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Media Bias: a corpus-based contrastive study of the online news coverage on the Syrian revolution - a cxritical discourse analysis perspective

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MEDIA BIAS: A CORPUS-BASED CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF THE ONLINE NEWS COVERAGE ON THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION- A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS PERSPECTIVE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

The Syrian revolution is one of a series of revolutions that erupted in the Middle East in late 2010 under the name of Arab Spring. This incident became a major issue, which attracted the attention of international mass media and led to the involvement of global super powers. This research is premised on the assumption that media discourse is biased and influenced by political, economic and social contexts (Fowler, 1991). Based on this assumption, the study opts to use news agencies as data sources because they are impartial news suppliers that are assumed to hold a non-ideological perspective. The research compares the online media representation of the Syrian revolution in the Iranian Fars news agency to that in UK Reuters news agency. It explores the discursive constructions of anti- and pro-government powers in the Syrian revolution in a 1,000,000-word corpus of online reports released between 2013 and 2015. Despite the body of research on the Arab revolutions, very few linguistic studies have tackled the Syrian revolution. In addition, none of them have considered the array of the fighting armed groups involved in this conflict and their ideological background.

The study adopts a corpus-based critical discourse analysis to investigate the discursive constructions of anti- and pro-government powers across the micro (i.e., lexical choices) and macro linguistic levels (i.e., the broader sense of the linguistic features in relation to their contexts). The analysis, at the micro level, examines three types of lexicosemantic relations: the semantic macrostructures within which the two conflicting sides are framed, the lexical collocations characterising the news discourse and the discourse prosodies they convey about the two sides of the conflict. The study utilises two computer-based approaches, the Sketch engine (Kilgarriff et al, 2004) and Antony's (2014) AntConc software, to minimize the subjectivity of analysis. At the macro level, the study draws upon an eclectic framework from critical discourse analysis. It incorporates van Leeuwen (2008) socio-semantic model, Transitivity model (1994) and Ideological Square (van Dijk, 1998) to investigate the possible bias in the coverage of the chemical attacks. The selection of this incident was guided by the findings of the corpus analysis.

The findings indicate that Fars representation of the Syrian Revolution was biased. Fars excluded the Sunni social actors, suppressed the Islamic faction identity of the rebels and depicted the uprising as a real war against foreign-backed militants. The

rebels are stereotyped as non-Syrians, terrorists, ISIL and Takfiri. In contrast, Reuters provides a more balanced representation of the two warring sides. The identification of the anti-government social actors is more critical and less stereotyped as they are categorized into moderate and radical. In addition, the identification of the government SAs were neutral and formal. Their negative racist representation is indexed by their actions at the political and military level not by the reporters' evaluative attributes. The study concluded that Fars news agency is highly influenced by the political stance of the Iranian government, its pan-Islamist ideology, and the shared Islamic orientation with the Syrian government. On the contrary, Reuters' coverage showed no dichotomous ideological representation, reflecting, to some extent, its independence from the effect of the political stance of the UK.

Acknowledgements

Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.

I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.

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1. Introduction

As a source of information, media access in large communities is key to 'the formation and expression of culture, politics and social life', forming stereotypes and influencing public attitudes (Bell, 1991, p 3-4). Thus, the media is a powerful agent that uses language to shape or breakdown public perception. This study aims to explore how the dominant political ideology influenced the news coverage of the Syrian revolution by two international news agencies, UK Reuters and Iranian Fars. The study further examines media bias by investigating how reports are linguistically constructed to communicate events in ways that fit the political stances of the countries that host certain news agencies.

The following sections start by providing a comprehensive background of the case study. The research questions are then introduced with a brief reference to the analytical framework, which integrates the corpus linguistic (CL) approach with critical discourse analysis (CDA). Following this, the rationale behind the study is elucidated. Finally, the chapter ends with an overview of the thesis' organizational structure.

1.1 Background of the Event

Syria gained its independence from British and French colonialism in 1946. In a long search for a 'central authority' that could bind the country together, successive coups took place until the Ba'ath Party headed by Hafez Al-Assad ruled the country in 1970 (Leenders, 2014, p. 313). During his presidential reign, Hafez Al-Assad improved the military power of the Syrian army significantly with the aid of the Soviets (Pollack, 2004). According to Leenders (2014), Hafez Al-Assad monopolized his power to serve his own minority sect (Alawite) and cracked down on any protest advocating representative members of other parties, such as left-wing Kurds and Muslim Brotherhood parties. This in turn led to a public outrage among Muslim Brotherhood Islamists, the main rivals against the Bath Party, who had been violently crushed in the Hama massacre in 1982 following their uprising against Hafez in 1981. Since then, the Syrian community did not witness any civil disturbance, especially since Christian and Druze minorities preferred the Ba'ath secular reign over an Islamic reign. The following subsections will proceed to further explain the structure of the Syrian community, the ideologies of the fighting armed groups in the Syrian conflict, the Syrian-Iranian axis including a brief review of the key nation state players in the Middle East, and finally the UK political stance.

1.1.1 Complexities of Syrian Community

The Syrian community is composed of different religions, sects and ethnicities. Due to Syria's social structure, it is therefore important for the current study to trace the voices that are suppressed and those that are foregrounded. In a recent statistical report about the religious makeup of Syria that was adapted from BBC News, the Sunni sect[1] was found to make up the majority of the Syrian population.
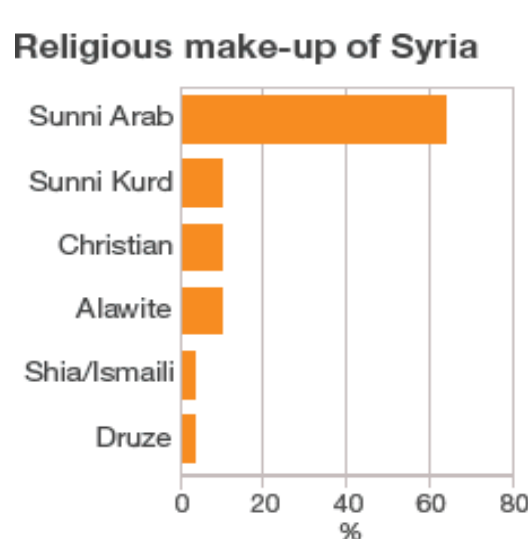
Figure 1.1 Religious-based ratio of Syrian people (source: UK Foreign Office)[2]

The figure above indicates that Sunni Kurds, Christians and Alawites are equally distributed, making up roughly 10% of the Syrian population, respectively, and that the Ismaili and Druze are the least populated religious groups in the Syrian community. All the same, the ruling power is completely centralized within the Alawite minority and controlled by the Ba'ath Party. According to "Syria: Sunni Opposition" (2011), a report released by the CIA, although the Sunnis are an important religious sect who have contributed significantly to the social and economic enhancement of the country, they have been politically abandoned. The report also discloses that when the Alawites gained power in the 1960s, 'Sunni leaders … fled into exile, suffered arrest and imprisonment, cut deals and arranged marriages to secure entry into the new elite, or lapsed into political inactivity' (p. iii).

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[1] Sunni is an Arabic word that refers to the loyal followers of the prophet Muhammed and his four successors (caliphs), Abu- Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali. Peace be upon them all.
[2] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14520830, adapted from BBC News.

It is important to note that there are two sectarian-based rival political parties in Syria—the Ba'ath Party, which is controlled by the Shi'ites[3], and the Islamic Brotherhood, which is led by the Sunnis. According to Issac (2009), Ba'athism is a nationalist-based political movement that advocates for pan-Arabism. It was originated by Michel Aflaq, a Syrian-Christian philosopher, in 1947, and it is an entirely secular and non-Islamic party. Central to Ba'ath ideology are the ideas that Western influence must be expelled from the Arab World and that Ba'ath ideals, such as the 'Renaissance or Resurrection of the entire Arab World' (p.1), must be upheld. By comparison, the Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamic movement that advocates for pan-Islamic ideals. Initiated in 1945 by Mustafa Al-Sibai in Syria, the Brotherhood strives to uproot western interference in the Islamic world (Lefèvre, 2013).

In their examination of ethnicity, Khalifa (2013) noted that Arabs and Kurds were the two largest ethnic groups in Syria, amounting to 80% and 10% of the Syrian population, respectively. Although Arabs are distributed throughout the country, the Kurds are primarily located in areas of northeast Syria, including in places of ongoing war, such as Hasakah, Kobani and Afrin. Other ethnicities, like the Turkmen and Assyrians, make up around 3–4% of the Syrian population, and the least populace groups include the Circassians (1.5%) and Armenians (about 1%).

1.1.2 From Demonstration to Civil War

Having elucidated the basic ethnic and religious population of the Syrian community, this section explains the role that Syria's social structure played on the progression of the Syrian uprising. To begin, the Syrian revolution is one of the enormous revolutions that took place in the Arab countries between 2010 and 2012. These series of uprisings, called the Arab Spring, was first triggered in Tunisia before spreading to Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria. This massive insurrection was undertaken in order to emancipate people from political abuse, brutality from security forces, poverty, rising prices, unemployment and other forms of social corruption.

The uprisings were safely and bloodlessly brought to Syria by Sunni citizens in 2011. While people peacefully chanted their demands for political reform and for the emancipation of individuals they believed were unjustly detained, their marches of

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[3] Shia is an Arabic word refers to the loyal followers of Ali (the Prophet Mohammed's cousin peace be upon them all) and who disbelieve in the first three successors of the Prophet, namely, Abu- Bakr, Umar and Uthman.

protest were often met violently by security forces, the civilian police and an Alawite armed faction known as Shabbiha, who would beat, arrest, torture and kill protesters (Arimatsu & Choudhury, 2014). In response, several teenagers drew graffiti in protest on a school wall in Deraa, saying 'Your turn Doctor' in reference to President Bashar Al-Assad (Asher-Schapiro, 2016). One day later, the teenagers were arrested and detained by security forces, who then tortured them for weeks. This incited anger amongst the citizenry, who repelled with weaponry to protect themselves and their families. As the violence escalated, support for Al-Assad grew more divided. Sectarian groups became involved, and the Sunni majority spoke out against the Shi'ite Alawites, who were loyal to the Syrian regime. A cluster of armed groups and international powers were drawn in. Eventually, the uprising turned into a civil war, and the protestors' demands shifted from a call for political reform to overthrowing the President's regime (Rodger et al., 2016).

People began to organize into fighting units to defend themselves and their sites. In 2011, a number of honest soldiers and police officers defected from the Syrian government to establish a new anti-government power comprised of several armed units called the Free Syrian Army (FSA). This power played a major role in protecting Sunni communities from the massacres the Syrian army carried out. While the battalion was made up of Arab Sunnis, other ethnicities, such as the Kurds, Durz, Palestinians and Turkmen, joined its cause (Casey-Maslen, 2014). As the army's power increased, it eventually managed to push Assad forces back, gaining more territories in the process. Then, in collaboration with civilians, the FSA established the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, which was 'recognized by several countries, such as the UK, France, Turkey and a number of Gulf Arab States', in 2012 (Casey-Maslen, 2014, p. 213).

Based on a project accomplished by the Security Assessment in North Africa (SANA), the three key ideological authorities of Syria are as follows:

- 'Secularism (marked by the desire to separate religion from the state);
- Islamism (which entails the ambition to establish an Islamic state in Syria, though not necessarily through violence);
- And Salafi jihadism (which is marked by imperialist Islamist ambitions and *takfirism*, as practised by Al-Qaeda)' (Bass, 2016, p. 2).

The word *Takfirism* is an Arabic noun that is derived from the root verb *kafara*, which means to disbelieve in Allah (God). In other words, the person who does not believe in Allah is called a *Kafir*, or an unbeliever or infidel. *Takfiri* describes the process in which a Muslim authority decides that another person is a nonbeliever. This radical ideology permits theses authorities to kill any person who is not Muslim. Moreover, it allows them to use *Takfiri* to judge the faith and weigh the beliefs of Muslims, enabling them to sentence those whose faith to Islam is in question to death or to impose extreme punishments for committing major sins due to the misinterpretation or misunderstanding of Islamic jurisprudence rules.

Each of the abovementioned ideologies are directed by armed forces that impose their dominance and rule over the territories they have gained. Secularism, the first of these ideologies, is commonly known as Moderate Opposition and was established in 2011 by rebels, civilians and defectors from the Syrian army (Arimatsu & Choudhury, 2014). According to Bass (2016), the term moderate is derived from the system that the ideologic group uses to select its fighters, as it excludes individuals with radical views or with relationships to terrorist groups, like Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS; Sham refers to the Levant), the Al-Nusra Front and Al-Qaeda. Moderate Opposition is a part of the FSA, which often receives military aid from the USA and is comprised of various militant groups, such as the 'Al-Sham Front, Army of the Mujahideen and Yarmouk Battalion' (Bass, 2016. p. 6).

Another powerful defensive front on Syrian ground includes the Kurdish Defence Units (YPG), which is also known as the People's Protection Units. Its forces are primarily located in northeast Syria. According to the Kurdish Project, Kurdish Rojava territory extends to the three cantons of Kobani, Afrin and Cizre near the Turkish borders[4]. This armed group is supported by the USA and is considered to be the country's 'most reliable partner' in its fight against ISIS in northeast Syria. Regardless, because of its to relationship with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, the Turkish government has listed it as a terrorist organization (Barnard & Hubbard, 2018).

Islamism is a Sunni faction that descended from the Muslim Brotherhood. Since its establishment in 1964, the faction has had a bloody history with the Syrian regime. Indeed, it was expelled from Syria after revolting against the Syrian government in the

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[4] https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-democracy/rojava-democracy/

1980s (Porat, 2010). After the Hama massacre in 1982, which saw the slaughter of about 40,000 Sunni people in three weeks, many members of the Muslim Brotherhood members escaped to Jordan, Turkey, Iraq or Saudi Arabia (Lister, 2016). Most of these Syrian opposition fighters, who possessed a populist vision and carried no radical views, were supported by loyal religious scholars in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Today, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar are considered to be the primary suppliers of the FSA and its affiliates (Gelvin, 2015; Bass, 2016).

