

Framing U.S. Policy on Libya and Syria
A Comparative Analysis on the Frames of Two Similar Conflicts

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Introduction

In nearly three years of conflict in Syria, many have wondered why there were ‘two cases of extreme violence committed against citizens by their own government’, but ‘in one case, the Obama administration responds with military force; in the other, it doesn’t’ (Silverleib 2011). Due to the seeming similarities between the Libyan and the Syrian conflict, many have asked why U.S. policy diverged in these cases. In the academic debate, Amos Guiora points to the contradiction that while the human rights violations in Syria are ‘no less compelling’ than in Libya’, the United States has not intervened militarily in Syria (2013: 251). Similarly, David Wilson states the U.S. policies were ‘contradictory’, calling the response to Syria ‘relatively muted’ (2012: 2). However, Donette Murray argues that U.S. policy is not entirely contradictory and refers to an ‘Obama doctrine’ (2013: 153).

Also in the media, Syria and Libya have often been compared. In April 2011, *CNN* wondered ‘why attack Libya and not Syria’ while both cases involved similar atrocities (Silverleib 2011). *The Washington Post* argued in October 2013 that Obama’s policy on human rights had made a ‘U-turn’ (Hiatt 2011). Furthermore, Ed Hussain of *The Economist* argued that ‘if outside powers had a responsibility to protect in Libya, is not Syria a prime candidate for intervention?’ (2013). In light of these debates and seeming inconsistencies, my research question is:

Given that there are several similarities between the Libyan and the Syrian conflict, how did the U.S. administration frame the intervention in Libya on the one hand and the non-intervention in Syria on the other between February 2011 and October 2013 in order to justify these seemingly contradictory policies?

As will be argued, rather than framing the policies as entirely compatible or entirely contradictory, the U.S. administration used numerous ‘reasoning devices’ to justify the different policies, but did not remove all ambiguity as their frames had significant overlap.

This research is relevant from two perspectives. First, it is practically significant because it relates to recent actualities in policy practice. The media, politicians and others have often compared U.S. policy on Syria and Libya and raised questions concerning its contradictions. As shown above, in popular debate there is sometimes little understanding of why these policies diverge. By deciphering the U.S. frames on the conflicts, it becomes clearer that some of this ‘confusion’ is justified due to inconsistency and ambiguity in these frames.

Second, it is theoretically relevant because it contributes to a theoretical debate on the seeming contradictions between the policies. This debate concerns the so-called ‘Obama doctrine’. By examining the justifications provided by the U.S., my research shows that there is certainly no doctrine of ‘universal’ humanitarian intervention and that the rhetoric on the policies is only superficially compatible at most.

In this paper, the analytical frame, situation and methodology will be discussed in the first chapter. The second and third chapter will answer the sub-questions as outlined below for Libya and Syria respectively. The fourth chapter will compare the two frames. Finally, I will conclude by answering my research question.

The central concept in my research is ‘framing’. Frames are ‘action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate actions’ (Benford and Snow 2000: 614). Framing ‘implies agency and contention’, and involves ‘a dynamic, evolving process’ (Benford and Snow 2000: 615). Thus, my research contains several analytical components. First, frames ‘diagnose’, and ‘prescribe’. Second, ‘framing’ refers to processes, potentially leading to ‘reframing’. Third, framing is ‘contentious’ and dependent on context, including actual events and ‘counterframes’ (Benford and Snow 2000: 616).

Considering these analytical components, in each of the two central chapters on Libya and Syria a number of sub-questions will be discussed. First, the framing itself and framing processes must be considered. Therefore: how did the U.S. administration ‘diagnose’ the conflict and what did they ‘prescribe’ during the period from February 2011 till October 2013, and what changes in these diagnoses and prescriptions have occurred? Attention needs to be paid to who was framed as responsible for the perceived injustices, and how, if applicable, intervention was justified.

Second, after analyzing these framing processes, it is essential to research *how* such changes may have occurred. Therefore, how did contending counterframing political elites and the public diagnose the Libyan conflict *and* the administration's policies, and what did *they* prescribe? And how did these counterframes affect the administration's frame? Third, I will analyze what events or contextual shifts led to changes in the administration's frame. Ultimately, these questions will decipher the 'diagnostic/prescriptive' stories used by the administration, as well as explain the background dynamics leading to shifts in these stories.

Chapter I Theory, Situation and Methodology

In this chapter, the theory will be discussed. This pertains to both the larger academic debate this research relates to, and the theoretical framework from which I will tackle my research question. This will be followed by a brief explanation of the context and methodology.

Theoretical debate

Because of the recency of the topic, there has not been any specific academic debate on the framing of the U.S. policies on Libya and Syria. However, there is a debate on whether the policies are contradictory or not, particularly whether there is an ‘Obama Doctrine’ of humanitarian intervention. A nuanced interpretation of this doctrine amounts to ‘a context-dependent response to grave human rights abuses that includes military action but does not assume automaticity’, whereas others call it a ‘doctrine of universal humanitarian intervention’ (D. Murray 2013: 159; Kissinger 2012). However, in the academic (and public) debate, there is little consensus on the existence of such doctrine. On the one hand, several scholars reject it. Guiora calls Obama’s policies a ‘combination of inconsistency and murkiness’ and an ‘unanswerable riddle of how the U.S. distinguishes between the massacre of Libyans by their own government and the massacre of Syrians by their own government’ (2013: 252,263). Moreover, Fareed Zakaria considers the administration’s actions too state-specific, ad hoc and inconsistent for a doctrine (Zakaria 2011). Finally, Simon Chesterman asserts that ‘such pragmatic assessment of individual cases can hardly be called a “doctrine”’ (2011: 10).

On the other hand, several scholars distinguish a certain consistency in the form of an ‘Obama Doctrine’. Henry Kissinger simply spoke of a ‘doctrine of universal humanitarian intervention’ (2012). Murray, while agreeing the two conflicts are equally poignant, argues there is no contradiction, as the doctrine is ‘a justification for both action and inaction, on a pragmatic basis, putting idealism in a realistic context’ (D. Murray 2013: 159). In order for the administration to act upon their set of beliefs and principles, according to Murray, there must be several ‘triggers’ such as a multilateral coalition and a suitable country-specific context. Similarly, Caitlin Buckley argues that the policies on Syria and Libya are consistent, as the context differs substantially and only seems similar ‘on an abstract level’, (2012: 89).

Although this research does not look into the Obama Doctrine specifically, it significantly overlaps with this debate. By looking at framing, it may not become clear whether the policies itself are inconsistent, but it will become clear whether the *rhetoric* is inconsistent, whether the policies may *seem* incompatible due to ambiguous framing, and if the frames are consistent enough to suggest a ‘doctrine’.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework consists of framing theory of both political science and social movement theory, in order to create a framework suitable for the actor (a government) and sophisticated enough to analyze changes and interactions in the framing processes. First of all, political scientists Rein and Schön assert that frames are ‘diagnostic/prescriptive stories’ or ‘narratives that tell what needs fixing and how it might be fixed’ (1996: 89). Such frames are constructed by ‘frame holders’ who ‘often rely on a unifying metaphor to make a graceful normative leap from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ (Rein and Schön 1996: 89). To do this, frame holders use ‘framing devices’ – how to think about an issue – and ‘reasoning devices’, such as visual ‘images’, prognoses and appeals to principle, that suggest what to do about the issue. Furthermore, Rein and Schön argue frames can be contested and ‘require adapting to a changing policy environment’, potentially leading to ‘reframing’ (1996: 94-95).

