(Un)Contested Frames
Frame resonance, narratives and the danger of blowback from airstrikes by the international anti-ISIL coalition

Nora Kindermann
5552338
Utrecht University
3 August 2018

A Thesis submitted to the Board of Examiners in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Master of Arts in Conflict Studies & Human Rights

Dr. Lauren Gould

3 August 2018

Program Trajectory: Research and Thesis Writing Only (30 ETCS)

Word count: 27 396

Abstract

Since 2014 the Dutch government participates in the international coalition that is fighting IS in Syria and Iraq. It has been argued that the coalition's military strategy is paradigmatic of 'vicarious warfare.' Airstrikes play a crucial role in the coalition's vicarious strategy to defeat IS. The framing of these airstrikes by the Dutch government differs from accounts from a civilian perspective. It is argued that the narratives of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands that possibly contest the framing of the Dutch government are a potential source of political blowback. In studying the dynamic of this potential for blowback, this thesis compares the framing of the Dutch government and the narratives told by Syrians using 'framing contests' and 'narrative analysis' as analytical lenses. The combination of both lenses made the government's as well as the civilian perspective accessible and comparable. In addition, combing framing contests with narratives sheds light on the relation between frame and narrative analysis. Frame analysis has been used to study the Dutch government's perspective on the coalition airstrikes. Episodic interviews, thematic and, on the other hand, narrative analysis have been used to collect data on and analyse the civilian perspective of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands. By getting insight into the civilian perspective in aerial warfare, this research also contributed to the academic debate on the (in)efficiency of airstrikes, and the connected debate about the dangers of blowback from aerial warfare.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations:

AI – Air Interdiction

CAS – Close Air Support

CENTCOM – United States Central Command

CJTF – Command Joint Task Force

COIN – Counterinsurgency

CT – Counterterrorism

DG – Dutch government

FSA – Free Syrian Army

FTFs – Foreign terrorist fighters

IS – Islamic State

ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

NDA – Netherlands Defence Academy

OIR – Operation Inherent Resolve

SDF – Syrian Democratic Forces

SRNs – Syrian Refugees now living in the Netherlands

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

*Firstly, bombs are dropped in the fight against IS and these bombs are
dropped in our name, that is, in the name of the Dutch people. With regard
to that it is not only important to pay attention to the positive consequences
of the airstrikes – the defeat of IS – but also to pay attention to the negative
consequences. Momentarily there is no way for the average Dutch national
to check what is being done [by the Netherlands in the fight against IS].
Secondly, the people who are being bombed have to know who is bombing
them. Now it is impossible to track down those those responsible for the
death of a brother or a destroyed home, for example.[1]*

Since autumn 2014, an international coalition led by the United States is fighting the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. The coalition's military component consists of training and equipping local forces, conducting special forces operations, and precision airstrikes (McInnis, 2016). This mode of waging war illustrates a recent development in the modern warfare: Western States increasingly fight wars at a distance, shield "the [own] military from danger and apply force by proxy or in the shadow" (Waldman, 2017, pp. 1-2). Part of this development is the increase in the reliance on airstrikes, which has been hotly debated by military theorists, academics and civil society organisations.

With regard to the reliance on airstrikes in the fight against IS, the following controversy emerged: based on air-only assessment, the coalition claims that their airstrikes are precise, effective and cause few civilian casualties. Civil society organisations that report from the field, however, argue that the death toll among civilians is much higher than admitted by the coalition. These organisations point out the problematic consequences for the civilian population (Airwars, 2016b; Amnesty International, 2017), and the coalition's lack of transparency (Airwars, 2016a).

From the start, the Netherlands have actively taken part in the coalition. An important aspect of the Dutch participation is their contribution to the airstrikes. In line with the coalition, the Dutch government (DG) portrays these airstrikes as effective, precise and causing a low number of civilian casualties (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 539; Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2016). Again, the DG's characterisation of these airstrikes is challenged by organisations who base their assessments of civilian harm on reports from the field (Airwars, 2016a; Amnesty International, 2017).[2] Interestingly, in 2016 Airwars (2016a) had ranked the DG as the least transparent member of the coalition when it comes to airstrikes.

---

[1] Notes from an interview with a member of Airwars, Utrecht, on 16 March 2018.
[2] Airwars bases its report on the monitoring of local Arabic-language media and social media, on local casualty monitors, NGO reports, and international media (see Airwars, n.d.). Amnesty International's (2017) report on

This controversy, and the alleged intransparency of the DG, is taken as the starting point of this thesis because it is interesting in light of two connected debates: firstly, it has been argued that a main driver behind secretive and intransparent warfare is the wish to lower the political costs at a national level because the public opinion is increasingly averse to the costs and risks of warfare (Knowles & Watson, 2017; Waldman, 2017). On the other hand, it has been argued that secretive operations abroad might have unintended negative consequences, called 'blowback effects' (Johnson, 2000; Waldman, 2017). Regarding the secrecy in the fight against IS it has been argued that, "in an age when leaks of information are seemingly inevitable, demand for political accountability is high, and trust in politicians is low, today's uneasy coexistence of official opacity and sporadic leaks of information to the media may be creating a host of unintended consequences" (Knowles & Watson, 2017, p. 4). An example of such an unintended consequence is the loss of trust in politicians and governments that are opaque with regard to their participation in war. Looking into this debate is especially interesting in the context of the Netherlands as currently a large number of Syrian refugees are residing in the Netherlands (SRNs), some of whom come from regions where the coalition is conducting airstrikes. In case that those SRNs publicly challenge the DG's presentation of the coalition airstrikes based on their own experience, they might cause a political backlash as described above.

Secondly, it has been criticised that secrecy with regard to the fight against IS evades discussions about the efficiency of fighting IS at a distance (Knowles & Watson, 2017). Such discussions would be important because the effectiveness of airstrikes is disputed. As will be argued below, more insights into civilian experiences of airstrikes are needed to enhance the debate on the (in)effectiveness of airstrikes. Looking into SNRs' experiences of the coalition airstrikes might therefore also provide insights into the debate of the (in)effectiveness of airstrikes.

Looking into the controversy regarding the airstrikes against IS is significant in two ways: socially it is significant to gain insight into the danger of political blowback from a possible contestation of the DG's presentation of the coalition airstrikes by SRNs; academically it is significant to gain more insights into the civilian perspective on airstrikes in order to enhance the debate on the (in)efficiency of airstrikes and danger of blowback in general. The controversy will be researched by answering the following research puzzle:

---

civilians trapped in the battle for Raqqa was based on interviews with civilians who were displaced in the course of that battle.

How is the Dutch government's framing of the United States-led anti-ISIL coalition strikes contested by the narratives of Syrian Refugees now residing in the Netherlands, who come from areas in which airstrikes were conducted between September 2014 and December 2017?

The choice for the analytical lenses 'framing contests' and 'narratives' in order to research the DG's presentation of the coalition strikes and the perspective of SRNs, will be justified in chapter two. Before turning to the discussion of the analytical lenses, the rest of the introduction examines, firstly, the Syrian context in which the coalition strikes take place. Secondly, the concept 'vicarious warfare' is discussed because it elucidates a trend in modern warfare, of which the coalition is paradigmatic, and critically reflects on its effectiveness and long-term consequences. Thirdly, the (in)effectiveness of airstrikes in a counterinsurgency setting, and the importance of insights into the civilian perspective is discussed. Lastly, the link between the (in)efficiency of airstrikes and the danger of blowback is clarified.

1.1 The empirical context

The coalition's fight against IS is partly located within the context of the Syrian civil war. In 2011, the Syrian people rose up against their government, demanding political change. The peaceful protests were soon met with violence by the Syrian government led by President Bashar Al-Assad. This escalated quickly as "protests were met by gunfire which led to funerals, which led to larger protests, which led to more funerals" (Yassin-Kassab & al-Shami, 2016, p. 56). By early 2012, armed force had largely replaced the peaceful demonstrations. The violence increased drastically when the government started to target the Syrian population with airstrikes (Boxx, 2013).[3]

Besides the extensive use of airpower, a second aspect characterises the conflict: the international interference. The United States supported the Free Syrian Army (FSA) which was not a trained army but rather a loose "collection of militias (…) – all signed up to the twin aims of destroying the regime and establishing a democratic State" (Yassin-Kassab & al-Shami, 2016, p. 85).[4] In addition, external actors such as Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, who

---

[3] According to Boxx (2013), the increase in violence and reliance on airpower had to do with the emergence and successes of the FSA.

[4] In the context of the coalition, the United States decided to shift their support from the FSA to the secular, Kurdish dominated YPG, and later to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) that encompassed the YPG and Arab forces (McInnis, 2016). The reason not to support the FSA any longer was some of the opposition groups it consisted of "were considered to be linked with Al-Qaeda-like jihadist organisations" (Sari Ertem, 2018, p. 143) which led to a decrease of FSA's credibility.

sided with the Syrian government, became politically and militarily involved (Yassin-Kassab & al-Shami, 2016).

As the conflict evolved, Islamism began to play an increasingly important role. In 2013, an alliance of several non-extremist Islamic groups that had previously fought with the FSA, formed the Islamic Front. Other Islamic groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and IS have been labelled as extremist and terrorist groups (Yassin-Kassab & al-Shami, 2016). According to Jones et al. (2017), however, IS can be better classified as "an insurgent group dedicated to holding territory" which "uses terrorist tactics to help achieve its objectives" (p. 7).[5] Nonetheless, the authors assume that IS will turn into a terrorist organisation when it no longer holds territory. As will become clear below, classifying IS as terrorist or insurgent group has far-reaching consequences for assessing the effectiveness of airstrikes in the fight against the group.

IS' successes prompted an international reaction on a large scale: in August 2014, the Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), "the military component of the global coalition to defeat the Islamic State" (McInnis, 2016, p. 2) in Syria and Iraq, commenced. One month later United States president, Barack Obama, formally announced the creation of the international United States-led anti-ISIL coalition (short: coalition) (ARK, 2014).

1.2 Vicarious warfare and the coalition's military campaign

According to Waldman (2017), the concept 'vicarious warfare' helps one to understand the coalition's mode of waging war. Vicarious warfare is a way of conceptualising recent trends in modern warfare, trends that are hotly debated and criticised with regard to their effectiveness and long-term consequences. Understanding the coalition's mode of warfare in terms of vicarious warfare, helps to assess its effectiveness and form an idea about its long-term consequences.

To start with, the concept needs clarification. Vicarious warfare, Waldman (2017) argues, is brought about by various trends. First of all, politicians increasingly pay attention to electoral timetables, aiming to satisfy the wishes of an electorate that rejects the high costs and risks attached to war. Secondly, the media are omnipresent and react immediately. The combination of these two trends mobilises politicians to calculate in terms of immediate utility. In short, they aim to minimise political costs of warfare "at the expense of long-term consequences" (p. 7). In this context, politicians need to prevent security incidents while

---

[5] Insurgent groups are groups that "seek to hold and govern territory" (Jones et al., 2017, p. 7). Terrorism is defined as a tactic "that involves the use of politically motivated violence against non-combatants to cause intimidation or fear among a target audience" (CIA, quoted in Jones et al., 2017, p. 7).

keeping measures "economically affordable, socially acceptable, legally permissible, and politically viable" (p. 7).

According to Waldman (2017), vicarious warfare consists of three major mechanisms: delegation, danger-proofing, and darkness. Delegation "involves shifting the burden of risk and responsibility onto others" (p. 9). Darkness is characterised as a "catch-all term to encompass [among other things] the use of covert action and special forces operation" (p. 15). A main driver behind darkness is the wish to evade the media's gaze and thereby to circumvent exorbitant political costs. Lastly, danger-proofing points to the heavy reliance on "various forms of airpower and stand-off weapons systems, which offer protection through distance" (p. 12). Taking a closer look at the international coalition, the above-mentioned mechanisms become visible. The training and equipping of local security forces are a form of delegation, while special forces operations reflect what Waldman calls darkness. Finally, the reliance on airstrikes constitute a form of danger-proofing.

Despite the expected benefits of delegation, darkness, and danger-proofing that allegedly enable politicians to hold the balance between the stakes mentioned above, these characteristics also comprise dangers in terms of e.g. military strategy or political reputation (Hudson, Owens & Flannes, 2011; Knowles & Watson, 2017; Waldman, 2017). As pointed out above, especially the effectiveness and benefits of the use of (precision) airstrikes in the fight against IS, and the secrecy/darkness surrounding that use, is a matter of debate.

1.3 The (in)effectiveness of airstrikes?

The choice to rely on airpower is a military strategic choice. Military strategies are often accompanied by other (e.g. diplomatic, political, or economic) strategies to achieve a certain goal set by politics. Whether airpower is effective or not depends on whether airpower helps to achieve the goals a strategy is designed to reach (Biddle, 2007).[6] The direct goal of airpower, to coerce the enemy (Allen & Martinez Machain, 2017), is therefore connected to broader political goals that several strategies should bring about.

The effectiveness of airpower in order to coerce the enemy has been ascribed to its capacity to *punish* the adversary, or to *deny* its military resources and plans (Allen & Martinez Machain, 2017). The *punishment strategy*[7] relies mostly on inflicting "pain on an adversary's

---

[6] According to Biddle (2007), "*military* (or *theatre*) strategy prescribes how military instruments *per se* are to achieve the goals set for them" (p. 462) by politics.
[7] The punishment strategy is introduced by Douhet (1942, cited in Allen & Martinez Machain, 2017). Douhet (1942) argued that indiscriminate bombing in conventional warfare, causing a break down of social structures, would lead to popular uprisings, demanding "an end to the war – this before their army and navy had time to mobilize at all" (p. 58).

population and economy" (p. 7). Thereby, its goal is to break the civilian moral and to socially distance the enemy leaders from the public. In line with this logic, Lyall (2009) finds that, in Chechnya, indiscriminate violence is effective in decreasing insurgent attacks. Studying the Vietnam War, however, Kocher et al. (2011) point out negative consequences of indiscriminate airpower (such as the shift of control towards insurgents), showing its limitation as a coercive instrument.[8]

Since the Gulf War and the increased use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), the debate of discriminate airpower has been revived as technological developments allow for more precision (Dunlap, 2007, 2008; Pape, 1997; Warden, 1992).[9] Advocates of discriminate airpower argue in line with the *denial strategy*. These arguments are supported by findings of several quantitative studies on the effectiveness of precision airstrikes.[10] It has been found that aerial precision strikes can degrade terrorist organisations by targeting leaders and disrupting militant operations which in turn decreases terrorist attacks in the region (Johnston & Sarbahi, 2016) and in the West (Jordan, 2014). Additionally, precision strikes are found to have deterring and incapacitating effects on terrorist organisations (Jaeger & Siddique, 2011). Other studies, however, find that even precision airstrikes might be ineffective or counterproductive: Hudson, Owens and Flannes (2011) identify several possible negative consequences of precision airstrikes, such as the wish for retaliation and the radicalisation of the local population which offers fertile ground for recruitment of extremist militias. Cavallero, Sonnenberg and Kunchey (2012) cite qualitative evidence in support of this claim. Ahmad (2014) and Boyle (2010) find that in the case of Pakistan, precision airstrikes led to public outrage and increased anti-American sentiment. Most importantly, these authors provide evidence questioning the alleged precision of airstrikes.

---

[8] The underlying logic is the following: "indiscriminate violence tends to generate a perverse structure of incentives leading to a failure of deterrence. When violence is indiscriminate, targeting whole collectives, individuals cannot avoid being victimized simply be refusing to participate in the insurgency" (Kocher et al., 2011, p. 203).

[9] Warden (1992) has argued that using discriminate airpower enables the attacker to (indirectly) pressure the enemy into making desired concession by attacking his strategic centres while causing less casualties (especially on the attacker's side) due to increasingly precise weapons. Pape (1997) argues that the attacker should seek "to thwart the enemy's military strategy for controlling disputed territory by interdicting supplies to, disrupting the movement and communication of, and destroying fielded forces" (p. 95). Dunlap (2007) argues that air power can even be of use in counterinsurgencies in order to "fracture, delegitimize, delink, demoralize, and deresource insurgents" (Metz & Millen, 2004, cited on p. 64).

[10] Recently, more research has been done on strikes by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles than on precision strikes by manned areal vehicles. I find, however, Chamayou's (2015) argument convincing that Unmanned Aerial Vehicle-strikes are not necessarily more precise than precision strikes by manned aerial vehicles that make use of precision-guided munition (see also Pape, 1997). Therefore, it is possible to combine the debate about the (in)effectiveness of drone strikes and the debate about the (in)effectiveness of airstrikes making use of precision-guided munition, such as the airstrikes by the coalition.

The academic debate on (in)discriminate airpower in irregular warfare shows that there is no consensus on its (in)effectiveness. One way to make sense of these contradictory findings is to place them in the light of either the counterterrorism (CT) or the counterinsurgency (COIN) paradigm (Chamayou, 2015). COIN is understood as a politico-military matter in which winning the hearts and minds of the population is crucial because insurgents are seen as "representatives of deeper claims at the heart of society" (Kilcullen, 2006 in Chamayou, 2015, p. 68). On the contrary, CT is fundamentally about policing and security, seeking to neutralise individuals that pose a potential threat rather than analysing "the roots of hostility and its own [i.e. of CT] effects upon it" (Chamayou, 2015, p. 69). Moreover, the psychological effects of counter-terrorist tactics on the civilian population are not considered; only "the psychosocial impact on the insurgents themselves" (Dunlap, 2008, in Chamayou, 2015, p. 70) is taken into account.

Being a politico-military matter, it can be argued that in the COIN paradigm military strategies are closely intertwined with political strategies in order to achieve certain goals set by politics. Scholars who contend that airstrikes are ineffective and who point to possible blowback effects argue from a COIN point of view. Their studies emphasise the political costs of airstrikes, their impact on the local population, and how they fail to win hearts and minds. In the CT paradigm it seems that military strategies are given a more dominant position in achieving political (security) goals. Studies finding that precision strikes are effective counterterrorism tactics seem to argue from a CT point of view. These studies do not consider the effects of airstrikes on the population, or pay much attention to political matters. They rather prioritise their effect on the immediate targets.[11]

In light of the fact that IS should be considered an insurgency group making use of terrorist tactics (see above), the next section discusses the limits and dangers of the reliance on airpower from a COIN perspective.

1.4 The danger of blowback?

Arguing from a COIN perspective, Waldman (2017) points out the risks of extensive reliance on airpower in the context of vicarious warfare. He argues that, even though the remoteness of airstrikes provides protection, it hinders the tackling of the underlying causes of insurgency. Airstrikes might even amplify these underlying causes. Moreover, instead of winning hearts and minds, airstrikes can "further alienate critical populations" (p. 14), help recruitment for

---

[11] Besides, statistical evidence is prioritised. This is in line with the counterterrorism mentality, for which "successes become statistical" (Chamayou, 2015, p. 69) and for which the evaluation of drone strikes "becomes disconnected from their real effects on the ground" (p. 69).

insurgency, and provoke retaliation. Waldman (2017) explicitly warns that the coalition's war faces the danger of cultivating "discontent and continued resistance" due to "the costs born by civilians – directly through bombings, raids, and abuses, or indirectly through protracted conflict and psychological trauma" (p. 19). Besides these strategic risks, there might be political costs attached to danger-proofing by means of airpower. In order to raise the political costs for Western powers, insurgents might make use of human shields. Also, diplomatic relations might be strained. Other political consequences close to home may concern democratic accountability (Waldman, 2017),[12] or the loss of political trust (see Knowles & Watson, 2017).

Such counterproductive consequences might be called 'blowback effects'. The term 'blowback' deserves further explanation. According to Johnson (2000), the term is an invention by the CIA referring "to the unintended consequences [and long-term effects] of policies that were kept secret from the American people" (p. 8). Simpson (2014, chapter 1) further specifies that blowback refers to "unexpected – and negative – effects at home that result from covert operations overseas." Johnson (2000), on the other hand, argues that "although the term originally applied only to the unintended consequences for *Americans* of American policies, there is every reason to widen its meaning" (p. 17). In this sense, blowback includes the negative consequences of United States policies for the local population. Some studies have addressed blowback of foreign interventions in general (e.g. Kennedy-Pipe & Vickers, 2007), and of the American military practices more specifically (e.g. Johnson, 2000; Waldman, 2017).

Blowback can occur on a strategic and political level (nationally and internationally).[13] As noted above, blowback effects on a strategic level from heavy reliance on airstrikes in a COIN setting include the alienation of the affected population, an increase of recruitment of insurgents, and the provocation of retaliation attacks. In line with Waldman (2017), Hudson, Ownes and Flannes (2011) identify blowback effects from precision airstrikes on a strategic level. They find that these strikes (1) spark the wish for retaliation against the United States; (2) radicalise the local population and offer fertile ground for recruitment of extremist militias (the population the drone programs try to tackle); and (3) that they further complicate the United States' strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The concept of strategic blowback helps to shed light on the above discussed controversy about the (in)effectiveness of airstrikes. The extent of blowback effects generated by aerial bombings calls into question their military effectiveness and strategic utility. From a

---

[12] Waldman (2017) notes that "the widespread prosecution of secretive, unaccountable operations corrodes the West's democratic foundations" (p. 196) and that (taking America as an example) "it is unlikely that decades of unremitting global warfare – even when conducted in the shadows – will not begin to take its toll on cherished American values and democratic traditions" (p. 199).

[13] As will be pointed out in chapter 5, blowback can also occur on a tactical level.

COIN perspective, Waldman (2017) and Kocher et al. (2011) argue that more insight in the civilians' perspective and their relation with insurgents/counterinsurgents is needed, in order to better understand the mechanisms underlying the (in)effectiveness, or blowback effects from airstrikes in irregular warfare. To fill this gap and to gain better insight into the (in)effectiveness of airstrikes from a COIN perspective, the experiences and testimonies of people coming from areas in which airstrikes were conducted must be researched.

On a political level, Hudson, Ownes and Flannes (2011) argue that drone strikes threaten to destabilise Pakistan and worsen the relationship between the United States and Pakistan. Waldman (2017) adds to this by pointing out that vicarious warfare (of which airstrikes often form a crucial part) might damage the acting country's reputation and complicate diplomatic relations. When analysing blowback from United States-counterterrorism drone strikes in Yemen, Hudson, Owens and Callen (2012) found evidence for a long-term political blowback in addition to the blowback effects identified in the case of Pakistan: they argue that air operations in the end undermine the legitimacy and authority of a government, a vacuum which might be filled by groups such as (in the Yemeni case), Al-Qaeda or Ansar al-Sharia.[14] The authors reiterate the same warning for the usage of airpower above Syria. Political blowback might also occur on a national level of the country conducting the airstrikes. As danger-proofing is often combined with darkness, trust in the government might decrease (see Knowles & Watson, 2017, discussed above) and democratic accountability might be undermined (Waldman, 2017).

1.5 Putting the puzzle in context

As is explained above, the specific case under study is the Dutch portrayal of the coalition airstrikes in which they participate, and the contestation of that portrayal from a civilian perspective, by SRNs. Insight into this controversy, and especially into the civilian perspective, enhances the debate on the (in)effectiveness of and possible blowback from airstrikes in a COIN setting. More generally, as the coalition's warfare is an instance of vicarious warfare, insight will also be given in the mechanisms underlying the effectiveness and (long-term) consequences of that mode of waging war.

A discussion of blowback in the context of aerial warfare against IS must take into account that the setting is different than the context in which the blowback debate emerged. As noted above, the term 'blowback' was coined in relation to clandestine operations that were not

---

[14] They state that "when State power is exercised from the sky (not just through strikes, but also through surveillance), it leaves a vacuum to be filled on the the ground" (Hudson, Owens & Callen, 2012, p. 151).

known by the public. More recent findings on the occurrence of blowback stem from the drone use in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and in Yemen (see Hudson, Owens & Flannes 2011; Hudson, Owens & Callen, 2012). Both regions were not an official warzone at the time of the drone campaign. Furthermore, drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen were the only form of aerial violence. When researching blowback effects in the context of the fight against IS, it must be taken into account that Syria is an official warzone, and that the coalition airstrikes are not the only form of aerial violence. As noted above, before and simultaneously with the coalition strikes, the Syrian government and its allies conducted large-scale bombings.

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter two discusses and justifies the choice for the analytical frames, 'framing contests' and 'narrative', and its link with blowback. Chapter three contains the methodology by which the research puzzle was investigated. Chapter four provides empirical context by discussing the Dutch contribution to the coalition and the legal grounds on which that participation takes place. Chapter five subsequently discusses how the DG frames its participation, while chapters six and seven discuss the civilian perspective on the DG's framing of the airstrikes, as well as their own perception of them. In the concluding chapter, the research puzzle is answered, and the findings are linked with the theoretical debate on the (in)effectiveness of airstrikes and the danger of blowback in a COIN setting.

2. ANALYTICAL FRAME

*"We, of course, try everything in order to convince that we work as accurate
as possible. Our opponent does everything in order to prove the contrary.
This is* the *core aspect of framing."*[15]

In order to research the research puzzle, the concept 'framing contest' and 'narrative' have been chosen as analytical lenses through which to study the above complication. These concepts have been chosen because they are analytical tools by which to access the DG's presentation of airstrikes, as well as the civilian perspective.

