials are commonly associated with a particular valence. For instance, of the 1,346 mentions coded in this study, only two that featured a tape did not receive a negative valence. But here, no matter the material cited, Al Jazeera received a variety of valences – positive, negative, and

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<sup>52</sup> Friedman, Thomas L. “War of Ideas, Part 4.” *New York Times*. 18 January 2004. A11.

<sup>53</sup> Ajami, Fouad. “Palestine's Deliverance.” *Wall Street Journal* 27 June 2002. A39.

neutral. The same goes for the sources associated with the network. Television does not confirm Hypothesis 2. Its overwhelmingly neutral approach to Al Jazeera was in place where negativity was expected.

The combined results from hard news, editorials, and television do not confirm Hypothesis 2. The results from newspapers and television were surprisingly balanced. While editorials did confirm Hypothesis 2, the results are not indicative of a media-wide trend given their inherent bias. Al Jazeera was represented fairly concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Possible reasons for these unexpected results will be addressed in the discussion section.

### Arab Spring

<b>Table 6 - Content Analysis Results: Arab Spring</b>						
*Unit of Analysis = "mention"						
	<b>NEWSPAPERS(N=85)</b>		<b>EDITORIALS(N=11)</b>		<b>TELEVISION(N=52)</b>	
	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>
<b>Negative</b>	1 (1.2%)	7 (8.2%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (27.2%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (11.5%)
<b>Positive</b>	19 (22.4%)	4 (4.7%)	1 (9.0%)	1 (9.0%)	15 (28.8%)	8 (15.4%)
<b>Neutral</b>	0 (0.0%)	54 (63.5%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (54.5%)	2 (3.8%)	21 (40.4%)

The Arab Spring is a turning point for American media’s treatment of Al Jazeera. While before the network was hard-pressed to garner a positive portrayal, their coverage of the Arab Spring received a warm welcome. Of the 85 mentions associating Al Jazeera with the uprisings, 54 were neutral, 23 were positive, and only eight negative. But the true testament to the shift in attitude is in the split between explicit and implicit portrayals. *19 of the 23* positive valences were *explicit*. This translates into 22% of all the Arab Spring mentions. None of the other topics covered thus far even come close to that percentage of explicitly positive valences. This is even more impressive considering all but one of the Arab Spring mentions occurred during the first nine months of 2011. Every other topic had at least eight

years of coverage. No other topic garnered so much explicit positive coverage for Al Jazeera as the Arab Spring.

The other striking aspect of the explicit positive valences is that they were so prevalent in *newspapers*. Usually, explicit judgments were reserved for editorials. Many of the explicit valences were positive because of their comparisons between Al Jazeera and a western media organization, here the BBC, Twitter, and Facebook. But these references only accounted for seven of the explicit valences. The remaining 12 were contextual descriptions of Al Jazeera that applauded the network's coverage of the Arab Spring. An article in the *New York Times* credited Al Jazeera with "[keeping] up an almost continuous live feed despite the Egyptian government's repeated efforts to block the broadcasts."<sup>54</sup> A *Wall Street Journal* article described Al Jazeera as the "Arab news network that has been seen as an early champion of international intervention to stop bloodshed in Libya."<sup>55</sup> And in an especially poignant detail, one article described Libyan protestors holding up signs that read, "With our blood, with our souls, we sacrifice for you Al Jazeera," imitating a common chant in the region usually reserved for Arab leaders.<sup>56</sup>

When discussing the Arab Spring, Al Jazeera's position in Arab media was frequently commented upon (28% of the time). Interviews were the only response cited more (35%). General information as reported by Al Jazeera was also cited more often than in other topics, 18% of the time. This indicates that Al Jazeera was looked toward for reliable on-the-ground information more often during the Arab Spring. Sources associated with Al Jazeera were also varied. Officials from transitioning governments, protestors, and "man-on-the-street" figures were the first, second, and fourth most cited sources. Indeed, U.S. officials were the least cited source (only once in 85 mentions). This is especially interesting as much of Al Jazeera's previous positive coverage was through such affiliations. These

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<sup>54</sup>Worth, Robert F. "On Al Jazeera, a Revolution Televised Despite Hurdles." *New York Times*. 29 January 2011. A11.

<sup>55</sup>Coker, Margaret. "Qatar Lines Up Behind U.N. Push." *Wall Street Journal*. 18 March 2011.

<sup>56</sup>Bradley, Matt and Charles Levinson. "Arab League Urges 'No-Fly' Zone." *Wall Street Journal*. 22 February 2011.

results indicate that Al Jazeera's positive reviews were independent of the typical frames. Overall, the results from hard news are a ringing endorsement of Hypothesis 2. Once Al Jazeera's coverage matched the aims of the United States, it received the most explicitly positive coverage of the entire study.

The results from editorials were surprisingly not telling. There were only 11 that associated Al Jazeera with the Arab Spring. Only one had an explicit valence. It was positive due to the comparison between Al Jazeera and the BBC. The rest were implicit – six neutral, three negative, and one positive. There were no real trends in the material Al Jazeera was cited for, and sources mostly cited unaffiliated academics or “man-on-the-street” figures. In this instance, editorials leave Hypothesis 2 unconfirmed due to the small sample and inconclusive results.

Television had similar results to hard news. Of the 52 mentions associating Al Jazeera with the Arab Spring, 23 were neutral, 23 were positive, and six were negative. Unlike other topics, none of the negative portrayals were explicit.

Much like newspapers, a majority of the positive valences were explicit (15/23). This represents 29% - an even higher percentage than found in hard news (22%). As it became a target of unhappy regimes, Al Jazeera's struggle to keep broadcasting earned much of its positive coverage. NBC described Al Jazeera as “the most influential source of information for [Egyptian] citizens” and as “highly trusted by the Arab people but an irritant to many Arab governments.”<sup>57</sup> Another interesting indication of Al Jazeera's shifting role is the amount of first-hand material used by American networks. 42% of cited materials were either general information reported by Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera segments broadcast in full, or visual footage shown with an American voiceover. This high use of Al Jazeera materials is unprecedented compared to the other topics. Further, for the first time comments on Al Jazeera's position in Arab media were overwhelming positive. The results of television show that Al Jazeera's

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<sup>57</sup>*NBC Nightly News*. 30 January 2011.

coverage of the Arab Spring improved its image in American media not only as a reliable source, but also as an emerging global news leader. Hypothesis 2 is confirmed by the results of television.

The combined results of hard news, editorials, and television confirm Hypothesis 2. The inconclusive results of editorials are overpowered by the stunning endorsement of Al Jazeera in newspapers and television. The Arab Spring proved a coming-out party for the network, after years of marginalization.