While this is a valuable start for a framework, Rein and Schön do not elaborate on framing contests and processes. A useful complementary theory on frame contests is Entman’s ‘cascade model’ (Entman 2003). His hierarchical model entails five levels: administration, other elites, media, new frames and public (2003: 418-419). These lower levels can propose counterframes, which directly or indirectly influence the frame of the highest level, the administration. However, considering the scope of this thesis, the media will not be considered. This can be justified as follows. First, Shoon Murray

argues that ‘there is strong evidence that reporters appear to wax hawkish and wane dovish as official sources lead them to do’, suggesting the media are mere ‘vessels’ of opinions (S. Murray 2013: 3). Second, even Entman himself considers the media a ‘key transmission point’. Therefore, it can be assumed for simplicity’s sake that the media are only ‘carriers’ of opinions held by others, rather than having an independent opinion. The revised model thus entails three layers: the administration, political elites, and the public. (As ‘new frames’ are not actors, these will be excluded.)

However, political science theory is still not as sophisticated as social movement framing theory; it especially lacks insights into processes. Benford and Snow have developed an elaborate framing theory. They distinguish three framing tasks, the first two consistent with Rein and Schön and Entman: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing and motivational framing. Motivational framing, an important addition, includes ‘the rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action’ and has four ‘vocabularies’: severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety (Benford and Snow 2000: 617). Particularly relevant are also Benford and Snow’s ‘strategic processes’. These include four types: frame bridging (an outreach to unconnected but similar frames); frame amplification (invigorating the previously existent frame); frame extension (broadening the topic); and frame transformation (replacing old ideas with new ones) (Benford and Snow 2000: 624-625; Snow *et al.* 1986). Since Rein and Schön’s ‘reframing’ is a rather vague term, these four concepts will be used to analyze frame changes.

Finally, relevant are the concepts ‘beliefs’ and ‘values’. Both can be amplified and evoked in different manners. Whereas ‘values’ refer to modes of conduct considered worthy of protection, beliefs refer to ‘presumed relationships between two things or between one thing and a characteristic’ (Snow *et al.* 1986: 469). Five kinds of beliefs can be distinguished: beliefs about the seriousness of the problem; about the locus of causality; stereotypic beliefs about antagonists or the ‘framers’ themselves; beliefs about the presumed efficacy; and, finally, beliefs about the necessity, urgency and propriety to act (Snow *et al.*: 470).

While Rein and Schön’s theory provides a start, framing contests will be analyzed using Entman’s (revised) model and the analysis of processes will make use of the elaborated concepts of social movement theory.

Context

With the outbreak of the ‘Arab Spring’, several regimes reverted to mass violence. While in March 2011, the U.S. – along with an international coalition – participated in an intervention in Libya, the Syrian conflict remains unresolved. The Libyan uprising against Muammar Qaddafi slowly emerged in January and turned truly violent in February 2011; a UN authorized intervention followed in March. In Syria, the conflict emerged slightly later, around early March 2011, and to this day Bashar al-Assad has managed to retain his power.

While the death toll of the Libyan conflict was slightly over a 1,000 by late February – shortly before the intervention – the death toll in Syria was claimed to exceed 110,000 people by September 2013 (Guiora 2012; Solomon 2013). Importantly, Syria has strong allies. Besides its regional ally Iran, two members of the Permanent Five of the Security Council (P5) – China and particularly Russia – continue to support Assad. So far, Sino-Russian support to Assad has blocked any effective action by the Security Council.

Methodology

To get a comprehensive insight into the U.S. administration's frame, I have analyzed a large sample of 'raw data' comprising speeches, statements and press releases by the U.S. Administration. The data have been collected by searching a variety of sites including Youtube, Google and the site of the State Department.

Moreover, data on the (passive) counterframes of the American public consisted of polls and media reports. Counterframes created by internal political elites (particularly the U.S. Congress) have been analyzed by reading media reports, public statements and resolutions. As a great number of American politicians have commented on Obama's Syria and Libya policy, I have allowed myself to be 'led', to some extent, by references in the administration's statements. For my analysis on external political counterframes, I used media reports and discussions in the UN. As the P5 appeared most prominent in the media, my analysis of external counterframes is limited to these states.

Finally, I have analyzed the dialectic interaction between 'real' events or occurrences and the administration's frame by studying this frame itself. Only when the administration explicitly referred to a certain event, has this event been included in my analysis.

Chapter II Libya

On March 17th, 2011, the U.S. supported resolution 1973, tabled in the Security Council by France, the United Kingdom and Lebanon. This entailed the start of a military mission – without ‘boots on the ground’ – in Libya lasting till October 31st that year. This chapter will analyze the frame the U.S. administration put forward to justify this policy. First, I will analyze how the administration framed and ‘reframed’ its policy. Second, I will consider the influence of counterframes. Third, the dialectic between framing and events will be analyzed.

The Libya Frame: pre-intervention

In late February 2011, the U.S. already had a reasonably tough frame that can be categorized as ‘an injustice frame’. First, the diagnosis pointed to a locus of causality responsible for the ‘unacceptable bloodshed and suffering’ that ‘peaceful protestors’ were subjected to (Obama 2011a). The locus of causality was, from the beginning, the Libyan regime, as can be deduced from Hillary Clinton’s statement on 22 February that ‘the government of Libya has a responsibility to respect the universal rights of the people, including the right to free expression and assembly’ (2011a).

Second, stereotypic beliefs created a stark dichotomous image between the protestors and the regime. To the former the U.S. attributed the epitome ‘peaceful’, emphasizing their ‘legitimate demands’, while the latter was associated with terms as ‘brutal’ (Obama 2011a; 2011h; Clinton 2011b). However, this dichotomy was still somewhat vague on 22 and 23 February, when the administration referred to ‘the perpetrators’ and ‘the use of violence in Libya’ rather than explicitly blaming Qaddafi (Clinton 2011a; Obama 2011a).

Third, in this diagnostic frame, the U.S. appealed to values that were interwoven with the (stereotypic) beliefs. Both the ‘victims’ – the protestors – and the ‘criminals’ were linked to highly inclusive values and norms. While the victims were said to be ‘supporters of universal rights (...) and the ability of the Libyan people to determine their destiny’, the regime was said to ‘violate international norms and every standard of common decency’ (Obama 2011a). The American frame thereby appealed to democratic values and the human rights discourse, widely shared in the U.S. itself.

On 22 February, the ‘prescription’ was relatively mild. The administration prescribed a collective ‘message’, arguing to be ‘working urgently with friends and partners around the world to convey a message to the Libyan government’ and that it was ‘imperative that the nations and people of the world speak with one voice’ (Clinton 2011a; Obama 2011a). Moreover, the administration claimed ‘the Libyan government has a responsibility to refrain from violence’, which carried the implicit underlying ‘reasoning device’ that Qaddafi would succumb to political pressure (Clinton 2011a).

However, by 28 February, the diagnosis had shifted to a larger emphasis on the dichotomy between perpetrators and victims and evoked beliefs about the severity of the conflict, signaled by phrases as ‘Qaddafi’s brutal attacks on his own people’, and ‘Qaddafi’s security forces opening fire on peaceful protestors again and again, using heavy weapons on unarmed civilians’ (Clinton 2011b). This diagnosis was maintained in early March (Obama 2011b; Gaoutte 2011; Clinton 2011e). The belief of a simple contrast between victim and perpetrator, peaceful and brutal, heavily armed and unarmed, was perpetuated by constant repetition of these stereotypes.

Furthermore, there was some ‘value amplification’, as Clinton emphasized on February 28th that ‘these are not Western principles or American ideals. They are truly universal, lessons learned by people all over the world’ (Clinton 2011b). Clinton also slightly extended the frame to strategic factors, claiming that ‘our values and interests overlap’, because ‘supporting these [democratic] transitions is not simply a matter of ideals. It is also a strategic imperative’ (2011b).

The prescription changed according to the increasing emphasis on the role of the Qaddafi regime. Clinton stated on February 28th ‘it’s time for Qaddafi to go – without further violence or delay’ (2011b). The ‘reasoning device’ between the amplified diagnosis and this prescription – the glue between diagnosis and prescription – was the catch-phrase ‘Qaddafi has lost the legitimacy to govern’

(Clinton 2011d; Rice 2011a). This sentence further vilified Qaddafi and appealed to democratic values concerning legitimacy.