2.1 Framing contests

The concept 'framing contest' is the main analytical lens and a theoretical component of framing analysis. Framing analysis is "a focused sub-variant of discourse analysis" (Lindekilde, 2014, p. 5), drawing on the social constructivist tradition which stresses the construction of social reality and its meaning. It draws from hermeneutics as well as from phenomenology, and takes an interpretative stance towards social interaction (Lindekilde, 2014). Framing analysis understands social movements as signifying agents that engage in signifying work, i.e. in *framing*: they "assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198). There are three core framing tasks that constitute "building blocks of a particular frame" (Lindekilde, 2014, p. 19): *diagnostic framing* to identify and define a problem, *prognostic framing* to propose a solution for the problem, and *motivational framing* to convince possible adherents to engage in collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000). Diagnostic and prognostic framing aim to achieve consensus mobilisation, whereas the latter aims to mobilise active participation (Snow & Benford, 1988). For this research, only consensus mobilisation is of interest as the DG's framing of the coalition airstrikes is not directed towards mobilising action, but towards creating and continue to maintain political support for their military contribution to the coalition.

What position does the concept 'framing contests' have in framing analysis? It has been argued that prognostic and diagnostic framing are contested processes (Benford & Hunt,

---

[15] Author's interview with member 3 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018. All quotes that were originally in another language than Dutch, were translated by the researcher. The quote in the original language is given in the footnote. "Wij proberen natuurlijk alles om te overtuigen dat we zo zorgvuldig mogelijk te werk gaan. De tegenstander doel alles om het tegendeel te bewijzen. Dit is *het* centrale aspect van framing."

2003; Benford & Snow, 2000; Ryan, 1991; Snow & Benford, 1988).[16] Attempts "to rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person's or group's myth, version of reality, or interpretative framework" (Benford, 1987, in Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 626) are called *counterframing*. The activity of framing and counterframing has been called framing contest which is are highly strategic process, i.e. it includes analysing the opponent's frame and framing tactics and anticipates the counterframing activities as reaction to its own counterframing (Ryan, 1991). From the above-mentioned controversy concerning the coalition strikes, some sort of framing contest is expected to occur. Framing contest in this political domain is especially interesting in the light of blowback: if the DG's frame is contested by SRNs this might harbour the danger of political blowback (reputation loss, lack of faith, etc.).

In order to be successful, frames must resonate. Framing contests are therefore decided by a *frame's resonance* (Riese, 2014; Ryan, 1991). Frame resonance depends on the "credibility of the proffered frame and its relative salience" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 619). Olsen (2014) criticises Benford and Snow's account of frame resonance for focusing too much on "the marshalling of empirical evidence, and thus [on] a relative high degree of scientific, technical, or specialist knowledge" (Olsen, 2014, p. 251). Olsen (2014) emphasises the role that narratives play in frame resonance, arguing that "the ways narratives are effective" (p. 264) should be included in the definition of frame resonance.

2.2 Narratives and Frames

Olsen's (2014) criticism brings about the much discussed question whether and how frame and narrative analysis are related (Davies, 2002; Nepstad, 2001; Olsen, 2014; Polletta, 1998). Before addressing this question, it first has to be clarified what a narrative is. According to Abbott (2008), there are two kinds of definitions of narratives: strict ones and loose ones. A strict definition views narratives as compact and definable. A loose definition, on the other hand, only needs narratives to be generally recognisable. The only essential aspect of a narrative for this definition is that a narrative has "some kind of narrative coherence" (p. 14).

Maines (1993) defines *narratives* as consisting of three fundamental features: *events* that are selected from the past; *temporal ordering* of these events "so that questions of how and why events happened can be established and the narrative elements can acquire features of tempo, duration and pace" (p. 21); and *emplotment* which transforms these events into elements of the narrative. Especially the term 'emplotment' deserves further elaboration. The term is

---

[16] In the words of Benford & Hunt (2003): "claims about problems and their solutions are contested and often become topics of protracted disputes" (p. 154).

defined by Davis (2002) as follows: "Narratively, to understand an event, even to explain what caused an event, is to locate it within the temporal and relational sequence of a story, linking it with both previous and subsequent events over time" (p. 12). Also Polletta's (1998) definition of 'plot' helps to understand this term. A plot is "the logic that makes meaningful events that precede the story's conclusion" (p. 421). Emplotment, therefore, is the way in which events are made meaningful in the light of the story's conclusion.[17]

Equipped with this definition, the relationship between narratives and frames can be discussed: Olsen (2014) argues that narratives, although sharing many features with frames,[18] are an important persuasive tool in itself that "interweaves frames, by bringing personal stories vividly to life, especially highlighting real life conflicts and consequences" (p. 264). Frames, in turn, can link together various narratives. Narratives focus more on emotions than frames do: by being directed towards emotional identification and transmitting personal experience, narratives are difficult to challenge (Olsen, 2014; Polletta, 1998). According to Olsen, therefore narratives can enhance frame resonance.

Acknowledging the overlapping and distinct aspects of frames and narratives, Olsen (2014) aims to find a middle position in the academic discussion that either subsumes narratives to frames, or sees them as an entirely different category. According to Olsen's middle position, narratives can be simultaneously developed within frames without being subsumed to them. The fact, however, that she does not specify *how exactly* the two conceptual frames relate, weakens her research.

How does the above relate to this research? Narratives, by bringing to life personal stories and being directed towards emotions, can be used by marginalised groups in order to create *counternarratives* (Delgado, 1989; Polletta, 1998) and to express and convey grievance (Olsen, 2014). Counternarratives have been understood as alternative narratives by out-groups to the dominant narrative of in-group members, but lack a clear definition. As narratives and frames both offer interpretive frameworks on different levels (collective vs. personal), counternarratives can be understood in line with counterframes. The difference between the two being that counterframes are a collective effort of meaning making and conveying that are

---

[17] Despite this seemingly clear definition, the following warning must be kept in mind: It is widely accepted that narratives have a certain degree of narrativity, which might be best defined as the degree to which "the set of qualities marking a narrative (Keen, in Abbott, 2008, p. 25) are present. Sticking to Maines' definition, the narrativity of a narrative is determined by the degree to which events, emplotment and temporal ordering are present in a narrative. It is, however, hard to imagine a measurement by which one can determine the degree of narrativity.

[18] According to Olsen (2014), narratives and frames are both "action-oriented in that they are used to incite and sustain mobilization" (p. 250), "directed internally to movement members, and external targets" (p. 250) and both their successes depend on "the extent to which they resonate with broader value systems and conform to specific institutional conventions" (p. 251).

highly strategic, whereas counternarratives are understood as individual and less strategic effort,[19] based on personal stories and directed towards emotional identification. Given the fact that Syrian refugees do not belong to the in-group in the Netherlands, and given the human tendency "to tell stories to make intelligible what is strange and potentially disturbing" (Polletta, 1998, p. 422), (counter)narratives seems to be a well-suited analytical frame to approach the experiences of Syrian refugees.[20]

Combining frame analysis and narratives in the present research is envisioned as follows: when discussing frame resonance, it has been argued that events in the world are of central importance for frame resonance, as well as personal everyday experiences. Events and experiences are interpreted and ordered in narratives (Delgado, 1989) and frames. Narratives are our primary tool to give meaning (Davis, 2002).[21] Therefore, by analysing narratives of SRNs, it should become clear whether and why the frame of the DG resonates with this group. Also, simultaneously employing frame and narrative analysis should help to understand whether or not and why, in case there is no resonance, SRNs contest the DG's frame individually (via counternarratives) or collectively (via counterframes). In summary, this research aims to contribute to the existing literature on framing and narratives by clarifying the relationship between the two, and, more specifically, by giving insight in the role of narratives in framing contests.

2.3 Sub-questions

To remind the reader, this thesis answered the following question:

> *How is the Dutch government's framing of the United States-led anti-ISIL coalition strikes contested by the narratives of Syrian Refugees now residing in the Netherlands, who come from areas in which airstrikes were conducted between September 2014 and December 2017?*

It now should be clear that this research puzzle ties together the various aspects elaborated upon above: (a) the contradiction concerning the precision of coalition airstrikes; (b) the above discussions of the (in)efficiency of airstrikes; (c) related debate about the danger of blowback

---

[19] As Nepstad (2001) argues: "narratives make a situation intelligible; frames recruit people to do something about it" (p. 24).

[20] A more detailed definition of counternarratives will be given in chapter 7.

[21] In Delgado's (1989) words: "We construct social reality by devising and passing on stories – interpretative structures by which we impose order on experiences and it on us" (p. 2415).

(whereby the contestation of the DG's frame might contribute to a political blowback effect); and (d) the concept 'framing contest' and its relation to narratives.

In order to answer the above stated research puzzle, a set of sub-questions were created in order to design a fitting methodology:

Consensus mobilisation:
- How does the DG frame the United States-led anti-ISIL coalition strikes in Syria?
    - *Diagnostic framing*: How does the DG negotiate a shared understanding of the situation in Syria as being problematic and in need of change?
        - Whom or what does the DG blame for the problematic situation?
            - What is identified as source of the problem?
            - Who are the culpable agents?
    - *Prognostic framing*: What set of alternative arrangements is proposed by the DG as solution to the identified problem?
        - What are its plan(s) to tackle the problem?
        - What are its strategies to carry out the plan?
    - How does the DG present its carrying out of the plan?

Narratives of SRNs:
- What are the narratives of SRNs concerning their experiences of the coalition strikes?
    - What *events* are selected from the past?
    - How are these events transformed into elements of the narrative? (Emplotment)
        - How did these events happen, according to SRNs?
        - How are the causes of an event explained by SNRs?
        - How are the events linked with previous and subsequent events over time by SRNs?
    - What is the temporal ordering of these events?

Frame resonance:
- Does the DG's frame of the coalition strikes resonate with SRNs?
    - Is the DG's frame of the coalition strikes credible for SRNs?
        - According to SRNs, is there congruence between the articulated beliefs and claims of the DG and its actions?

- According to the experiences of SNRs, is there an apparent fit between the DG's framing and events in the world?
- Is the DG as frame articulator credible?
  - How do SRN perceive the DG?
  - Is it seen as having expertise?
- Is the DG's frame of the coalition strikes salient for SRN?
  - Is the DG's frame central to SRNs?
    - Are the beliefs, values and ideas associated with the DG's frame essential to the lives of SRNs?
  - Is the DG's frame congruent and resonant with the personal, everyday experience of SRNs?
  - Does the DG's frame possess narrative fidelity for SRNs?
    - Does the DG's frame resonate with meta-narratives held by SRNs?

Counternarratives and counterframes:
- How do SRNs *individually* attempt to rebut, undermine, or neutralise the framing of the DG?
  - How do SRNs individually contest the *diagnostic* framing of the DG? (Counter-attribution)
    - Whom or what do SRNs blame for the problematic situation?
      - What is identifies as source of the problem?
      - Who are the culpable agents?
  - How do SRNs individually contest the *prognostic* framing of the DG? (Counter-prognosis)
    - What set of alternative arrangements form the outcome of which is a proposed solution to the identified problem do SRN propose?
      - What are their plan(s) to tackle the problem?
      - What are their strategies to carry out the plan?
  - How are personal (counter)narratives used in these attempts?

- How do SRNs *collectively* attempt to rebut, undermine, or neutralise the framing of the DG?

o How do SRNs collectively contest the *diagnostic* framing of the DG? (Counter-attribution)

- Whom or what do SRNs blame for the problematic situation?

    - What is identifies as source of the problem?

    - Who are the culpable agents?

o How do SRNs collectively contest the *prognostic* framing of the DG? (Counter-prognosis)

- What set of alternative arrangements the outcome of which is a proposed solution to the identified problem do SRN propose?

    - What are their plan(s) to tackle the problem?

    - What are their strategies to carry out the plan?

- How are narratives used in these counterframes?

3. METHODOLOGY

*"First, qualitative research needs to be conducted in a rigorous
way, with an explicit methodological base to inform its design
and execution"* – Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. xiv)

3.1 Research design

As outlined above, the ontological stance of the chosen analytical frame is individualism: actors are viewed as signifying agents and the meaning they give to certain events in the world are a key focus of this research. The epistemological stance is understanding: framing and narrative analysis are directed towards the understanding of meaning: "the social world must be understood from within" (Hollis, 1994, p. 16). What is sought for is "the meaning of action" (p. 17). In line with this ontological and epistemological classification, this research is qualitative in nature. Qualitative methods suit the epistemological stance of understanding best as they "offer the opportunity for participants to describe the subject of study in their own words" (Boeije, 2010, p. 32). Additionally, part of the topic under study is quite sensitive involving people's experiences and emotions, and how they are given meaning, are of central importance for both narrative and frame analysis. Moreover, the topic under study is an exceptional condition. According to Boeije (2010), qualitative research is especially well suited for studying such issues, making this type of research consistent with the ontological stance of the analytical frame.

The units of observation are texts and people that were sampled purposefully, i.e. they were "intentionally selected according to the needs of the study" (Boeije, 2010, p. 35). In order to research the framing of the coalition strikes, official statements and publications by the DG on the coalition strikes in Syria were sampled. In addition, interviews with members of the Netherlands Defence Academy (NDA) were conducted. Concerning the Dutch framing of the coalition strikes, sampling stopped when data-saturation was reached, i.e. when no new patterns were identified within the textual data.

In order to research narratives of the coalition strikes in Syria, I interviewed SRNs who were living in the regions in which the coalition conducted the airstrikes. These individuals were sampled purposefully as well. Again, data-saturation was the final aim. Because of temporal constraints and the difficulty to access the research population it was unfortunately not reached.

This research looks at the timeframe between June 2014 and December 2017. The DG has participated in the coalition since autumn 2014. June has been selected as a starting point in order to include textual data and narrative accounts addressing the coalition strikes during

the months before the DG decided to participate in the anti-IS coalitions. December 2017 has been chosen the cut-off date because many accounts of SRN include the entire year of 2017.

3.2 Research Method

A. The Dutch government's frame

In the first step of the research, sub-question 1.a-c is addressed. The data gathered in this step provided insight into the DG's prognostic and diagnostic framing of the coalition strikes in Syria.

The units of observations were textual official statements and online publications by the DG regarding the coalition strikes in Syria between June 2014 and December 2017. As the coalition strikes in Syria primarily fall within the responsibility of the Dutch Defence Ministry, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, those ministries' publications and official statements were collected. Using the DG's websites,[22] policy documents were collected using the following search terms: '*Syrië*,' '*Operation Inherent Resolve*,' '*ISIS*,' '*Islamitische Staat*.' That search yielded several hundred documents containing one or more of these search words. *Artikel-100 Brieven*[23] were selected as a starting point for the frame analysis. Then documents containing questions by the parliament (*kamervragen*) about the *Artikel-100 Brieven* were analysed in order to deepen the understanding of these documents. As the DG's framing was of interest, I only analysed the cabinets answers to parliamentary questions. Based on a first round of coding, other documents were selected that (a) either were referred to in the *Artikel-100 Brieven* or the *kamervragen*; (b) and/or contained a high density of the search-words. Also (c) the evaluations on the Dutch participation of in the OIR were included; as well as (d) the newsletters that were published by the Dutch Defence ministry during the timeframe of this research who address the OIR.[24]

As frame analysis focuses on the meaning given by the signifying actors, I attempted to collect interviews with representatives of the DG working on the topic of the coalition strikes in Syria. This would have allowed me to check the interpretation of the naturally occurring (textual) data against the interpretations and the meaning given by the participants (see Lewis, 2003). Unfortunately, no access was granted to government representatives as this research

---

[22] https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten, https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/zoeken/
[23] *Artikel 100-Brieven* are "memos sent by the government to the parliament" (Molier & Hekkenberg, 2017, p. 318) in order to inform the parliament about the deployment of Dutch armed forces.
[24] The newsletters were accessed via the website of the Dutch Defence Ministry (Ministerie van Defensie, n.d.(*b*)): https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/weekoverzicht-defensie-operaties.

concerns an ongoing military operation.[25] In order to further the understanding of the documents that were analysed, five members of the NDA and one pilot who had participated in the coalition were interviewed. Through these interviews, and by studying the Dutch Airpower Doctrine, insights into the institutional, juridical and political context, as well as about military doctrines underlying certain strategic and operational decisions, were gained. These interviews provided insights regarding the position of the Netherlands within the international anti-IS coalition.

The data generated during this phase of the research were analysed inductively by a combination of qualitative and quantitative textual analysis in order to identify the DG's frame. The units of observation were the separate publications (e.g. articles, policy pieces). The coding technique was based on the model of Matthes and Kohring (2008). Building upon Benford and Snow's (2000) definition, diagnosis and prognosis were understood as elements of the frame. The frame is understood as the sum of its parts. These elements and their component parts were understood as content analytical variables which guided the coding. In the end "the variables that signify single frame elements are grouped together" (Matthes and Kohring, 2008, p. 264).[26] Coding was done in the qualitative research program Atlas.ti. Codes were assigned to paragraphs, and, in the case of *kamervragen*, to the answer given by the cabinet. In order to detect the development of the DG's framing, the data was coded per year. The coding occurred in several rounds because the understanding of the matter at hand evolved through gathering more documents, and through the interviews conducted. The codes occurring most often were understood as the central aspects of the Dutch frame. The discussion of the results of the analysis focuses on these aspects.[27] In order to understand how the different frame elements relate to each other (e.g. which solution was proposed for which problem that was defined), interpretations derived from close reading of the documents were checked by making use of the 'Co-occurrence Explorer'-tool of Atlas.ti.

---

[25] I was allowed to send some questions via mail to both ministries. Some of their answers were helpful to better understand the background of the DG's framing. I could not, however, check my understanding of the DG's framing with officials which decreased the reliability of my findings due to the danger of undetected bias and subjectivity. I elaborate below how I dealt with those dangers.

[26] In order to group the variables together, a quantitative analysis method, cluster analysis, is recommended by Matthes and Kohring (2008): This entails that the content analytical variables are computed into a binary variable in order to identify patterns and relations between these variables. The different clusters emerging are interpreted as various frames. The authors argue that the validity and reliability of framing analysis is enhanced by incorporating cluster analysis as this method of analysis makes transparent *how* and *how many* frames are identified (breaking open the methodological black box). Matthes and Kohing's (2008) method was designed specifically for news frame analysis, i.e. for a setting in which there might be several frames of the same issue. In this research I assume that there is one frame as I study one framing actor only. Because of this, I did not make use of cluster analysis as recommended by Matthes and Kohring (2008).

[27] The appendices contain an overview of the final codes, only the codes occurring the most have been discussed when presenting the data in chapter 5.

Using this method of coding, the DG's frame was distilled from a variety of documents via predefined parts and subparts of the concept 'frame'. According to Matthes and Kohring (2008), this enhances the validity and reliability of framing analysis.

B. Collecting narratives

Step two addresses questions 2.a-c, 3.a-b and 4.a-c by collecting narratives of SRNs. These narratives captured SRNs' interpretations of the coalition strikes. Therefore, they provided insight into whether and how the DG's frame resonates (with SRNs), or is contested. The units of observation were SRNs from areas that were and are bombed by the coalition. Generated data is relied upon as the interpretations of SRNs is focused upon.

Episodic interviewing, a form of semi-structured interviews that generate narratives, was used as a data-collection technique.[28] Episodic interviewing is a specific form of in-depth interviewing that is based on the theoretical assumption that humans turn experiences into narratives (Flick, 2000). Episodic interviews "combine invitations to recount concrete events (…) with more general questions aiming at more general answers (…) of topical relevance" (p. 77). This was done by asking the interviewee to tell his/her "personal history with the issue or the field under study" (p. 91). Hereby, insights were gained in the understanding and experiences of the coalition strikes by SRNs, and how they are given meaning.

Episodic interviews "guarantee comparability by defining topics" (Flick, 2009, p. 318). The interviewer is allowed to pose specific, topic-related questions as long as he allows for the interviewees' narrative to develop unhindered.[29]

The structure of episodic interviews enabled the collection of semantic knowledge – i.e. "knowledge based on assumptions and relations, which are abstracted from [experiences and concrete situations] and generalized" (Flick, 2009, p.199) – as well as of episodic knowledge – "knowledge that is organized closer to experiences and linked to concrete situations and circumstances" (p. 199).

The interview guide was structured as follows: first questions concerning the general understanding of the conflict and situation in Syria, and the anti-IS coalition were asked (questions about the interviewee's conception of the issue, directed at accessing his/her semantic knowledge). These questions were followed by questions directed at narrations of personal experiences of coalition-strikes (questions about his/her biography in relation to the coalition strikes, questions directed at his/her episodic knowledge). The interview was

---

[28] The interview guide can be found in the appendices.
[29] Thereby, episodic interviews aim to combine the advantages of semi-structured and narrative interviews.

concluded by questions about more general relevant topics (questions directed at semantic knowledge again).[30] Through this combination of semantic and episodic knowledge, it was possible to gain insight into whether and why the DG's frame does or does not resonates with SRNs. Furthermore, it allowed for the collection of narratives that might function as counternarratives.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed inductively through thematic coding. Thematic coding is a coding strategy to extract "the social distribution of perspectives on a phenomenon" (Flick, 2009, p. 318). The first step of coding is open coding "which aims at expressing data and phenomena in the form of concepts" (p. 307). Per paragraph of the transcribed interviews, labels derived from the own words of the interviewee's expressions were assigned to that paragraph (*in vivo* coding) (Flick, 2009). In various rounds of coding, the *in vivo* codes were abstracted into broader code categories.

More importantly, thematic coding generates "thematic domains for the single case first" (Flick, 2009, p. 319), i.e. the process of coding described above is repeated for each interview. The identification of thematic domains results in a thematic structure of the interview. This allows the preservation of the "meaningful relation" (p. 319) the interviewee has with the topic under study. Thereby individual understandings can be drawn from the data and analysed, but cases can also be compared in order to develop broader thematic structures across interviews.

In addition to thematically coding, analysing, and comparing whole interviews, narratively recounted episodes were analysed via narrative analysis. The narratives were read intentionally. Intentional reading assumes that there is an author behind the narrative who functions as "a single creative sensibility" (Abbott, 2008, p. 102) that gives the narrative its coherence.

In order to understand whether and why the DG's framing does or does not resonate with SRNs, semantic knowledge was used to gain insight into the credibility of the government's framing. Episodic knowledge was used to understand the (empirical) credibility, as well as to gain insight into the salience of the government's frame for SRNs. The semantic knowledge was furthermore used to identify individual contestations of the DG's frame. Through thematic analysis common diagnosis and prognosis could be identified and compared to the DG's framing. This was possible because some questions of the interview guide were directed at a diagnosing the situation in Syria and prognosticate a solution.

---

[30] For example, questions about the motives of the coalition, the effects of the experiences on the live in the Netherlands, possible solutions for the situation in Syria, as well as questions directed at an evaluation of the coalition's action.

C. Counterframing

Step three addressed sub-questions 5.a-b. The data collected in this step provided insight into whether and why or why not the DG's frame of the coalition strikes in Syria is *collectively* contested by SRNs by a counterframe. One civil organisation was identified that works on topics connected to the coalition strikes in Syria (civilian casualties, war crimes, etc.) in which two respondents are active. The unit of observation was that organisation, and those respondents who are engaged in collective counterframing. The official statements and online publications concerning the coalition strikes in Syria were analysed, in order to see whether, how and why the DG's frame is collectively contested by SRNs. In addition, SRNs working for these organisations were interviewed in order to check the interpretation of the naturally occurring data against the interpretations and the meaning given by the participants. The analysis in this step parallels the analysis in step one.

3.3 Limitations

The first limitation concerns the analyse of the DG's frame. The frame analysis could not be triangulated with data gathered in interviews with representatives of the DG, which decreased reliability of the analysis. By analysing a variety of texts it was intended to compensate for this limitation. Besides, the in-depth interviews with members of the NDA made a certain amount of triangulation possible, which also increased the reliability of the findings concerning the DG's frame.

Another limitation concerns the use of episodic interviews in order to research the experiences of airstrikes. These experiences were often extreme or even traumatic which made it difficult to find respondents willing to talk about their experiences. As a consequence, the number of respondents is very limited. Besides, for some respondents it was hard to narrate their experiences.

Lastly, language and cultural differences made it difficult to interpret the interviews. This limitation has been tried to overcome by checking the interpretations with the respondents during the interview by summarising their answers and carefully posing follow-up questions in order to circumvent biased interpretations. In addition, when parts of the interview were unclear, interpretations of these parts were checked with respondents.

4. THE DUTCH CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIGHT AGAINST IS

"The mandate is very simple: The Netherlands participate in the fight against IS."[31]

In order to understand the DG's framing of the anti-IS coalition strikes, some contextual information is needed. To provide the needed context, it must be clarified what the coalition is, how it is structured, how it developed, and on what legal grounds the Netherlands contributed to it.

4.1 The structure of the anti-ISIL coalition and the Operation Inherent Resolve

In September 2014, an international Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) was established to fight IS. The (anti-ISIL) coalition is led by the United States and consists of a varying number of Western and non-Western member States (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N). It is organised alongside "five lines of effort" (McInnis, 2016, p. 1): military efforts,[32] but also efforts to tackle the problem of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), to hamstring IS' financing, to address humanitarian crises, and to delegitimise IS. The campaign consisted of four phases – (I) degrade,[33] (II) counterattack,[34] (III) defeat,[35] and (IV) support for stabilisation[36] – and should realise the coalition's goals: tackling IS' financing and propaganda; preventing the movement of foreign fighters; military progress; countering IS' propaganda; and stabilising liberated areas (The Global Coalition, n.d.).

