The Role of Media in Undervaluing Political Dialogue: Syrian War as a Case

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Abstract

Although the literature of contemporary capitalism theoretically abounds with calls for maintaining international peace and stability, in practice, its political representatives place wars among the many tools available for use to divide areas of political and economic influence when other political tools fail. This study aims to show the means used in the media to justify wars and armed conflicts by claiming that it is impossible to provide corresponding or alternative means, such as dialogue, for example, or the general social desire to maintain stability through political solutions. In this context, the Syrian case represents a typical case of the abovementioned circumstances. It is known that the Syrian crisis, which exploded for reasons mostly internal and local, coincided with an international situation witnessing a critical global balance between East and West, which led to the continuation of the war on Syrian territory with the political, logistical, and military sponsorship of dozens of countries in the world. These circumstances prompted the media, owned by local and international parties involved in the conflict, to justify the war as an inevitable evil. Therefore, it underestimated all calls and attempts to hold a political dialogue between the conflicting parties by presenting the dialogue as a form of military surrender, or as a solution that contradicts the possibility of retribution for the perpetrators of crimes, or by questioning the eligibility of the counterparty and its ability to hold its promises, or by cynical examining the possibility of success of this path as a result. Our research selects tow samples of television programs purposefully, within the framework of the qualitative method, to analyze their critical discourse and to test the hypotheses and questions on which the research is based.

Keywords: Dialogue; opposition media; political solution; pro-government media; undervaluing; war.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the outbreak of war somewhere in the world is almost an international decision that is taken at the highest levels. Armed clashes worldwide represent the declared side of the international conflict between global centers of influence and mean its most bloody and deadly form. When political tools become seemingly unavailable, military forces interfere to re-share influence. Since politics ultimately reflects deep economic interests, we see that the governments of the most developed countries in the world are still fuelling wars and armed conflicts around the world simply because war is still a valuable tool in achieving those economic interests, even though their constitutions, laws, and national institutions are rich in texts that recognize human rights and civilians' rights to life and safety. Some of these countries even provide those rights to refugees fleeing that war as soon as they reach their lands. This paradox reflects that war is still a "legitimate" game in the global system that allows the powerful to acquire increasing influence, or as Frederick Engels sees it, war is "the iron lung from which capitalism is breathing." (Engels, 1975, p531).

On the other hand, wars and armed conflicts do not arise except in regions where their internal crises allow that and where those crises enable regional and international powers to intervene and direct internal forces toward fighting. As is well known, the emergence of nuclear weapons in the middle of the last century closed the door to "total wars," such as the First and Second World Wars, and set new rules for war between international powers, so the latter's attention went to fragile countries, which transformed into arenas to score points between major powers

In Syria, in mid-March 2011, popular protests erupted in the southern governorate of Daraa against the backdrop of the detention of a group of children for writing anti-regime slogans on the walls. This coincided with the emergence of a general climate of protest in other Arab countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya (in 2010), when the ruling regimes in those countries were surprised by the emergence of a popular movement opposing the political-economic system after decades of almost complete calm. As a result, the Egyptian and Tunisian presidents stepped down, NATO intervened in Libya, and Muammar Gaddafi was killed.

Many expectations at that time were that the Syrian regime might go toward deep reforms in the state's structure in response to popular protests. But the regime disappointed those hopes that had been placed on it. Through the first speech of the President of the Syrian Republic, Bashar al-Assad (March 30, 2011), the regime's intentions were made clear to consider what happened to constitute an external conspiracy. This speech coincided with the escalation of government violence against the protests, which were mostly peaceful. Government violence escalated significantly over the following months, killing and arresting demonstrators, and the ground was set for counter-violence as armed opposition groups began to form in the most affected areas.[1]

This happened, as it is known, in light of intense media follow-up at the global level, which made the Syrian event the first news in most newscasts around the world, and this came in parallel with political and diplomatic activity on the global scale to discuss the Syrian crisis. Within a few months, violent developments on the ground, on the one hand, and international and regional interventions, on the other hand, contributed to the establishment of violent and destructive warfare bases on Syrian lands, which some consider the worst in terms of outcomes since World War II. Until 2022, more than half a million people are dead, with 6 and 7 million displaced outside the country and 6.9 million displaced inside the country.[2]

At the end of 2011 and the beginning of the following year, the Syrian crisis began in local and international media to gradually shift from its primary root as a ruling crisis that led to the emergence of popular protests with demands and a mass movement to formulate a new model of governance in the country in which Syrians are supposed to participate from their various positions to just quantitative data about the military confrontations taking place between the regime and its opponents, military operations and movements, maneuvers, and mutual penetrations.

The international and local media have not hesitated to shed extensive light on the pain and

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[1] An opposition military faction initially called the "Free Syrian Army" appeared on July 29, 2011, and it was made up of soldiers who had defected from the regime and volunteer fighters. After that, the opposition military organizations increased greatly.