America's role in this prescription, however, remained vague. In late February, Clinton admitted to be considering a no-fly zone (2011a). Yet, Clinton emphasized the necessity of a broad coalition: 'we are not going to act alone. There would be unforeseen consequences to that' (Clinton 2011f).

Therefore, the pre-intervention frame was amplified by increasingly emphasizing the role and stereotypic image of Qaddafi's regime (belief amplification). The frame was largely humanitarian, stressing 'universal' values. The prescription changed from not necessarily demanding Qaddafi's resignation to stating he had to go by 28 February. However, the role of the U.S. in the distribution of this medicine, so to speak, remained somewhat unclear.

The Libya Frame: post-intervention

The decision to intervene was made on March 17th. The post-intervention frame can be categorized by two changes: an instantaneous frame amplification and a gradual frame extension, towards a mix of humanitarian and strategic factors.

First, stereotypic beliefs about Qaddafi and beliefs about the seriousness of the problem were amplified. The amplification of the conflict's seriousness is found in the elaborate descriptions of the injustices, such as 'innocent civilians were beaten, imprisoned and killed', 'peaceful protestors were forcefully put down', and 'hospitals were attacked and patients disappeared' (Obama 2011c). The dichotomy between villain and victims was stressed by statements as 'to the Libyan people: your courage and character have been unbreakable in the face of a tyrant' (Obama 2011e).

The emphasis on the seriousness of the injustices is particularly poignant in the following quote, which signifies both the instant amplification and the more gradual extension towards security interests:

"For decades, Qaddafi has demonstrated a willingness to use brute force through his sponsorship of terrorism against the American people as well as others, and through the killings he has carried out within his own borders. And yesterday, speaking of the city of Benghazi – a city of roughly 700,000 people – he threatened, and I quote: "we will have no mercy and no pity" – no mercy on his own citizens.' (Obama 2011c)

Qaddafi was increasingly vilified, even linking him to American interests and fear with an explicit reference to 'terrorism'. This fragment also contains a motivational aspect, absent in the earlier framing: the immediate threat to Benghazi created a sense of urgency, used to justify intervention. Obama further elaborated on this, saying that 'left unchecked, a humanitarian crisis would ensue. The entire region could be destabilized, endangering many of our allies and partners. (...) The democratic values we stand for would be overrun' (2011c). Thus, Obama appealed to three 'urgent' aspects: the moral responsibility to prevent a humanitarian disaster; the security risks for American allies, and thereby America itself; the threat to American dominance in the 'realm of values'. The diagnosis of a 'looming humanitarian crisis' created a sense of urgency and propriety serving as a motivational and justifying 'reasoning device' to make the 'leap' to intervention.

Several other motivational elements were formed in the Libya frame. First, Obama framed America's moral and military uniqueness by arguing that 'American leadership is essential' and 'we will provide the unique capabilities that we can bring to stop the violence against civilians' (2011c). This is further elaborated in Obama's speech of 28 March:

'To brush aside America's responsibility as a leader and – more profoundly – our responsibilities to our fellow human beings under such circumstances would have been a betrayal of who we are. Some nations may be able to turn a blind eye to atrocities in other countries. The United States of America is different. And as President, I refused to wait for the images of slaughter and mass graves before taking action.' (2011e)

Such appeals to American pride - ‘every American can be proud of the lives we’ve saved in Libya’ – suggested to the public that the U.S. was compelled to act because of its moral superiority (Obama 2011e).

Second, the belief of efficacy of intervention was emphasized. Obama stressed that their mission was ‘clear, focused and limited in time, scope, with a well-defined mission’ (2011d). Post-intervention, the mission was argued to be a success (Gates 2011a). Moreover, the broad coalition was stressed to reinforce the belief in this efficacy and limited role of the U.S., as Obama claimed that he had ‘absolutely no doubt that we will be able to transfer control of his operation to an international coalition’ (Obama 2011d). Furthermore, Obama argued that ‘we had a unique ability to stop that violence: an international mandate for action, a broad coalition prepared to join us, the support of Arab countries, a plea to help from the Libyan people’ (2011e). The coalition and UN authorization were therefore emphasized to underline the ‘uniqueness’ of the intervention.

The second ‘framing process’ was frame extension towards inclusion of American ‘interests’, which was more gradual, and at times poorly and inconsistently defined. Besides his reference to terrorism mentioned above, Obama argued on March 18th that ‘where a brutal dictator is threatening his people, saying he will show no mercy (...) it is in America’s national interest to do something about it’, rather invoking a principle than an interest (2011c). Moreover, he argued the conflict might destabilize the region, referring to American interests and allies in the region (2011c). Obama spoke of a ‘humanitarian interest’ and a ‘very practical interest’ respectively and claimed that, due to these interests, ‘a failure to act in Libya would have carried a far greater price for America’ (2011e). This phrase, serving as a ‘reasoning device’, suggested that the Libyan conflict formed a direct – though non-existential – threat.

Yet, Clinton argued Libya itself was not vital interest, but that the U.S. ‘clearly has interests there, and it’s part of the region which is a vital interest for the United States’ (2011g). Libya would, according to Clinton, destabilize the transitions in Tunisia and Egypt, and directly threaten Europe ‘because of everything from oil to immigration’ (2011g). This destabilization, Clinton argued, indirectly threatened American interests.

After the immediate reframing, the frame changed relatively little, except for gradual development and sporadic use of the national interest-argument. In October 2012, Obama stated that ‘Qaddafi had more American blood on his hands than any other individual other than Osama bin Laden’ (2012b). Again, a link was made to terrorism, appealing to American fears and almost presenting the Libyan conflict as an existential threat. However, the (largely humanitarian) basis of the frame and the celebration of success remained unchanged, as Obama stated in September 2011 ‘after four decades of darkness, the Libyans can walk the streets free from a tyrant’, and ‘we can take pride in the innocent lives we saved and helping the Libyans reclaim their country’ (2011i).

In sum, the Libya frame ‘diagnosed’ an unjust conflict and ultimately ‘prescribed’ an intervention. This diagnostic frame was amplified between mid-February and March 17th, and got a major post-intervention ‘amplification boost’. It evoked several beliefs. First, there was increasing emphasis on the seriousness of the injustices. Second, the frame created a stark dichotomy between victims and perpetrator, reinforced by stereotypic characterizations as ‘peaceful’ and ‘brutal’. Third – strongly related to the dichotomy – the frame consistently put the locus of causality at Qaddafi. Fourth, the intervention was justified and motivated by a belief of urgency and efficacy, partly because of the international coalition, partly because of America’s unique capabilities.

From the very beginning, the frame also appealed to American values, such as democracy and civil liberties. These values were said to be ‘universal’ and attributed to the ‘peaceful protestors’. By framing these values and rights as ‘universal’, the frame became highly inclusive and useful in an international context. Moreover, to justify intervention, the frame was gradually extended to the belief that the Libyan conflict threatened American interests.

Counterframes

Considering that there were several substantial shifts in the American frame, these may have been driven by strong counterframing. The most vocal counterframe of the foreign elites was created by Russia and China. China will not be discussed separately, as its (less vocal) counterframe was largely similar to Russia's. First, pre-intervention, Russia 'diagnosed' that both parties committed crimes, rather than creating a dichotomous image. This is exemplified by UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin's comments in February, stating that 'all parties involved must show restraint' (2011a). Russia prescribed a 'political solution' and did not 'enjoin sanctions, for forceful interference in Libya's affairs could make the situation worse' (Churkin 2011a). In response to the draft resolution 1973, Russia's proposed a resolution demanding 'an immediate ceasefire' (Churkin 2011b).