CENTCOM[37] does the strategic planning and coordinates the military contributions of the coalition members (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, H). The most active countries in the coalition, one of which is the Netherlands, form the *Small Group*, a group that contributes to

---

[31] Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018. The quote in original language: "Het mandaat is heel eenvoudig: Nederland neemt deel aan de strijd tegen IS."

[32] The military efforts include supporting military operations, the training of forces and aid in capacity building (McInnis, 2016, p. 1).

[33] The goal is to stop the IS' expansion into Iraq and to limit the organisation's effectiveness by means of strikes against the organisation, as well as by training and equipping Iraqi Security Forces and partner forces on the ground in Syria (The Global Coalition, n.d.).

[34] Counterattack included support for Iraqi Security Forces and partner forces on the ground in Syria in attacking and liberating territory and people occupied by IS. Again, airstrikes were used in support of ground forces. Besides, partner forces were trained, equipped, advised and assisted (The Global Coalition, n.d.).

[35] Defeat of IS was aimed for by supporting partner forces on the ground in their decisive battles against IS by means of airstrikes. Driving IS out of Raqqa and Mosul was crucially important in this phase, as well as tackling pockets of resistance in Syria and Iraq. Besides, partner forces were trained, equipped, advised and assisted (The Global Coalition, n.d.).

[36] Stabilisation was aimed for by providing security, and by planning and supporting Iraqi and (appropriate) Syrian authorities (The Global Coalition, n.d.).

[37] The US Central Command (CENTCOM) "covers the 'central' area of the globe located between the European, Africa and Pacific Command" (CENTCOM, n.d.).

the strategizing and the coordination of the coalition's different tracks (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N).

In order to understand the nature of this international coalition, some words must be said about its command structure. In international operations, there is an international and a national command structure. At the top of the international chain of command stands an American four-star general[38] who is responsible for the entire CENTCOM area. For an operation within the CENTCOM area, such as the OIR, a Joint Task Force Commander is appointed. He is responsible for all units, and commands the land-, air- and maritime component of the operation. Also for each of these components there is a commander. The Commander Joint Forces Air Component is a three-star general whose headquarters are the Combined Air Operations Centre in Qatar, from where all air-operations are led and coordinated.[39] This commander controls the airpower capacities of the joint task force, including all airpower-related units from different countries (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014).

Each country contributing units to the coalition handles its own Rules of Engagement (ROE) (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014, pp. 66-74).[40] The NATO defines ROE as "directives to military forces (including individuals) that define the circumstances, conditions, degree, and manner in which force, or actions which might be construed as provocative, may be applied" (quoted in Voetelink, 2013, p. 157). ROE are developed for a specific operation. How ROEs are developed depends on the international organisation or coalition conducting the operation (Voetelink, 2013). According to two members of the NDA, each country contributing units to the coalition, handles its own ROE.[41] As a consequence, units of specific countries can only be tasked within their country's set of rules. The Netherlands have placed a so-called Red Card Holder at the operation's head-quarter. His/her task is to make sure that the Dutch contribution to the coalition fit the Dutch mandate and the ROE.

In addition to the international chain of command there is a national chain of command which is mostly concerned with logistical issues concerning the detachment. Moreover, when there is doubt about whether a certain mission is in line with the Dutch mandate and ROE, the national chain of commands is activated (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014, pp. 66-74).[42]

---

[38] The stars signify the rank in the US' military hierarchy.

[39] The operational headquarters are situated in Iraq, Kuwait, United Arabic Emirates, and Qatar (Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015,27925, E). The airstrikes are coordinated in the Joint Forces Air Component Command in Kuwait (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 527).

[40] Author's interview with member 5 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with a pilot of the Dutch Military, 15 May 2018.

[41] Author's interview with member 5 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with a pilot of the Dutch Military, 15 May 2018.

[42] Author's interview with member 5 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with a pilot of the Dutch Military, 15 May 2018.

Being aware the existence of two chains of commands, and the national character of the ROE, is important to be aware of the considerable legal autonomy the Netherlands have in this international coalition. The next section discusses the Dutch military contribution in the coalition, as well as the contribution on a strategic level.

4.2 Development of the Coalition and the Dutch Mandate

A. Developments in 2014

In 2014, the United States developed a campaign plan for the anti-IS coalition which initially focused on stopping the advance of IS. This should be achieved by training and equipping local forces (Iraqi and Kurdish fighters as well as moderate opposition groups in Syria), by conducting airstrikes against IS in Syria and Iraq, and by means of special operations (McInnis, 2016). The coalition's fight against IS currently takes place in Syria and in Iraq. Few countries, however, militarily engaged in Syria in 2014 (Kamerstuk II, 2014/15, 27925, nr. 506).[43] The reason for this was a difference in the legal grounds on which to militarily intervene in Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, the legal ground to engage in the fight against IS is provided by the Iraqi request for help (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, E). Militarily operating in Syria was more complicated as the Syrian government had and has not invited third parties to participate in the fight against IS. In order to understand this difference more information about the use of force in international law is helpful.

The use of force in international relations has been banned under international law since the second world war. According to the United Nations charter, however, there are two exceptions to this ban. Firstly, article 39 states that the "Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression" (United Nations Charter, quoted in Rodley & Çali, 2010, p. 215). Accordingly, the Security Council may decide upon measures to restore peace. If necessary, these measures might include the use of force. The second legitimate reason to breach the ban on the use of force is self-defence. Article 51 of the United Nations Charter states: "Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual and collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security" (quoted in Rodley & Çali, 2010, p. 215). Collective self-defence means that "a collection of States can use force collectively against an aggressor State, and that this is legitimized by the United Nations Charter" (p. 217). As becomes visible from

---

[43] Only Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi-Arabia, United Arabic Emirates, and the United States conducted airstrikes above Syria (Kamerstuk II, 2014/15, 27925, nr. 506).

the formulation of the United Nations Charter, international law assumes States as actors. The fact that IS is a non-state actor who attacks states, further complicates the matter. As Rodley and Çali (2010) argue: "It is only when the attack is disastrous or the host State is unwilling or unable to cooperate [in arresting and prosecuting the members of that armed group] that the self-defence paradigm is relevant" (p. 222).

As "Iraq had granted the permission for military operations against ISIS to be staged within its borders" (Molier & Hekkenberg, 2017, p. 317), there was an "*adequate* international legal mandate" (p. 316) for the Netherlands to fight IS in Iraq.[44]

Already in 2014, the United States evoked the right to collective self-defence of Iraq to militarily intervene in Syria (Kamerstuk II, 2014/15, 27925, nr. 506). According to Molier and Hekkenberg (2017) and the DG (see for example Kamerstuk II, 2014/15, 27925, nr. 506), in 2014 there was no consensus whether collective self-defence can be evoked in order to legally justify fighting IS in Syria. Therefore, in 2014, "the Dutch military contribution was limited to the armed fight against IS in Iraq" (Molier & Hekkenberg, 2017, p. 316). When the Netherlands started to participate in the coalition in the autumn of 2014 (Kamerstuk II, 2014/15, 27925, nr. 526),[45] they contributed 6 F-16 fighter aircrafts to the coalition that were stationed on an airbase in Jordan (Interview Van Deventer; Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, E). The Netherlands also decided to support the coalition in training and assisting Iraqi Special Operation Forces, and military units of the Peshmerga (Kamerstuk II, 2014/15, 27925, nr. 526).

With regard to Syria, the Netherlands did not operate militarily but supported the Syrian Opposition Coalition in Istanbul,[46] and provided non-lethal support to the FSA (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, E; Kamerstuk II, 2014/15, 27925, nr. 506).

B. Developments in 2015

Also in 2015 most of the countries participating militarily did not conduct airstrikes above Syria for the same reasons as in 2014 (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, H).[47] The Dutch mandate for

---

[44] For a detailed discussion on the interpretation of international law by the DG when justifying their mandate see Molier and Hekkenberg (2017).

[45] The first strike conducted by the Netherlands took place on the 7th of October 2014. It was directed at a ground-target in Iraq. At the beginning of their participation, they supported the coalition with six F-16 warplanes and were looking for partners who have the same airplanes to cooperate with (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, E). Until the 7th of January 2015, more than 200 Dutch airstrikes were conducted in Iraq (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 527).
Until the 24th of June 2015, more than 600 bombings by Dutch F-16's had been conducted (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 29 521 nr. 296).

[46] That support included trainings, the backing of local councils, police and justice actors in Syria, and the backing of the civil middle field (Kamerstuk II, 2014/15, 27925, nr. 506).

[47] The number of countries participating in the coalition rose to sixty in 2015, forty-two of which participated militarily. Only the United States and Canada conducted airstrikes, whereas the United Kingdom used airpower

militarily operating in Iraq remained unchanged (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, H). As in 2014, the Netherlands contributed F-16 fighting aircrafts to the coalition (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, H; Kamerstuk II, 2014/15, 29521, nr. 291).[48] Additionally, the Netherlands participated in the training of Kurdish fighters in Iraq as well as Iraqi Special Operation Forces Units (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, H). On a strategic level, the Netherlands participated in the Coalition Strategic Plans Group, and stationed liaison-officers within headquarters in Baghdad, Kuwait, and Qatar, where the operational efforts were planned. The Netherlands also contributed to coordinating the political and military aspects of the fight against IS. Moreover, they contributed to tackling the problem of FTFs, and to denying IS its financial resources. Furthermore, the Netherlands participated in the coalition's counter-messaging efforts, and in its stabilisation task-force (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, H). Also, they engaged in humanitarian help for Iraq as well as for Syria (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 539).

Concerning the assessment of legal grounds to fight IS in Syria, the DG's position did change in 2015. It did recognise that there were international legal grounds to militarily fight IS in Syria: there are recurrent attacks of IS from within Syria on Iraq. This, in combination with the alleged incapability of the Syrian government to prevent these attacks, and with the continuous deliverance of weapons and IS-fighters to Iraq, provided adequate legal grounds to operate militarily in Syria, according to the DG. At the same time, the government claimed that there were insufficient legal grounds for the Netherlands to become militarily active in Syria; first progress had to be made concerning a political solution to the conflict in Syria (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, H; Molier & Hekkenberg, 2017).

In late 2015, partly as reaction to IS terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States asked other coalition members to intensify their efforts in defeating IS in Iraq *and* Syria (Kamerstuk II, 2015/16, 27 925, nr. 570).[49]

C. Developments in 2016
Reacting to the requests of the United States and France, several countries among which Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom intensified the fight

---

(more specifically: Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) to gather intelligence above Syria (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 27925, H).

[48] They started out by contributing six F-16s, reducing the number to four in October 2015. F-16 missions were flown daily over Iraq (Kamerstuk I, 2014/15, 2014/2015, 27 925, H).

[49] The request for intensification went hand in hand with an alteration of the military campaign plan. This alteration included a shift "away from [the] 'Iraq first' approach to sequencing the campaign and targeting the Islamic State more directly while 'accelerating [the] overall anti-IS operations" (McInnis, 2016, p. 3).

against IS (Kamerstuk I, 27 925, N).[50] Besides the United States and Canada, the following countries started to conduct airstrikes against IS in Syria: Australia, Bahrain, France, Saudi-Arabia, Turkey, Emirates, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Kamerstuk II, 2015/16, 27 925, nr. 571). As the fight advanced, the coalition's need for trainers grew,[51] as well as the need for better integration between military and civilian tracks (i.e. military operations had to be coordinated with civilian (humanitarian) issues). Moreover, the coalition's need for Special Operation Forces, and Advise and Assist tasks grew (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N).[52]

Also the Netherlands followed the request to intensify their engagement to fight IS. They did so politically;[53] militarily (by contributing to airstrikes, and by training Iraqi forces and Peshmerga);[54] by participating in the coalition's efforts directed at FTFs, at financial incomes of IS, and at delegitimising IS; by increasing its efforts to stabilise the region,[55] and by providing humanitarian support (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N).[56] The legal grounds for operating militarily in Iraq again remained unchanged. In line with the changing stance towards the legal grounds for engaging militarily in Syria, the Netherlands extended their operational territory to Eastern Syria. In its Artikel-100 letter in January 2016, the government found that

---

[50] This intensification included "extending air operations to Syria, training police, stabilizing, assisting in recovery, and providing more trainers, critical logistic support and materiel to local partners on the ground" (McInnis, 2016, p. 4).

[51] Training activities needed to be broadened and more flexible. Besides, the coalition's need for *enablers* and medical support grew (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N).

[52] The needs grew towards supporting the preparation and execution of fights. More specifically that entailed aspects as operational planning, leadership, the coordination of fire-support, etc. (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N).

[53] Intensification on a political level entailed: increasing the financially supporting for the Genève peace-talks; supporting the Riyad-group; supporting Syrian women; supporting track-II peace-talks; and financial aid for the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre. Besides, the Netherlands continued to support the moderate opposition in Syria politically (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N).

[54] (1) The Netherlands intensified the training of Iraqi forces and Peshmerga. In cooperation with Belgium, the Netherlands engaged in various training activities. Dutch Special Operation Forces were cooperating with Belgium Special Operation Forces in the training of Iraqi Special Operation Forces. Moreover, the Netherlands engaged in North-Iraq so called train the Tribal Resistance Forces (Kamerstuk I, 2016/2017, 27 925, N). In general, the coalition's training activities, and thus the Dutch training activities were moving in the direction of 'train the trainer' activities (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N). (2) The Netherlands provided non-lethal support to Iraqi forces, including the Peshmerga. (3) Besides, they armed the Peshmerga in Iraq. (4) Lastly, they targeted the IS infrastructure with airstrikes. The Dutch F-16s conducted strikes until beginning of July 2016, when Belgium took over from the Netherlands. From July onwards, the Netherlands provided the Force Protection for the Belgium F-16 detachment, and delivered air-to-air refuelling capacities to the coalition (the KDC planes who have air-tanking capacities, were stationed in Kuwait) (Kamerstuk I, 2016/2017, 27 925, N). (4) The Netherlands placed one staff officer at the CAOC and were actively supporting the Coalition Target Development Cell of CJTF in Qatar. As in 2015, Dutch staff officers were placed at CENTCOM and the CJTF in order to support the strategic planning of the operation. Besides, two officers at the Coalition Strategic Plans Group provided advise and helped with the evaluation of the military operation (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N).

[55] The Netherlands provided non-lethal support for Moderate Syrian Opposition groups and the Free Syrian Police. Besides they provided monetary support for medical capacities of the Moderate Syrian Opposition groups, and also for them to counter (human-)trafficking and extremism. Moreover, they provided monetary support in order to recover public services, and they gave extra attention to the workgroup *Addressing Root Causes of Conflict* (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N).

[56] The humanitarian help included the investing in better perspectives for refugees in the region.

the recurring attacks by IS from within Syria on Iraq provided legal grounds to operate military in Syria. Significantly, the DG argued that important developments occurred with regard to political processes in Syria (Kamerstuk II, 2015/16, 27 925, nr. 570).[57] This, it was argued, gave the final impetus to militarily operate in Syria.

D. Developments in 2017

With the liberation of Mosul in July 2017, the transition from phase two (dismantle) to phase three (defeat) was made (Kamerstuk II, 2015/16, 27 925, nr. 611).[58] The coalition's need to train Peshmerga decreased, whilst the need of specific trainings for experienced units increased (Kamerstuk II, 2015/16, 27 925, nr. 611).[59] In 2017, the following countries were conducting airstrikes against IS: United States, Australia, Belgium, France, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom. The United States, however, conducted ninety percent of the airstrikes (Kamerstuk II, 2015/16, 27 925, nr. 612).

In 2017, the mandate for the Dutch military participation in the anti-IS coalition did not change. Also the contribution to the fight against IS did not change significantly, with one exception:[60] that year, the Netherlands did not participate in the coalition by contributing F-16's themselves, but remained involved in the airstrikes due to their cooperation with Belgium.[61] Building upon this overview on the structure and development of the coalition in general, and the Dutch contribution specifically, the next chapter focuses on the DG's framing.

---

[57] As Molier and Hekkenberg (2017) elaborate: "the Security Council agreed for a plan for political transition [in Syria]" (p. 330) which probably accounts for the changed stance of the DG towards operating militarily in Syria.

[58] Defeat was understood as military defeat of IS in the remaining areas in Iraq and the stabilisation of recaptured areas. This shift was already expected for 2016 (see Kamerstuk I, 2016/2017, 27 925, N), but the liberation of Mosul proves more difficult and time consuming than expected. After the liberation of Mosul, the operation to liberate Raqqa started (Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 611).

[59] For example, trainings in Wide Area Security, Counter-IED, and leadership op tactical level (Kamerstuk II, 2015/16, 27 925, nr. 611).

[60] As in 2016, the Dutch Defence Staff supported the coalition with targeting efforts: The Netherlands sent a Processing Exploitation and Dissemination-team to help analysing Unmanned Aerial Vehicle-recording, and to help with the targeting process (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N). Besides, the training, and advise and assist activities continued in 2017: trainers were stationed in Iraq (Kamerstuk I, 2015/16, 27 925, N). A Dutch Special Operation Forces team supports Iraqi forces outside of Kurdish controlled areas. Advice and assistance are provided for Iraqi forces and the Peshmerga.[60] Again, the Netherlands were active in the Foreign Terrorist Fighter Workgroup[60], and worked for further stabilisation of Iraq[60] and of Syrian areas that controlled by the Syrian government or by extremists[60]. They also provide non-lethal support to the moderate opposition. Moreover, the Netherlands contribute to the International Syria Support Group by trying to gain Humanitarian Access, and by giving financial humanitarian help (Kamerstuk II, 2015/16, 27 925, nr. 611).

[61] With the extension of the Belgium deployment of F-16s until the end of 2017, also the force protection for the Belgium units provided by the Netherlands, was extended. Besides participating in the coalition in this bi-lateral constellation, the Netherlands contributed to the coalition's airpower with KDC-10 planes for air-to-air refuelling, and by contributing C-130 transport planes (Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 606; Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 607).

5. THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT'S FRAMING OF THE COALITION AIRSTRIKES

"The fight against IS for most parts takes place in Iraq. There
IS is largely defeated. IS slowly moved in the direction of Syria.
That is such a complex conflict that we do not take a position in
it. But we do continue fighting IS."[62]

5.1 Consensus mobilisation

This chapter addresses the sub-question: *How does the DG frame the United States-led anti-ISIL coalition strikes in Syria?* As pointed out in chapter 2, only the diagnostic and prognostic framing by the DG is discussed as the focus lies on its efforts to achieve consensus mobilisation which aims to "foster or facilitate agreement" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615).[63] Consensus mobilisation consists of diagnostic and prognostic framing. According to Benford and Snow (2000) diagnostic framing means to "negotiate a shared understanding of some *problematic conditions* or *situations* they [i.e. movement adherents] define as *in need of change*, make *attributions* regarding to *who* or *what is to blame*" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615, italic added). These attributions concern "the identification of the source(s) of causality, blame, and/or culpable agents" (p. 616). To engage in prognostic framing, on the other hand, is to "articulate an *alternative set of arrangements* (…) [the outcome of which is] a *proposed solution* to the problem, or at least a *plan of attack*, and the *strategies for carrying out the plan*" (pp. 615-616, italics added). The analysis presented in this chapter is mainly based on *kamerstukken*. Interviews with members of the NDA and a pilot of the Dutch military, and the Dutch Defence Doctrine (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014) were used to enhance the understanding of the *kamerstukken.*[64]

A. Consensus mobilisation in 2014

Benford and Snow (2000) argue that a connection exists between diagnostic and prognostic framing: "the identification of specific problems and causes tend to limit the range of possible 'reasonable' solutions and strategies advocated" (p. 616). This is certainly true for the case at

---

[62] Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018. The quote in original language: "De strijd tegen IS vindt grotendeels plaats in Iraq. Daar is IS grotendeels verslagen. IS heeft zich langzaam verplaatst richting Syrië. Dat is een dermate complex conflict dat we daarin geen positie innemen. Maar we gaan wel door met de strijd tegen IS."

[63] In Klandermans' (1984) words: "*consensus mobilisation* is a process through which a social movement tries to obtain support for its viewpoints" (p. 586).

[64] As explained in the methodology section, the codes occurring most often were understood as the central aspects of the Dutch frame. The results describe patterns across a variety of *kamerstukken* listed in the bibliography. Because the results describe patterns over a large body of texts, references to specific *kamerstukken* is only given in the case of quotations.

hand: The previous chapter showed that the airstrikes are part of the coalition's strategy to fight IS. As will become apparent below, IS was understood in the context of the broader crisis of the Middle East, especially in Syria. The DG's (prognostic) framing of the coalition strikes can therefore only be understood properly when it is embedded in the government's (diagnostic) framing of the situation in Syria. Accordingly, the first question to be answered is:

(1) What is the Dutch government's diagnostic framing of the situation in Syria?
Importantly, the DG's diagnostic framing separates the IS uprising (I) from the Syrian civil war (II). (I) The existence of IS was portrayed as a problematic condition of international scope: In 2014, IS was diagnosed as a terror-group which posed an international terrorist threat as it planned to conduct attacks in the West. Because international and national security were seen as heavily intertwined, IS was also diagnosed as a national terrorist threat. One important aspect of the (inter)national terrorist threat that IS posed, was its recruitment of FTFs. The FTFs were depicted as problematic especially because of the threat they posed to their country of origin by planning to conduct terrorist attacks.

Besides posing an (inter)national security threat, IS was diagnosed as destabilising factor on an international and regional level. It ignored national borders (specifically Syrian-Iraqi border) and contributed to the growing instability at European borders.

IS was held responsible for another problematic condition in need of change: the large streams of refugees. These were seen as problematic because of the refugee's humanitarian situation, the destabilising effect they had on the region, their unregulated nature, and the pressure they put on already porous borders.[65]

The fourth important problematic condition blamed on IS was the bad humanitarian situation. (In addition to IS, the Syrian government received some of the blame.) IS was seen as terrorising the civilian population, targeting minorities, and boycotting humanitarian help.

In connection to the humanitarian problems, violations of the international law by IS were diagnosed as problematic. Especially the crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide committed by IS were highlighted. Special attention was paid to the crimes committed by FTFs.

(II) The Syrian civil war was diagnosed as a complex, internal Syrian problem. (Throughout the years, the DG emphasised that it only contributed to the fight against IS and did not interfere in the Syrian civil war.) Even though this problem was understood as being

---

[65] Refugees are understood as forming a problem for neighbouring countries, and the Kurdish Autonomous region (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 23432, nr. 389). Besides, the DG worried about the spill-over effect of instability in Syria and Iraq to other countries (Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015,27925, E; Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27925, nr. 506)

separate from the fight against IS, the ongoing civil war in Syria (its violence, the power vacuum it created, the instability and lawlessness it brought about, and the lack of a political solution which prolonged the conflict) was identified as the source for the emergence and ongoing successes of IS.[66] In that sense, the conflicts were depicted as being connected.[67] Nevertheless, two reasons were given in order to distinguish between the problematic situation of IS and the Syrian civil war: First, it was argued that there were no legal grounds to intervene in the Syrian civil war.[68] Second, the political suppression and terror by the government was identified as the source of the civil war, which makes it essentially a political problem. This affects the prognostic framing due to its connectedness with diagnostic framing. The connectedness between diagnostic and prognostic framing is visible in the different solutions and strategies that were suggested with regard to the problems posed by IS and the civil war: a military intervention was not seen as sufficient to solve the internal Syrian conflict. This leads to the second question to be answered with regard to the DG's consensus mobilisation:

(2) *What is the Dutch government's prognostic framing of the situation in Syria?*
The proposed solution to the civil war was a political transition brought about by the United Nations Geneva peace talks that the Netherlands supported. The strategy to arrive at that solution was to provide an alternative to the repressive regime. Therefore, the DG supported the Syrian opposition and the civil society to participate in the peace talks.[69] Other concrete plans by the DG to arrive at this political solution was to contribute to various international forums for stabilisation,[70] reconstruction[71] and reform.[72]

In light of this proposed political solution, another problem that IS posed was diagnosed by the DG: the existence of IS was seen as a hindrance to a political solution for

---

[66] In Iraq, where IS booked its first big successes, the coming about and success of that group was ascribe to the marginalisation of the Sunni population by the government of Prime minister Maliki. Besides, the polarisation between the Shia and Sunni population in the Middle East in general was understood as contributing to the coming about and the success of IS (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 526).

[67] The Syrian Government and its practices of political exclusion, suppression and terrorisation of its own population were seen as being responsible for the Syrian civil war (Kamerstuk II (Bijlage), 2014/2015, 28676, nr. 210).

[68] A United Nations resolution would have been needed for that, see the discussion on the use of force in international law.

[69] The DG did so via two for a: the 'Friends of Syria' group, but also via the European Union and United Nations. In order for the solution to be successful, the DG argued that the civil society must be included. Therefore, the Netherlands invested in the social middle-field, and aimed to support the United Nations peace-talks (Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015, 27 925, E).