The final ideological authority in Syria is Salafi jihadism. According to Al-Rawi and Jensen (2014), this armed group has recruited diverse fighters who are well-experienced in battle and have frequently acted as jihadists who participated in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. Salafi jihadists, they added, 'are generally adverse to non-Islamic state structures, and therefore often form stronger ties with foreigners sharing similar Salafi views, than with their own national compatriots' (p. 44). An important distinction in their ideology is that they do not believe that Shia is an Islamic party (Al-Rawi and Jensen, 2014). Salafi jihadists are internationally recognized as the most militarily and financially powerful armed opposition group in Syria. According to the Security Assessment in North Africa, Salafi jihadists are commonly involved in the three armed factions of Al-Qaeda, the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS (Bass, 2016). It has been estimated that more than 1500 military groups exist in Syria and are actively fighting against the current Syrian regime (Zuhur, 2015).

On the other hand, the pro-Syrian government supporters on the local level are Shia. Shia is an Islamic faction that has various offshoots with different beliefs. The Alawites[5], Druze, Nusairi and Ismailis are the most prominent branches of Shia (South ,Jermyn & Spence 2016). Bashar Al-Assad, Syria's president, belongs to the Nusairi, which is Shia's most radical branch. This sect's doctrines mix Islamic concepts with Paganism notions, the Trinitarian beliefs of Christianity and fallacies that have nothing to do with Islam (Nisan, 2002). These sectarian militias are unified under the National Defence Forces (NDF).

The Shabiha[6] is a pro-government group that is primarily comprised of paramilitary gangs and Alawites who were released from death row. They disguise themselves as unarmed citizens and hide in Sunni communities to kidnap, torture, kill

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[5] Also spelled as Alawis.
[6] Shabiha is an Arabic word that is derived from the word Shaba, which means ghost. They have been given this name because they cannot officially be recognised as a pro-government people.

and spread fear amongst civilians. In 2012, the US labelled them as a terrorist group who had committed war crimes (Townsend, 2015). According to a number of European newspapers, such as the *British Daily Telegraph* and the *French L'Express,* Maher Al-Assad, the president's brother, established, commanded and armed the Shabiha militia (Kerr & Larkin, 2015. p. 211). Syria has many powerful allies across the globe, including Russia, Iran, the Iraqi Shias and Hizballah[7]. Hizballah is a Lebanese sectarian force that has acted as the main domestic provider of weapons and ammunition since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in 2011 (Kerr & Larkin, 2015).

1.1.3 Syria-Iran Alliance

Understanding the socio-political relation between Iran and Syria in this study is crucial to retrieve the ideology underlying the news construction of the government and the rebels. This section aims to elucidate the reasons behind the Syrian-Iranian alliance and their political and ideological perspectives. Although the two countries do not share the same language, ethnicities (Arab and Persian) or ideologies (Ba'ath is secular, and Iran is Islamist), their alliance has lasted for more than 30 years (Gelbart, 2010). According to Goodarzi (2013), while Iran and Syria have different political interests in the region, their partnership has endured because neither country can fulfil its goals without the strategic support of the other. Goodarzi indicated that Iran's priorities are to regain control over the Persian Gulf, which is currently under the sovereignty of the Arab Gulf States, and to retain the government of Baghdad as a loyal backer of Iran's strategic interests. The Iranian government has also aimed to enhance Iranian pan-Islamism ideologies by supporting Shi'ite Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Hamas movement in Palestine. This is vital, as passage from Iran to southern Lebanon can only be achieved by way of Syria.

According to Goodarzi (2013), President Al-Assad's primary aims for the region are to remove Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, return it to Arab rule and to gain veto rights over any attempts by the Lebanese government to block or undermine his interests. The Syrian government's ideological goal is to promote the Ba'ath Party's pan-Arabism interests in Arab countries. It is worth mentioning that Iran and Syria share the same enemies and similar anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism foreign policies (Gelbart, 2010, p. 36).

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[7] Also spelled as Hezbollah.

1.1.3.1 Key Nation Players in the Middle East

It is important to indicate that the Sunni and Shia divide is one of the main reasons provoking the uprising in Syria. This Islamic rift is not new but dates back to the death of Ali, the last successor and cousin of the prophet Muhammad. Some Muslims believed that the successor of Ali should be one from his own family, a man who has a direct bloodline to the prophet Muhammad. Other Muslims objected, saying that the successor should be elected and agreed upon as the most qualified one to lead the Ummah[8]. Muslims then divided into two groups, those who support Ali's bloodline succession lately named Shia, and those who believe the successor is not required to be from the prophet's kinship. Therefore, religiously, the main difference between Sunni and Shia, at this point, lies in 'the religious authority and the leadership succession' (Knott, 2016, p.3).

According to the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, the upheavals of the Sunni-Shia divide started to influence political affairs since the 1970s, due to the political unrests which bred internal conflicts in the region. These conflicts include the 1979 Iranian revolution, the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf War in 1990, the US invasion on Iraq in 2003 which led to replacing the Sunni government with a fully controlled Shi'ite government, and finally the Arab Spring which started in 2010 (Knott, 2016). The repercussions of these unrests threatened the geopolitical ambitions of the two main nation state players, Iran (representing the Shia Muslims) and Saudi Arabia (representing the Sunni Muslims). Iran, as explained earlier (see Section 1.3.1), strives to create a passage which connects to the Mediterranean (Marcus, 2019). In addition, it aims to stretch its dominance over the two Holy Mosques that are currently under the reign of the Saudi government. However, for Saudi Arabia, the Arabian Gulf and the two Holy mosques are irreconcilable (Nejad, 2017).

These political repercussions, consequently, have drawn in the domestic and international powers in the Syrian conflict as it is no more considered an uprising against the government but rather a sectarian war against Sunnis. According to Rogers et al (2016), Hezbollah, Iran and Russia are the main allies of the Syrian government providing military and financial support. The regional backers of the Sunni opposition, on the other hand, are Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey and Qatar, in addition to the international support from the US, UK and France

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[8] Ummah is an Arabic word means the whole Muslim community.

1.1.4   UK Political Stance

It is equally important to understand the political stance of the UK towards the Syrian government in order to trace the impact of its standpoint in the news representation of the revolution. The UK considers the Syrian government the main responsible for the Syrian crisis. The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2015) reported that the UK firmly advocated for 'documenting and addressing violations and abuses of human rights and humanitarian law' in Syria, demanding the UN to refer the Syrian case to the International Criminal Court (ICC) due to the regime's informal executions and systematic torture within its official military sites (para. 4). Unsurprisingly, the tension between the British and Syrian governments escalated during this conflict. Martin Longden, the UK's special Envoy to Syria, tweeted on his official Twitter account that 'The Asad regime lost its legitimacy due to its atrocities against the Syrian people. We therefore closed the British Embassy in Damascus in 2012. We have no plans to reopen it. End of story' (Longden, 2019).

Moreover, based on the British government's mission statement on its official website, the UK encourages a power transition to the moderate Syrian Opposition in order to curb the violence enacted by the Syrian government (Gov.UK, n.d.). In addition, the UK supported U.S. airstrikes against Assad, which were also backed by France after the recurrent use of chemical weapons. The U.K. also launched several strikes targeting the chemical weapons arsenals in Syria (Borger & Beaument, 2018).

1.2   Research Questions

This study addresses Fowler's (1991) assumption that all news is 'reported from some particular angle' (p. 11) imbued by the social and political contexts surrounding it to 'shape rather than mirror the world' (para 3). Accordingly, this study's primary concern is to linguistically identify how the Syrian revolution is represented in online media.

Thus, adhering to Fowler's (1991) view that 'as far as differences in presentation are concerned, most people would admit the possibility of bias' (p. 11), the following main question will investigate the variations between the representations of the two news coverage to determine bias: how did the two independent news agencies represent the Syrian revolution, considering that the two governments—the UK and Iran—hold opposite stances towards the Syrian government (Sections 1.1.3 and 1.1.4) and that the two news agencies declared their independence from their government in their own policy statements (see Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2)? To address the aforementioned overarching question, the study integrates the corpus-linguistic

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method with the CDA. In addition, the study's research questions (RQs) will be divided into two sets of sub-questions (A and B) that will each fit the analytical characteristics of the chosen approach.

The following sub-questions (A) will be considered using the corpus-based linguistic approach:

1. What are the salient keywords that characterise the news coverage of each news agency? What are the common semantic macrostructures associated with the keywords that the coverage uses to refer to the two conflicting sides?

2. What are the most recurrent collocational features that accompany the keywords and characterise the two agencies' discourses on the Syrian revolution? What prosodies do they imply?

3. How do these linguistic manifestations contribute to the biases in news media (to the extent that these can be identified)?

The second set of questions (B) will investigate the polarising news coverage of chemical attacks in Syria. This topic was selected based on the findings of the corpus linguistic analysis (see Section 6.1.1). Thus, within the focus of the CDA, this study will answer how each news agency constructed the reality of the chemical attack in its respective coverage by considering the following sub-questions:

4. What socio-semantic representational choices were used to identify the participants who were involved in the chemical attacks?

5. What common transitivity processes did each news agency associate with the social actors it covered and the roles these actors were allocated with?

6. To what extent does each news agency's coverage reflect its adherence to its policy statements and values of objectivity?

1.3 Study Rationale

Many researchers have been interested in investigating the Arab Spring revolutions since they began in 2011. Like the Arab revolutions in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Yemin, the Syrian revolution has attracted a considerable amount of worldwide media and political attention. Therefore, this study examines the Syrian revolution due to the incident's significance and the attention it has drawn in both the Middle East and across the globe. In addition, this study offers a linguistic analysis of the event, which has been lacking, and provides a full picture of how the media has represented the conflict. To the best of my knowledge, no linguistic study has considered the full spectrum of the

armed groups that have fought to overthrow the Syrian government (see Section 2.1.7). This is surprising, as these military forces and their political agendas have played a critical role in the revolution.

This study was also conducted to examine raw data on the revolution that were not influenced by any ideological perspective. Most, if not all, current studies about the Arab Spring revolution have focused on a heterogenous set of newspaper coverage, such as opinion articles, news reports and editorials that have normally expressed the writers' views on the event. Considering that the UK press is influenced by either right-wing or left-wing political perspectives, bias in the representation of any political issue is to be expected (Smith, 2017). As such, this study investigates the biases that influence the coverage of news agencies, whose publications should function as informational hubs that do not reflect certain ideologies (see Section 3.2).

Finally, this study was conducted to provide a comparative framework of the current linguistic and media studies on the Arab Spring, which have predominantly followed an Arab versus the West template. By comparison, to better contribute to the debate about media discourse in the field of CDA, this study considers the high profile of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the turmoil of the Arab world by undertaking a comparative analysis between UK and Iranian media coverage. This study aims to close the empirical gap that has been caused by the lack of a comprehensive CL analysis of the Syrian revolution. The numbers of studies I encountered had examined limited number of news articles using the paradigm of critical discourse analysis, however, this study integrates the corpus-based approach with CDA so that it can provide an in-depth analysis of the linguistic manifestations of news discourse and increase critical awareness on the subject.

1.4 Dissertation Layout

This study is organized as follows. Chapter 1 sets the scene of the study, specifies the research questions and outlines its rationale. Chapter 2 is divided into two parts. Part I provides a comprehensive background on the study's approaches, including CDA and CLs, and concepts related to media representation. This survey is then followed by a review of the related literature, which provides context to the current research's relationship to studies on media discourse, ideology and linguistics. Part II is fully dedicated to the analytical framework of the study, addressing the eclectic model that was designed to answer the research questions, which employed the socio-semantic

inventory model (van Leeuwen, 2008), Halliday's (1994) transitivity theory and van Dijk's (1998) ideological square.

Chapter 3 introduces the study's methodology and data and discusses the steps that were taken for its analysis by explaining the corpus analytical tools it used. Chapters 4 and 5 present the corpus-based linguistic analyses. While chapter 4 tackles Iranian Fars, chapter 5 analyses UK Reuters. Both investigate how the two warring sides were constructed using keywords, collocational patterns, semantic macrostructures and discourse prosodies, and each explores how the socio-political environment influenced their representation. Chapter 6 tackles a more concise sample of news reports to investigate media bias in representing the chemical attacks using CDA. This chapter is divided into two parts. While part I analyses Iranian Fars' coverage of the chemical attacks, Part II evaluates UK Reuters' coverage of the chemical attacks. The two parts are further subdivided according to linguistic aspects meant to be investigated, such as socio-semantic representational strategies, transitivity selections and moves of ideological square.

Chapter 7 answers the research questions by discussing the study's findings in relation to its primary aim: to identify how coverage of the Syrian revolution was influenced by the different perspectives of the news outlets that represented it. The chapter also provides a comparative analysis of the findings that were determined in chapters 4, 5 and 6. This chapter is divided in two sections. The first section deals with the micro linguistic features of the news agencies' coverage of the Syrian revolution, and the second part compares the two news agencies' macro linguistic tendencies. This chapter's discussion has two objectives. The first is to spot the biases in each news agency's representation of the events, and the second is to determine the salient features that characterize each agency's coverage. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by providing reflections on the relationship between Syria's overall socio-political background and the specific journalistic practices that were used to portray the Syrian revolution. It then compares some of this study's key findings with the results of previous studies and discusses the thesis' contributions. Finally, the chapter closes by acknowledging its limitations and offering suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: PART I

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the theoretical background of the approaches utilised in this study. It is divided into two parts. The first part gives a detailed account of the dominant approaches upon which the study establishes its analytical framework. It starts with a review of the critical discourse analysis approach and its origins, methods and purposes, including key concepts in media representation. This is followed by an account of the corpus linguistics approach, its features and the triangulation with critical discourse analysis. The final section concludes the main points discussed in Part I. Part II is dedicated to a full account of the analytical model designed for the analysis.