[2] These figures are quoted from the statements by the United Nations and statistics of Human Rights Watch and international human rights organizations.

suffering of Syrians, such as massacres, killings, displacement, detention, and conditions of asylum internally or in countries that have received Syrian refugees. However, it did not do so in the context of calling for a solution that would stop these tragedies, but rather in the context of employing them politically to condemn the opposite side and call for more violence and the expansion of military actions to eliminate it. Our current study will refer to media reports from pro-regime and opposition media outlets dealing with the same event and throwing responsibility on the other side to mobilize and instigate public opinion and legitimize subsequent military actions. The clash of responsibility between the regime and the opposition was used in the media as a moral excuse for both sides not to accept dialogue. Both sides used the phrase "We will not talk to those whose hands are stained with blood" or "No dialogue with the killers." What interests us in this research is to shed light on the media's extreme disregard for the will and aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the Syrian people to stop the war and military operations, which have destroyed their lives in death and displacement, through negotiations or genuine dialogue which might lead to a solution that restores stability to the country and stops its bleeding. We claim that the evidence for the existence of this will among the "overwhelming majority" is evidenced by the distancing of a percentage exceeding 13 million from armed activity and from the locations of military operations, as data issued by the UN (UNHCR, 2022) indicates displacement (6.9 million) within the country from areas that are considered from this side or that to other areas. International figures and statistics indicate that a significant proportion of immigrants outside the country are young males escaping compulsory military service or decisions by the armed opposition to recruit them compulsorily.

Our study follows the qualitative method in the research through purposive sampling, as it is known that the media materials published about the Syrian event are vast and extensive. Therefore, selecting specific samples is the best way to process them, by which we will be able to identify many of the mechanisms used in the media to legalize and justify violence and raise levels of tension, and in return, diminish the significance and possibility of dialogue and peaceful solutions.

Therefore, our research chooses two television channels from the Arab media space as samples. The first is Al Jazeera, owned by the Qatari government, which uses rhetoric opposing the Syrian regime. The second is the Iranian-backed Al-Mayadeen channel,

which uses pro-Syrian regime rhetoric. In each sample, the media text will be approached in four headings that explain the mechanisms used to undervaluing of dialogue, which we believe are common to both samples despite their apparent contradiction. These headings are: Questioning the morality of dialogue with the opposing party. Questioning the eligibility of the opposing party. Portraying the dialogue as a victory for one party versus another. And portraying that dialogue reflects political naivety. because our study relied on the qualitative research methodology and purposive sampling, the tow samples were selected, and their texts were analyzed according to the CDA methodology, primarily based on Norman Fairclough's framework of analysis, which we found most appropriate to clarify the relationship between media discourse and ideology. Among the most prominent formulas that we borrowed from Fairclough were the group of "implicit assumptions, coherence, inferencing" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 85) that the media discourse imposes in some of its details on the recipient to form the required image that he calls "common ideological sense," which is preserved by "normalizing" it in one way or another. Generalizations and "foregrounding" the discourse are also the main rhetorical strategies used when the discourse is subjected to imbalance, criticism, and others.

RESULTS

This part contains tow main sections that refer to the tow samples mentioned earlier. Each section will begin with a brief overview of the selected TV channel and talk show and its media and politicians, so that various media texts will be presented later in a meaningful manner commensurate with the research questions and hypotheses.

Al Jazeera Channel

Al-Jazeera is a channel owned by the Qatari government, according to its identification data.[3] The *Opposite Direction* talk show, which has been broadcast live every Tuesday evening since 1996 until today, is one of the most popular programs on the island. This program is presented by the Syrian broadcaster Faisal Al-Qasim, who hosts two opposing personalities on the topic of discussion, and this is accompanied by an online vote by

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[3] Chairman of the Board of Directors: Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani, from the Qatari ruling family.

viewers in one of the two formulas (yes-no). With the encouragement of the broadcaster, the discussions between the two parties often witness intensity, which may sometimes lead to an exchange of personal accusations or insults and the withdrawal of one of the guests from the dialogue.

Since its outbreak, the Syrian war has occupied a large part of this program. Personalities loyal to the Syrian regime were hosted against opposition figures, and the discussion often took the form of accusations and abuses. However, in our studied case, the episode entitled "Why the Syrian People Revolted" was chosen, which was shown on December 12, 2015, several days after the issuance of Resolution 2254 on the political solution to the Syrian crisis (on December 18, 2015). These were the guests: Nasr Hariri (former head of the Syrian opposition coalition and later head of the opposition negotiating committee in Geneva), versus Kamal al-Labwani, a more radical Syrian oppositionist who is hostile to dialogue and a political solution.

Ethical perspective

In this section, we will discuss the mechanisms used to undervaluing dialogue ethically by portraying it as a way to legitimize and recognize the parties that have practiced bloody violence.

The questions of the presenter, Faisal Al-Qasim, at the beginning of the episode are usually divided into asking the first direction, then the opposite direction, followed by the percentage of viewers voting on the website:

The first direction: How does the Syrian opposition accept negotiating power-sharing with a regime that has killed more than a million Syrians and displaced half of them? How do you secure the side of the treacherous intelligence system? (…) Have the lambs ever negotiated with the wolves? What is left for the Syrians to lose? Shouldn't they negotiate with Bashar al-Assad in the form of the execution he deserves? Will the opponents of Bashar get anything but a Ministry of (National) Garbage and Sanitation? What is the value of negotiating with the regime as long as intelligence and the army are in the

hands of the fascists? (…) Isn't the negotiation a total surrender to Hitler of the era and his associates from murderers and thieves?[4]

The opposite direction: But on the other hand, do not all conflicts and wars usually end in negotiation? Do those calling for the continuation of the conflict want to fight to the last Syrian? Has the Syrian catastrophe not turned into the worst tragedy in the world since World War II? Isn't the victory of the opposition over the regime or the regime over the opposition forbidden in the first place? Is there an international will stronger than all Syrians to stop the conflict? Aren't negotiations the most effective way to preserve what is left of Syria? Isn't the alternative dividing the country forever? Isn't the exit of the murderous president a foregone conclusion, even if it was not included in International Resolution 2254?[5]

The question of the program submitted for voting via the Internet on the Al-Jazeera website is: "Do you support a political solution based on negotiation with the regime in Syria?" (Result: 16.4% yes and 83.6% no.)