### Terrorism

**Table 7 - Content Analysis Results: Terrorism**  
 \*Unit of Analysis = "mention"

	NEWSPAPERS(N=212)		EDITORIALS(N=19)		TELEVISION(N=128)	
	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit
<b>Negative</b>	7 (3.3%)	179 (84.4%)	4 (21.1%)	13 (68.4%)	5 (3.9%)	107 (83.6%)
<b>Positive</b>	1 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.8%)	1 (0.8%)
<b>Neutral</b>	0 (0.0%)	25 (11.8%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (10.5%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (10.9%)

To measure Al Jazeera’s association with terrorism in American media, we turn to four response options: (1) inciting violence/action against a state, group, or person; (2) claiming responsibility for a terrorist attack; (3) terrorist attack (not claiming responsibility); and (4) hostage/prisoner situation. Of the 781 total mentions, fully 27% (212) associated Al Jazeera with terrorism. The results were overwhelming negative. Of the 212 mentions, only one was positive. The vast majority (179 mentions, or 84%) were negative. Al Jazeera was most often cited for broadcasting taped messages from terrorist groups. Fully 71% of mentions referenced a tape played by Al Jazeera. They most often incited violence, such as rallying cries from bin Laden and Al Qaeda, or were ransom messages for hostages. The frequency of hostage tapes was actually unanticipated in this study, but turned out to be responsible for a significant portion of Al Jazeera’s appearance in newspapers (35%). Overall, Al Jazeera’s direct

association with terrorists through the regular broadcast of their taped messages earned the network an incredibly negative portrayal in newspapers. Hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

As expected, Hypothesis 2 is also confirmed by editorials associating Al Jazeera with terrorism. 19 editorials did so, and there was not a single positive valence and all but two were negative. Again, we see that taped terrorist messages are the most cited material (9 editorials). Similarly, a majority of editorials cite Al Qaeda, bin Laden, and other terrorist spokesmen as sources of Al Jazeera (11 editorials). Four of the negative valences were explicit. They reinforced the idea that Al Jazeera is the mouthpiece of terrorists, such as this description from *New York Times* columnist, Thomas L. Friedman, “[Sunni Muslim suicide murderers] have been treated by mainstream Arab media, like Al Jazeera, or by extremist spiritual leaders and web sites, as 'martyrs' whose actions deserve praise.”<sup>58</sup> One *Wall Street Journal* editorial described it as, ““The al-Zarqawi network, also known as Al Jazeera,” referencing the notorious Al Qaeda operative.<sup>59</sup> Again, we see that when Al Jazeera is associated with terrorism it is not as a trusted source of information, but rather a sensational outlet for terrorist propaganda.

Turning to television, the same trends are repeated for a third time. There were 128 mentions that associated Al Jazeera with terrorism. Again, the overwhelming majority garnered a negative portrayal of Al Jazeera. 88% of mentions were negative. Only two mentions in the entire terrorism sample were positive. For a third time, taped terrorist messages are the vast majority of materials cited alongside Al Jazeera (76%). An almost similar percentage (74%) associated Al Qaeda, bin Laden, and other terrorist representatives with the network. The results of television solidify Hypothesis 2.

Taken together, hard news, editorials, and television cement Hypothesis 2 in relation to terrorism. The vast majority of mentions referenced tapes from terrorist cells broadcast by Al Jazeera, reinforcing the stereotype that Al Jazeera is a channel for terrorist communications. Instead of being

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<sup>58</sup>Friedman, Thomas L. “No Way, No How, Not Here.” *New York Times* 18 February 2009. A27.

<sup>59</sup> “Semper Fi.” *Wall Street Journal*. 18 November 2004. A19.

looked upon as a source of information on developing events, Al Jazeera was predominantly featured in American media for its relation with terrorist propaganda material.

**Additional Topics: Western-Arab Relations**

The topics above were chosen before coding began as the stories most expected to include Al Jazeera. The coding scheme, however, allowed for unanticipated topics to be measured. The following sections review the results from other topics that emerged as significant.

<b>Table 8 - Content Analysis Results: Western-Arab Relations</b>						
*Unit of analysis = "mention"						
	<b>NEWSPAPERS(N=35)</b>		<b>EDITORIALS(N=16)</b>		<b>TELEVISION(N=25)</b>	
	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>
<b>Negative</b>	8 (22.8%)	1 (2.9%)	5 (31.3%)	3	8 (32.0%)	3 (12.0%)
<b>Positive</b>	2 (5.7%)	12 (34.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3	0 (0.0%)	6 (24.0%)
<b>Neutral</b>	1 (2.9%)	11 (31.4%)	1 (6.3%)	4	2 (8.0%)	6 (24.0%)

Western-Arab relations is a broad topic, but a significant one. 5.5% of newspaper articles counted Western-Arab relations as their article topic. This could include traditional events, like summits, or cultural events, like the fallout from the depiction of Mohammed the prophet in a Danish cartoon. Western-Arab relations was the fifth-most cited issue in newspapers. Al Jazeera’s portrayal was relatively even-handed. Of the 35 mentions, 12 were neutral, 14 were positive, and nine were negative. Interviews counted for most of the material cited, with 40% of these mentions. Al Jazeera’s programming was second (23%), while its position in Arab media was close behind (20%). As for sources, the plurality was pro-American (17/35).

All eight of the explicit negative valences either commented on Al Jazeera’s programming or its position in Arab media. A representative example comes from the *Washington Post*: “the administration has also mounted what it calls a 'rumor patrol' aimed at preventing false and

inflammatory stories from gaining traction in the Arab news media, particularly Al Jazeera."<sup>60</sup> As we have seen again and again, these comments rarely cite specific instances, but instead make blanket statements. This dynamic is especially interesting here, given that pro-American sources associated with Al Jazeera were dominant. Thus, it seems that more damage can be done by general statements than what good press can be gained by numerous interviews with U.S. or allied officials.

Western-Arab relations were even more prevalent in editorials as the subject of 10.4% of all opinion pieces. Again, on the surface level we see a relatively even split of valences. Of the 16 mentions, eight were negative, five were neutral, and three were positive. But the divide between explicit and implicit is stark. There were no explicit positive portrayals of Al Jazeera, while six were explicitly negative. Once again, Al Jazeera's position in Arab media was a frequent source of negative attention. As David Ignatius wrote in the *Washington Post*, "The Arab world lacks the tools of democratic expression...it's why the shrill voices on Al Jazeera television are so popular; it's the Arab version of reality TV."<sup>61</sup> This description, and others like it, again show the prevalence of judgment based on blanket statements rather than specified examples. Editorials show the same trend as newspapers here – vague proclamations on Al Jazeera's bias drown out any positive relations the network might procure.

Television follows the patterns established by hard news and editorials. We again see that valences are relatively balanced, but once broken down on the explicit vs. implicit level, negativity dominates. There were 25 mentions associating Al Jazeera with Western-Arab relations. Of these, eight were neutral, six were positive, and 11 were negative. But explicit portrayals had only two neutral examples, none that were positive, and eight negative ones. Fox claimed that "Muslim youth have been

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<sup>60</sup> Hauser, Christine. "Many Iraqis Are Skeptical of Bush TV Appeal." *Washington Post* 06 May 2004. A16.