2.1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

The term 'discourse' is generally defined as a unit of language beyond the sentence level. However, this definition can be expanded according to the approach it adopts. Formalists, for example, see discourse as an independent entity. This approach views discourse only in terms of form and style and studies how discourse is structured to be meaningful. Schiffrin (as cited in Richardson, 2007, p. 22) stated that formalists mainly look for cohesion, causality and narrative.

Functionalists, on the other hand, view discourse as a social, communicative act that 'contributes in the reproduction of social reality' (Richardson, 2007, p. 26). According to Mills (2006), discourse is the framework through which our understanding of reality is synthesised. For them, discourse is not an individual entity but a set of complex relations that 'constitutes social life: meaning and making meaning' (Fairclough, 2013, p. 3). This sociolinguistic view of language is the track through which legal discourse, educational discourse, political discourse and so on are delivered (Litosseliti, 2010, p. 120).

Thus, the notion of CDA has been introduced as a set of methods to encompass and represent a bulk of research that maintains the functional approach of discourse (Richardson, 2007). The origin of this 'paradigm' goes back to the late 1980s and is based on a brief symposium held by pioneer linguists in the field to set out specific guiding principles for the approach. These developed throughout a series of studies to become one of the most significant approaches adopted in various disciplines (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 3). CDA's multidisciplinary nature provides tools for elucidating the interwoven relations that bind language to power, society and ideology. Halliday's

tripartite theory (tenor, field and mode) is the basis upon which various CDA models are set as it explores the most important factors that make up any situation (Wodak & Myer, 2009). The field, for instance, examines the situation in terms of its participants, setting, time and all other related components while tenor shows the type of interpersonal relation that holds the participants in terms of formality and power; mode, however, is concerned with the type of medium the situation is transmitted through e.g., written or spoken (Halliday, 1985). Fairclough's (1995) and van Dijk's (1997) approaches, for instance, draw on the Halliday framework. Both take into consideration texts, discourse practices and social practices while analysing texts. The difference lies, however, in the mediating level. Van Dijk (1997) uses the mental model as the mediating relation between discourse structure and social structure while Fairclough (1995) focuses on the intertextual rather than cognitive aspects of discourse (Bell & Garrett, 1998).

Woods and Kroger (2000) state that the potential aim of CDA is to linguistically relate discourse analysis to social analysis. Therefore, CDA is the analysis of the layered relationships between institutions and states, between people and society and between newspapers, politics and power. It is 'an interdisciplinary form of analysis' (Fairclough, 2013). CDA can be best defined as follows:

> 'A type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality'. (van Dijk, 2001, p. 352)

van Dijk (2009, pp. 63-64) sets a number of properties that define the objectives of CDA. He states that CDA should investigate issues that negatively influence society to help identify social problems and contribute to solving them. The analysis, he adds, should be set in relation to consensus international norms, which help to provide 'resistance against illegitimate domination'. Finally, the analysis should consider the rights and stance of the opposing side that endures social inequality and power abuse.

The approach derives its analytical tools from such various theoretical sources as rhetoric, philosophy, cognitive science, literary studies, pragmatics and sociolinguistics (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). It is mainly, they add, a 'problem-oriented' paradigm that

aims to present ideologies and power issues through the scientific, systematic analysis of language.

2.1.2 News Values and Bias

Text and context are equally important when analysing discourse. Blommaert (1999) indicates that discourse cannot be reduced to the linguistic characteristics of the text only, but it is an intermingled relation where the sociocultural context should be considered along with the linguistic features of the text. Combining text and context, according to Richardson (2007), leads to understanding the discursive practices journalists commonly use to produce texts that meet their perspectives. Therefore, the representation of an issue in media is not a direct relation that mirrors reality, rather, it is a series of sorting, filtering and producing processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

In addition, Bednarek and Caple (2012) indicate that news worthiness is dependent on news values, so the story that fulfils one of the news values is worthy of being reported. These values include 'negativity, timeline, proximity, prominence, consonance, impact, novelty, superlativeness and personalization', which respectively refer to bad events, when it occured, relevance to the country, elite's affairs, fulfilling the expectation of the readers, the repercussion of the event, being unexpected, intensification of some aspects of the event and individualizing the event (Bednarek and Caple, 2012, p. 41). However, these values, according to Bednarek and Caple (2012) are not intrinsic in the event being reported but rather created by the reporter's manipulation of the language and imagery. Therefore, a competing approach in studying media discourse is to investigate how the linguistic tools are used to establish news values (see the approach of discursive news values analysis in (Bednarek and Caple, 2012 and 2017)).

Along the same line, Fowler (1991) indicates that the wording of news is highly influenced by the reciprocal process of stereotyping between readers and writers. An issue that is habitually presented in a negative frame will be perceived consciously or unconsciously in a similar schema that mentally stimulates anxiety, hatred and similar negative reactions. Accordingly, Fowler (1991) concludes that reporting news depends on the possibility of identifying it within 'a certain light of representation, and so selection involves an ideological act of interpretation' (p. 19). Therefore, Beard (2000) argues that 'there is no such thing as unbiased report, no such thing as neutral language' (p. 18).

Thus, media bias has long been an issue. According to Qayyum et al (2018). Bias is the tendency to positively or negatively represent something or someone based on a personal point of view or prejudice rather than facts and evidence. Hamborg et al (2018) explains that bias in news can be enacted through different ways such as the selection of one news story over another, quoting specific voices while excluding others, emphasizing the uncertainty of some sources and highlighting the credibility of others, using negative or positive lexical choices when referring to a person, group of people or a topic, and finally, the size and placement of the article in newspapers to gain more attention over other topics. Along the same vein, propaganda holds a prejudiced tone to 'influence people in favour of or against some doctrine or idea' and it is commonly used to refer to 'campaigns of lies and untruths' (MacLean, 1988, p.147). However, there are slight differences between them. MacLean (1988) explains that propaganda requires a great power to operate it while bias does not. Propaganda always disguises the real agenda and motivation to gain uncritical agreement to what it advocates for. By contrast, bias presents the message in a way that intends to get an emotional compliance with the message. These two concepts are the two extremes of impartial value, which is the ultimate goal that news sources seek to be presented through. Busa (2014) defines it as the 'code of ethics' that denotes commitment to the values of 'truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality and fairness' in news reporting without being affected by 'personal feelings or political ideology' (p. 33).

2.1.3 Media and Ideology

Investigating ideology is an essential part of CDA as it seeks to unmask the underlying practices that contribute to shaping reality (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Generally speaking, the meaning of ideology first emerged during the French revolution to refer to a new 'science of ideas, an idea-logy'; however, this meaning has been developed greatly since then, and it is no more the set of new ideas formulated by experiences in life (McLellan, 1986, as cited in Richardson, 2007, p. 32). Ideology becomes more attached to the notion of power. van Dijk (2001) defines ideology in terms of control that one group imposes over another throughout dominating social resources such as money and force. Wodak and Meyer (2009) reinforce this view, stating that ideology in politics is characterised by four main points: '(i) power is more important than cognitions, (ii) they (power and cognitions) are capable of guiding individual's evaluations, (iii) they provide guidance through action and (iv) they must

be logically coherent' (Mullins, 1972, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 8). Based on these concepts, ideology is more evident in semantic structure than in syntactic and morphological structure. It is more likely to be pertinent to people's opinions, which are inherently attitudinal, than to the word order (van Dijk, 1990).

Within the context of this study, examining ideology is essential to uncovering the discourses underlying the social representation of social actors in the online news under study. The social dimension perspective of ideology has been adopted, which explains 'what kind of groups, relations between groups and institutions are involved to develop ideology' (van Dijk, 1990, p. 4). This perspective illustrates how ideology is implicitly legitimised and interwoven in the social practices and various roles that social actors undertake within a certain context. For instance, the different aspects, which rich and poor show in their interactions, reflect the ideology of class in a certain social milieu. The same applies to ethnicist ideologies, feminist ideologies and so on (van Dijk, 1990).

Fowler (1991), on the other hand, draws attention to the relationship between language and ideology. He argues that the social, economic and the political factors surrounding news institution have an impact on news content. Thus, setting a relevant scene (religious, economic or political) while examining news reports is essential. This observation motivates the selection of the eclectic model designed for the current study (see Part II, in the current Chapter).

2.1.4 Power and Manipulation

Power is a key notion in CDA studies. van Dijk (1993) relates CDA to the study of the relation between discourse and power. He defines the power imposed by people of authority or institutions leading to inequalities in political, ethnic, racial or gender issues as dominance. This kind of power represents the relationship between people of power and less powerful people, such as the dominance of White over Black, which contributes in establishing the ideology of hegemony among people of different economic or social status. Fowler (1985) defines power as 'the ability of people and institutions to control the behaviour and material lives of others' (p.61). Therefore, power needs a solid supporting basis to stand on such as force: money, information and access to media, which is the most crucial power resource that influences people's minds and attitudes (van Dijk, 2000).

According to Fowler (1991), language is an instrument used by more powerful people to create an asymmetrical relationship. It is used to enforce inequality and discrimination by exploiting authority and position. This kind of power abuse or dominance, van Dijk (1993) argues, is commonly enacted by political officials and is usually resisted or challenged by people experiencing inequality. However, media reproduces dominance discourse in a more mitigated, indirect and concealed mode (p. 250). It is not represented in a direct relationship between victims and victimisers, or good and evil, but rather is processed and reproduced in a way that serves the interests of power holders.

This information reproduction in media is called manipulation (van Dijk, 2006) or propaganda (Richardson, 2007; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). According to van Dijk (2006), manipulation is an intermingled socio-cognitive concept as it is worked out socially, by text or talk to set the dominance regulations of elites, and cognitively by influencing the minds of recipients or dominated people. Moreover, it is ideologically motivated, characterised by polar representation, emphasising the positive characteristics of 'us' and the negative characteristics of 'them'. However, with reference to discourse analysis, manipulation can be parsed by tracing inconsistent information and fallacious arguments (de Saussure, 2005).

It is worth clarifying that manipulation differs from persuasion in that the former implies a negative psychological intent while the latter does not. Jowett and O'Donnell (2006) point out that persuasion seeks to drive the addressee into an agreement out of his or her own will while being aware of the message and its purpose. On the other hand, manipulation, is illegitimate and meant to mislead recipients and disguise a manipulator's goal. Therefore, de Saussure (2005) indicates that manipulation is commonly achieved via certain strategies such as inaccurate comparison; excessive use of lexis, which have connotative references, e.g., the word *democracy* has 'some fuzzy connotation', which can be employed to encode 'positive judgements' and manage the reader's approval in an argument (as cited in De Saussure, 2005, p. 4); use of quantification in numbers; and making generalisations. In addition, he emphasises the socio-cognitive strategy of group pressure, in which groups influence their followers to glorify their leaders and back up their pre-made agendas. The media representation of the leader's image plays a key role in changing the recipients' attitudes. Therefore,

manipulation is a vital concept for this study and is evident in the linguistic manifestations at the micro and macro levels of the news corpora in question.

2.1.5 Corpus Linguistics

Critical discourse analysis is widely incorporated with corpus linguistics as a methodological synergy to allow more in-depth and consistent results using large corpora (see Caldas-Coulthard and Moon, 2010; Fairclough, 2000; Baker et al., 2008). Hunston (2002) indicates that corpora have multiple applications in various fields such as stylistics, forensic linguistics and clinical and translation studies. Generally speaking, the word corpus refers to a large amount of data. Sinclair (1991), for instance, defines a corpus as a collection of natural language texts chosen to show the features of a variety or a specific aspect of a language. However, McEnery and Wilson (2001) point out that a linguistic corpus should possess four main characteristics: sampling and representativeness, finite size, machine-readable form and a standard reference.

Sampling and representativeness, according to McEnery and Hardie (2012), refer to a corpus being compiled in a way that reflects the level of variety it samples or the language it represents. Thus, a corpus that does not contain all types of the texts that exemplify the content of the original, considering the correct proportion, is not representative. Biber (1993) stresses the importance of representativeness in generalising findings by considering the number, length and type of texts for genre-based corpora. Baker (2006) illustrates that the right sampling technique ensures the representativeness of a corpus. Taking the first 2,000 words from literary texts to build a corpus, he explains, will not make a representative corpus as the sampled texts will reflect the prefaces and introductions only.

On the other hand, the size of the corpus is a controversial matter that requires practical considerations related to the source of the data, the methodology conducted in the study and the research questions. McEnery and Wilson (2001) state that, generally, a large corpus makes it easy to spot a distinguished set of linguistic patterns and examine a manageable number of hits. However, linguists agree that the average size of a corpus depends on the linguistic query being investigated. Biber (1993) indicates that studies investigating grammatical subjects require a corpus of roughly one million words. On the other hand, Baker (2006) points out that studying the morphological

structures of verbs needs a half-a-million-word corpus. Nevertheless, he points out that the content of the data in a corpus built up for a specific research purpose takes more priority over quantity.

Therefore, Hunston (2002) indicates the seven types of corpora based on the purposes for which they are designed. Specialised corpora are built to analyse one text type that represents one genre or one type of language, such as academic lectures, religious scripts, newspapers editorials or classroom essays. The level of specialisation in such a corpus is commonly defined by the parameters the researcher uses to set its limits. General corpora are larger than specialised corpora and not restricted to one type of text, including all text types whether written, spoken or both. Hunston (2002, p. 15) indicates that general corpora consist of different sub-corpora; however, they are 'unlikely to be representative of any particular whole'. General corpora can be used as references for specialised corpora. Comparable corpora are designed for comparative purposes. They contain two or more sub-corpora of one text type representing two different languages or different varieties of a single language collected at the same time (e.g. the International Corpus of English). Therefore, this type is utilised by translators and language learners. Parallel corpora are made by collecting a set of texts in a particular genre dealing with a particular topic and their translation to another language (e.g. European Union regulations and their translations). Learner corpora are collections of text, written or spoken, produced by learners of a foreign language. This type of corpora serves to point out the differences in learning levels between learners and native speakers. Pedagogic corpora consist of all books and academic courses, visual or audible, that a learner has practised. Finally, monitor corpora expand over time, either on an annual or monthly basis. It is like a database, which records changes to a language over time.