In fact, the presenter's introduction, which we have cited almost completely, provides a rich example of the media discourse that Al-Jazeera pursues in its approach to the Syrian crisis. Although the presenter put forward what is supposed to be two opposite points of view, which is the protocol followed in the program, the position is clear in both cases. It is undervaluing the importance of the dialogue because he either completely rejects it as a "principled" position in the first direction or portrays it as an annoying concession in the opposite direction. In the beginning, the assumption that there are just two opposite points of view in approaching the subject is in itself a reduction and exclusion of many approaches on any subject. Subsequently, presenting the descriptive data accompanying the questions of the episode, such as the numbers of dead and displaced persons, without having a clear reference and ignoring the existence of counter-military violence from the armed opposition and its responsibility for the numbers of displaced dead, is one of the shorthand

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[4] *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (00:21-01:45): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo

[5] *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (01:45-03:5): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo

methods in the propaganda industry. In the intervention of Ahad Nasr Al-Hariri, he also refers to numbers that the broadcaster Al-Qasim does not comment on. Nasr Al-Hariri says:

> It can be said that this regime no longer exists to negotiate. This regime, which lost its soldiers and equipment, killed 135 thousand fighters, and more than 150 thousand of them were wounded, maimed, or disabled. It is a regime whose entire military establishment has come to an end, and the regime fell a long time ago. It is our conviction that this regime can only be eliminated through a political-military solution. that is, the political solution based on the military solution, and this is what happened as the heroes of the Free Army (opposition fighters) took control of most of the Syrian lands.[6]

We conclude from this that the amount of manipulation is enormous in the numbers of the dead, wounded, and homeless. It is presented in a way to support a propaganda point of view in this media discourse. So, large numbers of victims are attributed to the regime without references, in the context of criminalizing it and making dialogue with it an immoral act. On the other hand, Al-Hariri, who is an opponent of the regime, boasts of a number of "achievements" to hint that the regime is in a militarily defeated situation.

In the questions section, as for the opposite direction, we see that Al-Qasim mentions at least two basic ideas in discussing the legitimacy of dialogue, but from what angle? The first is when he says that the victory of the opposition over the regime or vice versa is something that is internationally prohibited and that the exit of the "killer president" from the equation is a foregone conclusion, even if Resolution 2254 did not notice it. So, the opposite direction does not focus on the issue in terms of supporting dialogue as a principle but rather as a possibility. to maneuver to achieve a military goal that has been worked on militarily in the past, which is the removal of the Syrian president or compliance with an imposed international balance, and here one of the reduction mechanisms used in the aforementioned program appears with a political struggle. We conclude that the presentation of the losses and sacrifices in the episode's speech did not aim to address its cessation but rather to encourage political approaches that support violence in both cases.

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[6] *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (04:40-05:25): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo

Noam Chomsky, in the context of exposing propaganda, refers to the theory of Walter Lippmann, which looks at how to create a public consensus towards something that was rejected in the beginning. Within six months, the committee tasked with mobilizing Americans to participate in World War I, with a good mix of the real and the mythical, was publishing pictures of the Germans as exceptional war criminals, cutting off the hands of children in Belgium, destroying cities, heading towards the annihilation of humanity, and so on. propaganda that turned the Americans' negative attitude towards the war into a hysterical desire to destroy all that is German and save the world from their fire (Chomsky, 1991). The similarities between the above and our case can simply be noted. When examining the composition of the aforementioned TV episode, starting from the title to the affiliations of the guests, the introduction given by the broadcaster, and the percentage of votes on the episode's question, Norman Fairclough's argument that media texts impose certain assumptions on interpreters comes to mind. Fairclough (1989) says: "The powerful way in which to impose assumptions upon readers and interpreters" is to do so by "placing the interpreter through textual cues that she has to entertain these assumptions if she is to make sense of the text" (p. 83). In our concrete case, and specifically related to morality, the question and answer are driven in a way that prompts the recipient to reach one conclusion, which is the immorality of going to dialogue with the opposite party and makes it seem intuitive, so the discussion becomes about dealing with that step that lacks morality in a pragmatic spirit or principled spirit. There are many examples of this in the data quoted above: The episode's title is "Why Did the Syrian People Revolt?" Questions of the first and opposite direction, the assumed percentage of the vote, and others. According to the method and presentation of the text, the interpreter-recipient is obliged to accept that the dialogue is a bad option, and the discussion ultimately begins after this idea.