Second, Russia's post-intervention counterframe on the American prescription postulated that the intervening coalition had overstepped its goals and caused civilian casualties. On 23 March, Russia stated it was 'unacceptable to use the mandate derived from resolution 1973 (...) to achieve goals that go far beyond its provisions' (Lukashevich 2011). In May, Foreign Minister Lavrov argued it was 'unacceptable to try to impose some formulas of political system' (Goodenough 2011). Furthermore, Churkin stated that 'actions by the NATO-led coalition forces are resulting in civilian casualties' (2011d). Putin similarly claimed that 'Qaddafi's not there, but peaceful civilians are dying' (Bryanski 2011). In short, the intervention was supposedly illegal and made the situation worse.

The U.S. largely rejected the Russian (and Chinese) counterframe. First, pre-intervention, Rice accepted the Russian resolution as legitimate – although insufficient – by stating that 'we don't think that [our resolution] is mutually exclusive of another demand for a ceasefire. (...) It's quite conceivable that element could be drawn from the Russian draft and incorporated' (2011b). However, the U.S. merely accepted the Russian 'prescription' as complementary, rather than fully accepting it.

Second, the U.S. refuted accusations of overstepping the mandate and causing civilian casualties. In March, Gates claimed they had no proof of the U.S. being responsible for civilian casualties, but did have 'intelligence about Qaddafi taking the bodies of people he's killed and putting them at the sites where we have attacked' (2011). Moreover, the administration stressed that regime change and democratization came from within and were not imposed militarily, as 'this change [in Libya] doesn't represent the work of the United States' (Obama 2011a; 2012b; Clinton 2011e). The administration thus rejected most of the Russian counterframe.

Furthermore, France and Britain's pre-intervention counterframe proposed a different prescription than the U.S. administration. On March 11th – before the U.S. had done so – Sarkozy took the lead in prescribing intervention by noting France's and Britain's willingness to intervene if things escalated: 'les Anglais et les Français, nous avons dit notre disponibilité, (...) pour les actions ciblées purement défensives au cas où Kadhafi ferait usage d'armes chimiques ou de l'aviation contre les populations' (*Le Monde* 2011). This was followed by a UN resolution proposed by Britain, France and Lebanon on March 16th. The administration incorporated the Anglo-Franco prescriptive counterframe by accepting resolution 1973.

Moreover, the public created a (passive) counterframe. First, post-intervention, public opinion became unfavorable of the intervention with 46% disapproving and 39% approving in June 2011 (*Pollingreport.com* 2011-2012). Of the people disapproving, 51% were concerned about the number of American forces already deployed in other conflicts, while 19% thought the opposition was no better than Qaddafi. Therefore, the public questioned the capacity of the American military, the intervention's efficacy and the ('peaceful') nature of the opposition.

Second, the public questioned the notion that the mission was clear and successful, with 60% saying the intervention was 'not a victory' and only 32% 'proud' in August 2011. Moreover, in April, 61% thought Obama's explanation of the mission was unclear. In March, 75% thought it was at least 'somewhat likely' that the mission would become a long-term commitment. Finally, 61% thought Obama should have gotten Congressional authorization.

The U.S. administration generally did not explicitly refer to these (passive) counterframes. Only in late March, Clinton stated Obama would address the public's concerns on March 28th (2011g). However, most of these polls date from after 28 March and, if anything, demonstrate the frame's lack

of resonance. Due to the lack of explicit references, it is difficult to establish a clear connection between the public's and the administration's frame. However, the public does not seem to have had much influence. This is in accordance with Entman's model, in which the public is at the bottom of the 'hierarchy', and 'a dependent variable which sometimes feeds back to elites' (Entman 2003: 424).

Finally, the House of Representatives created a double counterframe. First, it argued there was no compelling reason to intervene. The House accepted resolution H.Res.292, proposed by Speaker of the House John Boehner, which stated that 'the President has failed to provide Congress with a compelling rationale based on U.S. national security issues' (Congress 2011). Also, Boehner pointed to a 'lack of clarity over the objectives of this mission' (Boehner 2011).

Second, it was claimed that Obama's intervention was constitutionally illegal. Congressman Dennis Kucinich claimed 'the President has no constitutional basis for sending armed forces into combat over Tripoli' (CNN 2011). Multiple congressmen also argued that the mission involved hostilities, which would make Congressional agreement necessary. In June 2011, Senator Bob Corker argued that 'to say that our men and women in uniform are not in a position to encounter hostilities is really incredible. You cite that 'hostilities' has never been defined. (...) So when you say that these are no hostilities, that is just not the intent of Congress when they passed the War Powers Act' (Corker 2011). Corker thus claimed Congress should have been consulted.

Both points were refuted. First, directly responding to Boehner's criticisms of having no compelling reason, Clinton stressed the important humanitarian 'interests': 'there is a great deal of appreciation for what we have done to stop Gadhafi on his mission of merciless oppression' (2011g). Moreover, Gates refuted the 'lack of clarity', as 'the president has made very clear there will be no American troops on the ground. (...) [and] has put very strict limitations [on the mission]' (2011).

The administration rebutted the second claim with two arguments. First, they claimed there had been considerable support and 'consultation' in the House. Clinton stated that 'on March 1, the Senate passed a [bipartisan] resolution calling for a no-fly zone. (...) There were a number of people in the House who were demanding that action were taken' (2011g). Moreover, responding to Corker, Kerry (nominated as State Secretary) argued that Obama had lived by the War Power Act, since 'he did come to the Congress. He sent us a letter requesting authorization and we didn't do it' (2011). It was therefore argued that the House had been 'consulted'.

Second, the Administration claimed Congressional consult was not required. In June, Kerry argued that 'there are hostilities, but American soldiers are not exposed to them' (2011). Moreover, an official report published in June claimed that 'because U.S. military operations [in Libya] are distinct from the kind of 'hostilities' contemplated by the resolution [of the House], the deadlines for congressional approval do not apply. (...) There's been no exchange of fire with hostile forces. We don't risk casualties' (CNN Wire Staff 2011). The administration therefore refuted this counterframe.

Summarizing, except for the acceptance of the Anglo-Franco prescription, and some concessions to Russia's demand for a ceasefire, the counterframes were refuted and did not visibly lead to significant changes in the administration's frame. Yet, the administration's frame was not widely accepted; this may have caused frame amplification and extension.

Dialectic interaction

The dialectic interaction between a changing 'reality' and the American frame – or adaption to a 'changing policy environment' – is evident in several cases. First, Qaddafi's threat to Benghazi led to reframing. By creating a sense of urgency, the administration used this threat as a reasoning device to make the 'leap' to intervention. Obama reasoned in March that 'left unchecked, we have every reason to believe that Qaddafi would commit atrocities against his people (...) that's why the United States has worked with our allies and partners to shape a strong international response at the United Nations' (2011c). On March 27th, Clinton evoked the same sense of urgency: 'can you imagine if Qaddafi had gotten to Benghazi, had massacred tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands had fled the border, destabilizing Egypt? Everybody would be saying, why didn't the president do something' (2011g).

This direct threat therefore altered the diagnosis – amplification of the problem’s seriousness and urgency – and the prescription – intervention rather than political actions.

Second, UN authorization and broad international support provided a powerful ‘reasoning device’ to justify intervention. ‘In response to a call for action by the Libyan people and the Arab League, the Security Council passed a strong resolution that demands an end to the violence against citizens. It authorizes the use of force’, claimed Obama on March 18th (2011c). Also, in March, Rice argued to have ‘responded to the Libyan cry for help’ (2011b). By referring to the calls for help, the U.S. portrayed a positive image of itself as a helper, rather than a neo-imperialist power. The emphasis on the authorization, widespread support, and coalition also contributed to the belief of efficacy of the intervention. Concluding, these two dialectic interactions were vital in the justification for intervention.

Chapter III Syria

The American frame on Syria was characterized by three elements. First, there was belief amplification. Second, the frame was extended to security interests. Third, in June 2012 the primary frame was extended to include new values and beliefs related to chemical arms. By August 2013, the ‘chemical’ aspect became so predominant, it amounted to frame transformation.