<sup>61</sup> Ignatius, David. "Wilsonian Course for War." *Washington Post*. 30 August 2002. A23.

propagandized over and over again by Al Jazeera, and had all kinds of negative stereotypes created.”<sup>62</sup>

NBC tempered their description a little by attributing it to “critics” who say Al Jazeera “is far more graphic than US television and is often used to incite anti-US passions.”<sup>63</sup> These general, and negative, statements outweigh the positive affiliations of pro-U.S. sources, which accounted for half of all mention sources (8/16). Television reinforces what has been true of hard news and editorials – it is easier to rely on established frames than to explain the nuance of new or competing information.

### Additional Topics: Al Jazeera and Arab Media

<b>Table 9 - Content Analysis Results: Al Jazeera/Arab Media</b>						
*Unit of Analysis = “mention”						
	<b>NEWSPAPERS(N=88)</b>		<b>EDITORIALS(N=23)</b>		<b>TELEVISION(N=39)</b>	
	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>	<b>Explicit</b>	<b>Implicit</b>
<b>Negative</b>	23 (26.1%)	2 (2.3%)	7 (30.4%)	3 (13.0%)	22 (56.4%)	2 (5.1%)
<b>Positive</b>	21 (23.9%)	5 (5.7%)	5 (21.7%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (10.3%)	2 (5.1%)
<b>Neutral</b>	6 (6.8%)	31 (35.2%)	2 (8.7%)	6 (26.1%)	3 (7.7%)	6 (15.4%)

Al Jazeera and Arab media accounted for 3.4% of all newspaper stories. What is most striking is the explicit/implicit comparison. Of the 26 positive valences, 21 were explicit as were 23 of the 25 negative valences. Most neutral valences were implicit – but negative and positive valences were much more likely to be explicit. This shows that when Al Jazeera or Arab media was the topic, much more context was provided.

The explicit nature of most of these valences indicates Al Jazeera’s merits were more thoroughly debated than usual. Indeed, while most newspaper articles have only one or two mentions of Al Jazeera, these articles regularly featured three or more. And more than any other topic discussed, articles about Al Jazeera overwhelmingly cited the network’s position in Arab media. This was true of

<sup>62</sup>Fox Special Report. 04 June 2009.

<sup>63</sup>NBC Nightly News. 14 March 2005.

70% of the 88 mentions. Further, while valences are often prescribed based on the attributed sources, in these articles 69% were not associated with anybody. Typically, this would be further evidence of blanket statements that make a judgment without any specified examples. But because so many of these articles have multiple mentions of Al Jazeera, the discussion is a more in-depth one.

The relatively even split between positive and negative portrayals suggests that even when more context is considered, Al Jazeera is not so easily pinned down. When considering other topics it was easy to relegate Al Jazeera to certain stereotypes. But when Al Jazeera itself becomes the focus, the full depth and breadth of the network's inconsistencies and competing values come to the foreground in newspaper stories. The network's allegiances could be argued either way. In newspapers, the predominantly explicit valences brought context into play. The relatively even split between explicit positive and negative portrayals showed that this context was varied and Al Jazeera not so easily categorized.

Editorials were not so different than usual. Al Jazeera was the subject of 12 editorials. Eight were neutral, five were positive, and seven were negative. Although many valences were explicit, this is not unusual for editorials. Thus, there is not much differentiating the contextual trends of editorials on Al Jazeera and editorials on anything else.

Al Jazeera was the subject of 39 television reports, or 9.7%. Explicit valences were assigned to 29 television mentions. Of these, 22 were negative and only four positive. Why is the divide between positive and negative so different from that seen in newspapers, where the balance of valences was more even? We would expect these explicit valences in television to come from talking heads rather than traditional reports. Thus, they are likened more to editorials.

But this does not appear to be so. All three networks consistently portrayed Al Jazeera negatively in their hard news segments. What is especially puzzling is that none of the typical indicators

of a negative valence are present – a tape was not referred to once and the majority of mentions do not associate Al Jazeera with any source at all. Instead, Al Jazeera’s position in Arab media is cited 33 out of the 39 times. It seems that television was especially prone to relying on simplified negative frames when describing Al Jazeera. NBC describes a “perceived anti-U.S. bias”<sup>64</sup>, while CNN named Al Jazeera a receptacle for “atrocities” filmed by terrorist groups<sup>65</sup>, and Fox was quick to point out Al Jazeera “[aired] Islamic extremist videos and even hosted an on-air birthday celebration for a convicted Lebanese terrorist, Samir Kuntar.”<sup>66</sup> More than hard news or editorials, television was unforgiving in its assessment of Al Jazeera.

Between hard news, editorials, and television we see a variety of responses to Al Jazeera as a subject. In hard news, the large amount of explicit valences combined with an even split between positive and negative portrayals showed that even with in-depth context, Al Jazeera is hard to categorize. Editorials showed little difference in their treatment of Al Jazeera, whether the subject of the editorial or not. And television was more explicit than usual and substantially negative. Perhaps the difference among mediums is itself a testament to the difficulty facing Al Jazeera in American media. Even when the network is the focus - with all of the opportunity for context and discussion that provides – there is still no consensus on how it is portrayed or what merits that portrayal. Hard news presented multiple characterizations, editorials showed indifference, and television stuck to easy frames. Overall, the topic is a mess. It should be no surprise, then, that Al Jazeera’s default portrayal in almost every other topic is negative – it is easier to revert to what you know than to sift through the mess.

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<sup>64</sup>*NBC Nightly News*. 06 June 2007.

<sup>65</sup>*CNN Newsroom*. 21 October 2006.

<sup>66</sup>*Fox Special Report*. 08 April 2009.

## Topic Conclusions

<b>Table 10 - Overall Valence Results, by Topic</b>				
*Unit of analysis = "mention"				
	<b>NEGATIVE</b>	<b>POSITIVE</b>	<b>NEUTRAL</b>	<b>Hypothesis 2 Confirmed?</b>
<b>Bin Laden/Al Qaeda</b> (N=125)	107 (85.6%)	5 (4.0%)	13 (10.4%)	Yes
<b>Terrorism</b> (N=359)	315 (87.7%)	3 (0.8%)	41 (11.4%)	Yes
<b>Afghanistan</b> (N=15)	11 (73.3%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20.0%)	No
<b>Iraq</b> (N=170)	84 (49.4%)	36 (21.2%)	50 (29.4%)	Yes
<b>Israeli-Palestinian Conflict</b> (N=109)	44 (40.4%)	30 (27.5%)	35 (32.1%)	No
<b>Arab Spring</b> (N=148)	17 (11.5%)	48 (32.4%)	83 (56.1%)	Yes
<b>Western/Arab Relations</b> (N=76)	28 (36.8%)	23 (30.3%)	25 (32.9%)	N/A
<b>Al Jazeera/Arab Media</b> (N=150)	59 (39.3%)	37 (24.7%)	54 (36.0%)	N/A

Looking at all the results together, Hypothesis 2 is largely confirmed. Of the six topics initially chosen, the results of four match the hypotheses. Bin Laden/Al Qaeda, Terrorism, and Iraq were all expected to be portrayed negatively. Bin Laden/Al Qaeda and Terrorism were definitively confirmed. While Iraq was characterized by negativity overall, the results were more of a mixed bag than expected. The final topic confirmed was the Arab Spring, portrayed positively as expected.