Eligibility

Our topic in this section will be the discussion of undervaluing the political solution by constantly questioning the eligibility of the parties for dialogue. The presenter and the guests unanimously agree that one or both sides of the dialogue are not qualified.
Al-Qasim asks the following:

What do you say to people? This regime does not work with solutions, so save what you have in money to buy weapons to confront this murderous regime. Because if they return, they will slaughter every Syrian who presses 'like' on Facebook (against power). These are the existing gangs. What do you tell them? Are you saying he understands something other than the barrel of a gun?[7]

Al-Labwani says:

The crisis in Syria is a crisis of authority, an authority that turned against its people, and instead of preserving the law, it practiced killing, torturing, and assaulting people, and therefore this authority must be brought to justice. The approach to the Syrian situation must begin with the criminal court. The origin is a crime committed by the Syrian regime. The issue is not between two states, for example, for dialogue to take place. The regime is known, so who is the opposite party? .... The problem is, where? The problem is between the people and the president. Before dialogue, people's rights must be fulfilled. This matter, which is the political solution, is a mistake and is based on misguidance. The idea of negotiation means that you disagree on the price and not on the principle. Don't try to convince me that you want to build law and order, because if you try to do that, you will be hanged the next day. Don't try to convince me that you're doing something good. Neither are the two parties qualified, nor is the international community, with its ethics, qualified to sponsor these negotiations. The political solution is absolutely immoral. You are destroying the social contract. If you destroy the basis of social existence, this will result in a real catastrophe, and we will pay the price for it all.[8]

As for the Syrian regime, Al-Labwani says: "If an employee wants to apply for a job, he needs a clean criminal record." He then asks, "How do you establish a dialogue with an international criminal (Bashar al-Assad), who has no legal capacity?" Al-Qassem follows,

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[7] *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (07:10-08:00): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo
[8] *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (08:00-11:05): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo

"nor mental capacity." Nasr al-Hariri also, according to a previous quote in the previous paragraph, considered the regime "non-existent" according to the losses it received.

The style followed by the three in this episode presents an almost unified approach to the dialogue that is taken as axioms by the viewer. First, the regime, which does not understand the language of violence, is legally or mentally incompetent or does not exist for one of the guests. Second, according to Al-Labawani, it proved disqualified because he regarded the possibility of going to dialogue as an "immoral" political solution. In this context, we must discuss the idea of what is required of dialogue, or the function of dialogue. If the conditions for legal capacity, legitimacy, and a record free of acts of violence were basically met by both the regime and the opposition, then there would be no need for dialogue in the first place. Power could have been transferred through elections, for example. The three attendees ignore the idea that dialogue is a process that will gradually restore the level of eligibility and legitimacy of both parties and that dialogue is a struggle (Habermas, 1987) that leads to new positions different from those before the process. Signs like these, which the three attendees work jointly to portray, give audiences the impression that dialogue has an unattainable purpose. On the other hand, the issue can be raised in a completely opposite way, in the sense that if certain obstacles hinder the start of a dialogue, what is needed to secure the minimum conditions for starting a dialogue as an alternative to bloody violence might be asked, like a last point of view not featured in the full episode. The set of implicit assumptions to which media discourse is driven constitutes what Norman Fairclough calls "common sense," closely related to ideology. Fairclough (1989) says: "Common sense' is substantially, though not entirely, ideological.... that ideology be regarded as essentially tied to power relations. Let us correspondingly understand ideological common sense as common sense in the service of sustaining unequal relations of power" (p. 84). The announcer and the two guests collectively launch many "axioms" that constitute "common sense" in rejecting dialogue in terms of the lack of conditions that qualify for this dialogue. This matter aims to make the audience forget that dialogue without preconditions is necessary to stop a humanitarian disaster.

Dialogue: a victory or a surrender?

Our topic in this section will be the discussion of undervaluing the political solution by portraying it as defeat of one of the parties in return for the victory of the other. Let's start with Al-Labwani:

> Whoever does not accept Assad will be classified as a terrorist, and whoever accepts him will fight alongside him. So you lost militarily. Politically, you accepted that your opponent would remain in power (saying to Nasr al-Hariri), and therefore you lost politically.[9]

Faisal Al-Qasim says:

> This is a very important point. As soon as I started dialogue with this regime, I gave it a deed of innocence. Some say that if they were in Bashar al-Assad's place, he would have made the day of Resolution 2254 a "Assadian" day (like a holiday) because it exempted him from everything.[10]

Nasr al-Hariri says:

> Bashar al-Assad and those who support him will not go away unless there is a strong positive military balance in favor of the Syrian revolution, and this requires the revolutionaries to close ranks and increase support from our friends for these fighters (meaning the countries supporting the opposition).[11]

In the same way, the three attendees continue, but from a new angle. Sometimes the regime will win politically if the opposition accepts dialogue (Al-Labwani), and sometimes the political solution is based on the military victory of the opposition, which makes the solution political-military (Nasr Al-Hariri). The broadcaster makes the international resolution an instrument of the innocence of the regime from its crimes. The issue of

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[9] *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (12:10-13:10): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo
[10] *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (14:15-15: 12): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo
[11] *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (17:30-24:50): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo

dialogue or a political solution is not approached in the three previous statements except on the basis that it is part of the military deception.