Core Package: Values and Beliefs

As in the Libyan case, the U.S. administration had a core package of democratic values and three beliefs. From the beginning, they diagnosed the Syrian protestors as demanding their legitimate rights, ‘that all individuals around the world should enjoy’ (Obama 2011f), while the regime was said to ‘violate human rights’ (Clinton 2011b). Consistently, the administration used the terms ‘universal’, ‘peaceful’ and ‘legitimate’, as opposed to ‘violent’, and later ‘brutal’ as framing devices (Rice 2011d; Feltman 2011a). Moreover, between 2011 and 2013, the diagnosis was characterized by three central beliefs, all gradually amplified: the belief about the conflict’s severity, the locus of causality, and stereotypic beliefs.

First, the belief about the seriousness of the conflict was amplified. Until late April 2011, the diagnosis was relatively mild. In March, Clinton claimed Assad’s actions did not equal Qaddafi’s, calling Assad a ‘reformer’ and his actions ‘police actions which exceeded the use of force any of us would have liked’ (2011g). Obama rather mildly condemned ‘the Syrian government’s treatment of its citizens’ (2011e). His prescription was equally soft: ‘we call on Assad to change course now, and heed the calls of his own people’ (2011e). The reasoning device linking prescription and diagnosis was the assumption that Assad would respond to pressure and still had some legitimacy.

By May, the diagnosis had become more severe and Assad’s legitimacy was questioned, as the U.S. stated he was to ‘either lead the transition or get out of the way’ (Clinton 2011i). The administration diagnosed in stronger terms, speaking of ‘killings of children’ and ‘brutal torture’ (Posner 2011). In August, Obama condemned the ‘brutality’ and ‘sustained onslaught’ (2011g; 2011h). The increased severity is also exemplified by the terminology; early on, words as ‘conflict’ and ‘war’ were avoided. As late as April 2012, Rice noted ‘it is increasingly becoming a crisis – a violent crisis – [that] will potentially devolve into civil war’ (Rice 2012c). By December 2012, however, senior official William Burns spoke of ‘Asad’s war’ (2012). In 2013, senior official Elizabeth Jones even called the crisis ‘one of the most devastating conflicts of the 21st century’ (2013). This terminology and explicit remarks about the conflict’s escalation gradually amplified this belief of severity.

Second, the administration held the regime accountable, arguing that ‘the regime is the source of the instability’ and ‘the government’s trying to play this as a sectarian issue, exacerbating tensions on the ground’ (Unnamed official 2011a). However, there was still some ambiguity about the character of the regime in 2011, and strong stereotypic beliefs were not yet apparent. As late as 17 June, 2011, an official claimed ‘the Syrian government seems to be trying to reach out to some real opposition types’ (Unnamed official 2011a). The prescription at this point was ‘increasing pressure on Assad’ (2011a). However, by July the diagnosis had been sufficiently amplified to propose the new prescription that ‘Assad has lost his legitimacy’ and had to go (Posner 2011; Rice 2011a).

Third, from mid-2011 onwards, the diagnostic frame increasingly evoked stereotypic beliefs about the regime and Assad. In November 2011, Feltman used language reminiscent of terrorists and criminals: ‘[there is] rampant corruption, brutality, and ineptitude of the mafia-like Assad clique that has *hijacked* [my emphasis] the Syrian state’ (Feltman 2011a). This term ‘clique’ was used more often (Unnamed official 2011b; Rice 2012g). Furthermore, Clinton spoke of the ‘whims of a dictator’ and claimed that ‘the regime’s brutality seems to know no bounds’ (Clinton 2011i; 2012e).

By stressing stereotypic beliefs, a dichotomy between the people and Assad became increasingly clear, although not as strong as in the Libyan case, as the Syrian people were admitted to be fighting (therefore not everyone was ‘peaceful’). Feltman admitted that ‘some [protestors] have taken up arms in self-defense’, but ‘forcing the opposition to become violent [was] the deliberate strategy of Assad’ (2011a). Similarly, Jones remarked in April 2013 that ‘there is a competition between extremists and moderates. We need to weigh in on behalf of those who promote freedom and tolerance. (...) I’d also

like to be clear that the Syrian regime bears the primary responsibility' (Jones 2013a). There was therefore still a clear distinction between perpetrator and victim. By December 2011, the Syria National Council was considered 'a legitimate representative of Syrians seeking a peaceful, democratic transition' and increasingly supported with non-lethal aid (Unnamed official 2011c; Donahoe 2011).

Besides frame amplification, the frame was somewhat extended from late 2011 onwards. The diagnosis increasingly included security interests – though not of the nature of direct or existential security threats – often presented as a potential climax exceeding human suffering. In June 2012, an official stated that 'it's not *simply* [my emphasis] about the suffering of the Syrian people (...) but there are real dangers for the wider region' (Unnamed official 2012). In early 2012, Clinton stated that 'not only will more civilians die, but instability will most certainly spill into neighboring states' (2012a). Yet, Clinton still prescribed a 'negotiated political solution' (2012a; 2012c). The reasoning device for this remained the presumption that the conflict could not be solved by outside powers, as 'only a genuine democratic transition will solve this crisis' (Clinton 2012a).

Justifying the prescription

Considering that the Syria diagnostic frame strongly resembles the Libya frame, this raises the question how the U.S. justified the different leap from 'is' to 'ought'. Consistently, they argued that they were not to provide the 'prescription' of Assad's resignation and a political transition, but merely support it through sanctions and diplomacy. First, rather than proposing a prescriptive frame, the administration frequently offered a 'prognostic frame' suggesting the inevitability of Assad's demise. In June 2011, Clinton stated that 'while continuing brutality may allow him to delay the change that is underway in Syria, it will not reverse it' (2011i). In October, Rice argued that '[repression] doesn't work and won't succeed, and sooner or later that will be self-evident' (2011e). In December 2012, Burns claimed that 'a transition is coming, one way or another' (2012). These prognoses were strengthened by stressing the opposition's increasing capacity; they were supposedly 'organizing themselves', 'refusing to back down' and 'had shaken the foundations of this authoritarian system' (Unnamed official 2011a; Clinton 2011i). This prognostic frame served as a reasoning tool to make the 'leap' from condemnation to a rather weak non-interventionist prescription.

Second, the U.S. framed stronger intervention as undesirable and current methods as efficient. In July 2011, Clinton argued that 'we regret the loss of life and violence, but this choice is up to the Syrian Government', rejecting an active American role (2011j). In August 2011, she argued that more active interference would even be detrimental to the conflict, because 'no outside power can or should impose on this transition' (2011k). Clinton argued their role in removing Assad was limited to 'pressuring the regime to get out of the way' (2011k). A belief in the efficacy of this strategy was also evoked, as the administration claimed their sanctions 'stroke at the heart of the regime' and 'disrupt[ed] the regime's ability to finance its campaign of violence' (Clinton 2011k). As late as February 2013, Kerry said he was 'very confident' that a package of new sanctions would lead to Assad's resignation (2013a).

Third, the responsibility was placed on several others. First, from November 2011 until April 2012, the administration pointed to the Arab League, and the Arab League Initiative outlining a peace process, as the focal points in the international community's efforts to resolve the conflict. In November 2011, Clinton stated that 'the Arab League pressure is probably the most effective pressure [on Assad]' (*Reuters* 2011). In January 2012, Feltman said the Arab League '[had] taken on an incredibly important responsibility' and Rice argued that the U.S. 'welcome[d] the Arab League's continued leadership' (Feltman 2012a; Rice 2012a). After April 2012, the U.S. supported the Six-Point Plan of the UN. From June 2012 onwards, this was replaced by the 'Geneva communiqué' (Burns 2012; Jones 2013a; DiCarlio 2013).