The two topics that did not match their hypotheses were Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Afghanistan was left unconfirmed because of the large lack of data. This was unexpected, given the prolonged nature of the war and Al Jazeera's position inside Afghanistan. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was expected to receive negative portrayals, because of the alleged Palestinian sympathies of Al Jazeera. The data, however, shows a relatively even split between negative, positive, and neutral portrayals.

Lastly, two significant topics emerged that were unforeseen in the original breakdown – Western-Arab Relations and Al Jazeera/Arab media. Western-Arab Relations garnered the most

balanced coverage toward Al Jazeera of any topic. When Al Jazeera or Arab media was the topic, coverage most often leaned negative.

Taken altogether, Hypothesis 2 is confirmed. The results, however, also revealed some surprising nuance in American media's portrayal of Al Jazeera.

### **Framing Over Time**

One of the central tenets of this study was to examine if and how frames on Al Jazeera changed over the course of the decade. We have already extensively discussed the results of each issue, but how did the results fare year-by-year? The results show two factors in the frame of Al Jazeera over time – level of coverage and valence. A change in Al Jazeera's frame could theoretically result from consistent levels of coverage and a change in valence from one assignment to another. The year-by-year breakdown, however, is not so clean-cut. The corresponding tables for each topic can be found in Appendix II.

Afghanistan, the first American military campaign of the decade, has dismal results. Only thirteen mentions occur in all three mediums over the entire decade. 2001 saw the most coverage, with 7 mentions among all mediums. 2002 and 2003 were insignificant, with one and two mentions, respectively. There were no stories on Afghanistan between 2004 and 2009. In 2010, there were three. While the results do lean negative, the miniscule numbers and complete gaps in coverage do not give an Afghanistan frame any significance. Al Jazeera is ignored on this issue.

Coverage on the Iraq War associated with Al Jazeera saw its highest numbers at the start of the war, between 2003 and 2006. There were 144 mentions in these four years among all mediums out of a total 168. This represents 88% of mentions in those four years alone. Of these mentions, 73 were negative (51%), 29 were positive (20%), and 47 were neutral (33%). This is compared to 11 negative

mentions (46%), seven positive mentions (29%), and six neutral mentions (25%) in all other years. We see that the percentage levels between these two brackets of years are relatively comparable. The results from Iraq show that the valences established during years of high attention resonate in later years with low attention. The frame remains unchanged.

The bin Laden/Al Qaeda topic also demonstrates a steep drop-off in coverage as the decade progresses. 2001-2003 saw the highest number of stories in newspapers and editorials, with 60 mentions. Not surprisingly, the valence was overwhelmingly negative (77% of mentions). The remaining eight years saw only 23 mentions total. While they, too, were predominantly negative, the lapse in attention speaks louder than the continued negative framing. The issue was never revisited, revealing nothing meaningful about a continued frame. Television had slightly different results. First, data before 2004 was unavailable. Second, there were 17 mentions in 2006, which was an irregularity compared to the other years. Going back to the original coding results, CNN and Fox mentioned the same story over and over again throughout a couple of different days in 2006. Thus, the mention level is attributed to the repetitive nature of cable news and a need to fill airtime. Other than 2006, television had the same low levels of coverage as hard news and editorials.

Terrorism, as associated with Al Jazeera, actually received consistently higher levels of attention throughout the decade than other topics. But these results do not add anything new to the discussion, nor are they particularly surprising. Of the 366 mentions, 322 were negative (88%). Thus, despite high levels of coverage and an opportunity for more critical evaluation over the decade, Al Jazeera was judged by simplistic negative frames when terrorism was the subject.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was one of the few topics that received regular coverage throughout the decade. The two spikes in coverage, occurring in 2002 and 2011, have already been discussed in detail. In 2002, the period of high violence between January and May of 2002 drove up

coverage. In 2011, Al Jazeera's release of sensitive cables concerning a peace deal resulted in a higher number of mentions. Just as coverage was balanced throughout the decade, so was valence. There were no significant patterns observed.

The Arab Spring coverage associated with Al Jazeera was dominated by positive valences and frequent coverage. In 2011 alone, the network received 155 mentions. Since this was the only year included in the study's time frame, it is impossible to make any conclusions about frame changes over time. It does, however, follow the trend that Al Jazeera receives high levels of coverage when events are new.

Western-Arab relations is another topic in which coverage was consistent over the decade – but unlike terrorism, it was consistently low. The most stories this topic ever received in a year was nine. The balance of this coverage was already discussed in the data analysis section – on the surface coverage seems balanced, but once split between implicit and explicit valences negativity is more frequent. But here we should note that there were once again no major shifts in valence year-to-year despite relatively consistent year-to-year coverage.

Al Jazeera and Arab media had similar results year-to-year as Western-Arab relations. Coverage was consistent, but at relatively low levels. There is one exception – in newspapers there were 30 mentions in 2003, a comparatively high number. Most of these mentions, however, were all in one article. As discussed in the data analysis section, there was a variety of valences assigned when Arab media was the topic. But looking at the data year-by-year, there is no pattern as to when a positive, negative, or neutral valence is assigned. There seems to be no evolution in the frame surrounding Al Jazeera.

Taken together, the year-by-year data shows the dynamic between levels of coverage and valence. Some topics had consistent valences, but irregular coverage. Iraq and bin Laden/Al Qaeda, for

instance, established negative valences in the early years of high coverage. In later years, when coverage dropped off, the negative frame still remained. Other topics saw consistent coverage through the decade, but varied valences within years. This is true of Western-Arab relations and Arab media. Both received consistent (albeit low) levels of coverage every year, but there was no discernible valence pattern over the course of time. Terrorism was the one topic that saw consistently high coverage, but it also had a consistently negative valence. Finally, the complete lack of coverage on Afghanistan made its valences relatively meaningless.

None of these results show any evolution in Al Jazeera’s frame on an issue over time. They started bad and stayed bad, were concentrated in just a couple of years, or showed no pattern in valence despite regular coverage. Al Jazeera’s frame is thus more based on the issue at hand than any comprehensive evolution over the decade.

**Table 11 - Year-by-Year Comprehensive Results Across Topics**

\* Topics = Iraq, Afghanistan, bin Laden/Al Qaeda, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Terrorism, Western-Arab relations, and Al Jazeera/Arab Media

\*\* Unit of Analysis = “mention”

<b>Year</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Total (N)</b>
<b>2001</b>	15 (18.1%)	15 (18.1%)	53 (63.9%)	83 (100%)
<b>2002</b>	10 (9.3%)	9 (8.4%)	88 (82.2%)	107 (100%)
<b>2003</b>	41 (29.1%)	34 (24.1%)	66 (46.8%)	141 (100%)
<b>2004</b>	31 (18.8%)	4 (2.4%)	130 (78.8%)	165 (100%)
<b>2005</b>	24 (23.5%)	7 (6.9%)	71 (69.6%)	102 (100%)
<b>2006</b>	30 (18.9%)	22 (13.8%)	107 (67.3%)	159 (100%)
<b>2007</b>	9 (18.4%)	10 (20.4%)	30 (61.2%)	49 (100%)
<b>2008</b>	10 (30.3%)	4 (12.1%)	19 (57.6%)	33 (100%)
<b>2009</b>	8 (12.1%)	12 (18.1%)	46 (69.7%)	66 (100%)
<b>2010</b>	4 (11.8%)	11 (32.4%)	19 (55.9%)	34 (100%)
<b>2011</b>	98 (50.0%)	60 (30.6%)	38 (19.4%)	196 (100%)
<b>Total</b>	280 (24.7%)	188 (16.6%)	667 (58.8%)	1135 (100%)

## Discussion

As shown in the data analysis, the major hypotheses of this study were largely confirmed. There were a few exceptions and a few unforeseen trends that deserve a more qualitative discussion.