[70] International efforts were made to improve the local security, and to tackle the lack of law and order. Besides, stability was sought to be increased by supporting the countries in the region in dealing with the large amount of refugees (foremost financial support) (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 526).

[71] Reconstruction was seen as essential in order to foresee the basic needs of population.

[72] Reform was not only needed on the political level, but also in the security sector and jurisprudence.

Syria. Therefore, the elimination of IS was understood as a condition to arrive at a political solution to the conflict in Syria.[73] Also in that sense, the conflict in Syria and its solution were seen as connected to the fight against IS. The proposed strategy to fight against IS, however, differed a lot from the political strategy envisioned for Syria.

IS was diagnosed as a terrorist group that must be defeated militarily.[74] This military defeat was viewed as an important step towards a solution for the problems IS was blamed for, and to arrive at a political solution to the Syrian civil war. To tackle IS and the problems it caused, two general lines of action were proposed: to take away the grounds for recruitment, which were found in the ongoing crisis in the region as well as in the past and present political exclusion. Ideally, the group should be eliminated militarily.

The DG suggested that the military strategy should build on international cooperation, and to integrate military and non-military efforts. The first step of the plan to eliminate IS was to stop the advance of IS. The Netherlands contributed to that plan by using airpower in Iraq, and by training Iraqi and Kurdish forces. The aim was to break the continued ability of IS by targeting its command structure, its continued ability, and its infrastructure.

Airpower was depicted as an important component of the strategy to stop the advance of IS. In 2014, the emphasise lay on Air Interdiction (AI) missions to which Dutch F-16s contributed.[75] Next to the use of air power as strategy to arrive at the proposed solution for Iraq, the Netherlands emphasised their contribution to the train and assist program of the coalition. The Netherlands highlighted that they operate militarily only in Iraq, which means that they (militarily as well as non-militarily)[76] supported Iraqi ground forces.[77]

The Dutch airstrikes were described as very precise, and as a crucial part of an integrated strategy. Also, it was emphasised that the airstrikes were in accordance with the Iraqi

---

[73] Other conditions were identified in order for the political solution to be successful: (a) The solution had to be regional, which implied the cooperation between and with the regional powers. On the one hand, the power play between Teheran and Riyadh, who influence the conflict by giving support to certain parties, had to be overcome. Also, the support for political reforms by neighbouring countries was seen as essential, as well as the cooperation with Gulf-States. (b) Besides, a common vision by the international community concerning a middle and long-term strategy for Syrian civil war was seen as key to solve the Syrian conflict (Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015, 27 925, E; Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 526).

[74] See the plan of the OIR discussed in the previous chapter.

[75] Air Interdiction is a type of counter-land operation – an operation directed at denying the opponent land by attacking his military units and supporting infrastructure (e.g. by targeting IS-locations, fabrics, etc.) – which usually takes place in great distance from the own ground-troops (therefor not needing cooperation with these groups) and which is directed at predetermined goals (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014, p. 45).
Other countries, among which the United States used airpower as well to tackle the humanitarian situation and to protect its own citizens (see Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 23432, nr. 389).

[76] The Netherlands for example supported Kurdish forces in Iraq non-militarily with materials such as helmets (Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015, 27 925, E).

[77] Other countries also support the moderate opposition in Syria (Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015, 27 925, E).

authorities,[78] and as embedded in international cooperation. Interestingly, at the same time, the Dutch mandate and ROE were emphasised.

When discussing the DG's prognostic framing, it is also interesting to look at how they frame the military action of coalition partners above Syria. Despite not operating militarily above Syria, the DG said that it 'understands' that the United States is operating militarily in Syria. The United States airstrikes were described as precise, as aiming to help refugees, to prevent further escalation and serious crimes by IS.[79] Although the DG 'understood' the US' use of airpower above Syria, they disagreed on the invoked legal grounds.[80] As discussed above, the DG argued that it was unclear whether the right to collective self-defence could be invoked. Notably, when justifying its military contribution to the fight against IS, justification in legal terms occur frequently. This observation is in line with Molier and Hekkenberg (2017) who noted that it is "striking (…) that international law played a particularly exceedingly important role in answering the question of whether the Netherlands should contribute militarily to the fight against ISIS" (pp. 318-319).

The coalition strikes were framed as being effective in stopping the advance of IS in Iraq, and even in pushing back IS forces in several parts of the country, especially in combination with Iraqi and Kurdish forces. The effects of airstrikes were not all portrayed as positive. However, these negative effects were rarely discussed. Considering the concerns of the DG, it is, however, interesting in the light of the awareness of and dealing with blowback. Therefore, these concerns will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

The DG often emphasised that the coalition also operates non-militarily: e.g. it intended to impair IS finances, and to delegitimise IS.[81] The efforts to delegitimise IS were seen to be connected to the efforts to creating stability in Syria and Iraq, and as being connected to the support for the moderate opposition in Syria in order to debunk IS. In general, again, the integrated nature between military and non-military actions was emphasised.

---

[78] Per airstrike the Iraqi government was asked for permission (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 526).

[79] Besides airstrikes, in some regions the United States provide humanitarian help via air-droppings (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 23 432, nr. 389).

[80] See the discussion in the previous chapter: The United States claimed that there exists a right to collective self-defence based on which military operations against IS in and above Syria are legitimised (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 506).

[81] Delegitimisation included the development of a counternarrative – by getting to know perceptions of target-groups. diminishing the receptivity for the hate-messages – that was supported by military action. Besides, it was planned to develop an anti-extremism campaign for the region (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 526).

The problem of FTFs was also depicted as in need of a non-militarily strategy: again, the international nature of the efforts (exchanging information to detect terrorist travel) to stop those who are leaving to fight with IS, was emphasised.[82]

Also in order to solve the problematic condition of the terrorist threat within the Netherlands, non-military measures were emphasised such as the development of guidelines on how to tackle the leaving of Jihadists, how to diminish the risks of them returning to the Netherlands to conduct terrorist attacks, and how to tackle and stop recruitment.[83] In order to tackle FFT problems on a European/international level, the improvement of intelligence was named as a strategy.

B. Consensus mobilisation in 2015

In 2015, the DG's consensus mobilisation efforts largely remained the same. Some important changes, however, should be noted. Concerning the diagnostic framing of the IS crisis, two more problems were added to the ones diagnosed in 2014. (1) The fact that IS conducted attacks from within Syria, and (2) the fact that IS expanded its influence on other countries was mentioned repeatedly.

Concerning the diagnostic framing of the Syrian civil war, the increasing involvement by regional actors (especially Russia's support for the Syrian government, and Iran's influence in the conflict) who try to secure their interests, and the complications this brings for a political solution to the conflict in Syria, were recurrently diagnosed as problematic condition in need of change.

Concerning the DG's prognostic framing, militarily, the plan shifted from stopping the advance of IS to driving back IS. Concerning the strategy to carry out this plan, again the use of airpower was ascribed a crucial role. With the plan to drive back IS, the supportive role of airstrikes for ground troops is emphasised in 2015, which entailed an increased emphasis of Close Air Support (CAS) missions.[84] At the same time, the importance of continued pressuring of IS infrastructure by AI was often noted.

---

[82] The Netherlands claimed to closely cooperate with Turkey on the issue of terrorist-travel (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 23 432, nr. 389).

[83] These measured were developed in the 'Integrale Aanpak Jihadisme.' Besides, the Netherlands took part in the global counterterrorist forum (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 23 432, nr. 389).

[84] Next to Air Interdiction, a second way in which airpower can be used is called Close Air Support which is a form of direct support of the ground troops in close proximity to them (the coalition, including Dutch F-16's give air-support to Iraqi and Kurdish forces in their fight against IS). A high degree of coordination between ground and air forces is needed (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014, p. 46).

The effectiveness of the strategy, especially of the airstrikes, was again emphasised.[85] In general, airstrikes were described as having a big and immediate, as well as having a long-lasting effect. The airstrikes, for example, helped to decrease the territory held by IS (they especially helped Kurdish forces who liberated much of IS' territory) and frustrated many of its income sources and streams. This effectiveness, however, was presented as limited because IS can recover due to its core area which is partly located in eastern Syria. In the light of this problematic condition, the coalition's military activity in and above Syria was described as necessary.[86]

C. Consensus mobilisation in 2016

Considering the understanding of IS or of the Syrian civil war, the DG's diagnostic framing in 2016 remained more or less the same as in 2014 and 2015. Again much attention was paid to the problematic condition that IS conducts frequent attacks from within Syria on Iraq. Concerning the prognostic framing, it was emphasised that, in order to defeat IS in Iraq, the infrastructure between Syria and Iraq, by which fighters and weapons were transported, must be destroyed. The biggest difference between 2016 and the previous years concerns the prognostic framing of the Syrian civil war: at the beginning of 2016, the DG perceived an advancement in the direction of a political solution for the conflict in Syria. This brought about a shift in the prognostic framing. In the light of these perceived advances towards a political solution, a contribution to the coalition's military strategy against IS in Syria was depicted as potentially successful in order to arrive at the proposed solution for both the problems posed by IS as well as by the Syrian civil war.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the fight against IS was portrayed as intensified (in reaction to the terror attack of IS in countries far away form their core area in Syria and Iraq). This intensification occurred parallel to the military, as well as on the political and civilian tracks. Besides an intensification in the fight against IS, plans to stabilise liberated areas became increasingly important.

---

[85] It was argued that the air-campaign above Syria was benefiting above all the Kurdish forces who had gained a lot of territory held previously by IS (Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 527).

[86] "As long as the situation in Syria remains politically unstable and IS continues to have freedom of movement in Syria, the group continues to have a save heaven. Therefore, the coalition also uses airpower above Syria. With the exception of the airstrikes by the coalition and the efforts by Syrian Kurdish forces along the borders with Turkey, IS encounters little military resistance" (Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015, 27 925, I, p. 9) (The quote in original language: "Zolang de situatie in Syrië politiek instabiel blijft en IS bewegingsvrijheid houdt in Syrië, houdt de groepering hier een veilige haven. Daarom zet de coalitie het luchtwapen ook in boven Syrië. Met uitzondering van de luchtaanvallen en de inzet van de Syrische Koerden langs de grens met Turkije ondervindt ISIS in Syrië nog weinig militaire weerstand.")

Considering the framing of the airstrikes, the most obvious change concerned the geographical area where Dutch F-16 pilots operated. Furthermore, the need for airpower in order to damage IS infrastructure and to support the fight of local ground troops, also the need for sufficient local ground troops was highlighted in order to defeat IS in Syria. The emphasis on the effects of airstrikes also increased in comparison to the previous years. Again, the fact was stressed that airstrikes are precise. This precision, it was argued, is made possible by accurate and careful targeting processes. Also, the coalition strikes are increasingly portrayed as in line with international humanitarian law. If accuracy and proportionality cannot be guaranteed, and if that leads to the risk of civilian casualties, then, it was argued, populated areas are not to be attacked. The Dutch contribution to the precision and accuracy of the coalition airstrikes was stressed. More than in the previous years, the positive effects of the airstrikes were discussed.[87]

D. Consensus mobilisation in 2017

Concerning the problem diagnosis in 2017, it is interesting to see that the humanitarian situation ranked lower than in previous years. More attention, however, was paid to the effects that the fight against IS had. This will be discussed in the next section, when discussing blowback. Besides, another problem was addressed more frequently: the tensions between certain groups in the region and their effect on the OIR. In that regard, the tension between Turkey and the (Kurdish-dominated) SDF was greatly discussed. Possible escalations of this tension were perceived as a risk for the OIR.[88] Concerning Raqqa, it was stated that the city would be liberated in 2017 by SDF forces. When discussing this, the cabinet stated that it is of utmost importance that shortly after the liberation of Raqqa the city's government should be representative of the population.[89] (No explicit reason is given for prioritising this issue. In the light of discussions about sectarian and ethnic tensions in Iraq, however, worries considering such tensions might be underlying the discussion of this issue.)

Concerning the framing of airstrikes, differences from the previous years become visible as well. As described in the previous chapter, in 2017 the Netherlands did not participate in the

---

[87] It was argued that, by destroying IS infrastructure in Syria, their capability to cause victims in Iraq is decreased. Besides, it is claimed that IS had lost forty percent of its territory in Iraq, partly due to the effectiveness of airstrikes. Thirdly it was argued that the airstrikes have further damaged IS's financial streams and fighting capacitates (Kamerstuk I, 2016/2017, 27 925, M; Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.(*b*))).

[88] Besides, more attention was paid to sectarian tensions in Iraq, especially with regard to the Kurdish Autonomous Region, but also with regard to tensions that might be brought about by the Western military presence in Iraq (Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 611; Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 616).

[89] "Het cabinet acht het van groot belang dat snel na de bevrijding van Raqqa de stad wordt bestuurd door een representatieve afspiegeling van de bevolking" (Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 608, p. 1).

airstrikes directly but did so in bi-lateral cooperation with Belgium. This change was reflected by the emphasis on the cooperation with Belgium when discussing airpower in the *kamerstukken*.[90] In line with the previous years, the international cooperative nature of the OIR was underlined; when the specific Dutch contributions were discussed, it was frequently highlighted how these contributions answered the coalition's needs. Again, the overall effectiveness of the airstrikes was reiterated.[91]

In the second half of 2017, the governments decided to prolong the Dutch contribution to the anti-IS coalition and to again contribute Dutch F-16's in 2018. When presenting this decision, again the precise nature of the Dutch air weapons was highlighted by which, it was repeatedly argued, the Netherlands meet the coalition's needs: as precision is what makes the Dutch fighting aircrafts especially suitable to fight IS in urban areas. In general, the increasingly urban nature of the fight against IS was discussed in 2017, marking how precision weapons make it possible to act in these areas while circumventing extensive collateral damage. When discussing the prolonging of the Dutch contribution to the coalition, the efforts to respect the international humanitarian law were again emphasised, as well as the accurate nature of the targeting process.

Interestingly, in June 2017, the DG for the first time acknowledged that the coalition was responsible for at least 352 civilian casualties since the start of the operation in September 2014. When discussing this, it was noted that this happened despite all the preventive measures taken.

5.2 The effectiveness of the coalition strikes

As set out above, airstrikes were portrayed as effective in defeating and eliminating IS. Besides they are portrayed as precise and bringing little harm to the population. The current airpower doctrine (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014), and remarks by members of the NDA[92] might give insight into why airstrikes are understood as such an important and effective means to fight and, in the end, defeat IS. According to members of the NDA, the use of airpower has certain benefits which might render certain negative effects acceptable.[93]

---

[90] Besides, the train and assist activities to which the Netherlands were contributing in 2017, were discussed more than in the previous years.

[91] It was argued that the IS continued ability to wage war was damaged, and that large parts of IS' territory in Syria was liberated (Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 607).

[92] The NDA is responsible for the military education of the Dutch Military. Besides, it engages in academic research. A part of the NDA, the Faculty of Military Science, supports the Dutch Military with academic research (Ministerie van Defensie, n.d.(*a*)).

[93] Author's interview with member 1 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with member 3 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.

Firstly, there are the strategic, tactical and operational benefits inherent to airpower. Airpower is characterised by *height,[94] speed,*[95] and *range.*[96] A combination of factors that makes *ubiquity* possible and increases *flexibility* (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014).[97] Airpower enables the collection of information, and to shadow a group for a long time, thereby making sure that one hits the right target (accuracy). The technological advantages, it is argued, provide the means to do all that with a minimum risk of causing collateral damage.[98] Another member from the NDA argues that airstrikes might be even more precise than operating with ground troops.[99]

In line with Waldman's (2017) observations about danger-proofing, it is argued that one can achieve these things from a position of certain invulnerability. Most members of the NDA confirm that the position of invulnerability does play a role in choosing the use of airpower. They, however, deny that considerations concerning the invulnerability of their own military staff play a very big, let alone a decisive role in making that choice. Interestingly the Dutch Defence Ministry seems to have a different take on this matter: when asked about the role that considerations about their own military staff play in giving airstrikes a prominent place in the military strategy to fight IS, a member of the Dutch Defence Ministry argued: "the security of Dutch soldiers always comes first."[100]

Secondly, there are specific benefits of airpower in the fight against IS: in a chaotic and unpredictable situation such as the fight against IS, where there are many actors on the ground, the West has limited alternatives unless one wants to send large-scale ground troops in what is called a 'wasp's nest.'[101]

Thirdly, empirical research on the actual beneficial effects of airpower was cited to highlight the benefits of airpower: one impacts IS' activity directly as fighters become afraid to move during the day.[102] In line with research done by Jordan (2014), one member of the NDA argues that the lethality of a group gets diminished by regular attacks on its military capacities.[103]

---

[94] Height increases oversight for and protection to the military personnel (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014).
[95] Speed decreases reaction time and the capacity to tune in on changing situations, as well as protection to the military personnel (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014).
[96] Range makes the reach global, and allows overcoming geographical limitation (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2014).
[97] Author's interview with member 1 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.
[98] Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.
[99] Author's interview with member 5 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.
[100] This quote stems from an email conversation with the Dutch Defence Ministry on the 19th of April 201. (The quote in original language: "De veiligheid van Nederlandse militairen staat altijd voorop.")
[101] Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.
[102] Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.
[103] Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.

5.3 Blowback, secrecy, and civilian harm

When discussing the coalition strikes, the DG also mentions possible negative consequences. Despite them not having a prominent place in the DG's framing, it is important to take a closer look at them in light of the blowback debate. Therefore, the last question to be addressed in this chapter, is whether these negative consequences (or the fear of them) are (understood as) instances of blowback?

The term 'blowback' is not mentioned in any of the *kamerstukken* that were analysed. When discussing this term with members of the NDA and with a pilot of the Dutch military, it was suggested that policy makers as well as military staff are aware of the danger of blowback effects and pay attention to them when planning and organising missions.

To start with, most respondents from the NDA understand blowback effects broadly:

> There is a blowback effect if the negative repercussions [created by military actions] form a greater concern than the concern that was initially addressed though eliminating the target of the attack.[104]

It should be noted that this definition of blowback is more narrow that the definition given in the academic literature. In addition to the definition of blowback given by various scholars (e.g. Johnson, 2000), the definition of blowback given here is limits the concept to situations in which the negative consequences of one's actions outweigh the positive ones. Also in another interview, blowback was defined broadly as the occurrence of negative effects on various levels, brought about by one's actions and deeds. Blowback could occur on the level of national political support, but also on a strategic and tactical level. As an illustration of the latter, the following example was given: one could attack an IS target but thereby lose a lot of intelligence. Thereby the negative consequences of the attack outweigh the strategic or tactical benefits.[105] In line with the discussion of blowback effects on a political level (see Hudson, Ownes, Callen, 2012; Hudson, Owens, Flannes, 2011; Waldman 2017), another member of the NDA argued that certain actions could damage the credibility of the Netherlands. As an example: if the Netherlands promotes human rights and at the same time is responsible for civilian casualties,

---

[104] Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018. The quote in original language: "Er is sprake van blowback effect als de ophef zodanig negatieve repercussies heeft dat die een groter belang vertegenwoordigen dan het belang van het doel dat je aanviel. Met andere woorden: het risico is veel groter dan het belang wat je daarmee uitschakelde."
[105] Author's interview with a pilot of the Dutch Military, 15 May 2018.

they might be depicted as hypocritical.[106] Most members of the NDA and the pilot who was interviewed agreed, however, that the danger of blowback should not be overemphasised.[107]

Despite the awareness of the danger of blowback, the general stance seems to be that the danger of blowback is known, can be countered in advance and therefore should not be overstated. Four examples can illustrate this: Firstly, as discussed in the *kamerstukken,* the Dutch participation in the anti-IS coalition led to a higher risk for terrorist attacks by FTFs. This threat was anticipated and there were investments in (e.g.) intelligence and international cooperation in order to counter this threat.

Secondly, in order to protect military personnel from e.g. direct revenge acts, certain information that could tie one person to a certain airstrike are not made public. The DG regularly argues that the release of information about ongoing operations must be limited in order to protect operational security.[108] What becomes clear in the *kamerstukken* (e.g. Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 611) and to some extent in the interviews as well, is that decisions on what information (not) to publish is connected, to some extent, to the fear of possible blowback.

Thirdly, in 2016, the possible effects that the Dutch participation in the anti-IS coalition might have on the Dutch population was discussed. On a political level unrest in the Netherlands was anticipated (Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 570).[109] In order to tackle this possible unrest measures were taken on a local level. For example, "transparent and focused communication on the nature of and motivation for the military operation"[110] (Kamerstuk II, 2016/16, 27 925, nr. 571, answer 246) in Syria was offered.

A fourth reason why blowback should not be overemphasised is given by two members of the NDA.[111] Concerning political blowback in term of reputational damage, both members point out that the local groups, which in this case is IS, have the monopoly on propaganda and

---

[106] Author's interview with member 1 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.

[107] Author's interview with member 1 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with member 3 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with a pilot of the Dutch Military, Breda, on 15 May 2018.

[108] Defined by the Defence Ministry as "information that, when ending up in the wrong hands, entail an (unacceptable) risk for (Dutch) soldiers, or that give away their mode of action" (quoted from an email conversation with the Dutch Defence Ministry). (The quote in original language: "Informatie die in de verkeerde handen een (onaanvaardbaar) risico met zich mee brengt voor (Nederlandse) militairen of die hun wijze van optreden verraadt.")

[109] The fear was expressed that more Dutch FTFs might be recruited by IS, that Dutch Muslims might react heavily to the Dutch participation in the airstrikes in Syria, and that the intensification of the fight from 2016 onwards might lead to public unrest (Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 570).

[110] The quote in original language: "transparante en gerichte communicatie over de aard van en motivatie voor de inzet."

[111] Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with member 3 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.

will exaggerate the occurrence of civilian casualties. This awareness is translated into attacks on the IS propaganda apparatus.[112] Airwars (2016a,b), which criticises the coalition in general and the DG in particular, for not being transparent with regard to civilian casualties, proposes another strategy in order to tackle IS propaganda. The organisation argued that intransparency with regard to civilian casualties created room for IS propaganda (Airwars, 2016a). It is important to note that the difference between civilian casualties reported by the military and those reported by the coalition increased the risk for reputational harm. Members of the NDA,[113] however, argue that within certain limits (think of operational security, but also of the limits of knowledge whether there have been civilian casualties)[114] the DG is transparent.[115]

Other possible blowback effects were discussed: in 2014 and 2015, the fear was expressed that fighting IS militarily might increase the support for IS and help its recruitment. These fears are in line with the warnings by Hudson, Ownes and Flannes (2011) and Waldman (2017), that increase in recruitment and support are possible direct consequences of airstrikes. The DG, however, invalidated these threats as military action progressed (e.g. Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 506; Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 527). The explanation underlying the danger of blowback in terms of increased recruitment is worth taking a closer look at. According to a member of the NDA, IS' use of the coalition airstrikes in order to recruit is not unusual as they have the monopoly on propaganda material.[116] The link between airstrikes and increased recruitment is sought in IS' propaganda. This explanation differs from the mechanisms identified by underlying this kind of blowback by Hudson, Owens, and Flannes (2011). The scholars argue, in line with Kilcullen, that recruitment is preceded by radicalisation due to the rejection of external forces.

---

[112] Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018
[113] Author's interview with member 1 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.
[114] Author's interview with member 5 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.
[115] The question whether the DG is transparent or not, is not directly addressed in this thesis. Remarks on this matter are limited to this footnote. The following argument by a member of the NDA is interesting in the light of the criticism of the DG's intransparency: that member of the NDA questions towards whom transparency is required as the local population notices themselves that the coalition airstrikes are accurate. (Author's interview with member 3 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.) Members of the NDA defend themselves and the DG against the accusation of not being transparent. It is noted that, within certain limits, the DG and especially the Dutch Military, are transparent organisations (Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018). Another member (Author's interview with member 1 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018), however, notes that "the Netherlands seem to prefer not to publish anything about possible collateral damage if they are not entirely sure. In that, the Netherlands might be bit more reticent." (The quote in original language: "Nederland lijkt liever niets bekend te maken over mogelijke nevenschade als het niet helemaal zeker is. Nederland is daarin eventueel wat terughoudender.") To that he adds: "The urge to know everything has to be assessed critically. Up to which detail would you like to know? Are there civilian causalities? Yes, there are civilian casualties." (The quote in original language: "Er moeten kanttekeningen geplaatst worden bij de drang om alles te willen weten. Tot welk detail wil je het weten? Vallen er burgerslachtoffers? Ja, er vallen burgerslachtoffers.")
[116] Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.

In 2014, the DG pointed out that the air campaign might lead IS to increasingly using irregular tactics which includes hiding amongst the population. As the DG admitted later, that indeed happened (e.g. Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 571). This is in line with Waldman's (2017) argument that one enemy tactic might be "to raise the political cost of their [i.e. airstrikes] use for Western operators: for instance, by using human shield and moving among civilian populations" (p. 15). When discussing these threats, the DG argued that the combination of intelligence and precision weapons would enable the coalition to cope with irregular tactics and minimise the chances of collateral damage, especially in urban settings (Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015, 27925, E; Kamerstuk II, 27 925, nr. 612).