Second, the U.S. consistently argued that stronger, multilateral actions were impossible due to Russian and Chinese obstructionism: 'we remain committed to pursuing multilateral sanctions at the Security Council, but Russia and China continue to stand in the way' (Feltman 2011). In June 2012, an official argued that 'it's really incumbent upon the Security Council members to exercise leadership' (Unnamed official 2012a). Moreover, in July 2012, Rice explicitly blamed Russia and China: 'the fault

lies squarely with the heinous Assad regime and those member states that refuse to join their fellow Council members in taking firm action against the regime' (2012f). By 'naming and shaming', the U.S. tried to generate Chinese and Russian support, while simultaneously blaming them for the UN's inaction.

Third, the administration continued to prescribe a medicine that somehow involved the Syrian regime's cooperation, arguing in July 2012 that 'they must begin a genuine transition to democracy', and 'this choice is up to the Syrian government' (Clinton 2012d). In May 2012, Rice stated that 'the onus remains on the Syrian regime to create the conditions for success' (2012d). As late as July 2013, Rosemary DiCarlio asserted that 'we now look to the Syrian government to display a genuine commitment to a negotiated political transition' (DiCarlio 2012).

Finally, in reference to Libya, the administration stressed the intervention's 'uniqueness'. In May 2011, Clinton argued 'there's no one size fits all' and claimed that while 'in Libya, we had a unique international coalition' and 'historical reasons, strategic reasons', for Syria 'there's no appetite [for intervention]' (Couric 2011). In August 2011, Ambassador Ford argued that '[the Syrians] do not want American military intervention', unlike the Libyans (Ford 2011). Later that month, an official argued that, in comparison, 'in Syria, we had very little contact with the government. We had very little economic interests' (Unnamed official 2011b). Therefore, the international consensus, local preferences and larger interests in Libya were used to justify the discrepancy.

In sum, until August 2013, the administration's Syria frame was, first, characterized by a package of values, including democracy and human rights, which were presented as universal. Second, the diagnosis evoked three – gradually amplified – beliefs: the severity of the crisis, the locus of causality at the regime only, and stereotypic characterizations, including a dichotomy between perpetrator and victims. Third, it increasingly involved (non-existential and indirect) security interests. The prescriptive frame was characterized by three core elements: emphasis on the supposed efficacy of current measures (diplomacy, sanctions and pressure); prognoses of inevitable change; and 'distributing' responsibility to other states, organizations and the Syrian regime itself. In reference to the Libya intervention, the administration stressed its 'uniqueness' and context-dependence.

Chemical weapons

Remarkably, in August 2013, the administration did prescribe an intervention, suggesting that the prescriptions for Syria and Libya had converged. However, the diagnosis had been changed considerably. Around August 2012, the administration's frame was extended to chemical weapons. Obama stated that chemical weapons 'don't just concern Syria; it concerns our close allies in the region, including Israel. It concerns us. (...) A red line for us is [when] we start seeing chemical weapons being utilized' (2012a). In December 2012, Clinton claimed they would undertake action if Assad used chemical weapons (2012f).

In August 2013, the emphasis on chemical weapons became so strong it may be considered frame transformation. On August 21st Assad allegedly killed over a 1,000 people in a chemical attack. That day, press secretary Josh Earnest stated that the U.S. was 'deeply concerned' by reports about a chemical attack by government forces (2013). By August 26th, military intervention was prescribed in the administration's speeches. The motivational frame – rather hypocritically – appealed to emotion, and morality. Kerry stated that:

'What we saw in Syria last week should shock the conscience of the world. It defies any code of morality. The indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, of women and children and innocent bystanders, by chemical weapons is a moral obscenity. (...) The meaning of this attack goes beyond the conflict in Syria itself.' (2013b)

By appealing to emotions and a sense of morality and propriety, the U.S. hoped to justify intervention. However, note that despite this emotional appeal, the diagnosis had been transformed: this was 'beyond' the conflict itself, and was about chemical weapons. The emotional aspect served as a motivational 'reasoning device' and was characterized by detailed 'visual' descriptions of the atrocities:

As a father, I can't get the image out of my head of a man who held his dead child, wailing while chaos swirled around him; the images of entire families dead in their beds without a drop of blood or a visible wound; human suffering that we can never ignore or forget.' (Kerry 2013b)

Clearly, 'human suffering' had been going on for two years in Syria, but never before had the atrocities been described with such detail and personal appeal to emotion ('as a father'). Using inclusive terms as 'we' and 'our', exemplified by phrases as 'with our own eyes, we have all of us become witnesses' and 'we saw rows of children lying on a hospital floor', Kerry attempted to make a personal connection (2013b; 2013c).

Although the motivational frame and 'reasoning devices' emphasized emotions and values, the chemical attack was largely diagnosed as an existential security threat. Appealing to fear, Kerry argued in rather hyperbolic terms that 'it matters because if we choose to live in a world where a thug and a murderer like Assad can gas thousands of his own people with impunity, then there will be no end to the test of our resolve and the dangers that will flow from those others who believe that they can do as they will' (2013c). Kerry claimed inaction might embolden 'Iran, Hezbollah and North Korea, and every other terrorist group or dictator that might ever again contemplate the use of weapons of mass destruction' (2013c). In September, Kerry concluded that 'Syria – bottom line – is important to America and our security for many reasons' (2013d). The most vital 'reasoning device' to leap to intervention was thus the existential threat posed by Assad's chemical attack.

Several other supporting reasoning devices were used. First, a 'unifying metaphor' of the U.S. as embodiment of moral authority was evoked, appealing to people's principles and pride. Kerry argued:

'It is also profoundly about who we are. We are the United States of America. We are the country that has tried to honor a set of universal values around which we have organized our lives and aspirations.' (Kerry 2013c)

This 'proud' perception was further elaborated in phrases as 'we lead with the belief that right makes might' (Obama 2013a). It was also used to explain why Obama sought Congressional consent – more likely a response to criticism on the Libya procedure. Obama argued he did so because 'our power is rooted in our example as a government of the people, by the people, and for the people' (2013a).

Second, a belief in the prescription's efficacy was underlined. Obama stated that intervention would be 'limited and tailored' and 'effective tomorrow, next week, or one month from now' (2013a). Kerry even refused to call it a war, saying 'we are not asking America to go to war', but '[Obama] is asking for authorization to deter and degrade Assad's capacity to use chemical weapons' (2013d). Clearly, this was about chemical weapons, and was not to be a *humanitarian* intervention.

Ironically, the lack of international solidarity – deemed essential for the Libya intervention – was no longer of great importance. Obama stated that he was 'comfortable going forward without the approval of a United Nations Security Council that, so far, has been completely unwilling to hold Assad accountable' (2013b). However, this bold language was somewhat compromised by 'an appeal to popularity' as justification, as the administration emphasized that 'a prohibition on the use of chemical weapons has been agreed to by governments of 98 percent of the world's people' (Kerry 2013c; 2013e; Obama 2013b).

Yet, by mid-September 2013 the prescription was put aside. Obama pointed to Russia's new willingness to pressure Assad into giving up his chemical weapons (2013b). Kerry claimed that 'we can avert military action and achieve, through peaceful means, even more than what military strikes promised' (2013f). UN Ambassador Samantha Power stressed the efficacy, as legal measures would 'eliminate one of the largest previously undeclared chemical weapons programs in the world' (2013). By late September, the earlier prescription of 'close partnership with the opposition', the Geneva communiqué, and 'negotiated political solution' was in use again (Kerry 2013g).

Counterframes

The divergence in the Syria prescription in comparison to the Libya frame raises the question whether this is the result of effective counterframing. China and particularly Russia created an important counterframe. Russia diagnosed the opposition as ‘armed extremists’ and Assad as ‘fully committed to a cessation of violence’ (McElroy 2012). Furthermore, Russia claimed that the conflict ‘[did] not present a threat to international peace and security’ (Churkin 2011c). Throughout these two years, the Russia continually diagnosed that both sides were to blame (‘all sides must take measures to end the violence’) and prescribed ‘constructive dialogue’ and ‘non-imposition’ (Churkin 2011c; 2012a). Moreover, Russia repeatedly vetoed drafts for UN resolutions, even those merely containing a condemnation, on the grounds that ‘the new resolution on Syria might receive too broad an interpretation, just as UNSC resolution 1973 on Libya has’ (Churkin 2011c).