### **Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

The most surprising results were those from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The newspaper and television results were remarkably balanced, though in two distinct ways. In newspapers, there was a relatively even spread between positive, negative, and neutral valences. This was unlike other topics, which predominantly portrayed Al Jazeera one way or another (typically negatively). Television, on the other hand, portrayed Al Jazeera in a balanced manner by predominantly featuring *neutral* coverage. So while hard news valences cancelled each other out, television valences were of themselves neutral. These results were unexpected. Al Jazeera has been criticized for its pro-Palestinian sympathies. Given the longstanding alliance between Israel and the United States, Al Jazeera's alleged sympathies for Palestine should reflect poorly on the network. Yet the data from newspapers and television does not confirm that suspicion. Indeed, it seems that editorials were the only medium that predominantly portrayed Al Jazeera negatively. This should come as no surprise – editorials are far more likely to be accusatory. This, in turn, supports the notion that elites direct dialogue. Their opinion of Al Jazeera became the “common wisdom” despite the balanced nature of coverage from other sources.

Of all the topics, why was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the only one to portray Al Jazeera in a balanced and neutral manner? Here I have a couple of theories. First, it is important to note that of the six topics identified, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the only one which predates the decade covered.\* Thus, there is more history to be considered and more time for debates to have arisen. Frames have

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\* An argument could be made that terrorism also fits this description, but the War on Terror and the tunnel-vision focus on bin Laden and Al Qaeda are definitely situated within the sample decade.

been evolving for decades. Secondly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was also the only topic in which the United States was not a direct actor. Given the American-Israeli alliance, it was expected that Israel would become the default “protagonist”. Yet American leaders frequently denounced Israeli attacks and negotiating barriers. Third, both Israel and Palestine have been responsible for repeated violence and attacks. It is not clear where one incident ends and another begins, as everything is labeled retaliation for something else. Thus, there is no clear and consistent aggressor and victim. Finally, perhaps media outlets recognize the challenge in covering such a sustained and polarizing conflict. Indeed, Al Jazeera reporters have expressed the difficulty in reporting objectively on a story that is often very close to home. As one Al Jazeera correspondent based in the West Bank put it, “to be objective in this area is not easy because we live here. We are part of the people here. And this situation belongs to us also, and we have our opinions.”<sup>67</sup> A similar sentiment was echoed by American journalists in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>. While the nuance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is daunting, perhaps what is best understood is just that – it’s complicated. And so, therefore, is covering it.

## **Afghanistan**

The War in Afghanistan was the first military campaign launched by the United States of the decade. Al Jazeera was expected to garner a lot of coverage from this topic, as they were the only international news organization allowed inside Taliban-controlled Afghanistan at the time. The results were shockingly sparse. Only twelve mentions appeared in hard news, two in editorials, and one in television (although this may have been different had data for television before 2004 been available). The gap in television data, however, does not explain the equally low numbers for newspapers and editorials. One theory presents itself to explain the threadbare numbers. The War in Afghanistan was launched on October 7, 2001. Al Jazeera broadcast the first bin Laden tape on the very same day. In

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<sup>67</sup> “Inside Al Jazeera,” *CBS 60 Minutes*, 10 October 2001 in Sharp, Jeremy. “The Al Jazeera News Network: Opportunity or Challenge for U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East?” *CRS Report for Congress*. 23 July 2003.

November and December, Al Jazeera released two more bin Laden tapes. By the launch of the War in Iraq in March 2003, Bush administration officials had publicly and repeatedly demonized the network. In his 2004 State of the Union address, President Bush singled out Arab media as a source of “hateful propaganda”. Given the toxic atmosphere surrounding Al Jazeera between 2001 and 2004, it is easy to see why American media outlets may have shunned Al Jazeera’s reports or information. The simultaneous release of the bin Laden tapes with the early stages of the War in Afghanistan set incredibly high barriers for Al Jazeera to overcome. Given the almost complete lack of coverage, it seems they never did.

## **Iraq**

Coverage of Al Jazeera as related to the Iraq War was more nuanced than initially anticipated. Much of the negative criticism Al Jazeera received in the early years of the decade came from Bush administration officials unhappy with Al Jazeera’s coverage of the war. This, at least, was the common impression. While the results from newspapers and television do show an overall negative portrayal of Al Jazeera, the factors that account for a given valence became less complex as time passed. That is to say, characterizations of Al Jazeera were based on simpler indicators later in the decade. There was less variety of sources and cited material, the two biggest factors in determining valence. This seems illogical – as time passes, more information should become available, the public should be more familiar with the circumstances, and the gap in knowledge between elites and the public should close. This would lead one to believe that frames would become more intelligent – not less. The data also shows, however, a steep drop-off in the number of stories associating Iraq and Al Jazeera after 2006. Perhaps, then, the simplification of frames was due to waning interest in the war. The War in Iraq no longer seemed a priority of the American public, much less the American media.

Again, editorials were much more black and white. Or rather, just black. Portrayals of Al Jazeera started bad and stayed bad. Further, there were very few editorials on Iraq after 2004. Editorials peeled back none of the layers that newspapers and television initially revealed. Unfortunately, hard news and television soon joined editorials in their simplified portrayals of Al Jazeera and the War in Iraq.

### **Arab Spring**

The Arab Spring garnered more positive coverage for Al Jazeera in American media than any other topic. And not only were valence results positive – they were overwhelmingly *explicitly* positive. Al Jazeera was commended for its journalism, but also its role in creating the atmosphere in which the Arab Spring protests could flourish. Philip Seib, a leading expert on Arab media, touched on this theme in a blog post he wrote on CNN’s website:

In addition to providing its own reporting, throughout the Arab Spring Al Jazeera made a point of aggregating social media content, repurposing YouTube video, reproducing Facebook material, and delivering Twitter messages to its TV viewers. Because many countries across the Arab world still have limited internet access – but boast very high percentages of satellite TV viewers – Al Jazeera bridged a vital communications gap.<sup>68</sup>

But the network’s role also transcended the mere transmission of information through a hybrid of old and new media. Part of the network’s role was symbolic. The former head of Al Jazeera, Wadah Khanfar, said that while the network did not aspire to political activism, “we provided the opinion, giving people a feeling about their rights, making them confident that they can do things without any pressure.” He went on to describe the role of Al Jazeera as “liberating the Arab mind” – “We created