The large sizes of corpora require an advanced methodological tool to fit the scope of the linguistic features they carry. Thus, corpus linguistics is a methodological concept to refer to 'the computer-aided analysis of very extensive collections of transcribed utterances or written texts' to address a specific hypothesis or research questions (McEnery & Hardie, 2012, p. 1). The two basic approaches of corpus linguistics introduced by Tognini-Bonelli (2001) are the corpus-based approach and the corpus-driven approach. The former is the typical approach used in corpus linguistic studies, and it uses the corpus to validate a hypothesis. The corpus-driven approach is

more inductive. It derives theory from analysing a corpus, claiming that each corpus formulates its own theory.

This study adopts the corpus-based approach seeking to validate a pre-formulated hypothesis of media bias in reporting the Syrian revolution and tackling a specialised corpus collected from two news agencies. Using the web-based and software analytical tools, it investigates the different linguistic aspects of news reports, such as keywords, concordances and lexical clusters, including the semantic macrostructures and collocations with the discourse prosodies they imply.

2.1.6 Synergy of Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics

Looking at the traditional ways that CL and CDA use to analyse texts shows their contradictory nature. CDA has started out as qualitative, examining the linguistic features of small sets of text while considering their political and social contexts (Wodak 2001). CL, on the other hand, is quantitative. It deals with large corpora that require computer-based analysis. Each approach has been criticised as being insufficient for effective linguistic analysis.

CDA has been criticised for being text-selective, focusing on under-representative data that leads to subjective analysis (Stubbs, 1997). On the contrary, CL analysts are criticised for decontextualising the data from its contexts (Widdowson, 2000; Vessey, 2013). Therefore, a wide range of arguments discussing the integration of CDA and CL has been made (see Baker et al., 2008; Baker & McEnery, 2005; Koller & Mauntner, 2004; Stubbs, 1997). The most compelling work emphasising the need for combining the two approaches is *Only Connect: Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics* by Hardt-Mautner (1995). She states that the shortcomings of each approach can be compensated by the synergy of the two approaches. Consequently, the theoretical model of corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) has been introduced. Partington (2006, p. 8) defines it as using the CL quantitative analytical tools to carry out the statistical analysis while utilising the theoretical CDA models as qualitative methods.

The fusion of the two disciplines, Jaworska and Krishnamurthy (1012) state, has proven the development of research quality in terms of text sampling and the

analysis of significant linguistic patterns that are politically and socially motivated. Therefore, this study conducts the CADS approach for the following reasons:

1) CL enriches the analysis with the frequency and salient linguistic patterns, which might not be recognised by manual analysis. This analytical feature gives more insights to the CDA analysis. Fairclough (2001, p. 54) stressed this, saying that 'a single text on its own is quite insignificant: the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader, and so forth'.

2) CL provides specific significance tests for each linguistic feature, such as collocations, grammatical relations and keywords, which upgrade the degree of certainty in reporting results (for more information about the set of significance tests, see McEnery & Hardie, 2012, pp. 51-53). This in turn helps to start a well-established categorisation, which copes with the vein of the CDA models used in this study.

3) Using the CADS approach deals with the problematic defect of CDA's subjective selection of texts. This study utilises CL tools to determine the selected sample, following Baker et al. (2008) and Gabrielatos et al. (2012). It employs word list and keywords analysis to uncover the focus and absence of news reports on specific events, especially in the periods that witnessed unprecedented incidents, such as the successive chemical attacks in 2013 and the Russian air strikes in 2015.

4) It also addresses the criticism of CDA's intuition-based analysis and the tendency to confirm the analyst's bias by considering patterns that support certain views and ignoring others (Gabrielatos & Duguid, 2015). However, by using CL, the priority will be for patterns that are statistically significant.

It is worth mentioning that CADS or the corpus-based approach to CDA requires a balance between two priorities. The first is the analysis of a wide range of linguistic patterns yielded by quantitative analysis and the second is elucidation of their socio-political contexts and ideological implications. Therefore, this study considers the scope of each approach in relation to the space limits and the structure of the research. The following section is dedicated to accounting for studies on media

discourse relevant to this research with the aim of highlighting the gap the study means to approach.

2.1.7 Review of Literature

Recently, research interest in linguistic studies on media discourse has increased. Considerable literature has been dedicated to investigating the stereotypes of Muslim representation in western media (Alharbi, 2012; Baker et al., 2012; Baker et al., 2013; Richardson, 2004), while other studies explore the abuse of power in different problematic areas, such as immigration, asylum-seeking, and violence against women (Baker et al., 2005; Santaemilia & Maruenda, 2014; Taylor, 2014; Baker, 2004; Orpin, 2005; McEnery, 2006). In the Middle East, Arab Spring was and still is the most significant issue in modern history that attracted global media attention. It attracted a great deal of interest among academics mainly due to its devastating consequences that led to social, economic, and political changes in the Arab World and North Africa.

This section aims to review relevant studies in the area of media discourse, ideology, and Arab Spring. The following review is divided into two main sections. The first part delineates the studies that have investigated the discursive representation of conflict; the second part focuses on linguistic studies that tackled discursive representations of Arab Spring. This division facilitates a comprehensive view of the subject under study and serves to establish the basis upon which the Persian–West comparison is selected, in light of previous literature**.**

2.1.7.1 Literature of Conflict

Studying conflict as a socio-political phenomenon is among the research trends that attracted researchers' interest in examining social reality as manipulated and constructed in the language of news media. Analysts applied different analytical frameworks to investigate what triggers conflict and how it is reported in the media. Thus, the review of studies in this section is organized in relation to their analytical approaches to elucidate how conflict is approached in discourse studies.

Within the framework of the social actor representation theory (van Leeuwen, 2008), a number of studies tackled the representation of conflicting sides to explore the variations in the portrayal of each side. This approach is concerned with the ways in which social actors are included and excluded, seeking to legitimize their representation

in relation to the socio-political context. It has been widely advanced in studies that investigate the influence of news outlets' political orientation on their representation of the two sides of war, such as Amer's (2017) study of the war in Gaza, which investigated the portrayal of Israeli forces and the Hamas front in four western newspapers taking a pro-Israeli stance. Another example is Osisanwo's (2016) study on the depiction of Boko Haram (BH) in Nigerian newspapers. This study manifested that the discourse on BH is characterized by condemnation, labelling, and distancing the government from 'them.' This approach is also employed to explore the legitimization processes in war discourse; an illustrative example is Naeem and Rafi's (2019) study of the presidential speeches of Zia and Musharraf in the Afghanistan war.

Historical background and intertextuality were also among the focuses in studying conflict. Chiluwa (2019) used Wodak and Meyer's (2009) discourse–historical approach to investigate the Boko Haram insurgence in Nigeria that occurred in 2009, undertaken by a group of armed radical Islamists against the Nigerian government. The study indicated that the conflict was motivated by previously written Jihadi texts released by Al-Qaeda jihadists. Wodak and Mayer's (2009) historical approach focuses on identifying six main categories in discourses: argumentation, nomination, predication, perspectivization, mitigation, and intensification. Numerous studies have adopted this approach to examine the discourse of presidential speeches in wartime, as it helps identify the patterns of discourse structure and their functions. Graham, Keenan, and Dowd (2004), for instance, examined the characteristics of political call-to-arms speeches in the last millennium. The study compared four political speeches, including Bush's (2001) speech on the "war on terror," Pope Urban II's (1095), Queen Elizabeth I's (1588), and Hitler's (1939). The findings uncovered a set of characteristics that these speeches have in common—enhancing the superiority of the speaker's culture, emphasizing the evil of the opposing forces, legitimizing the use of power, and an appeal to support this power.

Van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive approach identified numerous ways in which news coverage of a situation—social or political—can reveal an ideologically-motivated portrayal of the social members involved. This ideological representation may inform biases about the social actors' ethnicity, race, perspectives, values, and beliefs. Therefore, this analytical framework examines social practices in relation to the ideological background of the participants who have the power to influence the news

media and those being portrayed by the media. The whole framework of the theory was reduced to the moves that work towards the self-positive representation and the other-negative representation. This approach has been used to study the stereotypical representation of the Pakistani government and the Indian forces in news coverage of the Kashmir conflict (Ali, 2017), and the threats and appeals in representing the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Atawneh, 2008). In addition, Wenden (2005) examined the ideology-based thematic frames in which Al-Jazeera introduced the Israelis and Palestinians during the second Intifada.

A number of studies employed Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional approach to explore the relationship between discourse and ideology in war reports. This theory's name refers to three proposed levels of analysis—description, interpretation, and explanation. Thus, the analysis moves from the semiotic and linguistic properties of a text (description) to the interpretation, which looks at the influence of intertextuality that informs the perspective of the news source. Finally, it goes to the explanation in which the hidden ideology is explicated by relating the interpretation to the wider context, including social, political, and cultural surroundings. Utilizing this approach, Zhang (2014) investigated the effect of news production on news reporting of the Iraqi war in the American mainstream media. It was also employed in studying the Israeli–Palestinian conflict to unravel the role of the newspapers' stance on the negative depiction of the Palestinians (Zaher, 2009).

Investigating transitivity in constructing events in news language was also in the focus of researchers' studies on conflict, as transitivity is the key tool for deciphering the ideological significance of agents' absence or presence. Richardson (2007) examined 2,107 headlines in newspapers (broadsheets and tabloids) reporting the US invasion of Iraq in its first six weeks. The coding system of the analysis included the nationality of the agent, the processes, and the type of clauses and their construction. The study found that the absence of actors' nationality is a key strategy in some cases to mystify the role of agency in constructing the event in news reports. In addition, Richardson (2007) indicated that 'the most striking is the complete absence of UN as an actor' (p. 198), which implied ideologically the insignificance of the UN's role in the war against Iraq. In addition, the study showed the misrepresentation of British military activities in Iraq, in comparison with America's, as the headlines represented Britons more frequently than Americans. The study confirmed the news bias in

magnifying the British forces' operations on Iraqi lands. Similarly, Iwamoto (1995), in his study of war reports released by the Japanese press, examined the role of transitivity in transforming the bad event—"defeat"—into "victory" during the Second World War (p. 59).

2.1.7.2 Linguistic Studies on Arab Spring

This section presents a survey of linguistics studies that addressed the news representation of the Arab world's revolutions since they began, in late 2010. The aim of this review is to show the pattern of discourse that these studies reveal considering their respective comparative frameworks. The review starts with the studies that treated the Syrian revolution in particular, followed by a summary of previous studies on Arab Spring in general, tabulated to show the pattern in content and language features shown by their comparative templates.

Starting with the literature on the Syrian revolution, a number of significant studies have tackled the Syrian conflict within two main comparative frames, Arab versus western media and Arab versus Arab media. Considering the former, Akkerhuis (2013) used the CDA approach to compare articles released by BBC and CNN, as western news sources on the one hand, and Al-Arabia and Al-Jazeera as Arabic news outlets on the other, to examine the representation of various uprising issues, among which are the Deraa unrest in Syria and the use of chemical weapons against the rebels. The author found that the four news outlets gave polarized representations, indicating a discourse pattern of supporting the opposition and incriminating the government's atrocities, although each source had a different focus. While BBC's focus mainly revolved around the accusation against Assad's forces for using chemical weapons, CNN was intensifying the coverage around the possible reaction of the US against the Syrian government. Al-Arabia, on the other hand, focused on the role of Hezbollah in supporting Assad and using chemical weapons while Al-Jazeera's main argument involved the international community's response towards the use of chemical weapons. Accordingly, the four news sources showed similar polarized representations, portraying Assad's government negatively while depicting the opposing side positively.

The same pattern of discourse was revealed by Afzal and Harun's (2015) study of the portrayal of Syrian and Libyan uprisings between 2011 and 2012 in two sets of newspapers: the *Arab News*, published in Saudi Arabia, and *The News International of*

Pakistan. They examined the effect of their ideological perspectives on public opinion in relation to the content they conveyed. The study revealed a sense of "evaluated belief" in characterising the authorities in Libya and Syria (p. 243). It relied heavily on the lexical choices and referential strategies used by the newspapers to represent Qaddafi and al-Assad. The findings pointed to definitely negative representations of the two presidents and their brutal actions against protestors. Gaddafi, for instance, was described as "a liar," "more deluded than the Serbian leader," and as an "intolerant regime" (p. 250). Assad was negatively defined as well, as "brutal," bloody," and a "death machine" (p. 250).

Following the same categorisation scheme of analysis, Ali and Omar (2016) examined the discursive patterns in the reporting of the intervention of Russian forces in Syria during the current civil war. They employed Halliday's transitivity model to examine the headlines and the leads of CNN and RT (i.e., the Russia Today news network) coverage of the Russian intervention. The study examined the ideology and news production processes in relation to political institutions in the US and Russia. The findings showed that the two news outlets shaped the same event differently, in accordance with the political stance of their respective countries. RT structured the air force intervention as a positive step towards "fighting terrorism and paving the way for a peaceful settlement" (p. 153), while CNN represented the Russian intervention negatively as destructive power that left no safe place for civilians. The study indicated that the linguistic patterns used in the coverage fell into two main categories: the positive "self" representation and the negative "other" representation.

Examining the editorials in newspapers was the focus of Amin and Jalilifar's (2013) study. Van Dijk (1996) pointed out that editorials are the pedestals upon which the ideological perspective of the newspapers is expressed. For the purpose of revealing the impact of the newspapers' ideological perspective on news representation, the authors investigated the depiction of the Syrian civil war across three Middle East newspapers, namely *Tehran Times*, *Today Zaman*, and *Arab News*, published in Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, respectively. The findings showed that *Arab News* and *Today Zaman* had legitimized the opposition and delegitimized the Syrian government and its supporters by foregrounding the political agenda of Russian military interference and Assad's oppression against his people. In addition, Saudi and Turkish editorials downplayed western interference in the Syrian civil war. *Tehran Times*' representation,

on the other hand, was totally the opposite. It demonized the rebels and their backers while strongly supporting and legitimizing the Syrian government.