In 2015, and especially in 2016, the negative effect airstrikes might have had on civilians was discussed. This is interesting in the context of the debate about the (in)efficiency of airstrikes: as Hudson, Owens and Flannes (2011) and Waldman (2017) have argued, civilian casualties might enhance recruitment and thereby limit the strategic effectiveness of airstrikes. When discussing civilian casualties, the government highlighted the measures taken in order to prevent collateral damage, such as the use of precision weapons, using an extensive collection of intelligence in order to judge the risk of civilian casualties, but also the targeting process, which the DG described as 'careful' and 'accurate.'[117] At the same time, however, the DG admits that it is difficult to assess whether civilian casualties have occurred because it is difficult to do a battle damage assessment on the ground. This is confirmed by a member of the NDA who was working within the context of the coalition.[118] The DG, argues, however, that all claims about possible civilian casualties are taken seriously. Furthermore, they argue that the Syrian government and its allies are responsible for most civilian casualties. Additionally, the DG argues that the shift from AI to CAS missions did not increase (the dangers of) civilian casualties. Moreover, the question whether airstrikes are causing an increase in refugees, is asked: again the government emphasised that negative effects on the population should be circumvented as much as possible.

Civilian casualties are not discussed in relation to possible blowback. A possible reason for this is given by a Dutch soldier who participated in the anti-IS coalition. He argues that the context of the most recent blowback debate in e.g. Afghanistan is different from the

---

[117] The central position of the targeting procedure in the DG's description of how civilian casualties are avoided, is interesting in the light of Adey et al.'s (2011) discussion of the aerial gaze. Referring to Gregory's (2010, 2011, in Adey et al., 2011) analysis of the kill-chain (which consists of find, fix, track, target, engage and assess), the authors argue that in the targeting procedure several processes of calculation and abstraction "build and assemble an *object*, which has been performed through these processes" (p. 176). These calculations and abstractions are understood as a form of violence themselves, and are taken for granted in the further process of targeting.
[118] Author's interview with member 5 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.

context of the fight against IS. The war in Afghanistan, he argued, was a COIN war in which winning the hearts and minds of the population was of central importance. The fight against IS, however,

> is more easy in this regard because the whole world agrees that IS are horrible people and a horrible group. And then everybody thinks: something has to be done about them, IS has to be fought militarily. Therefore, we do not have to win the hearts and minds of the population. We can, of course, lose them.[119]

This remark suggests that the coalition's strategy can be understood in the light of a CT paradigm as outlined in the introduction.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

The question addressed in this chapter was: *How does the DG frame the United States-led anti-ISIL coalition strikes in Syria?* As argued above, the DG's framing of airstrikes is part of its prognostic framing. The framing of airstrikes must be understood in the light of the broader consensus mobilisation by the DG. The DG diagnosed two main problematic situations in Syria: the existence of IS and the connected problems the group is held responsible for (the (inter)national terrorist threat, regional instability, refugee streams, the worrisome humanitarian situation); the internal Syrian conflict. These two sets of problems are connected in that the Syrian civil war fertilised the ground for the coming about of IS. As prognostic and diagnostic framing are interdependent (Benford & Snow, 2000), the prognosis for these two sets of problems differ: for IS a military solution is presented,[120] for the internal Syrian conflict the solution should be political.[121] The existence of IS, however, is seen as hindering the realisation of a political solution for the civil war. In order to solve both sets of problems, IS must be defeated militarily, and airstrikes were framed as a strategy to bring about that solution. They were portrayed as effective in defeating and eliminating IS. By this, it is argued, a destabilising factor in the region is eliminated, the population is helped, and (inter)national security is improved. This positive view of airstrikes which underlines their effectiveness can be understood in the light of the benefits attributed to airpower.

---

[119] Author's interview with a pilot of the Dutch Military, Breda, on 15 May 2018. The quote in original language: "Deze oorlog is wat dat betreft makkelijker omdat de hele wereld inziet dat IS vreselijke mensen zijn en een vreselijke stroming. En dat iedereen denkt: daar moet iets aan gedaan worden en er moet militair opgetreden worden tegen IS."

[120] To remind the reader: the military solution should improve national and international security, protect the population, and set the stage for a political solution to the Syrian conflict.

[121] The political solution is envisioned as a political transition in Syria that should help to stabilise the region.

Most aspects of the DG's efforts in consensus mobilisation remained more or less unchanged between 2014 and 2017. There were only minor changes with regard to the DG's prognostic and diagnostic framing (e.g. with regard to the framing of the political situation in Syria, or to the military strategy).

The question of blowback, which is closely connected to the question of the effectiveness of airstrikes, was implicitly addressed in the *kamerstukken* and explicitly discussed in the interview. Drawing on both data-sets, it can be concluded that there is ample awareness and understanding of the danger of blowback. The general stance, however, seems to be that blowback effects can be anticipated and therefore prevented. The possible connection between civilian casualties and the danger of blowback is not discussed, probably because airstrikes are understood to be very precise and the fight against IS is not understood as a COIN mission.

6. THE CIVILIAN PERSPECTIVE: UNDERSTANDING THE RESONANCE OF THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT'S FRAME

"The media coverage, the public opinion all conveys the feeling that it is still justified. It justifies violence for a good reason. In every war there are victim, this is how that is. If you don't lose a son or daughter in this conflict… If these airstrikes were face to face fights and if you lose … if many Dutch start losing family members. Or when soldiers are going there and there are casualties, like in Vietnam. But here you are in the air, you do your attack, and you are leaving."[122]

In this chapter, the following question is addressed: *Does the DG's frame of coalition strikes resonate with SRNs?* As argued in the methodology section, a frame is understood as the sum of its constituent parts. In line with that, the frame resonance of the DG's frame is constituted by the resonance of its constituent parts. As this research focussed on consensus mobilisation, in the following the resonance of the DG's diagnostic and prognostic framing is analysed. The analysis in this chapter is based on interviews with SRNs.

6.1 Frame resonance

Frame resonance is defined as the degree to which "some framings seem to be effective or 'resonate' while other do not" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 619). Variations in the degree of frame resonance can be accounted for by the *credibility* of a frame and by its *salience*.

The (1) *credibility* of a frame is described as "a function of three factors: frame consistency, empirical credibility, and the credibility of the frame articulators or claim makers" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 619). *Frame consistency* denotes "the congruence between (…) articulated beliefs, claims, and actions" (p. 620). In other words, it points to the development and interconnection of the three core framing tasks are (Snow & Benford, 1988). *Empirical credibility* describes "the apparent fit between the framings and events in the world" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 620). Lastly, the *frame articulator's credibility* denotes the fact that the "status and/or perceived expertise of the frame articulator and/or the organisation they represent" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 621) influences the plausibility and resonance of certain frames.

A frame's (2) *salience* consists of three factors as well: centrality, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity. The *centrality* of frames denotes on the one hand,

---

[122] Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.

"how essential the beliefs, values, and ideas associated with movement frames are to the lives of the targets of mobilization" (p. 621). On the other hand, it denotes the salience of promoted values and beliefs within a larger belief system. Connected to this, a frame's resonance depends on the range and interrelatedness of its values and beliefs, i.e. on the range of values and beliefs it promotes and to their interconnection (Snow & Benford, 1988).[123] The *experiential commensurability* points to the extent to which a certain frame is "congruent or resonant with the personal, everyday experiences of the targets of mobilization" (p. 621). Lastly, *narrative fidelity* is defined as the extent to which "the framing strikes a responsive chord that rings true with existing cultural narrations that are functionally similar to what Gouldner (1970) calls 'domain assumption'" (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 212). The term 'domain assumptions' originally is derived from sociology. It means the assumptions that drive the thinking and reasoning within a specific social theory (e.g. whether humans are rational or irrational) (Gouldner, 1970). In line with this, cultural narrations are understood as implicit assumptions held by members of the frame audience that provide the grounds for accepting or rejecting a specific frame. Such implicit and encompassing assumptions might be understood in line with what Tanner (2014) calls meta-narrative: "an all-encompassing umbrella story about a certain phenomenon, a period in history, a region or the world as a whole" (p. 90).

6.2 Introduction of respondents

In total, nine interviews were conducted with eleven SRNs.[124] The data gathered in these interviews is presented and analysed in this and the next chapter. In order to properly understand the (personal) accounts discussed below, some background information is given about the respondents. The first interview was conducted with Adnan who originally comes from Deir Ez-Zor; parts of his family still live there. At the beginning of the revolution, he studied in Aleppo where he became an activist against the Syrian regime. He did not experience the coalition strikes himself but has heard stories of family and friends who live(d) in the areas bombed by the coalition. The second interviewee, Sayid, comes from Raqqa. He worked for a humanitarian organisation that was active in and around Raqqa when the city was hit by airstrikes of several parties (Russia, the Syrian government, and the Coalition). He himself

---

[123] This aspect might need more clarification: If a frame does not resonate, the promoted core value might have a too limited range which indicates that it is insufficiently central in the larger belief system. To extend the framework in order to include more central values, however, might overextend the frame (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 206).

[124] The interviews lasted between one and two hours, and were conducted at places familiar to and chosen by the respondents. In order to anonymise the respondents, their names were changed and no information was given by which they could be identified. In what follows, the sources of information are only indicated by referring to the respondents' names. In the appendix, one can find an overview of all the interviews that have been conducted.

experienced those strikes. Additionally, he still has family living in regions where the coalition is active. The third interviewee was Rifat who comes from Aleppo where he studied and worked, like Sayid, with a humanitarian organisation. He experienced the coalition airstrikes himself. The fourth interview was conducted with Nizar and Tarek, two men from Raqqa who were and are activists concerned about the violation against civilians by all parties in the Syrian conflict. Both lived and worked in Raqqa, both experienced the coalition strikes. Because of their activism they can recount stories of fellow Syrians who experiences the coalition airstrikes. The fifth interview was conducted with Aisha, who is married to Rifat. She comes from Deir Ez-Zor and left Syria via Aleppo. Personally, she did not experience the airstrikes by the coalition. Her family, however, has experienced these airstrikes in Deir Ez-Zor. The sixth respondent, Sami, comes from Aleppo where he worked in the health-care sector. Even though he lived in Aleppo at the time of the coalition bombings, he is not sure whether he experienced strikes by the coalition while several parties were bombing at the same time. Hayyan, the seventh respondent, is a man from a small town in the North-East of Syria. He did not experience the coalition strikes, but the area he comes from, and where his family is still living, was targeted by the coalition. Before leaving Syria he worked in the humanitarian sector. The eighth interview was conducted with Rasha and Yamen, a couple from Raqqa. Both experienced the coalition strikes. Their families still live in Raqqa. Rasha worked as a university teacher before leaving Syria; Yamen as a lawyer. Aya, the last interviewee, comes from Tabqa, a town close to Raqqa. She did not experience the coalition strikes, but parts of her family members that stayed in that area have.

6.3 Does the Dutch Government's framing of the coalition strike resonate with SRNs?

To recapitulate: The coalition airstrikes form a crucial part of the DG's prognostic framing. It has been argued that prognostic and diagnostic framing are connected, and together constitute consensus mobilisation. Therefore, in addition to the DG's prognostic framing, diagnostic framing was discussed. As frame resonance is constituted by the resonance of its constituent parts, as prognostic *and* diagnostic framing form part of consensus mobilisations, and as prognostic framing is closely connected diagnostic framing, in this chapter the resonance of the DG's prognostic and diagnostic framing is analysed.

The DG portrayed IS as the main problem of the region[125] and as both international and national security threats. It framed the coalition strikes as directed *only* against IS (therefore

---

[125] To remind the reader: IS was framed as a regional problem because of being responsible for large for violations of international law and terrorising the civilian population, by which they caused large streams of refugees, and

the coalition seemingly refrained from interfering with the Syrian civil war), as precise, as helping the DG's goal to protect the civilian population, and as effective in defeating IS. Also, it framed the airstrikes as an important aspect of an over-all, long-term strategy to stabilise the region.

A. Credibility

In order to determine the credibility of the Dutch frame, three questions must be answered: (1) *Is the DG as frame articulator credible* (actor credibility)? (2) *According to SRNs, is there congruence between the articulated beliefs and claims of the DG and its actions* (consistency)? (3) *According to the experiences of SNRs, is there an apparent fit between the DG's framing and events in the world* (empirical credibility)?

(1) *Is the Dutch government as frame articulator credible?*

When discussing the resonance of the DG's frame, it has to be pointed out that most respondents do not mention the actions of the DG separately. They talked about the actions of the coalition, even when asked specifically about the DG. The reason for this seems to be that, from a ground perspective, it is difficult to distinguish between the action of different members of the coalition (as Rifat pointed out). The United States is the only country which was regularly referred to. When asked about how the respondents know that the United States is responsible for certain actions, they clarified that they do not know. The United States was seen as representative of and responsible for the coalition rather than actually recognised by the respondents.

No matter whether the respondents talked about the United States specifically or the coalition generally, both actors were perceived in more or less the same manner: as hypocrites, persecuting their own interests while officially claiming they want to promote human rights and democracy, and wanting to help the Syrian population. This point is elaborated upon in the following section.

(2) *According to SRNs, is there congruence between the articulated beliefs and claims of the Dutch government and its actions?*

The recurring theme, termed 'Western Hypocrisy,' points to a perceived inconsistency between the coalition member's articulated beliefs, claims, and their actions. When reflecting on one

---

horrific humanitarian situations. It was framed as an (inter)national security threat by destabilising the region, conducting terrorist attacks worldwide and recruiting FTFs that pose a terrorist threat for the wider region.

goal of the coalition – to help local people – Rifat argued that there is a difference between official and unofficial reasons for fighting IS:

> It is not for saving lives of people on the ground. That is only the discourse, the narrative. The reason is purely national interest. What happens in France and Germany, these were the triggering events. And also because of the influx of refugees and potential IS fighters. (…) So the aim was to close the borders and to kill these guys there to prevent them to come to their [the members of the the coalition] countries and pose a threat.[126]

Also the claim that the coalition wants to fight terrorists was contested. Rifat, Hayyan and Sayid expressed their suspicions towards the official motives and goals of the coalition by referring to a deal that was struck between IS and the SDF when Raqqa was liberated.[127] The fact that a deal was struck, was understood as a proof that fighting terrorists cannot be the real goal of the coalition. Sayid described that incident as follows:

> There was a deal between IS and the Kurds and of course the Americans. To flee the city and act like they are fighting and how, how… Because it is not logical: if they just entered the city and Trump or Obama they were claiming that they are fighting the terrorists which is not true [deep sigh]. Yes. So they had to do something, destroy something, like it was a huge battle against IS and the city, completely destroyed because they were 'fighting' them, and in fact nothing! Only civilians! Nobody arrested! Where were the commanders? The highest people from IS? Where are they?[128]

Sayid even claimed that the coalition destroyed Raqqa to stage a fight in order to make the official reason, to fight terrorists, credible. Also Aya and Sami suspected the countries participating in the coalition to persecute other goals than the ones officially stated.[129] According to Sami, "also concerning Syria, they say they want to help. But they don't do anything. I cannot believe that NATO, United States, Russia, that all those countries cannot defeat one group." When asked about what he thinks are the real motives of the members of the coalition, he responded: "Oil. We have much and they need it."[130] Rasha and her husband Yamen also presented a similar argument.[131]

---

[126] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018.
[127] Author's interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018; Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018; Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.
[128] Author's interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018.
[129] Author's interview with Sami, a SRN from Aleppo, Amsterdam, on 28 May 2018; Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.
[130] Author's interview with Sami, a SRN from Aleppo, Amsterdam, on 28 May 2018.
[131] Author's interview with Rasha and Yamen, SRNs (a couple) from Raqqa, Zaandam, on 9 June 2018.

Most respondents thus did not seem convinced by the sincerity of the DG's diagnostic framing of IS as the biggest problem for the region, on the basis of which the argument to help the Syrian population is built. Rather they suspected that national interests form(ed) the main motivation for intervening in Syria. Interestingly, even the framing of IS as terrorist threat did not resonate for all respondents: as shown above, several times, other interests than security interests are assumed by SRNs.

Besides, the accounts of a change in the coalition strikes contest the DG's framing. Eight respondents told that the coalition shifted from targeting more or less empty cities such as Kobani and non-urban areas in which IS was active, to increasingly targeting urban areas, like Raqqa.[132] This shift in targeting, according to the respondents, paralleled a shift in the coalition's attitude towards civilians: the coalition seemed to care less about civilian casualties as the fight against IS evolved. As Hayyan explained:

> Some time the spokesperson of the coalition said that in 2013/2014 they only had thirty casualties which is very little. But these cities [e.g. Kobani] were empty! If you bomb a city with only fighters in it, yes you mess up the infrastructure but not the civilians. And then they moved to Mosul City and to Raqqa City. Raqqa had 100 000 people as refugees, IDP's [internally displaced people].[133]

Thus the claim to help civilians, was not perceived as being consistent with the actual actions (especially the airstrikes) by the coalition. As elaborated upon below, especially the coalition's decision not to fight Assad, was perceived as a proof that the coalition's actions were inconsistent with their claim that they want to help the Syrian population.

The claim that the coalition did not interfere in the Syrian civil war, was also not convincing to most respondents: many saw the coalition's support for the Kurdish forces as directly influencing the Syrian conflict. Some even called it demographic engineering, or called Raqqa, which the DG called "liberated," as "occupied" by the Kurdish forces. Tarek, for example, explained the following: "The problem was: who is going to liberate Raqqa? The militias who the United States is supporting. This was a mistake because people in Raqqa didn't like another militia group coming to control the city."[134] He continued to explain that IS expelled many Kurds from Kurdish regions, therefore the local Sunni population is afraid of revenge. The fear of ethnic tensions due to the support of the coalition to mainly Kurdish forces was shared by six respondents.[135]

---

[132] Also Mosul is often referred in this context.

[133] Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.

[134] Author's interview with Nizar and Tarek, two SRNs from Raqqa, Utrecht, on 16 May 2018.

[135] Author's interview with Adnan, a SRN from Deir Ez-Zor, Utrecht, on 17 April 2018; Author's interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018; Author's interview with Nizar and Tarek, two SRNs from

(3) According to the experiences of SNRs, is there an apparent fit between the Dutch government's framing and events in the world?

Experiences of SRNs challenged the DG's diagnostic framing: even though IS was seen as problematic, the Syrian regime was perceived as a bigger problem. Adnan, for example, told the story of some family members who joined IS in order to continue fighting the Syrian regime. One of his relatives defended this choice by telling that at least IS did not hurt the local population as much as the regime did.[136]

The DG's prognostic framing seemed partly credible: for some respondents, the coalition's claim that their airstrikes were precise did resonate. Sayid, for example, told that when the coalition bombed, one at least knew where the bomb would hit the ground. The regime, on the other hand, "just threw barrel-bombs and it's like the wind can change the direction (…). You are in the street, walking in the street and a barrel-bomb is coming. But you don't know what way, this way or go back or… because of the wind."[137] However, even though the bombings were perceived as precise, many civilians died because the coalition targeted urban areas. Rifat addressed this as follows:

> With every target you have civilians. And this was the most important thing. These missiles do not differentiate between civilians and military people. And even with the coalition. Yesterday the British government admitted that they had killed one civilian. It was really an event. For the first time? Come on! This is ridiculous. The coalition has been in that place for four years and now you say you have killed one civilian? It's contradicting the reality on the ground. The thing with the Syrian conflict, it is an urban conflict.[138]

So the claim that the coalition cares about civilians was not a credible claim for most respondents, and this lack of credibility was again connected to the lack of actor credibility.

As recounts of specific events show, there was a discrepancy of how the DG framed the coalition airstrikes and how the interviewees perceived them. In general, the airstrikes were seen as part of the problem rather than as a solution. They were described as causing a lot of extra suffering and grievances.

Also, the DG's framing of the airstrikes as effective did not resonate with many respondents. Airstrikes, for example, were seen as helping IS recruitment as Adnan's story

---

from Raqqa, Utrecht, on 16 May 2018; Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018; Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.
[136] Author's interview with Adnan, a SRN from Deir Ez-Zor, Utrecht, on 17 April 2018.
[137] Author's interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018.
[138] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018.

referred to above illustrates.[139] Additionally, Rifat thought that airstrikes lead to more extremism, comparing the Syrian situation to the situation of Iraq and the rise of IS there. When talking about the lasting effects of the coalition strikes, he explained that such experiences create grievances that

> will accumulate in people who have experiences these strikes and who at time didn't have the agency to react directly because they are in a weak position. But no one can see inside them how grievances are accumulated. So grievances will be accumulated and are waiting for a key event to be triggered again.[140]

B. Salience

In order to determinate the salience of the DG's frame of the airstrikes, again three questions have to be answered: (1) *Are the beliefs, values and ideas associated with the DG's frame essential to the lives of SRNs* (centrality)*? (2) Is the DG's frame congruent and resonant with the personal, everyday experience of SRNs* (experiential commensurability)*? (3) Does the DG's frame possess narrative fidelity for SRNs?*

(1) Are the beliefs, values and ideas associated with the Dutch government's frame essential to the lives of SRNs?

The DG claimed that it wanted to protect and help the civilian population in Syria. The protection of the civilian population, and the values underlying this aim, were seen as very important by all respondents. As elaborated upon above, however, these claims by the DG were seen as hypocritical. National interests – such as access to oil,[141] gaining more power, giving a boost to the weapon industry,[142] or getting rid of extremists who became FTFs[143] – were perceived as the real objectives of the coalition. All respondents in some way or another argued that the coalition does not care about the civilian population. Hayyan and Rifat even spoke of a 'devilisation' of the population living under IS.[144] According to them, this counted for Syrians living under IS rule, but also for nationals of other countries who went to live and fight with IS. Commenting upon a TV-show with the title "*Op Zoek naar de Kinderen van IS*," Hayyan said the following:

---

[139] Author's interview with Adnan, a SRN from Deir Ez-Zor, Utrecht, on 17 April 2018.
[140] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018.
[141] Author's interview with Sami, a SRN from Aleppo, Amsterdam, on 28 May 2018
[142] Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.
[143] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018.
[144] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018; Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.

> Looking for ISIS children! You cannot say ISIS victim… This child is a victim! Of his parents, of this conflict! The media coverage, the public opinion… It all gives the feeling that this is still justified! It justifies violence for a good reason.[145]

Furthermore, the DG claimed that one reason for fighting IS is to prevent human rights violations. Many respondents were aware of this claim. Most supported human right and the values supporting them. Again, however, human rights and the values supporting them were perceived as cover-ups for other (national and selfish) interests.

Moreover, the claim to be working for a political solution for the conflict by means of a political transition (towards an inclusive and democratic government that is supported by civil society), and the values underlying this goal (i.e. democracy), seemed very important to many respondents. Especially those who were or still are activists fighting for the same goals, and those who were humanitarian workers, trying to help civilians, were explicit about that. Again, however, because most respondents did not see the coalition taking action to reach these goals – efforts to support the moderate opposition were called a 'joke' on several occasions – there was suspicion whether these values and goals are honest. Also the fact that the coalition did not directly fight Assad was seen as proof of the insincerity of these goals. Adnan told the following story in order to illustrate his own disappointment with the coalition and its' values:

> What [the jihadists] used to influence people is that they are talking about injustice. 'Look at the United States, and they are playing with us…' So people during the first 2 years they were seeing that the regime is killing more and more and no one was doing some and then they meet me [Adnan as an activist and humanitarian worker]. So they have the chance to meet two kinds of people. They meet me and I will tell them about freedom, democracy and this kind of things. And in our minds, even in me, it came from Europe or the West. And it's easy to see that the West is hypocrite. So that means that freedom blablabla they are all bullshit, and… and they would meet someone who is jihadist (…). Those people go to people and tell them: 'don't listen to that guy,' me, 'because he is traitor, and he is working for the West, the same West that now doesn't care about you. I am willing to sacrifice myself for you!' And they see that, really, they are fighting and they are sacrificing themselves for those people. 'I am the one who can help you!' And day by day, when Assad was bombing more and more and more so… they influenced more people. This is how they get bigger. And we found ourselves, also because of the coalition, when the whole international community didn't do something against Bashar so… it was very hard to convince people with our ideas.[146]

With this story, Adnan not only illustrated why the DG's frame does not resonate with SRNs (nor, according to Adnan, with Syrians who are not in the Netherlands). This story also

---

[145] Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.
[146] Author's interview with Adnan, a SRN from Deir Ez-Zor, Utrecht, on 17 April 2018.

conveyed the claim that the coalition's lack of credibility (see the discussion on the frame's credibility above) and the shifting stance towards the values represented by it, helped jihadists such as IS.

Besides, the DG claimed to fight suppression and terror, and extremism. Underlying this aim seemed to lie the value of (personal and religious) freedom and security. Also these values were important to most interview partners. There were two recurrent arguments that challenge the sincerity of these values. Firstly, accounts of the deal between IS and the Kurdish forces who were supported by the coalition undermined the sincerity of these values: three respondents expressed their bewilderment about the fact that IS was allowed to leave Raqqa unharmed, with the knowledge of the coalition. As Rifat said: "If you are claiming you are fighting terrorism, to eliminate this group, and you are making a deal with them (…). That raises questions."[147] Sayid and Hayyan expressed the same argument: had the coalition been sincere about their wish to fight terrorism, such a deal hadn't been made.[148] Secondly, the fact that the international community and the coalition let many extremists come to Syria and failed to fight IS when it was still a small group, was seen as proof of the insincerity and hypocrisy of the coalition by many respondents.[149]

In summary it can be said that the coalition refers to values and ideas that in principle were essential to the lives of the respondents. As described above, however, the coalition and the contributing countries were not perceived as credible and sincere. There was a lot of distrust whether the above-described values are actually held by the members of the coalition, or whether they were just used to cover up real objectives.