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<sup>68</sup>Seib, Philip. “Why the Arab Spring was the Best and Worst Thing to Happen to Al Jazeera.” *CNN Global Public Square Blog* 27 September 2011.

the idea in the Arab mind that when you have a right, you should fight for it...If Al Jazeera wasn't there in the street, in the march, covering the story, [it was as if] it didn't happen."<sup>69</sup>

Whatever role Al Jazeera played in the Arab world, its reception in America was finally a welcoming one. Not only do the results show predominantly positive coverage by leading news outlets, but American audiences flocked to the internet and petitioned cable companies to carry the network. As Jonathan Gornall put it in an article in *The National*, "where once people tuned into CNN to watch governments collapse, this time around they tuned into Al Jazeera on the web."<sup>70</sup> As previously noted in the literature review, Al Jazeera English's website received more than 22 million visitors per month by the height of the protests in Tahrir Square.<sup>71</sup> New York provided more traffic to the Al Jazeera English website than any other city in the world.<sup>72</sup> Its YouTube channel was the most popular on the web, with over 2.5 million monthly views.<sup>73</sup> And between February and October of 2011, cable and satellite providers in the United States had received more than 70,000 emails requesting a carriage deal with Al Jazeera English.<sup>74</sup> It seems the network made more headway into American markets in the months since the first uprising in Tunisia than it had in a decade.

But Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring has ignited new critics, both within and outside the United States, harshly accusing the network of biased reporting. The network has been accused of remaining mostly silent on the uprising in Bahrain, a strategic regional ally of Qatar, while aggressively supporting military intervention in Libya and Syria. A series of high-level resignations by staff angry over such slanted coverage has magnified the issue. Writing in the Saudi-based *Arab News* and quoted in an

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<sup>69</sup> Edwards, Haley Sweetland. "Former Al Jazeera Head on Quitting, the Arab Spring, and Qatar's Role." *The Atlantic*. 30 September 2011.

<sup>70</sup> Gornall, Jonathan. "Arab Spring Brings Al Jazeera to Full Bloom." *The National* 24 June 2011.

<sup>71</sup> Gustin, Sam. "Al Jazeera's Spring." *Time* 26 October 2011.

<sup>72</sup> Gerhart, Bryan. "Does Al Jazeera's American Debut Give Hope for Media Diversity?" *Color Lines* 3 August 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Healey, Jack. "I want my AJE!" *Huffington Post* 15 September 2011.

<sup>74</sup> "Al Jazeera English Comes to Chicago on WTTW, America's Most-Watched Public Television Station." *PR Newswire* 19 October 2011.

article by *Bloomberg*, columnist Ramzy Baroud argued Al Jazeera ignores the distinctions between the various movements:

Some of us have warned against the temptation of a one-narrative-fits-all style of reporting. A nonviolent popular uprising is fundamentally different from an armed rebellion, and a homegrown peaceful Tahrir Square revolution is different from NATO-Arab military and political campaigns aimed at settling old scores and fomenting sectarian conflict (as in Libya and now Syria)."<sup>75</sup>

In response to mounting accusations like this one, Al Jazeera released its own editorial, defending the network's decision-making. It contended that its critics vastly overstate their case, "as if Qatar is a superpower wishing to control the region through Al Jazeera, or as if Al Jazeera could transform Qatar into a superpower with the ability to change maps" and redefine regional and international alliances.<sup>76</sup> This, however, is exactly what Al Jazeera and Qatar have been accused of for years –Al Jazeera is nothing more than a foreign policy tool used by Qatar to punch above its weight-class.

The accusation has some credibility. In November 2009 Wikileaks released a secret report sent to the State Department by the US Embassy in Qatar which said Al Jazeera "will continue to be an instrument of Qatari influence, and continue to be an expression, however uncoordinated, of the nation's foreign policy."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, Al Jazeera's longtime news director Wadah Khanfar resigned in September 2011 amidst such discussions, when it was revealed by Wikileaks that he had modified the network's coverage of the Iraq War in response to pressure from the United States. Khanfar's replacement was Sheik Ahmad bin Jasem Muhammad Al-Thani, a member of the Qatari ruling family

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<sup>75</sup>Noe, Nicholas and Walid Raad. "Al-Jazeera Gets Rap as Qatar Mouthpiece." *Bloomberg* 9 April 2012.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Gornall, Jonathan. "Arab Spring Brings Al Jazeera to Full bloom." *The National* 24 June 2011.

with no previous experience in media. The choice did not help discourage speculation on the cozy ties between the network and its sponsor state.

All the while, the Arab Spring did provide the network with more legitimacy in the United States than it had previously ever received. As noted in the introduction, Al Jazeera was the darling of American journalism awards in 2011. Ironically, despite its supposed “silence” on Bahrain, a documentary on the uprising there won the network the George Polk Award. Even Donald Rumsfeld, who had previously called the network’s news “vicious, inaccurate, and inexcusable”, seems to have come around. In an interview with famed journalist and current Al Jazeera host Sir David Frost, Rumsfeld said “[Al Jazeera’s] audience has grown and it can be an important means of communication in the world and I am delighted you are doing what you are doing.”<sup>78</sup> Though a tepid endorsement given during a press tour to promote his new book, the sentiment nonetheless speaks to the growing acceptance of Al Jazeera within the United States. It is no coincidence that this acceptance coincides with the Arab Spring, the strongest call for democracy in the Middle East in recent history.

### **Western-Arab Relations**

The prevalence of articles associating Al Jazeera with Western-Arab relations should also be considered when discussing Qatar’s foreign policy aims. Al Jazeera was associated with Western-Arab relations across a broad collection of articles. Some were traditional topics of diplomacy – a state visit by Rumsfeld or nominations to a Pentagon post. But others touched on cultural issues, like the role of clerics on Arab television or the fallout from a Danish cartoon depicting the prophet Mohammed. Some articles examined the role of media itself in foreign relations, like stories on BBC Arabic, the Chinese expansion into English-language broadcasting, state-run television in Egypt and Pakistan, or Hamas-sponsored programming. And more than a few discussed Qatar and Al Jazeera, specifically.

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<sup>78</sup> Fordham, Alice. “Up Next on Al Jazeera: Donald Rumsfeld.” *Washington Post* 30 September 2011.

So what role does Al Jazeera really play in Qatar's international relations? The subject could be another study entirely. What was revealed by this study, however, is the complicated relationships Al Jazeera has created with almost everybody. First, it was unforeseen that Western-Arab relations would be such a significant subject associated with the network. Second, there was incredible variety in the category's stories, actors, and valences. Looking at the articles in this category qualitatively, it epitomizes the saying "where you stand depends upon where you sit." For instance, when compared to state-sponsored propaganda, Al Jazeera has "shattered taboos and created an appetite for unfettered news across the Arab world."<sup>79</sup> But when the network's reporting upsets U.S. military priorities, "there is a feeling that Al Jazeera is inciting citizens to carry arms against coalition forces."<sup>80</sup> It has been harshly critical of every government (except maybe its own), while watched by over half of the Arab population. Al Jazeera's role seems to be neither here nor there, but somewhere in between. It has been a podium for terrorists, the voice of the Arab street, a target of U.S. military bombings, and a revolutionary for democracy. It is Qatar's most famous export, and whether or not one agrees with its politics, it has provided an otherwise marginal country with incredible leverage.