The ideological perspectivization of the news media in western newspapers was also examined. Shojaei et al. (2013) investigated the presentation of *Syrian crisis*, *Iranian sanctions*, and *Iranian nuclear program* in the headlines and leads of leading UK and US newspapers, among which are the *Independent* and *The Guardian* from UK and *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* from the US. The study focused on the lexical choices, ideological moves, and the patterns of collocates to examine "how linguistic tools can carry ideological traits in their discoursal properties resulting in misrepresentation" of the three cases mentioned above (p. 858). With reference to the findings on the first case of the Syrian crisis, the study concluded that western newspapers (both UK and US) predominantly passivated the Syrian government as an accused, criminal, and guilty social actor, while activating western politicians as vital social actors, taking on the role of "sayer and sensor" in condemning, criminalizing, and threatening the Syrian government.

Campanella (2017) studied the refugee crisis as represented by two western news media, *Fox News* and *CNN,* using content analysis. The findings showed huge discrepancies in their coverage. The author attributed the different representation to the political agenda to which each news source adheres, concluding that Fox News 'catered mostly to Republican Party consumers' (p. 34), while CNN presented numerous views and voices that defend and sympathize with refugees and challenge the Republican views.

It is noteworthy that literature on the Syrian revolution is not confined to the previously mentioned comparative frames; a number of studies examined the representation of the Syrian uprising as reported via a single news medium (see Kadhim, 2018; Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2014; Kinali & Nerso, 2013). Others examined the reflections of the revolution on the political speech of Assad (see Stirling, 2014; Anindyaputri, 2015; Al-Hamad & Al-Shunnag, 2011). Lynch et al. (2014) also tackled the Syrian conflict as disseminated on Twitter to examine how the uprising was reported, discussed, and integrated with other Arab revolutions on Twitter using keyword analysis. The comparative studies reviewed above are meant to set the basis

on which the current study opted to examine independent news agencies as a source of data, and to consider Persian versus western news as a comparative frame.

In the same vein, these two comparative frames (Arab versus Arab and Arab versus western media) have been widely adopted in the literature on Arab Spring, which consequently generated patterns of discourses that are largely similar. Table 2.1 gives a general view of the comparative discourse studies that tackled the Arab revolutions, for the purpose of identifying how the news of Arab revolutions was commonly examined and what pattern of discourses.

Table 2.1 Discourse Studies on Arab Spring

No	Study	Content	Linguistic feature patterns
1	Alhumaidi (2013)	The author studied the Egyptian revolution that erupted in 2011 by comparing the coverage of two Arab news outlets—Al-Ahram and Al-Jazeera—using a CDA approach. The study traces how the demonstrators and government were represented from the first day of the uprising until the first three days following the fall of President Mubarak.	The analysis revealed that Al-Ahram labelled the protestors negatively using lexical choices that link them to violence, looting, and chaos. Al-Jazeera, in contrast, portrayed the protestors positively as rebels seeking freedom. The study concluded that Al-Ahram news sets out to convey the government's perspective while Al-Jazeera reports the conflict from the protestors' standpoint.
2	Haider (2016)	The study investigated the representation of Qaddafi before and after the uprising, from 2009 to 2013, in two Arab newspapers, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* and *Al-Khaleej*, using CDA and CL approaches.	The two newspapers were negatively critical, depicting Qaddafi as "dictator" and "tyrant" (p. 24). They introduced Qaddafi, thematically, within shameful frames denoting his atrocities against his own people, criminality outside Libya, and unstable mentality. The author indicated that the two newspapers were highly influenced by the Arab governments' political stance against Qaddafi.
3	Fornaciari (2011)	This article examined the news reports of Al-Jazeera English and the BBC on the Egyptian revolution for the purpose of identifying the thematic frames of each news outlet's focus.	The findings showed that both Al-Jazeera and BBC provided similar coverage with great emphasis placed on two main semantic macrostructures: (i) the party responsible for the conflict and its repercussions, and (ii) identifying the conflicting parties. Within these two thematic frames, the BBC referred to the government and protestors as the winners and losers while Al-Jazeera avoided labelling the two conflicting sides.

4	Haider (2017)	The researcher examined the coverage of two western newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, before and after the revolution, between 2009 and 2013, focusing on the collocates of Qaddafi and their socio-political context.	Similar to his findings in Haider (2016), Haider (2017) showed the change in news language from being neutral and positive in constructing the image of Qaddafi before the uprising to being extremely negative in their representation after his fall. Both western newspapers presented Qaddafi in relation to the semantic macrostructures of power abuse, violence, and corruption.
5	Alshareif (2017)	The study compared Al-Jazeera's and the BBC's representation of certain incidents that took place in Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan uprisings for two aims. The first is to uncover the ideological perspective underlying their coverage and the second to explore their influence on students of Seba University in Tunis.	The findings showed the biased representation of Al-Jazeera, characterized by escalating horror and insecurity in its broadcasts, which negatively affected the students' everyday lives. BBC's representation, on the other hand, revealed a lack of evaluative words in reporting events. The study concluded that "BBC did not have any ideology in reporting their incidents whereas Al-Jazeera worked hard to support the rebels" (p. 206).
6	Abdi and Basarati (2016)	They examined the representation of the Yemen revolution in 63 headlines quoted from Iranian, Arab, and western newspapers. They used Fairclough's three-dimensional model to investigate the predominant themes through which each newspaper introduced the Yemeni crisis.	The findings revealed two differing discourses: the pro-Houthi discourse, which Iran enhanced by condemning Saudi forces and their western backers, identifying them as intruders. This pattern of discourse was characterized by linking Saudis to the violation of the cease-fire agreement and mass killing of Yemeni civilians. On the other hand, the Western and Saudi newspapers propagated the anti-Houthi discourse, which represented the Houthi as illegal rebels who incited unrest in Yemen. The findings revealed that western newspapers strictly advocate for anti-Fundamentalism while Iran's perspective is anti-American. The two clashing ideologies boosted the opposing thematic identifications of the Yemeni revolution.
7	Al Nahed (2015)	This is a comparative analysis comparing the representation of the Libyan revolution and the intervention of NATO in Arab and western news outlets, namely Al-Jazeera (English and Arabic versions) and BBC (English and Arabic versions). The study used content analysis to investigate how the two events are framed and narrated considering the influence of the	The findings showed that the influence of the foreign policy of Qatar and the UK were quite evident in their coverage. The coverage of the four tended to legitimize the uprising and describe it as a revolution. NATO interference was positively framed as a necessary humanitarian response to challenge the violence of Qaddafi's forces. Qaddafi was negatively

		political stance of Qatar and the UK, where the two news sources are located.	labelled and identified, whereas the armed opposition was described as authentic and legitimate.
8	Chen (2014)	This study used a corpus-based linguistic approach to perform a critical discourse analysis comparing the representation of the Libyan uprising in *China Daily (CD)* and in *The New York Times (NYT).*	The study revealed that *NYT* put more emphasis on the rebels, who were positively portrayed, while rebels, on the other hand, were not within the focus of *CD*. The findings also showed that *NYT*'s discourse on Qaddafi was extremely negative, collocating him with "regime," "terrorized," "bombing," "dictator," and "genocide" (pp. 25–27). In contrast, *CD* gave a neutral representation of Qaddafi and positively defended his stance against NATO's intervention. The study concluded that *CD* provided a more pro-government perspective whereas *NYT* was highly anti-Qaddafi government.
9	Seo (2013)	Seo investigated variations in the types of processes and participants, as manifested in newspaper headlines on the Tripoli Battle (Libya) in the UK's *The Guardian* and China's the *National Daily Newspaper* using transitivity theory.	The study revealed the influence of the newspapers' political stance on their depictions of the government and the rebels in coverage of the battle. The UK news reporting showed strong support for the rebels, who were positively represented, given the UK military support to the Libyan rebels. In contrast, China's newspaper was not supportive to either side— the representation was highly reflective of "the Chinese ideology of non-interference" (p. 790).

Based on the aforementioned findings in previous studies, it can be concluded that the representations of the Syrian revolution in particular and Arab Spring in general, within the respective comparative frames, are typically similar. They tend to support the political stance of the opposition and convey the conflict from the government's victims' perspective, which corresponds to the ideological binary image of self-positive versus other-negative representations. This might be attributed to the fact that the Arab and western media they tackled (representing US and the European league, except Russia) hold the same political stance towards the Syrian revolution. Therefore, the different ideological representations for the same reality are not clearly witnessed in their coverage. Further, the news focus and the thematic frames are congruent to some extent (see Al-Nahed, 2015; Haider, 2016, 2017; Alshareif, 2017; Alhumaidi, 2013).

Accordingly, this study was conducted with a different comparative frame, which is Persian–western media, and opted for a different set of data derived from independent news agencies' coverage. Considering the comparative frame, needless to say, in the context of the Arab revolutions, Iran (as a Persian country) played a pivotal role politically and militarily. The strategic relationship between the two countries had been established early, since 1980, when Syria backed Iran in its eight-year war against Iraq, between 1980 and 1988 (see Section 1.1.3). This mutual military and financial support were revived at the beginning of the Syrian revolution, in March 2011, by sending Iranian forces and providing training and "logistical support" to the Syrian army (Pantucci & Tabrizi, 2016). Iran is considered the sole threatening power to the Arab world in the Middle East and the regional force loyal to the Syrian regime. Furthermore, it shares the same Islamic sectarian orientation with the dynastic ruling family of Syria. Therefore, this study opted for the news coverage of the Iranian Islamic Republic to enlighten this area. Taking independent news agencies as a source of data rather than newspapers was done to avoid any possible perspective's effect on the portrayal of the Syrian revolution (see Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2). Accordingly, this study describes how uniquely the respective independent news agencies depict the Syrian revolution.

Moreover, studies that investigated the representation of social actors in the Syrian revolution did not identify the array of conflicting groups representing the anti- and pro-government social actors. Rather, they used one umbrella term to refer to either side, such as opposition, protestors, and government, or they tackled only one representative group, such as opposition, rebels, refugees, authorities, or government (see Campanella, 2017; Akkerhuis, 2013; Abid, 2015; Afzal & Harun, 2015; Amin & Jalilifar, 2013). The current study is meant to bridge this gap by considering the various social actors representing the anti-government party, such as ISIL, Opposition, Jabhat Al-Nusra, protestors, and victims as civilians and refugees. It also sheds light on the pro-government social actors, in order to give a full image of the conflict.

2.1.8 Summary

This section has reviewed the basic theoretical notions of CDA and CL with a survey of media-related concepts and ideology for the purpose of setting the basis of the analytical framework. It has also outlined the studies that showed relevance to the

current research and pointed out the gap meant to be bridged. The next section introduces in detail the analytical framework designed to address the questions of the study and fulfil their aim.

CHAPTER THREE: PART II

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2 Introduction

The preceding section introduced a background of the basic approaches and concepts in CDA, CL and ideology, which are relevant to the development of the theoretical framework used in this study. This section expands within the context of this background to set a well-established analytical model that best meets the overall aim of the study: an analysis of media bias and the data under investigation. The following review provides detailed explanations of the eclectic model employed in the study: van Leeuwen's (2008) social representation theory, Halliday's (1994) transitivity model and van Dijk's (1998) ideological square. The first section provides a full survey of van Leeuwen's (2008) model of social representation, which is concerned with the representation of social actors. The second section integrates both van Leeuwen's (2008) model and Halliday's (1994) theory of transitivity to account for the representation of social actions. The third section surveys the ideological square model, which elucidates the relationship between news representation of the revolution and the underlying ideology motivating it. The chapter concludes with general remarks that sum up the important points of the chapter.

2.2.1 Socio-Semantic Inventory Model

The main constitutive theory employed in this study is van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic inventory model, which elucidates how social actors are represented based on the information that is included or excluded. The framework of this model is eclectic. It utilises the work of Foucault (1977) to define the concept of discourse as 'socially constructed ways of knowing some aspects of reality' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 144). It also relies heavily on Halliday's (1978; 1985) systemic functional grammar to account for the representation of social actions (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Bernstein's (1991) approach is also consulted in this model (van Leeuwen, 2008). The following model, Figure 2.1, summarizes the representational strategies of this model.

Figure 2.1 Social Actor Network (adapted from van Leeuwen, 2008)

This model suggests that social practices can be recontextualised in multiple ways throughout different discourses. The term *recontextualisation* generally refers to the process of rendering an idea or practice from one context into another. This process implies a change or a bias in meaning. Linell (1998) defined it as the act of transformation of something from a text-in-context to a new, formulated text. The discourse transformation process of social practices is the focus of van Leeuwen's (1996) model. van Leeuwen noted that social practices are made up of eight elements: actions, performance modes, actors, presentation style, time, space, resources and eligibility. These elements can be reproduced to deliver different discourses and different purposes. Social actors, as a key element in the analysis, refer to the participants who carry out the actions or are involved in them. Participants may take the role of agent (doer of the action), patient (a participant to whom the action is done) or beneficiary (a participant who benefits from the action whether positively or negatively (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; van Leeuwen, 2008).

The re-contextualisation of these elements into a discourse is upheld throughout the process of transformation, which employs a number of strategies. Substitution is

one of the fundamental transformation strategies. It involves replacing 'an actual element of social practice into an element of discourse' (e.g. Syria regained control over large swathes). The place name *Syria* in the previous example substitutes the real social actors, military forces (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 150). Actors, for example, can be represented as 'a specific individual or as a type of people' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 150). Rearrangement is concerned with how the order of events is presented and for what purpose. Rearrangement can be worked out by activation and passivation of the role allocated to each participant (see Section 2.2.1.1). Van Leeuwen points out that role's choices can reveal aspects of ideology when relating them to the social contexts in which they occur (van Leeuwen, 2008). Deletion refers to crossing out one or more elements of social practice, such as participants, actions and resources. This transformation strategy adopts two linguistic systems*,* background and suppression*.* Background refers to the passive structure, which has a reference to the doer, such as *people are killed by militants in a battle*. Suppression, on the other hand, deletes the reference to the doer in the passive form, such as *people are killed in a battle*.