Norman Fairclough (1989) points out that "Power is not a permanent and undisputed attribute of any one person or social grouping" (p. 68). Therefore, we see that the dichotomy of victory or defeat in the approach to a political solution starts from a single ideological position, which is "the quest for power," and branches out between the regime and the opposition later on. This refutes the allegations of obtaining a new democratic governance model as a political goal, which we believe could result from a process such as dialogue or a political solution to be distinguished from the two existing models. At the same time, the outcomes of victory or defeat are exclusively one of the two sides of the old model.

Political naivety

Our topic in this section will be the discussion of undervaluing the political solution by portraying it as a trap that only those with little experience and the politically naive fall into.

Let's start with Al-Labwani again. Addressing Nasr al-Hariri, he says:

> You say that the fighting could stop. Do you really believe that? If it were possible, it would have at least certain signs. What you are doing is not right. You are manipulating the feelings of people who have been brought to a state of acceptance by the international community for any solution in exchange for a bite to eat. If the negotiation fails, Syria will be divided. Therefore, you have entered us into an untrue battle. You promise to return the people to the country; how will you return under the authority of the regime? This is a joke, right? I am not only afraid of negotiation; I am even afraid of the negotiating team itself. They want our youth in the "Free Army" to fight their brothers in "Jabhat al-Nusra" and "Ahrar al-Sham"[12] on the grounds that these are extremists. I morally cannot accept what you say[13].

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[12] Organizations classified internationally as terrorists.
[13] *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (19:21-20:15): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo

Nasr Hariri answers back as follows:

> I am not at all optimistic about the political process, and I do not expect its fate
> to be better than that of Geneva 2, as the gap between the two parties is very
> deep. The international resolution seeks to re-float Bashar al-Assad, and our
> expectations are very low on this issue.[14]

Thus, we find that Al-Labwani portrays those who deal with the idea of dialogue, even as an option, as deceived. He makes general assumptions about the fact that, as soon as you accept dialogue, you have politically admitted the regime, as if what is required of dialogue is to keep the regime as it is, to glorify it, and to establish it in its positions. It matches the concept of dialogue with naive acceptance of the fait accompli. It also gives viewers the impression that the dialogue was part of a plot to discourage the opposition from overthrowing the regime. He directs a fierce attack on ideas such as "stopping the fighting" and "people returning to the country" on the grounds that they manipulate people's feelings. On the other hand, this reflects an acknowledgment that the idea of dialogue is popular and socially acceptable. However, Al-Labwani deliberately humiliates people, depicting that these "feelings" are humiliated in search of a livelihood only as a result of the negligence practiced by the international community against the Syrian people. We also find the opposite guest, Nasr al-Hariri, and in defending himself on charges of falling into the trap of naivety and lack of political experience, he says that he is not optimistic about the political process and its fate will not be better than its predecessors, in an attempt to show himself that he is politically "savvy" in terms of form. In terms of content, we see that this saying reflects in depth the idea of hostility toward a political solution and dealing with it as something imposed by the international community.

The mentioning of a dialogue or meeting between the government and the opposition has shaken Mr. Labwani's "common ideological sense." This necessitated the return of sound ideological sense to the primacy position. Norman Fairclough points out that when discourse is disturbed, its producers seek to "foregrounded common sense, or to return it to the forefront." (Fairclough, 1989, p. 106) Another situation where common-

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[14] *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (34:45-41:00): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo

sense elements are "spontaneously' foregrounded is where there is a "sufficiently large social or cultural divide between participants in an exchange, or between participants in and observers of an exchange, for the arbitrariness and social relativity of the common sense of one to be evident to others." (Fairclough, 1989, p. 106).

The back of the trends supporting the option of violence are exposed, and its stability is disturbed when faced with the possibility of changing the methods of conflict from the military to the political. Therefore, Mr. Labwani works to reaffirm the order of the discourse by using numerous justifications and warnings to maintain the previous pattern of stability.

Al-Mayadeen TV

Al-Mayadeen channel is a similar case for the Qatari Al-Jazeera channel. Since the outbreak of popular protests in Tunisia and Egypt in late 2010, Al-Jazeera played a supportive role for public protests in general, and Islamic forces in particular. A number of the main media professionals separated from Al-Jazeera, including the later director of Al-Mayadeen channel, Ghassan bin Jiddo, and launched their channel in Beirut, next to the Iranian embassy, with financial support from Iran and security protection from the Lebanese Shiite currents allied with Iran.

At a later stage, the channel showed a trend opposite to the majority of Arab channels owned by the Arab Gulf states that supported the Syrian opposition.

The sample studied in this chapter is the "Akhir tabaa,"[15] a program on January 20, 2016, about a month after the issuance of Resolution 2254. It was presented by the Syrian broadcaster, Fatoun Al-Absi, and hosted Sharif Shehadeh, a member of the Syrian Parliament, as a main guest. The introduction to the program was as follows:

> A few days separate us from the Geneva 3 conference, which is still facing
> obstacles to its scheduled date of the twenty-fifth of this month. There is no
> agreement yet on the list of terrorist organizations or on the representation of
> the opposition, and therefore there are no UN calls directed at this time when

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[15] The name of the program means "Last Edition."

all eyes are on the meeting of the Russian and US foreign ministers, which it is hoped will result in understandings that overcome obstacles and contribute to the achievement of the conference on time to talk about whether or not the Geneva conference will take place and the prospects for a political solution in light of the current situation.[16]

Ethical perspective

The announcer asks, "After the last meeting between Moscow and Washington, which was held in Geneva, faltered, do you expect that something positive will result today from the supposed meeting between Kerry and Lavrov in Zurich?"