## Elites

Often in this study, the role of elites has been alluded to as an influencing factor in the framing of Al Jazeera in American media. While this study did not set out to systematically measure the opinion of elites on Al Jazeera, anecdotally their comments and actions informed the narrative surrounding the network. Perhaps most telling is when elites changed their behavior.

First it is helpful to define what is meant by "elites" in this study. Elites were considered those actors whose opinions or comments regularly received media attention due to their status, official

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<sup>79</sup>Shadid, Anthony. "Rivalry for Eyes of Arab World." *Washington Post* 11 February 2003, A12.

<sup>80</sup>Boustany, Nora. "Al Jazeera's Learning Curve." *Washington Post* 30 April 2004. A25.

position, or influence in a certain sector. Elites were most often government officials or media figures, and if in the media typically editorialists.

Concerning Al Jazeera, a relevant question is whether elites used the network as a public diplomacy tool to communicate with foreign audiences, or if it was made into a scapegoat for promoting so-called anti-American propaganda in the lead-up to the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars. The answer is probably both, though at different times. As noted before, the Bush administration initially paraded their representatives on Al Jazeera immediately after 9/11. Then-Secretary of State Colin Powell granted the channel an interview on September 17, 2001, just six days after the terror attack. This was quickly followed by appearances by National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Attorney General John Ashcroft, the diplomat Marc Gross and State Department Policy Planning Director Richard Haass. Whether Al Jazeera's persistence to keep playing bin Laden tapes or the imminence of coming war is to blame, these officials soon changed their tune. Throughout the remainder of the Bush administration, and the majority of this study's timeline, government elites had nary a good thing to say about Al Jazeera. Whether this is an example of manipulating rhetoric to achieve a political aim – in this case, the decision to go to war in Iraq and subsequently to defend an increasingly unpopular and unsuccessful mission – is beyond the scope of this study. But it does seem consistent with the types of quotes aired in the media.

This also calls into question the assumptions the media makes about the elites that it covers. While the platform the media affords elites is in some part symptomatic of the journalism industry (it is admittedly easier, not to mention cheaper, to cover a press conference at the State Department than guerilla warfare in Afghanistan), is there a lack of critical dialogue surrounding elite statements? Is it the media's job to engage in such dialogue, or are they simply meant to report the facts? Especially in cases of war or strife where there are significant costs to consider, chief among them human lives, it seems

essential that media is capable of independently assessing a situation. This does not, however, seem to be the experience of Al Jazeera's treatment. While we cannot assign direct cause-and-effect, it seems too happy a coincidence that American media portrayals of Al Jazeera shifted simultaneously with elite dialogue.

We see this trend repeated at the close of the decade, although this time opinion of Al Jazeera is driven in the opposite direction. With a new administration came new government elites, and their attitude seemed more open to Arab media. Indeed, the first interview Barack Obama gave as President was to Al-Arabiya, an Al Jazeera competitor. While this alone brought no watershed transition to make complete amends, it certainly struck a different tone than the Bush administration. Finally, as has been discussed earlier, Al Jazeera was heralded during the Arab Spring as a stalwart for freedom, revolution, and democracy. If elites drive policy, and if policy agreement drives the portrayal of Al Jazeera as this study suggests, then elites are influential in setting the media agenda. And while coverage of elites is nothing new, the influence of elites on which information is shunned or promoted is an aspect of media practices perhaps too often left in the shadows. Hopefully this study has shed some light on the factors that enable such influence.

### Conclusion

This study began with the question, "how was Al Jazeera portrayed in American media over the past decade?" The results suggest that framing of Al Jazeera was event-driven, typically negative, and largely unchanging over the course of time. It was frequently judged by the actors it associated with and its portrayal was more often based on general judgments rather than specific examples. It was less often cited for its reports or information than its propensity to broadcast terrorist tapes and interviews. Once assigned a position on an event, the passage of time did little to change that portrayal. Overall, it

proved much harder to obtain a positive portrayal than a negative or neutral one. Frames on Al Jazeera were ultimately based on simplistic associations early on in an event and were largely unyielding.

This could, however, be about to change. The results of the Arab Spring were a tremendous change from the established frames. Al Jazeera was portrayed positively, not only in agreement with American policy positions, but as an ally of democracy and human rights. And while the media approached Al Jazeera suspiciously over most of the decade, there were examples of more level-headed assessment. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict showcased the American media's ability to understand nuance and differentiate between the actors and the messenger. Al Jazeera should look for more of these well-rounded assessments as the polarized environment of post-9/11 fades into a more globalized world. The recognition for its coverage of the Arab Spring, its evolution into a global network, and the inroads it is making in American markets project an optimistic outlook for the decade ahead. Even if Al Jazeera again frustrates American elites, it must at least be respected as a serious news organization. In the future, labels like "the mouthpiece of bin Laden" and "anti-American propaganda" will only point to the ignorance of the speaker rather than the merits of Al Jazeera.

But it would also be misleading to assume all the friction will fall away and all the disagreements assuaged. This study has shown nothing if not the complicated atmosphere in which this controversial network operates. Events, actors, and circumstances collide to highlight in some instances what is ignored in others. Al Jazeera's identity lies in its independence, but it must also face its growing influence and thereby those who want to influence it. The Arab Spring has demonstrated this, too.

So the question becomes, how will Al Jazeera and American media treat each other from here on out? It is a funny industry in which your competitors are also your partners, and your business is not only one of profits, but information, freedom, and even revolution. As we have seen, American media was quick to judge and fast to label. But while the American media industry faces financial crisis,

technology has globalized their audience – both in the information they crave and their physical location. If American media plays hot and cold with potential international partners like Al Jazeera, how well can they truly serve their purpose and inform? Hopefully this study has demonstrated the circumstances that alienate foreign news organizations. The only error would be to repeat these mistakes.

Early in the decade, when then-Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak toured Al Jazeera's headquarters, he commented, "all this trouble from a matchbox like this."<sup>81</sup> Considering the circumstances of his demise, he was perhaps more prescient than intended. A matchbox no more, Al Jazeera is still looking for trouble to cover. And for the time being, it seems America is watching.

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<sup>81</sup>Seib, Philip. "Hegemonic No More: Western Media, the Rise of Al-Jazeera, and the Influence of Diverse Voices." *International Studies Review* (2005) 7, 601-615. p. 601.

### Appendix I – Comparison of Sources

The sources that were sampled were chosen for their overall position and influence in American media. While any inherent bias was not considered in the above results, it is important to check the balance of sources and any potential influence on the results.