(2) Is the Dutch government's frame congruent and resonant with the personal, everyday experience of SRNs?

In the course the interviews, respondents frequently illustrated their claims by narrating experiences.[150] As these stories recount experiences, they can be used to assess the experiential commensurability of the DG's frame.

---

[147] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018.

[148] Author's interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018; Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.

[149] Author's interview with Rasha and Yamen, SRNs (a couple) from Raqqa, Zaandam, on 9 June 2018; Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018; Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.

[150] In the next chapter, the definition and understanding of narrative will be elaborated upon.

As these stories show, the DG's frame seems not to be congruent with the personal, everyday experiences of SRN. This was visible in the personal narratives, as well as in the narratives of friends and families which the respondents retold.

These narratives point to a lack of resonance of diagnosing IS as the biggest problem in Syria: most narratives about suffering, displacement, and human rights violations/violations of international law concerned the Syrian regime as well as the coalition. Yamen, for example, recounted how he was arrested and tortured by the Syrian regime twice, thereby emphasising that the Syrian regime is a much bigger problem than IS.[151] Aya, Sami, and Sayid told stories about how the Syrian regime targeted its own people on a large scale.[152]

All respondents told narratives about civilian casualties due to the coalition strikes. This challenges the DG's framing of airstrikes as precise and therefore hardly harmful for civilians. As Rifat declared, the coalition was targeting

> a very strategic crossroad that connects Aleppo to the Northern countryside. They targeted it one time and then when people came… It was 400 meters from the hospital, and when people were gathering and trying to help out the second attack happened. (…) And unfortunately most of the casualties were civilians, especially the second time.[153]

Sayid retold his father's experiences of the liberation of Raqqa:

> More than a hundred raids on the city, like Raqqa city. It's small, I think the same size as Amsterdam. But can you imagine a hundred of raids? Every single day? (…) And you know that there were like more than 200 000 people there who couldn't leave, who couldn't flee? People! (…) Until today there are still people… under the rubbles.[154]

Interestingly, as Sayid continued to point out that the coalition strikes indeed were precise initially. At one point, however, the coalition seemed to stop caring about casualties.

Furthermore, narratives about the civilian casualties caused by the coalition, three respondents told stories about how the coalition strikes forced their families to leave their

---

[151] Author's interview with Rasha and Yamen, SRNs (a couple) from Raqqa, Zaandam, on 9 June 2018.
[152] Author's interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018; Author's interview with Sami, a SRN from Aleppo, Amsterdam, on 28 May 2018; Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.
[153] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018.
[154] Author's interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018.

homes.[155] These stories of displacement also show that the Dutch framing of the airstrikes (as avoiding civilian harm) did not resonate with the respondents.

Narratives about people who joined IS because other groups who are supported by the coalition were not allowed to fight against the Syrian regime also show that the DG's frame lacks empirical congruence. Adnan, for example, told a story of a young man who first fought with the FSA before joining IS.

> He became a fighter with FSA but then he became a fighter with ISIS because he still wanted to fight the regime and there is no way to fight against the regime if you fought against ISIS, you know. (…) [The coalition] wants to fight ISIS but we are not allowed to fight against the regime? So what is the difference? So this is also a big problem because for local people IS is a problem but the regime is a problem! So they are willing to fight against ISIS but they… were pushed because they were asked to fight only against ISIS, so… Here in the West the enemy is only ISIS even when they are talking about the government but when it comes to real action… so they only want people to fight ISIS. But the local people have two big enemies and when you ask them to fight only one, so they won't do that.[156]

A story told by Nizar illustrated a connected point, namely that IS used the fact that the coalition only bombed them and not the regime as recruitment tool: "After [an hour the bombing] stopped and ISIS went to the street and started to tell people: this is what we told you. Because you are Muslims, because we are fighting the regime, the coalition is targeting you, not only us, but you!"[157] Nizar explained that this argument grew more powerful over time as the population's grievances that were brought about by the coalition strikes aggravated.

Aya and Adnan told stories of family members who tried to avoid what they perceived as a 'Kurdish occupation.'[158] These stories show how the claim that the coalition does affect the Syrian civil war by influencing ethnic tensions is rooted in personal experiences. Besides, such stories show that the proposed solution, and the strategy of supporting mostly Kurdish forces to arrive at this solution, did not resonate with SRNs. The will be discussed in more detail when discussing the counter-prognostic framing in the next chapter.

(3) Does the Dutch government's frame possess narrative fidelity for SRNs?

---

[155] Author's interview with Adnan, a SRN from Deir Ez-Zor, Utrecht, on 17 April 2018; Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018; Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.

[156] Author's interview with Adnan, a SRN from Deir Ez-Zor, Utrecht, on 17 April 2018.

[157] Author's interview with Nizar and Tarek, two SRNs from Raqqa, Utrecht, on 16 May 2018.

[158] Author's interview with Adnan, a SRN from Deir Ez-Zor, Utrecht, on 17 April 2018; Author's airterview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.

It seems that many of the SRNs I interviewed implicitly held a metanarrative about the Middle East and its relation to the West. As Adnan explained, the coalition's engagement in Syria was perceived in relation to other Western interventions in the Middle East. For example, the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, were frequently referred to. Sayid voiced his suspicion of the official reasons of the coalition to intervene in Syria with reference to what the CIA had done in "Afghanistan, in Pakistan, in Iran, in general in the Middle East."[159] Also Adnan, Rifat, and Hayyan positioned their understanding of the situation and development in Syria in relation to broader developments in the Middle East, explicitly referring to past intervention in Afghanistan.[160] The underlying metanarrative (that is also reflected in the recurrent theme that I have termed 'Western Hypocrisy') seems to tell that the West is using the Middle East in order to realise its own interest.[161] This metanarrative was connected to, and therefore helps to account for, the lack of credibility of the DG as a framing actor (see above), the lack of consistency (see above), and the lack of centrality (see above).

6.4 Concluding Remarks

The question addressed in this chapter was: *Does the DG's frame of coalition strikes resonate with SRNs?* It can be concluded that the DG's framing in general, and of the coalition strikes specifically, does not resonate with SRNs. The credibility of the DG's framing was low because the DG as an actor was seen as not credible. Besides, the consistency of the DG's frame is low: SRN perceived an incongruence between the beliefs and claims of the DG, and its actions. Connected with the lack of credibility as a framing actor, SRNs perceived the DG, its claims and actions as hypocrite and insincere (especially with regard to the claim that the DG cares about the civilian population). Furthermore, the empirical credibility of the DG's frame was limited especially with regard to the diagnosis of the main problem (the framing of IS as the

---

[159] Author's interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018.

[160] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018; Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.

[161] When suggesting this, Adnan and Hayyan even pre-emptively state that this might sound like a conspiracy theory, which they do not believe in. (Author's interview with Adnan, a SRN from Deir Ez-Zor, Utrecht, on 17 April 2018; Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018). This reference to conspiracy theories is interesting in the light of Tanner's (2014) argument that "the more intense and violent the conflict, the likelier it is that people will fall victim to conspiracy theories. The middle East remains fertile ground for such stories" (p. 91). According to Tanner (2014), conspiracy theories are a version of conflict narratives that help to make a very complex reality conceivable. This is interesting in the context of the present research although I am not satisfied with Tanner's term 'conspiracy theory.' The term 'conspiracy theory' implies a normative judgement about the truth or falsity of a theory/narrative. In frame of narrative analysis such a judgement is not of interest. Instead, the aim is to understand and map the meaning certain individuals or groups give to a phenomenon. From a narrative perspective, it is interesting, however, that, in order to coherently make sense of what is happening, reality is interpreted until a hypothesis is found which helps to make sense of a certain situations/happenings.

main problem does not match the experiences of SRNs) and with regard to the prognostic framing (experiences of airstrikes do not match the claim that the strikes help to being about a solution for the region).

Concerning the salience of the DG's framing, a similar pattern becomes visible. With regard to the centrality of the DG's framing, several values and ideas of the DG were of central importance to SRNs. Connected to the frame articulator's credibility, and the low perceived consistency of the DG's frame, the ideas of human rights, the protection of the civilian population, and democracy were perceived as covering up 'real' selfish and national interest. Also the experiential commensurability of the DG's frame is low: again neither the DG's diagnostic nor prognostic framing matches SRNs' personal experiences.[162] Lastly, the DG's frame seems not to possess narrative fidelity. The meta-narrative implicit in the stories of SRNs again reflected the suspicion of the (Western) foreign actors intervening in the Middle East; selfish and national interests (again) played a central role in that narrative.

As it has become clear that the DG's frame does not resonate with SRNs the next chapter addresses the question of whether or not there exists counterframes and/or counternarratives that challenge the DG's frame.

---

[162] As mentioned above, interestingly the framing of the airstrikes as precise resonates to some extend. That, however, does not change the fact that the airstrikes are seen as not paying attention to civilians. This argument is interesting in the light of Chamayou's (2015) reasoning that "there is a crucial difference between hitting the target and only hitting the target" (p. 141).

7. COUNTERNARRATIVES AND COUNTERFRAMES

"If we keep these stories inside, who is going to hear our stories?"[163]

In this chapter, two sub-questions are answered: *How do SRNs* individually *attempt to rebut, undermine, or neutralise the framing of the DG? How do SRNs* collectively *attempt to rebut, undermine, or neutralise the framing of the DG?* The answer to these questions is derived from careful analysis of interviews with SRNs, and a member of a civil society organisation, called Layal. Before setting out to answer these questions, some theoretical remarks on narratives and counternarratives are needed.

7.1 Narratives and counternarratives

In order to make transparent how narratives were dealt with, two aspects need clarification. To start with, there is the question whether there needs to be an author in order for something to qualify as a narrative? This question is especially important when it comes to *interpreting* a narrative. To assume that there is an author in the sense that there is "a single creative sensibility [that] lies behind the narrative" (Abbott, 2008, p. 102), is to assume a narrative's wholeness. Such as stance is termed 'intentional reading.' There is, however, no consensus whether there needs to be an author in order for something to qualify as a narrative, nor does one need to assume an author in order to interpret a narrative (see Abbott, 2008, p. 103).

Secondly, there remains the question of the status and interpretation of narratives within narratives. Here, Abbott's (2008) concept of framing narrative is a helpful analytical tool. Framing narratives "work as a way of collecting together a multitude of quite different stories" (p. 28). The narratives within the framing narrative might be called *embedded narratives*.

Based on the discussion and the definition of narrative discussed in chapter 2, uninterrupted answers that contain events, temporal ordering and emplotment were understood as narratives. Often personal accounts were embedded in longer answers. Such personal accounts were treated as embedded narratives, and the uninterrupted answers as framing narratives. When interpreting the narratives, the implied author was taken as a starting point. The aim was to discover what he or she wanted to convey through the narrative(s). Assuming one author made it possible to interpret various uninterrupted answers by one respondent

---

[163] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018.

((framing) narratives) in relation to each other. Entire interviews, however, were *not* analysed as one narrative, but thematically (see the methodology section above).

Now the question of how to understand a counternarrative, must be addressed. According to Delgado (1989), counternarratives are "stories of out-groups [that] aim to subvert [the] in-group reality" (p. 2413). This definition is problematic: if one assumes an author, in this definition, the out-group would be the assumed author, telling collective stories with a specific *aim*, namely to subvert the in-group's reality. In chapter two, however, it has been argued that (when compared to counterframes) counternarratives are understood as individual, less strategic effort of creating and conveying meaning, based on personal stories and directed to emotional identification. Sticking to Delgado's definition of counternarratives seems to again blur the definition between counternarratives and counterframes. Fajer's (1992, in Olsen, 2014, p. 250) concept of 'persuasive storytelling' might be helpful in arriving at an adequate definition of counternarratives as clearly demarcated from counterframes. As paraphrased by Olsen (2014), persuasive storytelling "is a way of selectively crafting a story to forge a bond between the storyteller and listener by convincing the listener that she is like the subject of the story, based on their 'common ground in human experience', thus impacting her feelings about the subject, and ultimately, her decision-making" (p. 250).[164] Combining Fajer's definition of persuasive storytelling, Delgado's definition of counternarratives, and Benford's (1987, in Benford & Snow, 2000) definition of counterframes,[165] counternarratives are defined as *stories of members of an out-group with the objective to rebut, undermine or neutralise an in-group's version of reality. This is done by forging an emotional bond between the listener and the storyteller, based on their common ground in human experience.*

7.2 Shared lines in individual attempts to rebut, undermine, or neutralise the framing of the Dutch government

As stated above, this chapter analyses the individual contestation of the DG's frame via counternarratives, and the collective contestations via counterframes. Common patterns between single interviews that were developed by comparing different interviews, do not fit into the analytical lens of either counternarratives nor counterframes.[166] The broader thematic

---

[164] In Polletta's (1998) words: "Personal narratives are a way to discover and communicate that which is shared in individual experiences" (p. 425).

[165] To remind the reader: counterframes were defined as attempts "to rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person's or group's myth, version of reality, or interpretative framework" (Benford, 1987, in Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 626).

[166] To remind the reader: Thematic coding takes a single interview first, aiming to grasp the respondent's perspective on a phenomenon. Only after the respondent's individual perspective was distilled from the interviews, these perspectives were compared and broader thematic structures shared by the respondents appear.

structures do not qualify as a narrative because they lack a single author, nor are they a counterframe because there is not one authority who appears as a framing actor. Although these common patterns do not strictly fit into framing or narrative analysis, they are of interest here, especially with regard to the lack of collective counterframing despite the fact that many views were shared by the respondents.

Based on the analysis in the previous chapter, in what follows I discuss shared lines in how SRNs' individually contest of the DG's frame.[167] In order to do so, two questions must be answered: (1) *How do SRNs individually contest the diagnostic framing of the DG* (counter-attribution)*? (2) How do SRNs individually contest the prognostic framing of the DG* (counter-prognosis)*?*

(1) How do SRNs individually contest the diagnostic framing of the Dutch government?
According to SRNs, the biggest problem of Syria is the civil war for which the Syrian regime was blamed. IS was seen as problematic by all respondents but by far not considered the biggest problem (the Syrian regime is). The fact that many respondents contended that IS is actually, at least to some degree, a creation of Assad, illustrates the shared diagnosis of the respondents. As elaborated above, six respondents understood IS as being a creation of Assad, or at least as being somehow connected to the Syrian regime. Rasha and Yamen underpinned this claim by claiming that the Syrian government stopped bombing Raqqa as soon as IS held the city. Besides, they asserted that the Syrian regime was delivering weapons to IS.[168] Aya, on the other hand, argued that Assad created or at least supported IS so that people would appreciate the sense of security and stability they had under the rule of Assad.[169]

Following from this problem description and attribution, IS and the fight against it were not seen as disconnected from the Syrian civil war. On the contrary: first of all, IS, its action and success, were understood as closely connected to the actions of Assad and the coalition. Secondly, some respondents perceived the actions of the coalition as directly influencing the internal Syrian conflict. As has been described above, many argued that, by supporting military groups that consist of mostly Kurdish forces, ethnic tensions between Kurds and Arabs were amplified. Adnan and Layal argued that this will lengthen and complicate the

---

[167] Some parts of this chapter repeat what has been said in the next chapter. This, however, is necessary because the reasons why (parts of) the DG's frame does not resonate with SRNs often entailed a counter-attribution or a counter-prognosis. Empirical evidence is only cited directly if no evidence for a certain argument has been given in the previous chapter.

[168] Author's interview with Rasha and Yamen, SRNs (a couple) from Raqqa, Zaandam, on 9 June 2018.

[169] Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.

conflict significantly.[170] Others argued that refugees, who are mostly Arab-Sunni cannot return to Syria because all major Arab-Sunni cities are now under the control of either the regime or the Kurdish-led SDF.

Furthermore, as has been elaborated above, the coalition's actions were seen as problematic in the sense that they aid IS: by not supporting local forces in their fight against Assad, the coalition ergo helps IS recruitment.

More or less in line with the DG, the humanitarian situation in Syria was seen as a big problem, as well as the fact that so many people have fled Syria,[171] were displaced and lost everything. Aya told the following story about her niece:

> I have a niece who is like my sister, and she was living in a building that was from ISIS. It was the third time she moved and found herself in a building with all ISIS members. She said: 'Where can I go?? Where??' Of course she wanted to go somewhere else, to put her kids out of danger, in a safe place. And if they bombed ISIS buildings, my niece and her three kids are living there. But where can she go? She said: 'I need a lot of money.' She already sold everything before ISIS came.[172]

This story illustrates, on the one hand, the fact that people lost everything in the course of the conflict. On the other hand, this story illustrates the limited choice of the civilians in Syria. Many respondents told stories that aimed to convey sympathy for the population living under IS. Often this was done when criticising that the coalition 'devilises' the population which is connected to their perceived indifference towards civilian casualties in IS areas. Besides, Aya's story points to the often high costs to flee Syria, a problem which was pointed out by five respondents.[173] As Hayyan explained:

> many stayed because they are the poor of the poor. They didn't have money to leave. Do you know how much it costs per person? At the beginning it was free. Then it became ten, twelve Euro. When IS came Turkey started with the wall. Then it cost 200-300 dollar. That is … the average income of wage is 60 dollars a month. And the 300 for each individual. For a family you have to sell whatever you have. And many already sold their savings just to arrive to Raqqa, escaping from the

---

[170] Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.
[171] Interestingly, when talking about the problems faced by refugees, SRNs also point to the harsh situation many refugees face when they stay in countries in the region. Three respondents address this topic directly, highlighting the difficulties Syrian refugees face in Turkey. This is interesting as the DG discussed mostly the problematic situation of refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.
[172] Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.
[173] Author's interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018; Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018; Author's interview with Rasha and Yamen, SRNs (a couple) from Raqqa, Zaandam, on 9 June 2018; Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.

countryside. So many had no other chance or resources. I met a lot of them. They were completely traumatised.[174]

A little later he added: "Again I call it devilisation. They made them devils." Thus, contrary to the DG's frame, most respondents contended that the humanitarian situation is aggravated by the airstrikes of all parties. Coalition strikes were understood as killing civilians, displacing them, destroying homes and local infrastructure, and making humanitarian help more difficult. In general, the strikes were either depicted as not precise, or as being precise but not taking care of avoiding civilian casualties.

Lastly, the interventions by the international community were seen as problematic. This, again, to some extent corresponds to the DG's frame. The DG, however, only criticised the involvement of regional powers, especially the support by Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Syrian government. Many respondents, however, not only criticised the involvement of regional powers such as Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, but also of the coalition. Aya, for example, argued:

> What happened in Syria is not from inside Syria. It is from the outside. You can see that from who is involved: China, Iran, Russia, all the… the Netherlands… Lots of countries share with it. They say they bomb ISIS, but yeah, where is ISIS? They are between the civil people. And they bomb ISIS a lot of people die. So what they think they did? Help the Syrian people? No, no…[175]

Also the Syrian perception of FTFs showed that all the respondents understood the Syrian conflict as an international problem. Because FTFs came from other countries, especially European ones, Adnan and Hayyan argued that the conflict is not purely Syrian.[176] Also, they voiced suspicion about the fact that so many FTFs could just travel to Syria unhindered. Aya, Sami, Nizar and Tarek strongly shared this belief.[177]

(2) How do SRNs individually contest the prognostic framing of the Dutch government?
None of the respondents proposed any concrete plan or strategy in order to solve the problems that they diagnosed in Syria. However, some broad solutions and steps to be taken were suggested: firstly, all parties should immediately stop the airstrikes. Secondly, IS should indeed

---

[174] Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.
[175] Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.
[176] Author's interview with Adnan, a SRN from Deir Ez-Zor, Utrecht, on 17 April 2018; Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.
[177] Author's interview with Nizar and Tarek, two SRNs from Raqqa, Utrecht, on 16 May 2018; Author's interview with Sami, a SRN from Aleppo, Amsterdam, on 28 May 2018; Author's interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018.

be fought and eliminated, but not by means of airstrikes. Many contended that the coalition should support local forces (in the case of Raqqa: Sunni-Arab forces). Others even called for boots on the ground, or another action by the coalition in order to prevent what some called a 'Kurdish occupation.' The local forces should not only be supported in their fight against IS, but also in their fight against the Syrian regime. As Adnan predicts:

> [I]n Syria there is no real solution. I would like that US or European countries, or coalition, they can deal with the Kurdish fighters to leave those cities and then give it to… find a way to arrange local councils, departments that can control these cities from those people, it can help a lot! But if it doesn't happen it is a problem. So we will have angry people like the guy who went to become ISIS.[178]

Also Nizar and Tarek wished for a political solution but added that at the same time "it should be a kind of military solution to get Assad out, because Assad, since seven years, destroyed many things. He killed more than one million people and no one cares about that. And he will not go if they don't tell him."[179] Aisha, Rasha and Yamen explicitly agreed that the international community/the coalition should start fighting Assad.[180]

Additionally, the international community should get out of Syria. This wish was often voiced out of frustration that the international involvement was not directed against the true cause of all the problems in Syria: the regime. Instead, many perceived the international involvement as making the situation in Syria worse, as international actors pursued their own interests and neglected the interests of the Syrian population. Thus, in case the international community does not intervene on behalf of the Syrian people (which they were not perceived to do) they should leave Syria and the conflict to the Syrian people.

7.3 The functions of (counter)narratives

In line with Olsen (2014) and Delgado (1989), personal narratives were recurrently used to enforce the arguments described above. This brings about the following question: *How are personal counternarratives used in the attempts to rebut, undermine, or neutralise the framing of the DG?* As argued above, in order to apply narrative analysis to the interviews of SRNs, uninterrupted answers that contained accounts of personal experiences were analysed. The following example should give the reader an idea of the method used to analyse interviews: answering a question about his perception of the coalition, Adnan told a story of how the

---

[178] Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.
[179] Author's interview with Nizar and Tarek, two SRNs from Raqqa, Utrecht, on 16 May 2018.
[180] Author's interview with Aisha, a SRNs from Deir Ez-Zor, on 19 May 2018; Author's interview with Rasha and Yamen, SRNs (a couple) from Raqqa, Zaandam, on 9 June 2018.

coalition airstrikes affected family members in Deir Ez-Zor.[181] That chunk of text was approached as a narrative which means that important events were located, a timeline, and the logic of the story (emplotment) was extracted. Within this example, the interviewee made use of embedded narratives. The entire answer was therefore treated as a framing narrative, while the embedded narratives (which were all accounts of personal experiences either from the interviewee self or from people he knows) were interpreted in the light of the framing narrative. The framing narrative itself was again understood in light of the entire interview as one author was assumed who functions as a single creative sensibility expressing meaning.

Adnan's narrative is structured around the following moral: the local population is neglected in the Syrian conflict, and there is a lack of understanding for the choices and actions made by the local Syrian population. There are four main actors in his narrative: the coalition and its local allies, the Syrian regime and its allies, IS, and the civilian population exemplified by his family members. The narrative is temporally ordered: first, his family was fighting against IS. After IS won, however, they chose to stay in IS-controlled areas in order not to lose their homes. That was possible because IS was a local actor with whom the family could arrange with although they wouldn't support its ideas and goals. Then, however, the bombings by the Syrian regime and its allies, and by the coalition started; all of them bombed civilian areas which made the situation unpredictable. Even though the family did not want to leave their home, they were forced to do so because of the unpredictability. A second reason (besides the coalition strikes) to leave the area, was the fear that Kurdish forces (who were backed by the coalition) would control the city after IS was driven out. Two people who did not want to leave Syria would rather move with IS (which they already knew and could cope with) than live under another "occupation" (as Adnan termed the control by Kurdish forces).[182]

There were three short personal narratives embedded within this frame narrative: one telling how his aunt and uncle fled Deir Ez-Zor because of the coalition strikes; one recounting how the family's stance towards IS changed and how they could arrange themselves with the IS presence; and one about family members who would rather move with IS than live under the Kurdish occupation. Interestingly, these short personal narratives embedded within the wider frame narrative are indirectly contesting the Dutch framing elaborated in chapter three: these stories illustrate the claims that (1) IS is not perceived as the biggest problem by Syrians, and that (2) the coalition strikes harm the civilian population.

---

[181] Author's airstrikes interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.
[182] Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.

Of all the personal narrative accounts collected throughout the interviews, a little less than half of these accounts concerned experiences of coalition airstrikes. Before the interview, the respondents were informed about the fact that personal narratives about experiences with coalition strikes were of particular interest. Some interview questions were directly asking the respondents to narratively describe their experiences regarding the coalition strikes. These stories were especially interesting in order to gain access into the civilian perspective on airstrikes, and in order to understand why the DG's frame did (not) resonate with them (think of a frame's experiential credibility).