Sherif Shehadeh says the following:

I do not see that there are features confirming that the conference will be held on time. Terrorist groups cannot be allowed to infiltrate the dialogue as opposition groups, because whoever wants to go to Geneva means that he wants to go to a political solution, and therefore there is no dialogue without the Syrian government knowing who it is going to talk to. It is not possible to pass a name to one of the terrorist groups and thus say that he is a political opponent; then the Syrian government sits at a table to talk to him, and thus this group takes on the status of the political opposition.[17]

He continues as follows:

You heard, at least a year ago, calling the opposition the Saudi representative, the Qatari representative, and the Turkish representative, and this is an unfortunate thing, and it makes the opposition from now on tend to be a betrayer. Allow me to say that whoever wants to be an opponent is not a shame. But if he is affiliated with this side or that, this is a very dangerous matter.[18]

He adds the following:

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16 *Akhir Tabaa,* (20/01/2016), (00:20-01:04): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg

17 *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (03:40- 4:48): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg

18 *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (5:00- 5:25): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg

> The opposition had met in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabia is part of those who participated in the war against Syria and is the one who finances terrorist groups in Syria. The Qatari and Saudi roles in Syria are clear. There are countries that pay terrorist organizations.[19]

The announcer then says, "This is not new and is not hidden from anyone."

Mr. Shehadeh opens his speech about the need for the absence of terrorist organizations in the dialogue process, although Resolution 2254 notes this in its provisions as it differentiates between the opposition and terrorist organizations and calls for the unification of all Syrian forces to combat terrorism.

It is very clear that this introduction is the beginning of the rejection of the counterparty. And this is what happened in the subsequent sentences, where Mr. Shehadeh moved from terrorism to "treason," attributing opposition figures to groups of regional powers without proof. So such discourse leads to the idea that the dialogue process is not national. Like many of the media professionals representing the Syrian authorities, Mr. Shehadeh takes advantage of the fact that the negotiations are taking place under an international umbrella in order to challenge their patriotism and locality, and thus their moral dimension. Ignoring the existence of the authority itself within specific international alliances and that the authority's failure to open the door to dialogue led to the internationalization of the crisis. The emergence of a political solution and dialogue through an international resolution or an international effort has disturbed the sound ideological logic of the supporters of military solutions, including Mr. Sharif Shehadeh in our particular case. "When things go wrong in discourse... where people attempt to 'repair' their discourse, as a way of highlighting and foregrounding discoursal common sense". (Fairclough, 1989, p. 106)

In such cases, they "return common ideological reasoning to the fore," according to Norman Fairclough (1989, p. 106), who uses the term "foregrounding common sense," which occurs "when things go wrong in discourse." Mr. Sharif Shehadeh rearranged the scene to return it to its previous state of stability. The previous context of the Syrian crisis was based on the continuation and escalation of the spiral of violence. When signs of

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[19] *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (5:25- 6:08): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg

political solutions appeared, Shehadeh rushed "to 'repair' their discourse, as a way of highlighting and foregrounding discoursal common sense." Therefore, the words "treason," "terrorist groups," "sponsoring terrorism," and others that we mentioned earlier were used to arrange "sound ideological logic" within an appropriate version of the event.

Eligibility

The announcer says the following:

> The most prominent obstacle threatening Geneva 3 is opposition representation. Moscow rejects the Riyadh list because it includes terrorist organizations and is devoid of important opposition figures. Do you expect a broader representation of the opposition in an agreement between Russia and Washington? In return, what will Washington give to accept that?[20]

Sherif Shehadeh replies back as follows: "Because it realizes that the opposition does not represent the Syrian people, the USA will agree on the grounds that reality dictates that military progress on the ground in Syria will lead to dialogue." He then adds, "Saudi Arabia is the source of terrorism, and it is not qualified to sponsor the process of forming the opposition delegation."

The simple assertion that the opposition "does not represent the Syrian people" indicates in itself one of the causes of the crisis. Representatives of the Syrian authority, even before the Syrian crisis, including Mr. Sharif Shehadeh, often deal with the fact that any opposition movement represents certain external agendas, which have emerged as a title for the regime's media discourse since the beginning of the crisis, represented by the term "conspiracy." He believes that any internal movement is merely a result of foreign policy in the sense that part of the masses, due to their lack of awareness, are driven like a herd behind loud slogans or petty material temptations.[21]

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[20] *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (25:45- 29:00): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg

[21] The Syrian president says in one of his interviews that citizens were seduced with an amount of two thousand Syrian pounds, which corresponds to a few dollars at the time, to go out in demonstrations against the government. President Bashar al-Assad's speech at the Syrian People's Assembly on June 4, 2012 – quoted by the official Syrian news agency, SANA: https://sana.sy/?p=3218

Therefore, when discussing the idea of the opposition's eligibility to engage in dialogue with the authority according to the model represented by Sharif Shehadeh, we find that the skepticism of the eligibility is rooted in the inability of the masses and political forces that are not affiliated with the system of power to form a political situation that is qualified to engage in dialogue. Therefore, the frequent use of the term "conspiracy" in the authority's media discourse provides an easy answer to many details related to politics. In other words, this is the word "conspiracy" that forms a basic pillar of both discourse and perception structures in the media loyal to authority.