The strategy of addition can be performed through repetition, that is, 'the mental processes which accompany specific action or actors, for example, the way the actor feels about or interprets certain action' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Purpose is another element of addition, which states why the action is performed. van Leeuwen (2008) notes that purpose is not an inherent part of social activities but is an addition that serves a function. Legitimation is another addition strategy that refers to the reasons for performing a practice. These reasons bear a sense of authority. They can be realised through a reference to the value system (moral evaluation) or the authority (authorisation) of a society. Rationalisation is another form of legitimation, which can involve a reference to the 'goals and uses of institutionalised social actions' acknowledged by the society (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 106). All these types of legitimations can be explicitly presented, implicitly communicated or delegitimised.

In addition, van Leeuwen (2008) points out that the socio-semantic realisation of agency in a discourse is more decisive in representing social actors than linguistic realisation. *Agents* and *patients*, he argues, are the sole grammatical categories that could represent the participants in events. However, through sociological categorisation, analysts can understand actors through different linguistic structures, such as prepositional phrases, possessive pronouns or nominalization. Thus, the

representations of social actors, in this model, are traced within their sociological identifications. The following section explicates the linguistic realizations of these representational choices for ease of identification and reference.

2.2.1.1 Social Actor Coding[9]
2.2.1.1.1 Activation and Passivation

According to van Leeuwen (2008), representational categories are based on the basic dichotomy of the inclusion and exclusion of social actors (SAs). He indicated that social actors are included in the text through the two main strategies listed below.

A. **Activation**, where SA is the active agent who carries out the action. The activated agent can be foregrounded or backgrounded.

B. **Passivation**, where the SA is also included, though functions as an object that undergoes the activity and receives the action. The passivated SA can be subjected or beneficialized.

The activated SAs are foregrounded when they adopt the role of actor, senser, assigner, sayer or behaver in the material, mental, relational, verbal and behavioural transitivity processes, respectively. They are backgrounded when they are represented by circumstantialization, which is linguistically realized by the following forms:

1. A prepositional phrase, such as *from* and *by* in passive voices;
2. A premodifier, such as an adjective;
3. A post-modifier, such as a prepositional phrase or relative clause;
4. A process noun realized by a possessive pronoun, such as my and our.
5. A nominalization, which refers to a noun formed from a verb or adjective (Baker, 2006).

On the other hand, passivated SAs are subjected when they are 'treated as objects…for instance, as objects of exchange: Immigrants 'take in' in return for the skills or money they bring' (van Leeuwen, 2008, p.33). They are beneficialized when they receive a benefit from the action, such as refugees to the U.N., which provides aid for the refugees.

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[9] See van Leeuwen (2008, pp. 2-54).

Additionally, the subjected SAs are realized by the roles of goal, carrier and phenomenon in the material, attributive relational and mental processes, respectively. Van Leeuwen (2008) also indicated more cases where the SA can be identified as subjected, or receiving the effect of the action:

6. When the SA appears as an object of the preposition *against*;

7. When the participants come in the form of a prepositional phrase that signals post-modifying possessivation, as in 'an intake *of 54,000 skilled immigrants* is expected' (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 34) and

8. The 'adjectival pre-modification' of abstracted social actors also passivate the participants as in 'racial tolerance' (van Leeuwen, 2008. P. 34.

Each of these representational choices has a specific effect, either negative or positive, on the constructed image of the SAs according to the repeated roles allocated to them. Foregrounding some roles and passivating others is one of the most important strategies used to manipulate the discourse to serve the ideology of the news source.

2.2.1.1.2 Assimilation

This category represents the social actors by plurality through using a general reference, which does not give a sense of specificity. It has two subcategories:

9. Aggregation: Represents SAs as numbers, statistics, terms of quantifiers and percentages.

10. Collectivization: Represents SAs with generic terms, such as Muslims and Egyptians, the name of countries, such as Australia, or by using mass nouns, which provide a sense of plurality, such as nation and community (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Partington and Taylor (2018), indicate that using ethnic or national labels without specifying 'whether *some*, *all*, a *few* or *many* is intended' can be considered a 'racist stereotyping', especially when the context depicts them negatively (p.141). With regard to aggregation, van Leeuwen (2008) points out that this strategy is employed to manipulate opinions and build up consensus. It is a crucial strategy in social representation as it represents SAs in terms of documented facts, which enhance the credibility of the representation, and hence affects the reader's attitude.

2.2.1.1.3 Association, Disassociation, Indetermination and Differentiation

According to van Leeuwen (2008), association refers to the special actors who are formed for specific purposes to undertake specific goals. Therefore, association commonly lasts as long as the causes of alliances last. This category can be realized with clauses, which consist of possessive attributive verbs, such as *have* and *belong*. The SAs in this category may sometimes not be represented by their alliance's names but rather by a metaphorical reference, such as *evil*. When the association is no longer a unified group sharing the same interests, then it is called a disassociation.

Indetermination is used to represent a SA as an unknown or unidentified identity by using indefinite pronouns, such as *someone* and *somebody*. The plural pronoun *they* can also be employed as an exophoric reference to anonymise actors. Differentiation, on the other hand, is used to represent a SA or a group of actors as different from another similar group.

2.2.1.1.4 Individualization and Categorization

In the socio-semantic representation of social actors, individualization plays an important role in a given discourse. According to van Leeuwen (2008), social actors in this category are introduced as specific individuals, linguistically realized by nomination. Ideologically, this strategy can be used to highlight the names of social actors in a certain context and hide their names in others when the nomination will not serve the writer's interest. Nomination can be realized by, proper nouns with titles or without in an informal or formal or semiformal way. It can also be realized by acronyms, which are used to stand for the person's name.

Categorization, on the other hand, differs from nomination in that it uses the names of careers or functions to represent actors instead of their names, for example, doctor, captain and so on. However, when the career stands for a definite rank, such as U.N. Secretary, then it is a nomination. Categorization is divided into two types:

C. **Functionalization**: To represent the SAs in terms of the activities they practice. This category can be realized by:

11. Verbs attached to suffixes to form nouns, such as *-er, -ian* and *-ent*, as in *teacher* and *guardian*;

12. Nouns of place or tools attached to suffixes to form nouns denoting the activity, such as *-ist and -eer* in *pianist* and *mountaineer* and

13. Compound nouns that relate the SA to its tool, such as *cameraman*.

D. **Identification**: To represent the SAs 'not in terms of what they do but in terms of what they, more or less permanently or unavoidably, are' (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 42). It includes three categories:

14. Classification: In classification, SAs are identified according to their major inherent classifications, such as gender, age, wealth, class, religion, ethnicity and so on.

15. Relational identification: SAs are identified in terms of their family ties or social relationships. They are commonly realized by the words expressing the relation type, such as sister, son, friend and so on. However, sometimes these kinship relations can be used as a means of classification, for example, to classify people below 16 as children.

16. Physical identification: SAs are identified according to their physical appearance such as the colour of their eyes or hair, their height and similar physical characteristics. This type of representation can be realized by adjectives or post-modifying prepositional phrases, for example, the Muslim with a prostration mark on his forehead.

Van Leeuwen (2008) indicated that physical identification may convey an implicit meaning in some contexts. 'Large moustaches' on Prussian officers, he argued, connote a rigid and firm personality (p. 45). Therefore, identifying the physical characteristics of an actor may provide more insights about the perspective of the writer towards certain actors.

2.2.1.1.5 Appraisement

This category represents the social actors based on the interpersonal evaluation. It introduces the SAs in a way that shows the self-attitudinal stance either toward or against them. It is realized by idioms and nouns e.g., 'thugs' and 'bastard' (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 45).

2.2.1.1.6 Overdetermination

Overdetermination is an important representational choice, used to give legitimation and justification to social practices. It introduces the social actors as vital actors who

participate in multiple actions. It has four sub-categories, inversion, symbolization, connotation and distillation. Inversion is the sole category that is relevant to the present study, whereas the three remaining subcategories are more pertinent to fictional representation (van Leeuwen, 2008).

I. Inversion: refers to the social actors who are participating in two opposite social practices. E.g., despite being a peace activist she participated in war against rebels.

2.2.1.1.7   Impersonalization

This category identifies the SA as an object, which has no human attributes. It has two subcategories:

E. **Abstraction**: To represent the social actors in terms of a quality that has been allocated to them, for example, describing the poor people who escaped from the war to other countries as *an issue*.

F. **Objectivation**: To represent the SA in relation to a 'place or thing closely associated either with their person or with the action in which they are represented as being engaged' (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 46). There are three types:

17. Spatialization: To refer to the social actors in terms of the place they are associated with, for example, *America declares war against terrorists*.

18. Utterance autonomization: To refer to the SAs by means of their words or utterances, such as *the letter says*, instead of stating the name of the writer. This sort of representation is commonly used when reporting the declarations of elite persons or government officials.

19. Instrumentalization: To introduce the SAs in relation to the tool or object by which they undertake the action, for example, *The bullets strike people on the street*. This subcategory pertains to the actions of the SAs.

20. Somatization: To represent the SAs by utilizing parts of the body in the description, for example, *They implanted their eyes everywhere*.

Thus, according to van Leeuwen (2008), impersonalization is employed to mystify the identity of the SAs in specific contexts and to grant the action or the SAs some authority when they are represented by the utterances of important officials.

Abstraction, he indicates, enhances the positive or negative attitude towards the SAs according to the qualities assigned to them.

2.2.1.1.8 Exclusion

The second set of the binary representation system is exclusion, which refers to the absence of the SAs. This representational choice has two subcategories:

I. **Radical Exclusion**: This occurs when the text shows no trace of the SAs or their actions and activities. The exclusion then can be detected by investigating two texts dealing with the same subject, as the present study does.

J. **Suppression**: This occurs when the activity is mentioned in the text while the SAs are deleted. The suppression can be realized by the following strategies:

21. Passive agent deletion, for example, *The aeroplane was hijacked*.

22. Non-finite clause, for example, *To regain the lost lands is a risk*. The underlined infinitive clause plays the semantic role of the agent, whereas the SA who is responsible for regaining the land is not identified.

23. Nominalization and process nouns to alter the action into a noun and delete the SAs. The noun used still indicates the action, for example, *Support for Syria and Lebanon should continue since these countries are in the forefront of resistance against Israel* (Fars, September 07, 2013). The nominalization here excludes the SA and does not show who should give support, although it could have been included in a post-modifying prepositional phrase.

24. Adjectives denoting processes, for example, *The opposition says the government carried out all three alleged chemical attacks* (Reuters, March 27, 2013). The adjective *alleged* refers to the action of allegation; however, it includes no reference to who made the allegations. It could be the Syrian government itself, the activists, ISIS, rebels, the U.N. or the opposition front.

Such representational choices are common in news language. The news selection and the transformation processes are influenced by the de facto political social and economic factors (Fowler, 1991). Thus, the process of including some specific social

actors and excluding others in some contexts is a conscious manipulation strategy, which serves the ideological perspective of the news media.

2.2.2 Transitivity Model

Transitivity system forms the main part of the ideational metafunction, which is concerned with reality representation (Halliday, 1994). This semantic concept is defined as the 'representation in language of processes, the participants therein and the circumstantial features associated with them' (Halliday, 1976, p. 159). Teo (2000) points out that discourse analysts usually resort to *Systemic Functional Grammar* to elucidate the implications underpinning linguistic structures, which helps in revealing the writer/speaker's attitude and motivation. Both the linguistic realisations and socio-semantic representation of actions, van Leeuwen (2008) argues, are crucial in representing the discourse ideology, because the different options of encoding actions are what leads to multiple interpretations of the same event. Accordingly, this model is employed to describe the relationship between the social actors surveyed earlier and the types of processes in which they are involved.

According to Halliday (1973, p.134), transitivity refers to 'the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his experience of the process of the external world and of the internal world of his own consciousness, together with the participants of these processes and their attendant circumstances'. This means that transitivity focuses on the actions in relation to the agent (the one who acts) and the patients or the participants (the ones who are affected by the action), as well as the accompanying information that gives more details about the event. These three elements are what critics usually consider to determine the causality of an action and establish the ideology interface.

Fowler (1991) explains the three basic elements in the transitivity system: the process, the participants and the circumstances. He points out that *process* is the part of a clause that semantically forms its core meaning. It can be either a verb, an adjective or a noun that expresses the event or state of affairs in the clause. The *participants*, however, are the nouns or the noun phrases that carry out the process. *Circumstances*, as previously mentioned, refer to information denoting 'time, place or manner' of an incident (p. 76).

The categories of processes, Halliday (1985) points out, are *material, verbal, relational* and *mental*. A material process (i.e. doing) is an action that has an effect upon

the goal, an affect that can be tangible or seen as in *the policeman killed the criminal*. Verbal processes are generally related to the verbs expressing speech and what is relevant, such as *say, declare* and *deny*. Relational processes are verbs expressing being and having. They are commonly used to make judgements and comments. They can be attributive, which displays a relation between nouns and attributes or qualities e.g. *he is strong* or equative, which expresses a relation between nouns e.g. *this man is a doctor*, or expresses possession e.g. *he owns a house* (Kress & Hodge, 1997). Mental processes, on the other hand, have three different subcategories. Cognitive processes are mainly related to abstract brain operations such as thinking, remembering and forgetting, whereas perceptive processes are more pertinent to sensations such as seeing and hearing. Affective processes, on the other hand, are mostly related to emotions and feelings, such as liking, wanting and loving. It is worth mentioning that mental processes are almost always identified as reactions. The important point here is that these reaction verbs can alter their functions while preserving their linguistic forms. In van Leeuwen's (2008) example, 'they did not feel they understood', the verb *feel* here is functioning as a cognitive verb. The object of the verb 'they understood' is normally a proposition that is grammatically realised by a relative clause.