Other personal narrative accounts were not prompted by direct questions, but arose spontaneously. Seven respondents narrated experiences of atrocities committed by the Syrian government.[183] In addition, stories that fostered the understanding for the local population choosing to live or even join IS were told by five respondents. Three respondents told stories to illustrate the coalition bombings had a positive impact on IS recruitment. Three respondents told stories in order to give insight into the hardship the civilian population has had to endure in areas controlled by SDF forces. Also, three respondents told accounts of hardship they experienced under IS. Two respondents illustrated the hardship to flee Syria, or to certain areas in Syria through personal accounts.

With the exception of the stories to illustrate the hardship suffered under IS rule, all other narratives contest the framing of the DG, in that, these narratives all seem to function as counternarratives. Two respondents even explicitly stated that the goal of the narrative is to give a different, less accepted perspective on an issue. Rifat for example, introduced his story as follows: "You can take this story, but it is a disclosed thing."[184] Thereby he emphasised the secretive and thus uncommon perspective of the issue under discussion. Also Sayid adds the following to the narrative about the deal between Kurdish forces and the coalition on the one hand, and IS on the other: "This is what happened on the ground, this is the truth. But even you can't say that." When asked to clarify, he continued: "you can't say there was no actual fighting because nobody will believe you. Or nobody wants to believe that."[185]

---

[183] These atrocities concerned airstrikes but also experiences of imprisonment and torture.
[184] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018.
[185] Author's interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018.

7.4 Collective attempts to rebut, undermine, or neutralise the framing of the Dutch government

A. Collective counterframes

Collective counterframes by SRNs were hardly found. View respondents were active in an organisation that challenged the DG's framing, despite the fact that there is little frame resonance among SRNs. Possible explanations for a lack of collective counterframing were given by several respondents. Rifat, for example, argued that his status as a refugee does not allow him to speak up as he is not a citizen. He added: "I don't have a place at the table to talk about it."[186] Hayyan thought that many Syrian refugees feel that way: "many people are afraid to criticise the country they are living in as refugee. (…) They are living in the Netherlands, in Germany… and these countries have a big role in the coalition also."[187]

Only two respondents, Nizar and Tarek, work for an organisation that is documenting and making public violations against civilians in Raqqa. That organisation consists of several members in Syria, Turkey, and Europe. The group describes themselves as a group of non-violent activists who aim to expose the atrocities by the Syrian regime and IS, which they understand as a terrorist extremist group. The organisation was set up in April 2014 in order to make public violations against civilians committed by IS and the Syrian regime. Violations against civilians committed by these two parties were originally seen as the biggest problem. As Nizar explains, one of the organisation's main goals was to counter IS propaganda and disclose their violations. When more parties became active in this region, however, they documented violations of these parties as well. Nizar clarified: "Actually we covered everything happening in Raqqa. When ISIS do something we will write about it, videos, photos, but also when the regime, coalition, Russia are targeting."[188]

An analysis of the organisation's website shows that the organisation indirectly challenges the DG's frame. At the beginning, their diagnostic framing depicted IS as one of the main culprits for the problematic situation in Raqqa, under which mostly the civilian population suffers (in line with the DG's diagnostic framing). They even acknowledged that IS is an international security threat, especially to Western countries as they confirmed hearing about IS' plans to use FTFs to conduct terrorist attacks in the West. As they depicted the coalition's strategy of using airstrikes against IS as effective and accurate at the beginning,[189] they might partly accept the DG's prognostic framing (at least of the airstrikes). This changed in 2015: the

---

[186] Author's interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018.
[187] Author's interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.
[188] Author's interview with Nizar and Tarek, two SRNs from Raqqa, Utrecht, on 16 May 2018.
[189] The organisation comments on the effects of the airstrikes in the fight against IS and note the accuracy with which the strikes hit IS targets such as the groups infrastructure, its sources of incomes, its fighters, etc.

organisation voiced a warning about the dangers of civilian casualties when bombing a city like Raqqa. A few months later the first 'mistake' by the coalition (this is how the organisation referred to the civilian casualties of coalition strikes) was documented in Raqqa city. By June 2015, the organisation spoke of a large number of mistakes and noted that people fled the city partly due to their fear of coalition strikes. Besides, doubts about the effectiveness of the coalition in targeting IS' financial sources, especially its refineries and pipelines, were voiced.[190]

By February 2017, the stance towards the coalition and its airstrikes seems to have changed completely. The coalition was portrayed as not paying attention to civilian harm. It was claimed that the accuracy of the airstrikes decreased, and that the coalition restored to siege-warfare, the negative consequences of which were borne by civilians. Besides claiming that the coalition does not take care of civilian casualties, the organisation lamented the shift in the coalition's strategy from targeting IS directly (by targeting the headquarters, etc.) to targeting the city's infrastructure and public facilities which harmed civilians and left IS untouched.

Nizar complained that the violations by the coalition and by the military forces supported by the coalition, are not paid attention to in the media: "Human Rights Watch went to Raqqa two times and wrote a lot about the situation. Also, I talked to the UN for their year report. They published everything but no one cared. So no media follows the organisation."[191]

B. Lobbying instead of framing?

Another organisation that is partly based in the Netherlands and that is active in order to stop the bombings by all parties, is the Centre for Civil Society and Democracy. Interestingly, instead of relying on public counterframing, this organisation is mostly engaged in lobbying for their goals and solutions. Layal, who is a representative of the organisation, explained that the organisation aims to promote freedom, justice and coexistence. "But", she continued, "if there is conflict, how can we move forward?"[192] Working for peace in order to move forward and realise the organisation's goals is the immediate objective. In that context, the organisation addresses topics such as the (coalition) airstrikes, which should stop as the civilian population

---

[190] From August 2015 onwards, the organisation critically comments on the United State support of the (for most parts Kurdish) SDF and documented public unrest in reaction to measures by the YPG (which forms part of the SDF). As reported by the organisation, the public unrest was met with suppression. According to the organisation, the YPG is called 'the yellow ISIS' by the local population. Accusations of looting, suppression and revenge actions[190] by these forces were voiced.

[191] Author's interview with Nizar and Tarek, two SRNs from Raqqa, Utrecht, on 16 May 2018.

[192] Author's interview with Layal, a member of the Centre for Civil Society and Democracy, Utrecht, on 11 June 2018.

suffers under them. The organisation works for that mainly by lobbying with governments of countries who are the most active in the coalition, like the DG. In such lobby-meetings, representatives of the organisation try to convey the civilian perspective to officials of the governments and give advice on alternative ways of conduct.[193] Discussing that organisation's strategies and the considerations behind them, transcends the scope of this research. It might be interesting, however, to gain more insight and understand whether and how lobbying in (inter)national political forums is connected to the (lack of) collective counterframing.

7.6 Concluding remarks

How do SRNs individually *attempt to rebut, undermine, or neutralise the framing of the DG?* From the interviews with SRNs a picture of the situation is Syria emerges that differs fundamentally from the DG's framing. Contrary to the DG's diagnostic framing, the many problems in Syria were seen as inherently connected. Besides, the Syrian government and not IS was understood as the biggest problem. Furthermore, *all* international interventions in Syria were seen as part of the problem rather than a solution because the fundamental issue – the Syrian regime – was not targeted, and because it stimulated ethnic tensions. And lastly, the coalition strikes were seen as a problem because they directly influence the Syrian conflict and aggravate the humanitarian situation for the local population.

Contrary to the DG's prognostic framing, fighting the Syrian regime militarily was seen as an important step towards solving Syria's manifold problems. Therefore, the airstrikes were depicted as harming the population, as being ineffective, and, in addition, as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The same applied to the international involvement in general.

Considering civilian harm that might influence the effectiveness of airstrikes as a strategy, or even create blowback effects, the following picture emerges: The accounts of SRNs indicate that the West suffers from a loss of reputation (as the recurring theme 'Western Hypocrisy' suggests). Besides, it has been pointed out that the coalition's airstrikes help IS' recruitment. Interestingly, IS' use of coalition airstrikes for their propaganda is not mentioned as main mechanism underlying recruitment. Rather, the combination of airstrikes against IS which creates additional grievances for the population, and the fact that the coalition does not fight (or help the fight) against Assad, helps IS recruitment, according to various respondents. One respondent suggested that the grievances due to airstrikes might have long-term

---

[193] Author's interview with Layal, a member of the Centre for Civil Society and Democracy, Utrecht, on 11 June 2018.

consequences as they create fertile ground for future conflicts. Another consequence from the coalition airstrikes pointed out by one respondent is that Western values are not credible anymore, which has led to increased sympathy for (radical) Islamism.

When setting out their understanding of the situation in Syria in general, and of coalition strikes specifically, SRNs regularly narrated experiences. Especially those arising spontaneously functioned as a counternarrative in that they tried to rebut, undermine or neutralise the DG's framing by using their experiences in order to forge a bond between themselves and the listener.

The second question addressed in the chapter was: *How do SRNs* collectively *attempt to rebut, undermine, or neutralise the framing of the DG?* Interestingly, there seems to be a lack of collective counterframes. One reason for that seems to be that SRNs do not feel as being in the position to speak up against the country that is hosting them. The use of narratives in that context confirms Delgado's (1989) and Polletta's (1998) argument that (counter)narratives are an important tool for marginalised groups. Another reason for the lack of counterframing might be the choice for lobbying instead for collective and public counterframing. In the introduction is has been suggested that the danger of political blowback on a national level might be increased by the presences of SRNs who might contest the DG's framing from their own experiences. It seems, however, that due to the position SRNs see themselves in, the danger of that kind of blowback is not increased by their presence in the Netherlands.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Reflections in light of the blowback debate

When drawing conclusions about airstrikes, Kocher et al. (2011) warn that there is a "need for caution in drawing conclusions from the analysis of aggregated data and case studies" (p. 216). The reason for this is that the effects of airstrikes depend on many factors. Heeding this warning, and bearing in mind the nature of case-studies, this concluding section does not aim to generate generalisations, but to give a careful in-depth analysis of (indications of) blowback effects in the context of the case under study.

This thesis has examined SRNs' contestation of the DG's framing of the coalition airstrikes in the fight against IS. One aim was to understand whether this contestation brings about a blowback effect in terms of political costs at a national level. Despite the fact that the DG's framing is contested by SRN's, no evidence has been found indicating that this contestation might lead to political blowback in terms of a decrease in political trust. One reason for this is that the contestation does not happen in terms of a typical framing contest, i.e. in terms of framing and counterframing. In fact, it was found that despite having a very different perspective on the coalition strikes, most interviewees were not engaged in collective and public counterframing activities. Findings that SRNs do not consider themselves in the position to speak up as refugees, seems to suggest that they understand themselves as an out-group. This confirms Delgado's (1989) and Polletta's (1998) suggestion that counternarratives are an important tool by out-groups to convey their perspective and challenge the in-group's reality. The preference given to lobbying activities instead of public and collective counterframing might be a second reason for the lack of collective counterframing. Anecdotal evidence suggesting this has been found, but further research is required.

As has been pointed out in the introduction, political blowback in terms of a loss of political trust happens due to the combination of governmental secrecy and the leaking of information that should have been kept secret. The lack of counterframing among SRNs implies that they do not publicly contest the DG's framing, and thus do not increase the danger of this kind of political blowback.

In addition to looking into the danger of political blowback in terms of the loss of political trust, it has been argued that shedding light onto the controversy between the DG's perspective and the SRNs (civilian) perspective might help to better understand the effectiveness of airstrikes and the mechanisms underlying blowback effects. It has been suggested that evidence for blowback is mainly provided from a COIN perspective which pays careful attention to the perspective of civilians. The COIN paradigm, it has been argued, is apt

for the case under study because IS fits the classification of an insurgency group. Interviews with SRNs indicated that blowback effects from the coalition airstrikes do occur. It has been suggested that the West suffers from a loss of reputation, partly due to the civilian harm the airstrikes cause (political blowback). As pointed out in the introduction, Airwars (2016a) argues that the contradicting accounts respecting civilian casualties is connected to the DG's intransparency with regard to their participation in the coalition. This intransparency, it has been argued, leads to a gap between public and military accounts of civilian casualties, which in turn damages the international reputation of the Netherlands. This research found evidence in support of this concern: the West suffers from a loss in reputation as it is seen as not credible and hypocritical. Part of this hypocrisy and lack of credibility is rooted in the fact that, according to SRNs, coalition strikes do harm more civilians than admitted by the countries conducting airstrikes. Evidence thus suggests that there is a connection between political blowback in terms of a loss of reputation on the one hand, and a lack of transparency on the other.

Furthermore, it has been pointed out that grievances due to airstrikes might have long-term consequences as they create fertile ground for future conflicts. Also it has been suggested by SRNs that IS used the coalition airstrikes for propaganda and recruitment (strategic blowback). This propaganda based on airstrikes is effective in combination with fact that the coalition does not fight (or help the fight) against Assad. The suggested mechanisms differ from the explanation of the same phenomenon by the DG, i.e. that IS has the natural monopoly on propaganda material, and by Airwars (2016a), arguing that intransparency leaves space for IS propaganda which might help recruitment.

Another consequence from the coalition airstrikes might be that Western values are not credible anymore, which might lead to increased sympathy for (radical) Islamism. Considering the fact that the solution envisioned for Syria is a political transition along democratic lines, such a development might turn out to be a blowback effect in light of the political goals set for that region.[194]

When discussing the DG's framing it has been argued that there is awareness of the possibility of blowback on various levels: (1) On a strategic level, blowback might occur in terms of retaliation (a heightened terrorist threat due to the participation in the coalition, threat of retaliation against soldiers), increased recruitment by IS, and IS increasingly hiding between civilians. (2) On a political level, blowback might occur in terms of the loss of political

---

[194] Interestingly, evidence suggesting blowback effects form the coalition's strategy of supporting Kurdish fighters has emerged from the interviews with SRNs. The support of these ground forces, it has been argued, might lead to increased ethnic tensions and might prolong the conflict.

reputation on an international level, political costs on a national level, and public unrest in the Netherlands. (3) On tactical level, it might occur in terms of the loss of intelligence due to an otherwise successful attack. According to the DG and members of the NDA,[195] the danger of blowback effects can be anticipated and thereby be prevented. Therefore, the danger of blowback should not be overemphasised. Interestingly, blowback effects are not linked to civilian casualties or civilian harm which might be understood in connection to the CT paradigm. It has become clear that the coalition's strategy fits Chamayou's (2015) description of the CT paradigm.

In conclusion, it can be stated that from the civilian perspective there is evidence suggesting that the costs born by civilians (see Hudson, Owens, Flannes, 2011; Waldman 2017) might cause blowback effects. From the perspective of the DG, however, the danger of blowback is portrayed very differently. The fact that the coalition's strategy fits the CT paradigm might help to understand the DG's stance towards and its dealing with blowback effects: it might be focused more on short term blowback in terms of the immediate effects of the airstrikes, and consider the impact on the population to a lesser extent.

What does this say about the relation between the debate about the (in)effectiveness of airstrikes and blowback? The effectiveness of airstrikes, it has been argued, is determined in the light of the goals they should help to achieve. Strategic and tactical blowback can help to understand the conditions under which airstrikes are (in)effective and why. Political blowback, however, transcends the 'mere' (in)efficiency debate. Political blowback might impact factors that are not connected to the immediate goals that a strategy aims to reach. Examples of such a political blowback effect are the loss of political reputation on an international level the occurrence of which is suggested by the data, and the loss of political trust on a national level, for which no indications have been found.

8.2 Counterframes and counternarratives in framing contests

Another question addressed in this thesis concerns the relationship between frames and narratives. Three ways to understand this relation were presented in the introduction: (1) as entirely separate categories; (2) narratives can function within frames without being subsumed to them (Olsen's, 2014, middle-position); (3) narratives as subsumed to frames.

---

[195] Author's interview with member 1 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018; Author's interview with a pilot of the Dutch Military, Breda, on 15 May 2018.

As, on the one hand, there were no narratives in the prognostic and diagnostic framing of the DG, and as, on the other hand, there were hardly any counterframes, the interaction between narratives and (counter)frames could not be researched directly. Despite this lack of direct evidence, some insights have been gained with regard to that issue.

On a theoretical level, contrasting frames and framing narrative might be insightful with regard to the relation between frames and narratives. Abbott's (2008) position seems to imply that frames and narratives are entirely different categories. Frames, according to Abbott (2008), are more cognitive and strategic in nature as they tune in with the audience's modes of understanding. He explicitly warns against confusing framing narratives with frames. Framing narratives, as outlined above, are narratives that give meaning to and collect together embedded narratives. As argued in the introduction, Olsen (2014) argues that frames can also fulfil the function of linking together and making coherent personal narratives, despite them fulfilling different functions. One could thus say that according to Olsen, frames can fulfil the same function as framing narratives.

Despite a lack of evidence of how narratives function within frames, Olsen's (2014) argument for the interaction and combinability of frames and narratives seems plausible in light of the interaction between frames and narratives in a setting where frames are contested. The counternarratives by SRN's seem to fulfil the same function as counterframes as they were used to rebut, undermine or neutralise the DG's diagnostic and prognostic framing. Most arguments by SRNs were presented narratively. Those narratives often contained embedded personal narratives that illustrated the broader (narratively presented) arguments (that parallel plots of frame narratives). Especially these personal narratives seem to fulfil the function of conveying a story based on a shared human experience (in line with Fajer 1992, in Olsen, 2014). These findings suggest (in line with Polletta, 1998, and Olsen, 2014) that narratives cannot be subsumed under frames as they can fulfil a similar function as frames *in the absence* of frames. The fact that frames can not only be contested by counterframes, but also by counternarratives underlines the plausibility of Olsen's account: if narratives and frames were two entirely different categories, a dialogue between frames and counternarratives as the one presented in this thesis would not have been possible. To recapitulate, narratives and frames are both tools to give meaning, but differ in the following aspects: frames are strategic efforts and less emotional, whereas narratives focus more on emotions and emotional identification, as well as on the transmission of personal experiences, and are especially well suited to express and convey grievances (Olsen, 2014). Besides, they are a tool that can be used by an out-group that

might not be in the position to easily access or use technical, scientific, expert or political discourse (Napels 2003, in Olsen, 2014; Polletta, 1998).

As pointed out in the introduction, Olsen (2013) researched the position of narratives in framing contests, namely in relation to frame resonance by which framing contests are decided. She argues that narratives should have an explicit position in the definition of frame resonance because Benford and Snow (2000) focus too much on scientific, technical and specialist knowledge. Criticising this, Olsen (2014) argues that this focus, which is especially visible in the frame articulator's credibility, "leaves discursive forms that do not possess authority at a marked disadvantage in the sort of venue that privileges the authority of the speaker" (p. 251).

Olsen (2014) builds her argument in a setting where narratives are used within frames to alter a frames resonance. This thesis analysed the interaction between narratives and frames in a setting where narratives function independently of frames. That is: they are not embedded in a frame, and probably even function as substitute to a frame in lines with arguments of Napels (2003, in Olsen, 2014) and Polletta (1998). As has been stated above, because of a lack of counterframes, and because of a lack of narratives in the DG's frame, it is unclear what influence the existence of narratives within frames has on frame resonance. It seems, however, that the concept of frame resonance does not provide tools to determine the degree to which the occurrence of personal narratives within the frame increases or decreases frame resonance. In order to provide such tools, frame resonance would have to include a third aspect besides credibility and salience, that captures the degree of emotional identification due to the use of narratives within a frame. Adding such a component to the concept of frame resonance would be useful in order to analyse frames that embed narratives.

For the present case at hand, it has been shown that personal experience conveyed as narrative does play an important role when determining the DG's frame resonance. More importantly, the empirical credibility and experiential commensurability of the DG's frame have been assessed with reference to narratives of SRNs.

To conclude it can be said that, firstly, this thesis provided evidence that narratives have features by which they might, in certain situations (such as contestations of in-group frames by out-groups), replace frames. This suggests that frames and narratives should be viewed as conceptually distinct. Secondly, this thesis found that narrative analysis and frame analysis can be combined in e.g. situations of contestations of frames. Thirdly, Olsen (2014) argues that narratives can function within frames (situations in which frames function in the same way as framing narratives), and still be treated as narratives. The last two aspects suggest

that there exists conceptual proximity between frames and narratives. Taken all these aspects together, Olsen's (2014) middle position seems to be the most plausible understanding of the relation between frames and narratives.

8.3 Further Research

Various scholars have warned that the coalition's warfare against IS causes short- and long-term blowback effects on a strategic and political level. Anecdotal evidence confirming these warnings has been found. More research is needed in order to determine whether and to what extent blowback effects occur.

Secondly, anecdotal evidence has been found suggesting that the lack of counterframing might be attributed to a preference of lobbying strategies of civil society organisations. More research is needed in order to understand whether there exists a trend from public action towards focused lobbying outside of the public arena.

Thirdly, concerning the relation of the concepts 'framing' and 'narrative' it has been pointed out that this research only provides insight into the interaction of counternarratives and frames in the context of framing contest where counternarratives function instead of frames. In order to further the line of research set out by Olsen (2014), cases must be analysed in which narratives function within the contexts of frames. Such case studies might help to further develop the concept 'frame resonance' by conceptually integrating narrative content of a frame and its impact on frame resonance.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources:

Kamerstukken:

Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015, 27 925, E.

Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015, 27 925, H.

Kamerstuk I, 2014/2015, 27 925, I.

Kamerstuk I, 2016/2017, 27 925, K.

Kamerstuk I, 2016/2017, 27 925, L.

Kamerstuk I, 2016/2017, 27 925, M.

Kamerstuk I, 2016/2017, 27 925, N.

Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 23 432, nr. 389.

Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 506.

Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 518.

Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 526.

Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 527.

Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 27 925, nr. 539.

Kamerstuk II (Bijlage), 2014/2015, 28 676, nr. 210.

Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 29 521, nr. 291.

Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 29 521 nr. 296.

Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 29 754, nr. 302.

Kamerstuk II, 2014/2015, 30 977, nr. 104.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 570.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 571.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 590.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 591.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 593.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 606.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 607.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 608.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 610.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 611.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 612.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 27 925, nr. 616.

Kamerstuk II (Bijlage), 2016/2017, 29 521, nr. 315.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 29 521, nr. 324.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 29 521, nr. 345.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 29 521, nr. 352.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 32 623, nr. 163.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 33 279, nr. 19.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 33 694, nr. 11.

Kamerstuk II, 2016/2017, 33 763, nr. 126.

Kamervragen II (Aanhangsel), 2016/2017, nr. 1215.

Kamervragen II (Aanhangsel), 2016/201, nr. 2854.

Kamervragen II (Aanhangsel), 2016/2017, nr. 1215.

Kamervragen II (Aanhangsel), 2016/2017, nr. 1750.

Kamervragen II (Aanhangsel), 2016/2017, nr. 2034.

Websites:

CENTCOM (n.d.). *Mission, Vision & Strategic Approach*. Retrieved from: http://www.centcom.mil/ABOUT-US/.

Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.(*a*)). *Defensieacademie (NLDA)*. Retrieved from: https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/defensieacademie.

Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.(*b*)). *Weekoverzicht Defensie-operaties*. [News letters.] Retrieved from https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/weekoverzicht-defensie-operaties.

The Global Coalition (n.d.). *The Mission*. Retrieved from: http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/mission-en/.

Other:

Koninklijke Luchtmacht (2014). *Nederlandse Doctrine voor Air & Space Operations.* Air & Space Warfare Centre: Breda. Retrieved from: https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/publicaties/2014/12/18/nederlandse-doctrine-voor-air--space-operations.

Koninklijke Luchtmacht (2016). *Factsheet: Air Task Force Middle East.* Retrieved from:
https://www.defensie.nl/binaries/defensie/documenten/brochures/2016/03/15/factshe
et-air-task-force-middle-east/Pdf-F16+in+missie+ME_Factsheet_interactief_maart-
2016.pdf.

Secondary sources:

Abbott, H. P. (2008). *The Cambridge introduction to narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

Adey, P., Whitehead, M., & Williams, A. J. (2011). Introduction: air-target: distance, reach
and the politics of verticality. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *28*(7-8), pp. 173-187.

Ahmad, M. (2014). The United States Use of Drones in Pakistan: A Politico-Strategic
Analysis. *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, *41*(1), pp. 21-29.

Airwars (n.d.). *Methodology*. Retrieved from: https://airwars.org/methodology/.

Airwars (2016a). *Limited Accountability. A transparency audit of the Coalition air war against
so-called Islamic State.* Retrieved from: https://airwars.org/wp-
content/uploads/2016/12/Airwars-report_Web-FINAL1.compressed.pdf.

Airwars (2016b). *Netherlands airstrikes in Iraq and Syria: Towards improved transparency
and public accountability.* Retrieved from: https://airwars.org/reports/.

Allen, S. H., & Martinez Machain, C. (2017). Understanding the impact of air power. *Conflict
management and peace science*, pp. 1-14.

Amnesty International (2017). *I won't forget this Carnage. Civilians trapped in Battle for
Raqqa – Syria.* London: Amnesty International Ltd.

ARK (2014). *Anger, Betrayal and Mistrust: Public reactions to the initiation of coalition
airstrikes in Syria.* ARK: Ras Al Khaimah.

Benford, R. D., & Hunt, S. A. (2003). Interactional Dynamics in Public Problems Marketplaces.
In J.A. Holstein & G. Miller (eds.), *Challenges and choices: Constructionist
perspectives on social problems*, (pp. 74-103). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview
and assessment. *Annual review of sociology*, *26*(1), pp. 611-639.