It is also necessary to mention the attack on Saudi Arabia and its sponsorship of terrorism.[22] Historically, the Syrian regime has had deep relations with Saudi Arabia in dealing with the file of the Lebanese civil war and the formation of governments of sectarian division since the mid-seventies of the last century. Recently, Syrian-Saudi relations have returned through President Al-Assad's visit to Saudi Arabia and his attendance at the Arab Summit this year. This leads us to believe that despite Saudi Arabia's involvement in nurturing terrorist tendencies historically in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, respectively, Sherif Shehadeh's questioning of Saudi Arabia's eligibility at the time for sponsoring terrorism was not at the time an attack on Saudi Arabia as much as it was an attack on the political solution process itself. Fairclough (1989) says: "Acknowledging the phenomenon of naturalization is tantamount to insisting upon a distinction between the superficial common-sense appearances of discourse and its underlying essence" (p. 92). However, what then are we to make of the people's explanations of their discourse practices? "Explanations should be seen as rationalizations which cannot be taken at face value but are themselves in need of explanation." So "We can see rationalizations as part and parcel of naturalization: together with the generation of common-sense discourse practices comes the generation of common-sense rationalizations of such practices, which serve to legitimize them" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 92). The continuous use of justifications and pretexts to challenge the eligibility of the forces that should participate in the political dialogue is an attempt to make war a natural phenomenon in the consciousness of the recipient. In politics and life in general, we can always repeat many justifications to reach

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[22] The 2015 Vienna Conference on the Syrian Crisis assigned the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to organize a conference for the Syrian opposition to negotiate with the Syrian regime.

a conclusion that maintains the status quo to prevent a transition from one situation to another. This is the essence of what Mr. Shehadeh is doing.

Dialogue: a victory or surrender?

Sharif Shehadeh says the following in the program:

The Syrian military's (government forces') advance on the Syrian coast and in Aleppo in the north and south confirms that the military force has reached its goal in Syria and what the leadership wants in Syria. This means that the United States will not announce the convening of the conference in light of the defeat of the groups. Another option must be discussed, which is postponing until the Syrian military forces are defeated on the ground or until the decisions of the conference are confiscated, which will not happen.[23]

He adds:

Washington desires military control of southern Syria as well as northern Syria, which confirms that there is no solution other than the victory of the Syrian military forces on the ground. I believe that what we are witnessing now of the progress of the Syrian army has terrified others, and this is what stopped the convening of the Geneva 2, 3, 4, or 5 conference, which is a new picture of the scene in Syria.[24]

It is also noticeable that the media professionals of the Syrian regime follow a tactic with every improvement in the course of the political process. They usually warn of a major military action that the enemies will prepare for, and that talking about dialogue aims to numb the powers of the authority and its public. Most likely, the use of this method arose during the years of the Syrian crisis under the pressure of the popular bases operating in the state or residing under the control of the Syrian government. Those bases are deprived of safety, a decent standard of living, and the most basic services such as electricity, water,

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[23] *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (38:25-39:40): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg
[24] *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (39:40-40:40): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg

and fuel. On the other hand, these bases are exposed to heavy media pumping from pro-Syrian authorities about victories, military progress, the approaching date of decisiveness, and the collapse of the opposition fronts. Therefore, the authority's media often carries a paradox, which coincides with the progress of the Syrian government forces and the end of the crisis with victory, while at the same time the enemies hide a treacherous and dangerous attack under the guise of a political solution and dialogue.

The warning of a significant military danger is disguised as a political solution or dialogue. Or the claim that the dialogue is a maneuver to stop the series of military victories for the authority is, in fact, an example of what Norman Fairclough (1989, p. 107) calls "the foregrounding" of discourse if common sense is disturbed by some kind of intervention in the discourse: "People quickly become incredulous, irritated, and angry when this world is disturbed, and may well conclude that whoever disturbs it is playing the fool, or mentally ill. This is, therefore, a technique to use cautiously!" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 107). Such a maneuver can make the recipient rationalize and lower his expectations of dialogue and a political solution as long as the possibility of deception is removed from behind. Thinking that the political solution is a severe one causes distress and anger in the recipient, and this is what is required of MrShehadeh's warnings.

Political naivety

Sharif Shehadeh says the following:

> The United States seeks to create a new army in southern Syria to fight ISIS. It means that there is a reprogramming of what the United States of America wants, in the sense that it should hold on to the south of the country as well as its east. This indicates that we are still in the midst of the battle and that saying that America wants a solution in Syria is incorrect, as is saying that the Arab parties agree to a political solution. and that the military factor will determine the situation on the ground.[25]

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[25] *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (41:15- 43:10): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg

Sherif Shehadeh provides no way to get the idea of a solution out of people's minds. For this reason, it activates the memory of the masses that the United States of America often plays the role of triggering wars and conflicts around the world and that regional parties comply with its policies, and this is a reality without a doubt. Assuming that Sherif Shehadeh, or whoever represents them, is in the opposite camp to the United States, as we conclude from his words, isn't confronting the warmongers by finding a formula to prevent war, or at least to call for it? On the contrary, we find that the "trenches" agree on the military conflict so that each serves the other and provides an excuse to continue in the same direction. Approaching a tragic situation such as the Syrian catastrophe requires, in fact, exceptional diligence and initiatives that block the continuation of the bleeding. This is supposed to be the goal of the discussion: to provide the least opportunities for that, instead of invoking the violence of the opposite party to justify more future violence, which we have seen in the previous samples of both parties.