We begin with hard news. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were almost identical in their portrayals of Al Jazeera. The *Times* had 316 mentions, while the *Post* had 313. Both had neutral portrayals 28% of the time, positive portrayals 17-18%, and 54% of mentions were negative. They also had similar splits between explicit and implicit portrayals. 20% of portrayals in the *Times* were explicit, while slightly more were explicit in the *Post*, at 24%. The *Wall Street Journal* had significantly fewer mentions, with only 152, about half of the other two papers. The *Wall Street Journal* more frequently had neutral portrayals (41%) than the *Times* or the *Post*, and had negative portrayals less often (39%). Their positive portrayals, however, were in the same ballpark at 20%. The split between explicit and implicit was also relatively similar, with 19% of portrayals being explicit. Looking at the overall valences of these three newspapers, there is no cause for concern.

Moving to editorials, we expect to see a wider variety of valence differentials given the nature of opinion writing. While all of the papers had only 10-15% of editorials portray Al Jazeera positively, neutral and negative valences were more divided. 45% of *New York Times* editorials were neutral, while an almost identical 44% were negative. The *Washington Post* editorials were slightly more negative toward Al Jazeera, with 61% portraying the network poorly and 24% neutrally. The *Wall Street Journal* had the starkest split, with only 16% of editorials judging Al Jazeera neutrally and 74% negatively. The *Wall Street Journal* also had the most explicit portrayals, at 48%. This is compared to 35% in the *Post* and 27% in the *Times*. All three papers ran a similar number of editorials – the *Times* ran 55, the *Post* 46,

and the *Journal* 62. While editorials varied in their overall assessments of Al Jazeera, this was within the range of expectation.

Television posed the greatest opportunity for significant variance in portrayals. *Fox* is well-known as a conservative outlet, while *CNN* is regarded as more left-leaning. *NBC*, as a network news outlet, should be the most center. Surprisingly, there was not much difference in portrayals of Al Jazeera. *NBC* and *Fox* had a similar number of mentions, with 111 and 115, respectively. *CNN* had about 60 more, at 175. All portrayed the network neutrally 21-29% of the time. A similar spread was seen in positive portrayals, ranging from 13-20%. Finally, negatively coverage was a bit wider, with *CNN* at the low end of negative portrayals at 51% of mentions, followed by *NBC* (58%), and *Fox* (66%). The split between explicit and implicit coverage was also similar across the three outlets, ranging from 21-30% of mentions being explicit. Overall, television was much like newspapers – similar figures across sources both on valence and explicit vs. implicit portrayals.

After reviewing the sources for hard news, editorials, and television it is safe to say source did not significantly determine the valence of Al Jazeera's portrayals.

Appendix II – Inter-Coder Reliability, by Variable

In hard news and television, the total number of articles for “Issue” is less than the other categories. “Issue” is judged on the article level while all other categories are judged on the mention level. Each editorial, however, was judged as one big mention, so the denominators are all the same.

<b>Table 12 - Inter-Coder Reliability Results, by Category</b>			
*Unit of analysis = “mention” except for ISSUE which is coded on the “article” level			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Hard News</b>	<b>Editorials</b>	<b>Television</b>
ISSUE	45/65 = 69%	12/23 = 53%	32/47 = 68%
CITEDFOR	57/87 = 66%	12/23 = 53%	31/59 = 53%
ABOUT	60/87 = 69%	16/23 = 70%	38/59 = 64%
PERSONS	53/87 = 61%	13/23 = 57%	34/59 = 58%
VIOLENCE/TERROR	70/87 = 80%	21/23 = 91%	43/59 = 73%
CONTEXT	64/87 = 74%	15/23 = 65%	49/59 = 83%
REFERENCE	86/87 = 99%	21/23 = 91%	58/59 = 98%
VALENCE	48/87 = 55%	10/23 = 43%	34/59 = 58%

*Appendix III – Year-By-Year Framing Tables*

The unit of analysis for all tables is “mention”.

**Table 13 – Year-by-Year Framing: Iraq**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2001</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2002</b>	2	1	5	8
<b>2003</b>	20	14	35	69
<b>2004</b>	15	2	17	34
<b>2005</b>	2	0	12	14
<b>2006</b>	5	13	9	27
<b>2007</b>	3	5	2	10
<b>2008</b>	0	0	1	1
<b>2009</b>	0	1	1	2
<b>2010</b>	1	0	2	3
<b>2011</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	48	36	84	168

**Table 14 – Year-by-Year Framing: Afghanistan**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2001</b>	0	1	6	7
<b>2002</b>	0	0	1	1
<b>2003</b>	1	0	1	2
<b>2004</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2005</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2006</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2007</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2008</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2009</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2010</b>	0	1	2	3
<b>2011</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	1	2	10	13

**Table 15 – Year-by-Year Framing: Bin Laden/Al Qaeda**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2001</b>	8	4	23	35
<b>2002</b>	1	1	15	17
<b>2003</b>	0	0	10	10
<b>2004</b>	0	0	11	11
<b>2005</b>	1	0	5	6
<b>2006</b>	1	0	21	22
<b>2007</b>	0	0	6	6
<b>2008</b>	0	0	2	2
<b>2009</b>	0	0	7	7
<b>2010</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2011</b>	2	0	7	9
<b>Total</b>	13	5	107	125

**Table 16 – Year-by-Year Framing: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2001</b>	1	2	1	4
<b>2002</b>	1	4	15	20
<b>2003</b>	1	4	0	5
<b>2004</b>	1	0	2	3
<b>2005</b>	1	0	2	3
<b>2006</b>	1	1	2	4
<b>2007</b>	3	3	5	11
<b>2008</b>	1	1	2	4
<b>2009</b>	4	5	7	16
<b>2010</b>	0	3	2	5
<b>2011</b>	21	4	6	31
<b>Total</b>	35	27	44	106

**Table 17 – Year-by-Year Framing: Terrorism**

Year	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Total
2001	0	0	17	17
2002	2	0	47	49
2003	2	0	12	14
2004	13	1	90	104
2005	7	1	34	42
2006	9	0	58	67
2007	0	1	16	17
2008	1	0	9	10
2009	1	0	25	26
2010	2	0	12	14
2011	5	0	2	7
<b>Total</b>	42	3	322	367

**Table 18 – Year-by-Year Framing: Arab Spring**

Year	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Total
2010	0	1	0	1
2011	62	54	18	134
<b>Total</b>	62	55	18	135

**Table 19 – Year-by-Year Framing: Western-Arab Relations**

Year	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Total
2001	2	7	3	12
2002	1	2	2	5
2003	3	1	3	7
2004	1	0	2	3
2005	9	4	7	20
2006	6	1	5	12
2007	0	1	2	3
2008	2	0	1	3
2009	2	1	2	5
2010	0	6	0	6
2011	0	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	26	23	28	77

**Table 20 – Year-by-Year Framing: Al Jazeera/Arab Media**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2001</b>	4	1	3	8
<b>2002</b>	3	1	3	7
<b>2003</b>	14	15	5	34
<b>2004</b>	1	1	8	10
<b>2005</b>	4	2	11	17
<b>2006</b>	8	7	12	27
<b>2007</b>	3	1	6	10
<b>2008</b>	6	2	4	12
<b>2009</b>	1	5	4	10
<b>2010</b>	1	0	1	2
<b>2011</b>	8	2	2	12
<b>Total</b>	53	37	59	149

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