Furthermore, Russia claimed Assad did not commit the chemical attack and opposed American intervention, stating this would lead to escalation (Bowen 2013; Putin 2013). On 9 September, 2013, Lavrov offered an alternative prescription of establishing international control over Assad’s chemical weapons, which included ‘placing chemical weapons storage sites under international control’, ‘[their] destruction’ and ‘[Assad] joining the treaty on prohibition of chemical weapons’ (Lavrov 2013).

China agreed that ‘the Syria issue is a matter of the country’s internal affairs’ (Sheng 2011). It also vetoed strong action by the Security Council for fear it might prelude military intervention (Wee and Mao 2012). Furthermore, China rejected intervention and favored a ‘political solution’ (Lamarque 2013).

The U.S. administration rejected the Sino-Russian diagnosis and prescription of non-interference. First, Rice expressed her outrage at the Security Council’s failure ‘to address an urgent moral challenge and growing threat to regional peace and security’, because ‘two members have vetoed a vastly watered-down text’ (2011e). She argued that these two states ‘propped up desperate, cruel dictators’, while ‘the record is clear’, denying any validity to Russia’s ambiguous diagnosis (2011e).

Second, responding to the claim that strong Security Council action was a pretext for military intervention, Rice called it an ‘overused excuse’ and stated: ‘this is not about military intervention. This is not about Libya. That is a cheap ruse by those who would rather sell arms to the Syrian regime than stand with the Syrian people’ (2011f; 2011e).

Third, the administration refuted the Sino-Russian denial of Assad’s guilt in the chemical attack. On September 4th, Kerry stated that ‘only the most devious political purpose could assert that (...) the regime did not do it’ (2011d). However, the Russian prescription of having Assad hand over his chemical weapons was accepted. Therefore, this prescriptive counterframe was incorporated into the administration’s frame.

Internal opposition came from two sides. First, interventionists – particularly John McCain – pressed for further intervention in Syria. In October 2011, McCain prescribed humanitarian-based ‘practical military operations’ to ‘protect civilian lives in Syria’ (*FoxNews* 2011). Furthermore, in April 2012, McCain proposed the establishment of a safe zone.

On the other hand, there was strong opposition even to non-lethal support to the opposition. Especially Senator Ron Paul was rather vocal, as his diagnosis emphasized the presence of terrorists in the opposition, which led him to propose ending the support to the rebels (Paul 2013). He argued that both parties were to blame and prescribed not picking a side. Paul also questioned Assad’s guilt in the chemical attack, calling it American ‘war propaganda’ and a ‘false flag’ (2013).

The U.S. administration rejected McCain’s proposal of military intervention by reiterating their original position in early November 2011. Clinton stated that ‘in other cases [than Libya], we would have to act alone, at a much greater cost, with far greater risks’ (Mohammed and Quinn 2011). Furthermore, the administration did not respond to the proposal of the safety zone, as it was a too ‘specific hypothetical scenario’ (Unnamed official 2013). Paul’s criticisms were not referred to.

The interventionist prescription in August 2013 was supported by top Republicans and Democrats on September 3rd (*Al Jazeera* 2013). However, by September 4th, the majority of Congress rejected the

prescription, with 31 in the Senate and 47 in the House in favor of intervention, while 25 in the Senate and an overwhelming 233 in the House opposed intervention.

This change in Congress's opinion may have reflected American public opinion. On September 3rd, Reuters reported that '56% of those surveyed said the United States should not intervene in Syria, while only 19% supported action' (Sullivan 2013). Moreover, 65% felt that 'the problems of Syria are none of our business' (*Pollingreport.com* 2011-2013). Furthermore, the public did not share the diagnosis of chemical attacks being worse than conventional killings, with 68% saying that the response should be the same to all killings. Finally, 82% agreed with the Russian plan. Clearly, public opinion and the internal political elite did not accept the prescription of intervention.

The internal opposition was incorporated first by amplifying beliefs of the propriety to intervene. On September 4th, Kerry stressed that Congress had already agreed there was a propriety to act, saying that 'this is also about Congress's redline. (...) Congress passed the Syria Accountability Act stating that Syria's chemical weapons threaten the security of the Middle East and the national security interests of the United States' (2013d). Yet, Obama ultimately agreed to the Russian plan. This suggests that, eventually, due to the rejection of the administration's frame and the strong Russian counterframe, the administration reverted to a non-interventionist prescription (2013b).

Dialectic interaction

Changes in the Syria frame were driven by two cases of dialectic interaction between events and framing. First, a gradual escalation the conflict amplified the beliefs of severity, the dichotomy between perpetrator and victims, and stereotypic beliefs. Reports about extreme cases were used to reinforce this position. For example, on February 4th 2012, Rice argued that 'since yesterday, the Syrian government has waged an intensified and especially horrific campaign in Homs' (2012b).

Second, Assad's chemical attack on August 21st, 2013 led to such a strong emphasis on chemical weapons that it may be considered a temporary frame transformation, from a humanitarian towards a chemical weapons and security frame. This altered the diagnosis and prescription significantly, and led to the temporary prescription of an intervention.

Summarizing, Assad's chemical attack transformed the administration's frame towards a diagnosis that did *not* revolve around humanitarian concerns, but around existential security threats to the United States. However, its motivational frame also included a strong appeal to emotions by highlighting the atrocities in Syria. Although the U.S. initially prescribed military intervention to secure America's safety, the strong Russian prescriptive counterframe of legal measures was accepted instead.

Chapter IV Comparison

In this chapter, the main differences and similarities between the two frames will be analyzed. Furthermore, I will discuss the impact of ‘real events’ and counterframes on any divergences between the frames.

Comparing Frames

There are several similarities between the frames on Syria and Libya. First, both diagnoses were characterized by three similar beliefs: beliefs about the seriousness of the conflict, the locus of causality at the regime and stereotypic beliefs. The latter also included a similar dichotomy and discourse; words as ‘brutal’ and ‘outrageous’ were used to characterize the regime, whereas ‘peaceful’ and ‘courageous’ were used for the protestors. However, the dichotomy and stereotypic beliefs were slightly stronger in the Libyan case and manifested themselves earlier. As all beliefs – particularly the severity – were amplified faster in the case of (post-intervention) Libya, the diagnoses initially diverged somewhat. However, in due time, the diagnoses converged with regard to all three beliefs.

Second, both frames had a very similar ‘core’ package of values, referring to democracy, human rights and liberties. These were claimed to be ‘universal’ and ‘legitimate’. Appeal to these values was used to justify U.S. support to the opposition.

Third, both frames were characterized by frame extension to strategic and security factors. However, this is also where the diagnostic frames diverged. In the Libya frame, the frame extension led to a ‘mixed’ humanitarian and security diagnosis, in which the security threat was largely direct but non-existential, despite linking Qaddafi to terrorism. In the Syrian case, the (direct) strategic and security interests were originally limited – even explicitly argued to be less than for Libya. Yet, the frame extension was so severe in August 2013 that the Syria frame was transformed. Rather than revolving around the humanitarian disaster and regional security interests, its main diagnosis involved the direct and existential threat chemical weapons posed to the United States. The diagnosis thus focused on security interests rather than humanitarian factors.

The prescriptions also strongly diverged. Although the diagnoses of the Libyan and Syrian conflict were relatively similar until the frame transformation in August 2013, the prescriptions differed substantially. While the U.S. prescribed military intervention in Libya, they limited their intervention in Syria to sanctions and diplomacy. This different leap from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ was justified by several factors. First, it was stressed that each situation was ‘unique’, and that the U.S. had more interests in Libya than in Syria. Second, Assad’s demise was predicted to be inevitable. Third, current measures were supposedly effective. Fourth, the responsibility for solving the Syrian conflict was put on several multilateral initiatives and the Assad regime itself. Also, the U.S. pointed to the lack of international support as a major obstruction in their Syria policy.