Boeije, H. (2010). *Analysis in qualitative research*. London: Sage publications.

Boxx, S. E. (2013). Observations on the air war in Syria. *Air & Space Power Journal,* pp. 147-168.

Boyle, M. J. (2010). Do counterterrorism and counterinsurgency go together? *International Affairs*, *86*(2), pp. 333-353.

Cavallero, J., Sonnenberg, S., & Kunchey, S. (2012). Living under Drones: Death, injury and trauma to civilians from US drone practices in Pakistan. *International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic at Stanford Law School and Global Justice Clinic at NYU School of Law*, pp. 1-165.

Chamayou, G. (2015). *A Theory of the Drone*. New York: The New Press.

Davis, J. (2002). Narrative and Social Movements: The Power of Stories. In J. Davis (ed.), *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movement* (pp. 3-30). New York: State University.

Delgado, R. (1989). Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative. *Michigan Law Review*, *87*(8), pp. 2411-2441.

Douhet, G. (1998). *The Command of the Air.* Washington: Office of Air Force History.

Dunlap, J. (2007). Air-minded considerations for joint counterinsurgency doctrine. *Air & space power journal*, *21*(4), pp. 63-74.

Dunlap, J. (2008). Making revolutionary change: Airpower in COIN today. *Parameters*, *38*(2), pp. 52-66.

Flick, U. (2000). Episodic interviewing. In M.W. Bauer & G. Gaskell (eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound* (pp. 75-92). London: Sage Publication.

Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage Publication.

Gouldner, A.W. (1970). *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology.* London: Heinemann.

Hollis, M. (1994). *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hudson, L., Owens, C. S., & Callen, D. J. (2012). Drone Warfare in Yemen: Fostering Emirates through Counterterrorism? *Middle East Policy*, *19*(3), pp. 142-156.

Hudson, L., Owens, C. S., & Flannes, M. (2011). Drone warfare: Blowback from the New American way of war. *Middle East Policy*, *18*(3), pp. 122-132.

Jaeger, D.A. & Siddique, Z. (2011). Are drone strikes effective in Afghanistan and Pakistan? On the dynamics of violence between the United States and the Taliban, Discussion Paper series, *Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit,* No. 6262. Retrieved from: http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:101:1-201203016420.

Johnson, Ch. (2000). *Blowback. The Costs and Consequences of an American Empire.* New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Johnston, P. B., & Sarbahi, A. K. (2016). The impact of US drone strikes on terrorism in Pakistan. *International Studies Quarterly*, *60*(2), pp. 203-219.

Jones, S. G., Dobbins, J., Byman, D., Chivvis, C. S., Connable, B., Martini, J., Robinson, E. & Chandler, N. (2017). *Rolling Back the Islamic State*. Rand Corporation.

Jordan, J. (2014). The Effectiveness of the Drone Campaign against Al Qaeda Central: A Case Study. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *37*(1), pp. 4-29.

Kennedy-Pipe, C., & Vickers, R. (2007). 'Blowback' for Britain?: Blair, Bush, and the war in Iraq. *Review of International Studies*, *33*(2), pp. 205-221.

Klandermans, B. (1984). Mobilization and participation: Social-psychological expansions of resource mobilization theory. *American sociological review*, pp. 583-600.

Knowles, E. & Watson, A. (2017). *All quiet on the ISIS Front? British secret warfare in an information age.* London: Oxford Research Group.

Kocher, M. A., Pepinsky, T. B., & Kalyvas, S. N. (2011). Aerial bombing and counterinsurgency in the Vietnam War. *American Journal of Political Science*, *55*(2), pp. 201-218.

Lindekilde, L. (2014). Discourse and frame analysis: in-depth analysis of qualitative data in social movement research. In D. della Porta (ed.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (pp. 195-227). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, J. (2003) Design Issues. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis, (eds.). *Qualitative Research Practice. A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* (pp. 47-76). London: Sage Publications.

Lyall, J. (2009). Does indiscriminate violence incite insurgent attacks? Evidence from Chechnya. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *53*(3), pp. 331-362.

Maines, D. R. (1993). Narrative's moment and sociology's phenomena: Toward a narrative sociology. *The Sociological Quarterly, 34*(1), pp. 17-38.

Matthes, J., & Kohring, M. (2008). The content analysis of media frames: Toward improving reliability and validity. *Journal of communication*, *58*(2), pp. 258-279.

McInnis, K. J. (2015). Coalition contributions to countering the Islamic State. *Congressional Research Service*. Retrieved from: https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R44135.pdf.

Molier, G., & Hekkenberg, M. (2017). The Dutch Contribution to the Armed Coalition Against ISIS. In R. Wessel, W. Wouter, B. Boutin (eds.), *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law 2016* (pp. 315-336). TMC Asser Press, The Hague.

Nepstad, S. (2001). Creating transnational solidarity: The use of narrative in the US-Central America peace movement. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *6*(1), pp. 21-36.

Olsen, K. A. (2014). Telling our stories: Narrative and framing in the movement for same-sex marriage. *Social Movement Studies*, *13*(2), pp. 248-266.

Pape, R. A. (1997). The limits of precision-guided air power. *Security Studies*, *7*(2), pp. 93-114.

Polletta, F. (1998). Contending stories: Narrative in social movements. *Qualitative Sociology*, *21*(4), pp. 419-446.

Riese, J. (2014). On Dynamic Processes of Framing, Counter framing, and Reframing: The Case oft he Greenpeace Whale Campaign in Norway. In K. Fahlenbrach, E. Sivertsen & R. Werenskjold (eds.), *Media and Revolt: Strategies and Performances from the 1960s to the Present* (pp. 283-299). New York: Berghahn Books.

Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative Research Practice. A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. London: Sage.

Rodley, N. & Çali, B. (2010). Use of force in international law. In B. Çali (ed.), *International Law for International Relations* (pp. 213-233). New York: Oxford University Press.

Ryan, C. (1991). *Prime time activism: Media strategies for grassroots organizing*. South End Press.

Sari Ertem, H. (2018). *Surrogate Warfare in Syria and the Pitfalls of Diverging US Attitudes towards ISIS and PYD/YPG*. In Ö.Z. Oktav, E.P. Dal, & A.M. Kursun (eds.), *Violent Non-State Actors and the Syrian Civil War* (pp. 129-148). Cham: Springer.

Simpson, Ch. (2014 [1988]). *Blowback. America's Recruitment of Nazis, and Its Destructive Impact on Our Domestic and Foreign Policy*. New York: Open road media (kindle edition).

Snow, D. A., & Benford, R. D. (1988). Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization. *International social movement research*, *1*(1), pp. 197-217.

Tanner, R. (2014). Narrative and Conflict in the Middle East. *Survival*, *56*(2), pp. 89-108.

Voetelink, J. (2013). *Militair Opertioneel Recht.* Oistenwijk: Wold Legal Publishers.

Waldman, T. (2017). Vicarious warfare: The counterproductive consequences of modern American military practice. *Contemporary Security Policy*, pp. 1-25.

Warden, J. (1992). Employing Air Power in the Twenty-first Century, in R. Shultz & R. Pfaltzgraff (eds.), *The Future of Air Power in the Aftermath of the Gulf War* (pp. 57-83). Alabama: Air University Press.

Yassin-Kassab, R., & Al-Shami, L. (2016). *Burning country: Syrians in revolution and war.* London: Pluto Press.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Codes

2014[196]

Diagnostic framing

- *Problematic condition in need for change*
    - Attacks of IS on Iraq
    - Context:
        - National-international security nexus
        - Condition for engagement
    - Emergence of IS
    - Factors enhancing the success of IS
    - Foreign terrorist fighters
    - Humanitarian situation/suffering civilian population
    - Crimes under international law
    - International instability/insecurity
    - Lack of international consensus
    - National insecurity
    - No space for moderate opposition
    - Possibly negative effects of fight against IS
    - Refugees
    - Impact on Dutch society
    - Terrorist threat
- *Attribution: Actor*
    - Allies Syrian government (Iran & Russia)
    - Extremists
    - Iraq government
    - ISIS
    - Syrian Government
- *Attribution: Situation*
    - Crisis Syria/Iraq

---

[196] This overview contains all the final codes that were derives in various rounds of coding and abstracting. Not all of these codes were discussed in chapter 5, only the codes occurring the most have been presented.

      o Factors that enable success of IS

      o Underlying political factors that caused IS

Prognostic framing:

- *Proposed solution*

      o Eliminating IS

      o Iraq

      o Syria

- *Alternative set of arrangements*

      o Condition for solution to be successful:

          ■ Common vision of international community

          ■ Cooperation with/of regional powers

          ■ Syrian government must not profit

          ■ Tackling problems underlying success of IS

      o Political solution

      o Reconstruction

      o Stability

      o Stopping advance of IS

      o Actor:

          ■ Coalition

          ■ Iraqi Government

          ■ Moderate opposition

          ■ Netherlands

          ■ Regional powers

          ■ UN

          ■ US

          ■ Other Western actors

- *Strategy*

      o Airpower

      o Breaking continued ability of IS

      o Delegitimising IS

      o Dutch (non-military) intervention to counter terrorism

      o European cooperation

      o Foreign Terrorist Fighters

      o Helping/supporting civil society

- o Humanitarian assistance
- o Integrated strategy
- o Intelligence
- o International cooperation
- o International negotiations
- o Legally pursuing crimes against the international law
- o Military
- o Political
- o Precision
- o Risks for soldiers
- o Supporting Iraqi fighters
- o Supporting local forces
- o Train and assist

Others:

- Civilian casualties 2014
- Effect international effort concerning IS-crisis 2014
- Effect of airstrike
- Reason for not providing information 2014
- Timeframe of Dutch contribution to the coalition 2014

2015

Diagnostic framing

- *Problematic condition in need for change*
  - o Attacks of IS on Iraq
  - o Context:
    - ▪ National-international security nexus
    - ▪ Condition for engagement
  - o Foreign terrorist fighters
  - o Humanitarian situation/suffering civilian population
  - o Crimes under international law
  - o Impact Dutch society
  - o International instability/insecurity
  - o IS influence in other countries
  - o National insecurity

- o No space for moderate opposition
- o Possibly negative effects of fight against IS
- o Power play regional powers
- o Radicalisation
- o Refugees
- o Success IS
- o Terrorist threat
- *Attribution: Actor*
  - o Allies Syrian government (Iran & Russia)
  - o Extremists
  - o ISIS
  - o Militias
  - o Syrian Government
- *Attribution: Situation*
  - o Crisis Syria/Iraq
  - o Factors that enable success of IS
  - o Underlying political factors that caused IS

Prognostic framing:
- *Proposed solution*
  - o Eliminating IS
  - o International security
  - o Iraq
  - o Syria
- *Alternative set of arrangements*
  - o Conditions for solution to be successful:
    - ▪ Cooperation on the ground
    - ▪ Cooperation of/with regional powers
    - ▪ Syrian Government must not profit
    - ▪ Stability and security
    - ▪ Tackling problems underlying success of IS
  - o Driving back IS
  - o Inclusion
  - o Political solution Syria
  - o Prevention

- o Reconstruction
- o Stability
- o Stopping advance of IS
- o Actor:
  - Coalition
  - Iraqi Government
  - Moderate opposition
  - Netherlands
  - Regional Actors
  - Russia
  - UN
  - US
  - Other western actors
- *Strategy*
  - o Airpower
  - o Breaking continued ability **of** IS
  - o Cooperation with Belgium
  - o Delegitimising IS
  - o Dutch (non-military) intervention to counter terrorism
  - o Foreign terrorist fighters
  - o Helping/supporting civil society
  - o Humanitarian assistance
  - o Integrated strategy
  - o Intelligence
  - o International cooperation
  - o International negotiation
  - o Legally pursuing crimes against the international law
  - o Military
  - o Political
  - o Precision
  - o Risks for soldiers
  - o Stabilising liberated areas
  - o Strengthening security apparatus
  - o Supporting Iraqi fighters

- o Supporting local forces
- o Train and assist

Others:

- Lack of information 2015
- Civilian casualties 2015
- Effect of international effort concerning IS-crisis 2015
- Effect of airstrikes (2015)
- Reason for not providing information 2015
- Timeframe of Dutch contribution to the coalition 2015

2016

Diagnostic framing

- *Problematic condition in need for change*
    - o Attacks of IS on Iraq
    - o Context:
        - National-international security nexus
        - Condition for engagement
    - o (Factors enhancing the) Success of IS
    - o Foreign terrorist fighter
    - o Humanitarian situation/suffering civilian population
    - o Crimes under international law
    - o International instability/insecurity
    - o IS influence in other countries
    - o National security
    - o Possibly negative effects of the fight against IS
    - o Power play regional powers
    - o Radical Islam
    - o Refugees
    - o Terrorist threat
- *Attribution: Actor*
    - o Allies Syrian government (Iran & Russia)
    - o Extremists
    - o ISIS
    - o Syrian government

- *Attribution: Situation*
  - Crisis Syria/Iraq
  - Underlying political factors that caused IS

Prognostic framing:

- *Proposed solution*
  - Eliminating IS
  - International security
  - Iraq
  - Syria
- *Alternative set of arrangements*
  - Conditions for solution to be successful
    - Cooperation on the ground
    - Cooperation of/with regional powers
    - Political transition in Iraq
    - Political transition in Syria
    - Syrian Government must not profit
    - Tackle problems underlying the success of ISIS
  - Political solution
  - Prevention
  - Recapture IS territory
  - Reconstruction
  - Stability
  - Actors:
    - Coalition
    - Iraq government
    - Moderate opposition
    - Netherlands
    - Regional Actors
    - UN
    - US
    - Other western Actors
- *Strategy*
  - Airpower
  - Breaking continued ability of IS

- o Cooperation with Belgium
- o Delegitimising IS
- o Dutch (non-military) intervention to counter terrorism
- o Foreign Terrorist Fighters
- o Helping/supporting civil society
- o Humanitarian assistance
- o Integrated strategy
- o Intelligence
- o International cooperation
- o International negotiation
- o Legally pursuing crimes against the international law
- o Military
- o Political
- o Precision
- o Risks for soldiers
- o Stabilising liberated areas
- o Supporting Iraqi fighters
- o Supporting local forces
- o Train & assist

Others:
- Lack of information 2016
- Broader goal Dutch defence-policy (2016)
- Civilian casualties 2016
- Effect international effort concerning IS-crisis 2016
- Effect of Airstrikes 2016
- Reason for not providing information 2016
- Result of not providing information 2016
- Timeframe of Dutch contribution to the coalition 2016

2017

Diagnostic framing
- *Problematic condition in need for change*
  - o Attacks of IS on Iraq
  - o Context

- National-international security nexus
- Condition for engagement
- o (Factors enhancing the) Success of IS
- o Foreign Terrorist Fighters
- o Humanitarian situation/suffering civilian population
- o Crimes under international law
- o International instability/insecurity
- o IS influences on other countries
- o National security
- o No space for moderate opposition
- o Possibly negative effects of fight against IS/Blowback
- o Tension on the ground
- o Terrorist Threat
- *Attribution: Actor*
  - o Allies Syrian government (Iran & Russia)
  - o Extremists
  - o ISIS
  - o Syrian government
- *Attribution: Situation*
  - o Crisis Syria/Iraq
  - o Effects of IS

Prognostic framing:

- *Proposed solution*
  - o Eliminating IS
  - o International security
  - o National security
  - o Protecting civilian population
  - o Syria
- *Alternative set of arrangements*
  - o Conditions for solution to be successful
    - Cooperation with regional powers
    - Destroying ideology
    - Humanitarian situation
    - International cooperation

- - - Political transition in Iraq

    - Political transition in Syria

    - Syrian government must not profit

    - Tackling problems underlying success of IS

  - Local security

  - Political solution

  - Prevention

  - Recapture IS territory

  - Reconstruction

  - Stability

  - Actor:

    - Coalition

    - Iraqi government/fighters

    - Moderate opposition

    - Netherlands

    - Regional powers

    - Russia

    - Syrian government

    - UN

    - US

- *Strategy*

  - Airpower

  - Breaking continued ability of IS

  - Cooperation with Belgium

  - Countering irregular migration

  - Delegitimising IS

  - Dutch (non-military) intervention to counter terrorism

  - Foreign Terrorist Fighters

  - Helping/supporting civil society

  - Humanitarian assistance

  - Integrated strategy

  - Intelligence

  - International cooperation

  - Legally pursuing crimes against the international law

- o Military

- o Political

- o Precision

- o Risk for soldiers

- o Stabilising liberated areas

- o Supporting Iraqi fighters

- o Supporting local forces

- o Train & assist

Others:

- Lack of information

- Broader goal Dutch defence-policy 2017

- Civilian casualties 2017

- Effect of airstrikes 2017

- Reason for not providing information 2017

- Timeframe of Dutch contribution to the coalition 2017

Codes for all years:

- International law

- Minority protection

- Researching civilian casualties

- Rules of Engagement

- Targeting process

Appendix 2: Interview-guide

Date of interview:

Duration of interview:

Indication to identify interviewee:

Gender:

Age:

Birth place/living place in Syria:

Since when in NL:

Profession:

Other relevant info:

Introduction of topic: Short summary of my research topic and its relevance.

Introduction of interview-style: Information about the structure of the interview, and the fact that questions directed at narrative accounts are asked.

Ethical issues: Discussing anonymisation, and the fact that the interview can always interrupt

First set of questions: the respondent's conception of the issue and his/her biography in relation to it

- Description of the situation in Syria.
    - o What is/are the biggest problem(s)? Now, in the past?
    - o How should it/they be solved?
- Anti-IS coalition:
    - o How do you see the anti-ISIL coalition in relation to the current situation in Syria? How do you understand it? What do you associate with the anti-IS coalition?
    - o When did you first hear about it?
    - o When did you first hear about foreign countries bombing ISIS?
    - o What was your reaction to it?
    - o How do you understand their goal, to fight IS? (How do you understand IS?)
    - o What do the coalition-bombings mean to you? What do you associate with the expression 'coalition bombings'?

Second set of questions: narrative questions

- When you look back, what was your first experience with the coalition bombings? Could you please tell me about it?

- What was your most significant experience with coalition strikes? Could you tell me about that situations?

- Are there other experiences of coalition strikes that you recall and that you would like to tell me about?

- What role did the coalition strikes play in your life in Syria? Can you tell me about specific situations in which the coalition strikes played a role in your life?

Third set of question: more general, relevant topics

- Why do you think the coalition started to bomb IS?

- How do you understand the Dutch/the coalition's justification to bomb IS in Syria?

- Do the coalition strikes still play a role in your life since you left Syria/since you are in the Netherlands?

- Can you tell me about the last situation that you remember in which it played a role in your life since you left Syria?

- If you look at the Syrian community in the Netherlands, what role do coalition strikes and the fact that the Dutch participate in them play?

Appendix 3: Overview interviews

Background interviews:

Interview with a member of Airwars, Utrecht, on 16 March 2018.

Interview with member 1 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.

Interview with member 2 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.

Interview with member 3 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.

Interview with member 4 of the NDA, Breda, on 24 April 2018.

Interview with member 5 of the NDA, Breda, o 24 April 2018.

Interview with a pilot of the Dutch Military, Breda, on 15 May 2018.

Interview with Layal, a member of the Centre for Civil Society and Democracy, Utrecht, on 11 June 2018.

Narrative interviews:

Interview with Adnan, a SRN from Deir Ez-Zor, Utrecht, on 17 April 2018.

Interview with Sayid, a SRN from Raqqa, Amsterdam, on 18 April 2018.

Interview with Rifat, a SRN from Aleppo, Utrecht, on 4 May 2018.

Interview with Nizar and Tarek, two SRNs from Raqqa, Utrecht, on 16 May 2018.

Interview with Aisha, a SRNs from Deir Ez-Zor, on 19 May 2018.

Interview with Sami, a SRN from Aleppo, Amsterdam, on 28 May 2018.

Interview with Hayyan, a SRN from a small town in the North-East of Syria, Utrecht, on 3 June 2018.

Interview with Rasha and Yamen, SRNs (a couple) from Raqqa, Zaandam, on 9 June 2018.

Interview with Aya, a SRN from Tabqa, 's-Hertogenbosch, on 9 June 2018

Appendix 4: Glossary

Blowback - referring "to the unintended consequences [and long-term effects] of policies that were kept secret from the American people" (Johnston, 2000, p. 8). Simpson (2014, chapter 1) further specifies that blowback refers to "unexpected – and negative – effects at home that result from covert operations overseas." Johnston (2000), on the other hand, argues that "although the term originally applied only to the unintended consequences for *Americans* of American policies, there is every reason to widen its meaning" (p. 17). In this sense, blowback includes the negative consequences of US policies for the local population.

Counterframing – "attempts 'to rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person's or group's myth, version of reality, or interpretative framework'" (Benford, 1987, in Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 626).

Counter-attribution – a problem is recognised but "alternative interpretations of who's or what's to blame" (Benford & Hunt, 2003, p. 163).

Counter-prognosis – which "involves challenging prognostic frames and offering alternative solutions" (Benford & Hunt, 2003, p. 165).

Counternarratives – are defined as *stories of members of an out-group with the objective to rebut, undermine or neutralise an in-group's version of reality. This is done by forging an emotional bond between the listener and the storyteller, based on their common ground in human experience* (this definition is based on Fajer's (1992, in Olsen, 2014, p. 250) definition of persuasive storytelling; Delgado's (1989) definition of counternarratives; and Benford's (1987, in Benford & Snow, 2000) definition of counterframes).

Framing – the activity when social actors/movement "assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198)

Diagnostic framing – to "negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic conditions or situations they [i.e. movement adherents] define as in need of change, make attributions regarding to who or what is to blame" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615).

106

These attributions concern "the identification of the source(s) of causality, blame, and/or culpable agents" (p. 616).

Prognostic framing – to "articulate an alternative set of arrangements (…) [the outcome of which is] a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan" (Benford & Snow, 2000, pp. 615-616).

Framing contest – the highly strategic activity of framing and counterframing, which includes analysing the opponents frame and framing tactics and anticipating on the counterframing activities as reaction to the own counterframing (Ryan, 1991), and which is decided by a *frame's resonance* (Riese, 2014; Ryan, 1991).

Frame resonance – the degree in which "some framings seem to be effective or 'resonate' while other do not. Two sets of interacting factors account for the variation in degree of frame resonance: credibility of the proffered frame and its relative salience" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 619). The *credibility* of a frame consists of:

Credibility – "The credibility of any framing is a function of three factors: frame consistency, empirical credibility, and the credibility of the frame articulators or claim makers" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 619).

Frame consistency – "the congruence between (…) articulated beliefs, claims, and actions" (p. 620). In other words, it concerns how developed and interconnected the three core framing tasks are (Snow & Benford, 1998).

Empirical credibility – "the apparent fit between the framings and events in the world" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 620).

Frame articulator's credibility – "status and/or perceived expertise of the frame articulator and/or the organisation they represent" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 621) influence the plausibility and resonance of certain frames.

Salience – consists of three dimensions: "(1) centrality, (2) experiential commensurability, and (3) narrative fidelity" (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 208).

Centrality of frames: This means on the one hand, "how essential the beliefs, values, and ideas associated with movement frames are to the lives of the targets of mobilization" (p. 621). On the other hand, *centrality* denotes the salience of promoted

values and beliefs within a larger belief system. Connected to this, a frame's resonance depends on the *range and interrelatedness* of its values and beliefs, i.e. on the range of values and beliefs it promotes and to their interconnection (Snow & Benford, 1988).[197]

Experiential commensurability – the extent to which a certain frame is "congruent or resonant with the personal, everyday experiences of the targets of mobilization" (p. 621);

Narrative fidelity – the extent to which "the framing strikes a responsive chord that rings true with existing cultural narrations that are functionally similar to what Gouldner (1970) calls 'domain assumption'" (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 212). The term 'domain assumptions' originally is derived from sociology. It means the assumptions that drive the thinking and reasoning within a specific social theory (e.g. whether men are rational or irrational) (Gouldner, 1970). In line with this, cultural narrations are understood as implicit assumptions held by members of the frame audience that provide the grounds for accepting or rejecting a specific frame. Such implicit and encompassing assumptions might be understood in line with what Tanner (2014) calls meta-narrative: "an all-encompassing umbrella story about a certain phenomenon, a period in history, a region or the world as a whole" (p. 90).

Narrative – "consists of three fundamental features: *events* that are selected from the past, *emplotment* which transforms these events into elements of the narrative; a *temporal ordering* of these events "so that questions of how and why events happened can be established and the narrative elements can acquire features of tempo, duration and pace" (Maines, 1993, p. 21).

Emplotment – "Narratively, to understand an event, even to explain what caused an event, is to locate it within the temporal and relational sequence of a story, linking it with both previous and subsequent events over time" (Davis, 2002, p. 12). A plot is "the logic that makes meaningful events that precede the story's conclusion" (p. 421). This logic she further characterises as heuristic and normative. Emplotment, therefore, is the way in which events are made meaningful in the light of the story's conclusion.

---

[197] This aspect might need more clarification: if a frame does not resonate, the promoted core value might have a too limited range which indicated that it is insufficiently central in the larger belief system. To extend the framework in order to include more central values might overextend the frame (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 206).