Mr. Sherif Shehadeh gives many signs in his speech, hoping to remove the idea of a political solution and dialogue from people's minds as far as he can. If direct ideological signals are implemented, he resorts to throwing inaccurate data without references about an "American plan" or the like to indirectly create in the recipient the perception that talking about a solution is just a trap.

"Texts do not typically spout ideology. They so position the interpreter through their cues that she brings ideologies to the interpretation of texts - and reproduces them in the process" (Fairclough, 1989, p: 85). This description applies to all cases of presenting inaccurate data that is hidden under the cover of speculation or analysis. It is straightforward for those with a pro-war ideological position to throw any analysis that predicts a specific political or military event that prevents the political solution's success, so just thinking about it shows a kind of naive idealism.

DISCUSSION

Our world is still witnessing many military conflicts and political crises in different parts of it. The media around the world closely monitors, on a daily basis, the slightest changes in the various battlefields and political platforms. Analytical and political talk shows broadcast a huge amount of information, figures, analyses, strategies, and tactics without

interruption. With regard to the causes of conflicts, their continuity, escalation, and recurrence, the daily analysis of the event often refers to momentary and immediate developments on the scene, while the deep causes are rarely discussed, which we believe to be complex, meaning that they are internal and external at the same time.

Internal causes are often sharp class inequalities, poor distribution of wealth, low political and democratic freedoms, racial discrimination, marginalization, unemployment, and deprivation of education and medical care, while external reasons are related to the struggle over spheres of influence around the world and the intervention of superpowers and regional powers in the internal affairs of other countries to detonate the situation in them and use them as sources of pressure in the conflict.

The Syrian war is a typical example of a complex internal-external explosion. With the availability of internal reasons, international and regional powers, divided into two camps, sought to support the parties to the conflict through intense military and political interventions throughout the years of the war. This led to the escalation of the conflict and brought it to its extreme and tragic limits.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research focused largely on the discourse of media outlets owned by parties supporting and opposing the regime in approaching the Syrian event, at a time when the choice of those parties was to continue the war for certain political reasons. In other words, our research sought to monitor the discourse of the media in the case of justifying war and military actions, demonizing dialogue, and distancing it from the imagination and minds of the masses.

The research also sought to analyze the media discourse in the sampled outlets by focusing on the words, phrases, and sentences on which that discourse is based in the context of their defense of their allied war camps. In other words, through this study, we tracked the discourse structure of both parties and its ideological contents presented to the audiences to provide them with ready-made formulations filled with arguments, pretexts, numbers, reasons, results, and conclusions in order to be reflected in social life in the form of a vertical division that constitutes fuel for the military battle and instigates its continuation. That is, politicians exchange hate speech in the media so that people shoot each other with

bullets. The word "revolution" was frequently repeated in the opposition media. As we have seen in the study, this word has been employed to imply that it is the choice of an entire people, that the violence of those under it is justified or sacred violence, and to win sympathy and cordiality through the sacrificial dimension of the word. But in the context in which it was used, we noticed that it was used to justify undemocratic, divisive, and violent practices, thereby contradicting the deep concept of the national democratic revolution. We also find that the word "conspiracy" occupies a large area of the discourse of the pro-government media, and it is almost being used for the same reasons that the word "revolution" is used, albeit in reverse, such as legitimizing violence to defend the homeland, comprehensive representation of the people, and expressing vigilance towards the interests of the homeland and the people. We also find that, in the context, it was employed to describe important and vital sections of the Syrians as engaged in treason. The two parties also remarkably used the phrase "the Syrian people will accept or not accept, or will prevent or not, etc." It is also a way to give legitimacy to a specific issue that one of the parties to the conflict demands without making an exact reference to the "people" they mean. Is it only the people loyal to them, whether the opposition or the authority? Is it the whole population? Or not? Any answer to any of the previous questions is a disaster in itself, especially since the Syrians were not asked for their opinion throughout the years of the crisis, not in fair elections or referendums. It is also illogical for all "people" to agree with the opinion of the politician from the studied samples. Our research suggests that a more prominent space should be devoted to discussing some headlines independently, such as the role of media discourse in threatening security in some politically and economically unstable countries. Moreover, the direct and indirect responsibility of the media before and after a war or massacre and the extent of its contribution to violence should be questioned. This is particularly essential in light of the recent emergence of conflicts, wars, and political crises in the eastern Mediterranean, eastern Asia, central Europe, Africa, and South America. It is also important considering the unequal exchange between the developed and developing capitalist countries, the political and economic instability in the latter, and the emergence of large and remarkable waves of refugees toward Western countries in the last two decades.

Finally, our study raises a question that is generally difficult to answer: Is there a way to measure the media's contribution to bloody violence? And what is its responsibility for that? Although its role in this is indirect, we consider that the question remains legitimate. As long as this measurement tool is not available, criticism of political and media discourse remains necessary and essential to approaching any political or social event that is likely to turn violent.

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