Therefore, even though the diagnoses of the two conflicts were similar, containing similar beliefs and values, the prescription differed. Ironically, when the prescriptions finally did converge (military intervention was prescribed for Syria in August 2013), this was attached to a different diagnosis than in the Libyan case. For Libya, the administration diagnosed that humanitarian and potential security issues were of such urgency that intervention was required. A vital reasoning device stressed the prevention of a ‘looming humanitarian crisis’. When intervention was prescribed for Syria, however, the diagnosis was that Assad’s use of chemical weapons threatened U.S. security. The reasoning device was therefore not humanitarian concern, but an appeal to fear based on a supposed existential threat. However, the intervention was still motivated by appealing to emotion, principle and American exceptionalism, as it had been for Libya.

Influence counterframes and dialectic

These divergences and convergences suggest critical counterframing or ‘shifts in context’ may have ‘molded’ the administration’s frames (and policies). For Libya, it can be argued that the administration accepted the Anglo-Franco prescriptive counterframe and perhaps increased security arguments due to criticism. Moreover, counterframing was vital in the non-implementation of the interventionist

prescription in the Syria frame. Due to the Russian counterframe and the rather ubiquitous rejection of the American prescription, the administration opted for the Russian alternative rather than their own prescription. This led to the non-implementation of the intervention. Therefore, both the interventionist prescription for Libya and the non-interventionist prescription for Syria were (to some extent) induced by (international) counterframing, leading to divergence.

Moreover, while intensification of the Syrian conflict led to convergence of the diagnoses, three dialectic interactions are vital in the divergence of the prescriptions. First, Qaddafi's threat to Benghazi formed a major aspect in the administration's diagnostic and motivational frame. It was repeatedly used as a 'reasoning device' to create the sense of urgency that justified intervention. Such a threat, evoking a sense of urgency, was never made in the Syrian case. Two, the presence of an international coalition and UN authorization formed a vital 'reasoning device' to make the leap from 'is' (a humanitarian disaster) to 'ought' (military intervention) for Libya. It supposedly contributed to the efficacy and legitimacy of the intervention. Three, Assad's chemical attack led to frame transformation and an alternative prescription, as the administration temporarily prescribed intervention. This led to a (superficial) divergence between the Syria and Libya prescriptions, but – ironically – a temporary convergence of diagnoses.

Conclusion

Both in popular and academic debate, there has been considerable confusion regarding the U.S. policies on Syria and Libya. While some have argued they are compatible in an ‘Obama doctrine’ (Kissenger 2012; D. Murray 2013), others have criticized and wondered at the seeming discrepancies (Zakaria 2011; Guiora 2012). Having analyzed the frames on Syria and Libya, the conclusion can be drawn that the framing on the two conflicts was not entirely compatible as it contained numerous justifications for divergence, but maintained some ambiguities. This conclusion can be decomposed into several elements.

First, the diagnostic frames contributed little to a justification of the divergent policies and created considerable ambiguity. As discussed in chapter 4, there were various striking similarities between the two diagnoses. They both emphasized ‘universal’ (democratic) values and encompassed three main beliefs (severity, locus of causality at the regime, stereotypes). Both frames underwent belief amplification and a gradual extension towards the inclusion of security factors. These security factors, however, were framed as being of somewhat greater importance to the U.S. in the Libyan case than in the (pre-chemical weapons) Syrian case. Yet, until August 2013, the diagnostic frames were so similar that, purely considering the diagnoses, they did not justify different policies.

Second, divergence was justified as several motivational ‘reasoning devices’ were missing in the Syria frame in comparison to the Libya frame. First, until August 2013, the Syria frame did not have the sense of urgency as invoked by Qaddafi’s threat to Benghazi; the argument of preventing a ‘looming humanitarian crisis’ was a major reasoning device for the Libya intervention. Second, the ‘international consensus’ and coalition were lacking in the Syrian case. This element was often used to justify the Libya intervention, as it would contribute to its efficacy and legitimacy. Moreover, the multilateral intervention’s ‘uniqueness’ was emphasized to justify non-intervention in Syria, stressing context-dependence.

Third, the U.S. used numerous ‘reasoning devices’ in its Syria frame to justify *not* making a similar leap from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ as for Libya. Most prominent were the (partial) rejection of responsibility, lack of international consensus, the emphasis on the belief of efficacy of limited action, and the prognosis of inevitable change in Syria.

Finally, the frame transformation in the Syria frame in August 2013 led to a superficial convergence of prescriptions, but highlighted some discrepancies. The interventionist prescription for Syria was connected to a very different diagnosis – stressing the security threat of chemical weapons rather than humanitarian issues. Whereas the Libyan conflict and the pre-chemical attack Syrian conflict were mostly ‘humanitarianized’, the Syrian conflict was now ‘securitized’. The ‘reasoning devices’ in this case did not emphasize the prevention of a ‘looming humanitarian crisis’ but of a looming existential threat to America. This laid bare two inconsistencies. First, even though the plan was revoked due to strong (international) counterframing, American willingness to intervene without international consensus in August 2013 somewhat undermined the earlier argument of requiring this consensus for intervention. Second, except for the emphasis on an existential threat, the Syria motivational frame had significant overlap with the Libya frame, as it, in very similar ways, stressed the atrocities and appealed to emotion and morality. Therefore, this motivational frame seemed somewhat ‘out of place’ considering the new diagnosis revolving around chemical weapons, and inconsistent considering the absence of such a motivational frame in response to human suffering in the two years before.

In fact, certain emotional and humanitarian elements in both motivational frames are unequivocally incompatible with non-intervention in Syria. The references to a ‘looming humanitarian crisis’, Obama’s statement on Libya that he ‘refused to wait for the images of slaughter’ before taking action and Kerry’s remark on ‘human suffering that we can never ignore’ after the chemical attack, are inconsistent with (earlier) inaction in the Syrian humanitarian crisis (Obama 2011e; Kerry 2013c). Therefore, justification remained ambiguous due to the similar diagnoses and motivational emotional and humanitarian appeals.

Regarding the academic debate discussed in the introduction on the existence of an ‘Obama Doctrine’, it can be said that three factors – the increased emphasis on security arguments in the Libya frame, the emphasis on context and particularly the necessity of multilateral consent – indicate there is not a

doctrine of ‘universal humanitarian intervention’, as Kissinger suggested. Yet, superficially, these three factors do make the framing compatible with a doctrine of ‘on a pragmatic basis, putting idealism in a more realistic context’ (Murray 2013: 159). However, as the similarities between the Syria and Libya diagnostic frames were so striking and emotional and humanitarian arguments dominated both motivational frames (for intervention), the different prescriptions until August 2013 do not seem entirely compatible. This is especially so as the argument of requiring international consensus and authorization for intervention is undermined by the administration’s willingness to intervene in Syria in August without having either. This also suggests that the ‘pragmatic basis’ easily outweighs ‘idealism’ in the ‘doctrine’. Therefore, although inaction in Syria may *be* compatible with a pragmatic ‘doctrine’, the significant overlap in the (diagnostic) frames makes the non-intervention in Syria *seem* incompatible with the Libya intervention and does not suggest a coherent doctrine.

This research raises further questions about the motivations of the administration. While the framing on Libya suggests that it concerned a humanitarian intervention, the discrepancies between the prescriptive frames on Libya and Syria insinuate that the intervention may have been more inspired by *realpolitik* than rhetoric suggests. Furthermore, while this research was limited to Syria and Libya, there are several other countries experiencing their versions of the ‘Arab Spring’. This raises the question whether framing on these countries is characterized by similar beliefs and values as for Syria and Libya, as – perhaps - the similarities between the Syria and Libya frames may simply be part of a wider discourse used for conflicts all over the world.

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