Further to this classification of processes, van Leeuwen (2008) adds that material actions can be either transactive or non-transactive. In non-transactive processes, the action is represented as 'display and behavioural', for example, 'the children are crying'. van Leeuwen expands the material transaction model into interactive transaction when the goal is human and instrumental transaction when the goal is non-human or when a human is used as an instrument to achieve the actor's goal (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 61). Different encoding of the same actions gives different implications, as they are not synonymous (Halliday, 1985)

The action, moreover, can be *agentialised* when the agent is identified and named or *deagentialised* when the actor is replaced by a non-human agent, as in 'the knife stabbed a woman'. Deagentialised actions can be eventuated by unintentional actions such as *happen* and *occur*. *Existentialisation*, as in existing or naturalisation, denotes actions that occur as a natural process. *Naturalisation* creates a natural link between action and reaction, as in 'birth and death' or 'rise and fall' and usually provides a legitimising role (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 157). Further, *generalisation* refers to the actions or reactions that do not specify the practice in an action but rather

give a general label to it, as in 'reviews performance'. In a *distillation* action, which is a type of abstraction, 'a quality is distilled from the whole that has particular relevance in the given context' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 156–157), usually to rationalise the action.

The aforementioned survey shows the meaning of transitivity, the categories of processes and the basic elements upon which the transitivity system is grounded. Thus, based on this model, the analysis investigates whether the agency and the causality are clear cut in the news reports or not. Kress and Hodge (1979) explain the relation between the construction of these linguistic processes, passive and active, and the ideological functions they serve. They emphasise the role of nominalisation and passivisation of linguistic processes in changing or shifting the focus of social reality. Nominalisation as a transformation strategy is 'a process of syntactic reduction' in which verbs are transformed into nouns (Fowler et al., 1979, p. 41), as in the BBC headline 'Florida School Shooting'. The process of nominalisation serves to exclude the agent, glossing over the identity of the actor as well as the participants affected by the action (Hodge & Kress, 1993).

Passivation, on the other hand, is concerned with rearrangement of agent and patient positions in the clause, which sometimes involves agent deletion. Fairclough (1992) emphasises the risk of nullifying the responsibility of an action by agent deletion. According to van Dijk (1985, p.73) 'news bias can even be expressed in syntactic structures of sentences, such as the use of active or passive constructions, which allow the journalist to express or suppress the agent of news acts from subject positions'. It is worth noting that the concept of agency is intermingled in the representation of both actions and actors (see Section 3.2.2). Yamamoto (2006) argues that mystifying the agency or mitigating it might be politically motivated.

The analysis of transitivity choices is crucial in examining how the Syrian revolution is represented. The main insights this model provides in the analysis in terms of the participants' roles, their actions and how they are constructed in news reports reflect the perspective of the news source.

2.2.3 Ideological Square Model

As this study aims at uncovering the way the Syrian revolution is represented in the two online news outlets, the analysis opts for the ideological square model to

establish the relationship between the news representation and the underlying ideology. Thus, this section explains the notion of van Dijk's (1998) ideological square, characterised by self-positive presentation and other-negative presentation. According to van Dijk (1995, p. 20), ideology emerges from the minds of social actors, their mental models, which are implanted by their biographical experiences, knowledge and attitudes and translated into societal structure throughout actions, identity, goals and positions. Therefore, the group's ideology usually enacts the rules of how people interact in different social practices, and accordingly the discourse is structured along with their cognitive schemata (van Dijk, 1995). Based on this specific perspective, the notion of ideological square was initiated.

According to van Dijk (1995), the theoretical concept of ideological square has two main functions. The first is social, which establishes the relationship between the group members, their relationships with different groups and how the members of the groups and their actions are represented. The second is cognitive, which projects and controls the group members' attitudes and beliefs. This framework offers a binary strategy to trace the underlying ideology of a given text or speech throughout the negative representation of *other* and the positive representation of *us* (van Dijk, 1998). It is a competent process of polarisation, he adds, in which the in-groups enhance their good qualities and gloss over their bad or unfavourable traits, while at the same time emphasising the negativity of the out-group and de-emphasising their good qualities. Therefore, the function of ideological polarisation is pertinent to the representation of social actors.

van Dijk (1995, p. 24) elucidates that positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation strategies are manifested in sentence structure, lexical choices and semantics. The sentence syntactic structure, for instance, can give a reference to the ideological bias via the presence or absence of an agent. Kress and Hodge (1979) account for the crucial role of transactive structures in analysing ideology. Transactional structures, they argue, can reveal causality, which shows the initiator of the action, those affected by the action and the effect of the action itself. Hence, 'the judgement can be made on a reasonably secure ground' (p. 18). Generally, active voice is used to highlight the agent of an in-group's positive actions as well as emphasise the negative actions of the out-group. On the contrary, the out-group's positive actions are commonly structured in a passive voice or nominalised in order to de-emphasise or

delete the presence of the agent. Passive voice is also employed in representing in-group's actions to de-emphasise their unfavourable actions. According to Reah (1998), different syntactic structures bring different effects to the meaning. The use of non-transactive structure, she states, attracts more attributes, whether positive or negative, to the intended agent, and thus give more focus to the aspects meant for the foreground.

Likewise, lexicality is a rich domain for ideological expressions. Polarisation is also present in lexical choices, employed to enhance the positive or negative sides of the intended group. Lexical items like *terrorists* and *freedom fighters*, van Dijk (1995) argues, reflect different political ideologies. Richardson (2007, p. 47) emphasises the role of lexical choices in 'value judgement'. He points out that naming and reference terms not only describe the good and the bad qualities of social actors but also establish the relationship between those who name and those who are named or referred to. Calling someone *Sir*, he points out, reflects the social status of the addressee in addition to denoting his gender, and describing a person as *accused* yields different connotations than calling him *guilty*. It is worth mentioning that this model considers the overt as well as covert expressions that convey a sense of negative or positive presentation.

The semantics of the discourse refer to the topicalisation, which is important in identifying the ideological orientation. Herman and Chomsky (1994) emphasise the role of topic selection and presentation in creating bias in media outlets. They state that the perception that media produces for an issue is highly affected 'by selection of topics, by distribution of concerns, by emphasis and framing of issues' (p. 55). According to van Dijk (1995), in-groups tend to filter the information that does not reinforce their positive image while simultaneously '[topicalising] information that emphasises the negative [out-group] properties' (p. 28). The 2003 Iraq war, for instance, was reported in a highly polarised way. The newspapers were focusing on what U.S. and UK officials declared, and no sources outside the initiators of the war were cited. The actions of Iraqi soldiers were topicalised as savage while the violence of collation troops against the Iraqis was completely mitigated and backgrounded (Richardson, 2007). This is also evident in studies on the representation of Muslims in Western media in which the prevailing topics are related to conflict, terrorism, threat and struggle (see Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2013; 2012; Richardson, 2004).

Moreover, topicalisation can appear in the upgrading and downgrading of the events manifested in the hierarchical structure of news reports. So, the most important information is upgraded in the headline while the information that would deteriorate the status of the in-group is backgrounded or deleted (van Dijk, 1995). Headlines commonly show the perspective of the news reports. According to van Dijk (1998), perspective is deeply rooted in the notion of ideology. This perspective, he adds, is an attitudinal judgement that could be 'cultural, social, personal or situational' (p. 43). Martin and White (2007) indicate that judgement shows the writer's support for or condemnation of (or challenge against) other views and subjects. White (2005) points out that under judgement, people may assess behaviours as moral or immoral, such as 'corrupt politician', as legal or illegal, as in 'to sin, to cheat', as normal or abnormal, such as 'a brutal tyrant' or as socially acceptable or unacceptable such as 'eccentric student' (p. 104). It is worth noting that judgement language is semantically intermingled with that of effect, as it is generally manifested through the mental effectual lexis, for example, 'dislike' or 'like' (White, 1998, p. 105).

Finally, this model offers a dichotomic view that could give a full interpretation of the underlying ideologies that lead to different representations of the same event in the selected samples. Therefore, this model is utilized to illustrate the polarized representations across the micro- and macro-level of analysis.

2.2.4 Summary

This section has provided a survey for the main theoretical models and analytical tools from the socio-semantic and socio-cognitive approaches of CDA employed to analyse the data of this study. It introduced the socio-semantic inventory theory (van Leeuwen, 2008), transitivity theory (Halliday, 1994) and ideological square (van Dijk, 1998). Each of these provides its own analytical concepts, which fit the various linguistic features the news corpora shown. The following chapter outlines the methodological approach, the data in question, the rationale of the data and the steps of the analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

DATA AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodology of the study. It starts by identifying data sources and their significance. Then, it offers a detailed discussion of the analytical approach to data collection, describing the procedures and techniques manipulated at each level of analysis.

3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1   Data for the Corpus Analysis

As the study aims to investigate the representation of the Syrian revolution in cyber news reports, the data for the study are derived from two online news sources, which have different political positions toward the Syrian revolution. The first is *Fars*, an Iranian online news agency, and the other is *Reuters*, an international news agency headquartered in London. Fars is patronized by the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is the main ally of the Syrian government in the Middle East. However, the agency states its independence from the Iranian government, thus, assumed to be impartial (see Section 3.2.2). On the other hand, Reuters resides in UK, which 'declared its intention to intervene in the conflict in Syria' after the use of chemical weapons (Bailliet and Larsen, 2015, p. 113). Nevertheless, Reuters, in its policy, affirms its adherence to the Trust Principles, which maintain objectivity and independence (see Section 3.2.1). Thus, the two news media sources claim non-ideological alignment, which fit the purpose of the study in terms of examining how the reality is reported when the news sources are under the effects of two different political positions. This type of data will facilitate a comparison of the findings and provide a firm basis for the discussion.

The data for this study are constructed from scratch. They are specialized corpora that fulfils the following criteria:

1- The corpora meet the overall aim of the study, which addresses the media representation of the Syrian revolution.
2- The corpora have time restrictions, including only news reports issued between 2013 and 2015.
3- The two sets of corpora are of a comparable size (see the Table 3.1 below)
4- Each set of corpora reflects a different political stance towards the Syrian revolution.

Table 3.1 Data set at the Micro Level

News Agency	No. of Words	Broadcasted from
Fars	596.844	Iran
Reuters	768.102	UK
Total	1.364.946	

The news reports of the two agencies are accessed directly from their official online websites[10]. The total corpus data contained more than one million words. The key search terms the study used in compiling the reports are *Syrian revolution, conflict, protestors* and *civil war*, based on an intensive reading of the news agencies' reports and motivated by initial analysis.

3.1.2 Data for Critical Discourse Analysis

The sample texts selected for the CDA are informed by the corpus-based analysis of the two corpora (Fars and Reuters). Thus, to avoid simply picking out particularly outstanding examples (cf. criticism of CDA by Mautner, 2009; Breeze, 2011), the following systematic methodology was conducted. The CL approach was used to decide the topic of the sample by contrasting the keyword lists of the two corpora. This contrast revealed the absence of the chemical attacks in Fars corpus despite being a vital incident until the present day (see Section 6.1.1). The text selection is then meant to be a purposive sample 'selected on the basis of having a significant relation to the research topic', i.e., the crisis of chemical attacks (Seale, 2012, p. 237). The downsampling maintained the following criteria:

1- The selected news reports should address the issue of chemical attack (i.e., the chemical attacks should be within the main focus of the report).
2- The sampling period still extends from 2013 to 2015. However, the reports are selected according to the reports released within the nearest time span of the alleged chemical attacks.
3- The average size of the selected reports has to be within the range of 700-850 words.

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[10] Fars, www.farsnews.com. Reuters UK, https://uk.reuters.com/subjects/middle-east

The sample includes 10 news reports, five from each corpus (see Appendix A and B), the headlines are listed below.

Table 3.2 The Headlines of the Chemical attacks' Reports Sample

No	Fars Headlines	Reuters Headlines
1	Hersh: Turkey Behind Sarin Attack in Syria	Dogged rebels the target of Syria gas attacks -activists
2	Army Makes Major Advances in Eastern Ghouta	U.N.'s Ban says all claims of chemical arms use in Syria need investigating
3	Army Regains Control of Strategic Town in Ghouta	France says ready to act over Syria, despite British refusal
4	Deputy Leader of Syrian Journalists' Union: Iraqi Plants Producing Chemical Arms for Rebels	U.N. confirms chemical arms were used repeatedly in Syria
5	Sources: Terrorists in Syria Receive Cargo of Chemical Substances	Exclusive: Chemical weapons used by fighters in Syria - sources

3.2 Rationale of the Data

Online sources are much easier to access than hard copies from two separate countries. This feature allows a heavy global reliance on online news and digital resources. Therefore, the potential readership of the official websites is likely to be wider. According to Lin et al (2005), cyber news has widely displaced the traditional newspaper form. In addition, Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2012) argued in their study that the sale of traditional newspapers declined and their influence decreased between 2000 and 2009. This has consequently led to the accrual of a wider range of readers than those of hard news copies (Brown, 2005). Digital media generally plays a major role in changing and shaping peoples' views and attitudes. The way the media covers a public issue, whether it is political, economic or social, orients the way people receive and interact with the subject (Happer & Philo, 2013).

Therefore, the choice of online news agencies' reports was made to meet the study's overarching aim of investigating media bias. News agencies play a key role in determining and distributing the news to other news outlets. According to Rantanen & Boyd-Barrett (2004, p. 18), news agencies are 'the wholesalers of news to most media', fully dedicated to gathering information and reporting news. In addition, news

agencies are highly committed to the values of truthfulness and objectivity. Shrivastava (2007) stressed the impartiality of news agencies, citing the Press Commission of India's statement that 'As purveyors of news, agencies should not merely keep themselves away from bias and follow strictly the principles of integrity, objectivity and comprehensiveness in the coverage of news, but it should also appear clear to the newspapers and the public that the news agencies are maintaining such a course' (p. 80).

On the other hand, newspaper coverage may become imbued by the journalist's views or the journal's perspective. According to Bell (1991), a newspaper article does not only present the factual information about an event but depicts the views of the institutions and the reporters. Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013) surveyed a number of studies that affirm the powerful impact of newspaper articles upon the prevailing sentiment in society, among which was Dietrich et al (2006), who studied the influence of news articles upon readers' attitudes. He pointed out that the portrayal of psychopathic persons who are mentally troubled as criminals or violent may have a direct relation to linking those mentally troubled people to violence and fear. This shows that newspaper articles reflect a degree of subjectivity, which influences the formation of news and the recipients' judgement in turn.

Thus, addressing the news agencies' coverage is important for a number of reasons, one of which being the independence of the UK Reuters and Iranian Fars news agencies from their governments (see their policy statements in Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2). This means that the political position of UK and Iran is not supposed to influence the agencies coverage of the Syrian conflict. Accordingly, these two agencies are likely to provide similar realities. In addition, news agencies, generally speaking, are at the top of news outlets' hierarchy and have a dominant effect on other news sources such as TV, radio, press and social networking. This is crucial because any biased coverage in a news agency will descend to these news sources, then, no matter where you look or what you read they will all have this bias because they all came from the same source, which makes it difficult to write anything else and ultimately becomes the opinion of the whole community. Thus, tackling the agency data aims to raise public awareness of what they read online or in newspapers.

Thus, based on the aforementioned differences, the importance of the data lies in the strict reporting values of objectivity that news agencies adhere to. Accordingly, deviation from these values will be more significant in determining bias. The following subsections give an account of the selected data sources.

3.2.1 Reuters Online News Agency

Reuters is one of the most influential global news agencies in the world (Griessener, 2012). It is a multimedia news agency first established in London, UK by Paul Reuters in 1851 (Shrivastava, 2007). Reuters has achieved a prestigious position in providing international news independently during the two world wars, after establishing its own private company in 1940 to free itself from the government interference and the political pressure ("Reuters: a brief history", 2007)[11]. It has also been awarded prizes for its unique news coverage in 2015, 2016 and 2017 successively on war, human rights, business reporting and breaking news ('About us,' Reuters[12]). In terms of its global reach, the total visitors to Reuters website has been estimated as 60,642,411 visitors monthly[13], having more than 55.000 reporters spreading in more than 100 countries ("Global Fact".2015). Therefore, UK Reuters does not only show a single-sided perspective, which is limited to UK or the West, but rather an international perspective, which is reflected in the diversity of its reporters who hold different nationalities and ethnicities. Accordingly, Reuters addresses a non-homogeneous audience that possess different perspectives and views of the world.

Moreover, the coverage of British Reuters has been assessed as the least biased, according to the official website of Media Biased/Fact Check[14]. Reuters established its editorial policy statement by strictly stating that 'Reuters news operations are based on the company's Trust Principles, which stipulate that integrity, independence and freedom from bias must be held at all times' ('About us,' Reuters[15]).

According to Read (1992), Reuters is an independent institution, fully dedicated to reporting events impartially regardless of any political or governmental pressures.

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[11] https://www.theguardian.com/media/2007/may/04/reuters.pressandpublishing retrieved in October 2018

[12] https://agency.reuters.com/en/about-us/awards-2016.html

[13] https://www.crunchbase.com/organization/reuters#section-website-tech-stack-by-builtwith retrieved in August 2019.

[14] https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/reuters/ retrieved in May 2018

[15] https://www.imediaethics.org/news/12-12-06Dogs/reuters_policy.htm retrieved in May 2018

Reuters International Style Guide confirms that 'Reuters does not comment on the merit of events…one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' (Read, 1992, p. 2). A recent case that supports the selection of Reuters is the agency's courageous news coverage of the Myanmar massacre against Rohingya Muslims in 2017. The reportage by Reuters uncovered the involvement of Myanmar forces and disclosed a systematic ethnic cleansing against the Muslim minority in Rohingya. This issue consequently led to a landmark case when the two journalists who wrote the reports were arrested by Myanmar authorities and sentenced to seven years in prison (Fullerton & Goldberg, 2018).

Serote (2017), in Reuters blog, stated that personal opinions are never voiced in Reuter's coverage, as the correspondents' main aim is to provide accurate stories from authentic sources and leave the judgement to the readers. Therefore, Reuters stressed on the value of impartiality emphasizing that 'neutrality is a hallmark of our news brand and allows us to work on all sides of an issue, conflict or dispute without any agenda' ("Reuters Handbook of Journalism", 2008, p. 11).

3.2.2 Fars Online News Agency

The process of determining the appropriate online news sources (newspapers or news agencies) to utilise as data sources initially focused on the following important points. First, the selected cyber news source should be national but also represent the Islamic Republic of Iran internationally. Second, the focus of the reporting should place a greater emphasis on political events than social or economic issues. Third, the news media should be available in English. After the application of these three criteria, eight potential news media sources emerged: Iran Daily, Iran Herald, Iran News Daily, NCRI News (National Council of Resistance of Iran), Tehran Times Daily, Kayhan, The Iran Project and Fars. The first six sources are all online newspapers, whereas the final two are online news agencies. All produce reports that are approximately three to four paragraphs in length.

A further key consideration was raised upon closer examination, specifically that most of the cyber archives of online newspapers only retain records for up to one year, and the Iran Herald's archive contains only 30 days of articles. Furthermore, the archived records can only be accessed using the websites' search engines, as there is no separate archive icon available. The exception is the Tehran Times Daily, which has a

systematic archive containing volumes dating back to 1998. Unfortunately, however, the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 are missing, and there are no accessible records from that period. In addition, it was not possible to procure an institutional subscription to any of the newspapers, as no contact details are provided at their official websites.

By contrast, the archive coverage for the online news agencies, The Iran Project and Fars, dates back further. Both agencies keep news records for three years, which fits the limitations of the study's data collection period. As a result, the decision was made to select an online news agency as the data source for the study. However, The Iran Project was excluded due to its alignment with the Iranian government, as declared at its official website, which states that 'Everything is issued independently, however not in [any] way causing reprimand from the Iranian government' ('About us,' Iran Project)[16].

Accordingly, the decision was made to concentrate on the reports broadcasted by Fars news agency, which was established in 2003. According to The Washington Times, the news agency of Fars is considered an official or semi-official Iranian news website worldwide ("Fars News Agency," n.d.[17]). Fars stated in its official website that:

> "Fars News Agency (FNA) is Iran's leading independent news
> agency covering a wide variety of subjects in different, political,
> economic, cultural, social, legal, sports, military and other areas with
> the most up-to-date, independent, unbiased and reliable news and
> reports in Persian and English" ("About us", Fars)[18]

Furthermore, the website is issued in four international languages, Arabic, English, Turkish and Persian, which makes it worthy of consideration. In addition, the potential readership of Fars is estimated as 4,643,452 per month according to the statistics given by SimilarWeb[19], targeting audience of different nations and ethnicities, Arab, Persian, Turkish and Western community. It is important to mention that Fars adheres to anonymity; therefore, its reporters are rarely named or credited on its reports.

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[16] https://theiranproject.com/about/, retrieved in October 2018.
[17] https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/fars-news-agency/ retrieved in April 2015.
[18] https://en.farsnews.com/Aboutus.aspx
[19] https://www.crunchbase.com/organization/fars-news-agency#section-web-traffic-by-similarweb

Based on the above surveys, Reuters and Fars form two comparable data sources for the study. In the first place, both are independent and committed to the news values of freedom and truthfulness, which meet the aim of the study. In addition, the two agencies show a significant focus on the political repercussions of the Syrian Revolution. Their archives cover the period of the conflict under study and keep records for three years. Further, they are the leading news agencies in the countries where they are based, have a wide international prevalence, and are broadcasted in several international languages, which make them worthy of consideration. More importantly, the selection of an Iranian news source is meant to identify the Shia Islamic perspective, which is different from the common Sunni Arab news sources being examined in the previous literature (see Section 2.1.7.2).

3.3 The Analytical Method

The study used a multi-methodological approach combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data quantification utilises the corpus-based approach to calculate the frequency of the input data and access the pattern of the linguistic forms that resulted, in order to recover the news representation of each news agency separately. The qualitative method utilises the CDA eclectic models. The following sections illustrate each method separately.

3.3.1 Micro-Level Quantitative Analysis

The corpus-based approach used in the quantification of the data searches for the highly frequent linguistic patterns identified by the corpus analytical tools to determine the common discourses and the roles of the recurrent patterns in revealing the different aspects of news representations. This approach is conducted to analyse the linguistic features at the micro level of analysis, utilising software-based programs, namely Antony's (2014) AntConc and Kilgarriff et al.'s (2004) Sketch Engine.

The analysis at this level examined three types of lexical-semantic relations:

i. The semantic macrostructures within which the two warring sides, that is, the anti-government social actors and the pro-government social actors, are framed;

ii. The lexical collocations characterising the news discourse; and

iii. The discourse prosodies they convey about the two sides of the conflict.

To accomplish the three aims listed above, the study conducted a bottom-up analysis approach to investigate *keywords*, *lexical clusters*, *concordances*, *collocations* and *colligations* (see Figure 3.1 below).
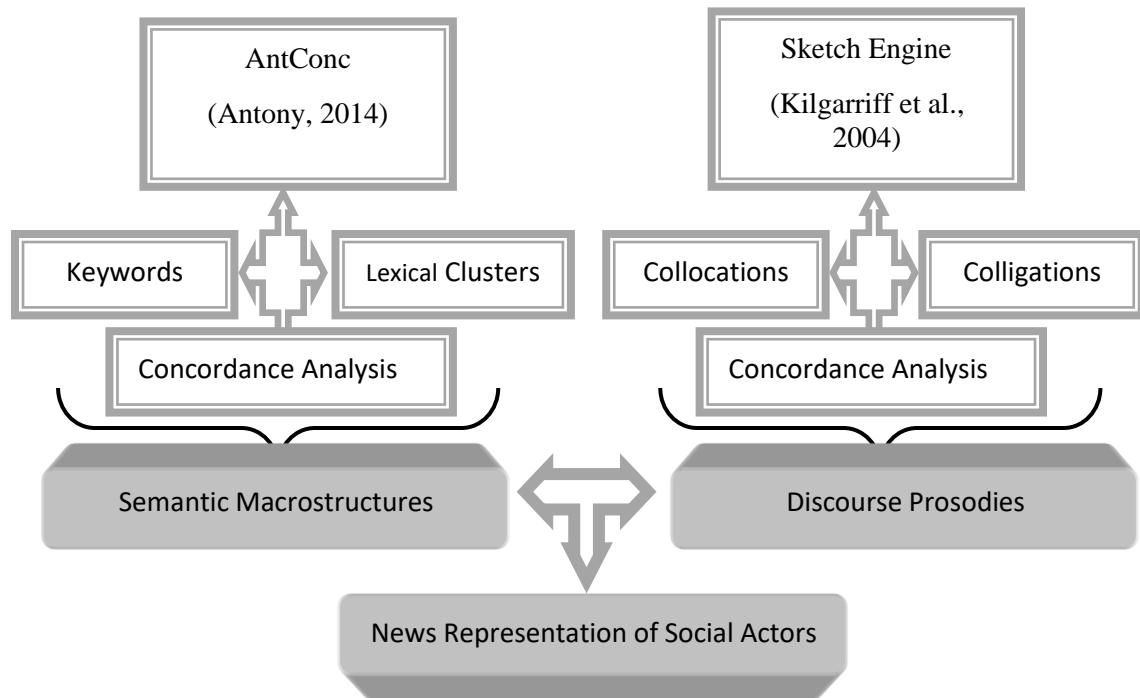
Figure 3.1 Corpus-based analytical framework

Figure 3.1 shows the two software sets employed at the micro-linguistic level (see Section 3.3.1.2 for more details). AntConc, as the figure shows, is used to investigate the keywords, lexical clusters and their concordances to draw up the dominant semantic macrostructures of the social actors, while Sketch Engine is run to examine the collocations and their grammatical patterning together with their concordance lines to uncover the discourse prosodies, which the collocations imply. Accordingly, the news representation of the social actors is constructed by demonstrating the resulting linguistic features in relation to the socio-political context (see Section 3.3.1.3 for the detailed steps of the analysis). Figure 3.1 also shows the technical analytical tools used in the corpus linguistic analysis. To facilitate the overall comprehension of the method, the following section provides an explanation for each term.

3.3.1.1 Basic Corpus Linguistic Concepts

This section pinpoints the main CL terms that are used in the analysis. Each term's definition and function are stated briefly. They are numerated for ease of reference.

1- WordList: The basic CL tool, which calculates the frequency of each word in the data. This tool is considered the basis for determining the keywords of each corpus (Baker, 2006).

2- Keyword: A statistically significant word in a corpus when it is compared with its frequency in another (reference) corpus. The keyword list provides the level of saliency while the WordList tool shows only the frequency (Baker, 2006).

3- Lemma: The various inflectional forms of the same word stem (e.g. act, acts, acting and acted are all parts of the verb lemma for 'act'). The derivational form is considered another lemma (e.g. destroy and destruction) (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

4- Collocation: 'The statistical tendency of words to co-occur' (Hunston, 2002, p. 12).

5- Span: The number of words selected to the right and the left of the main word under examination; the node.

6- Colligation: The node attraction of the syntagmatic grammatical categories, such as part of speech, identified by the syntactic functions (Firth, 1968). The node is the word under study in the context of collocation (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

7- Lexical cluster: This refers to the high frequency of a string of words that appear next to one another. The lexical cluster is different from the collocation in that a collocation does not necessarily require the lexical items to be placed next to each other in lexical clusters. Collocation refers to the lexis that is more semantically bounded. The statistics behind each of them are different (Thomas, 2017). Lexical cluster analysis is commonly used in corpus studies taking various technical terms, such as the lexical bundles used by Biber et al (1999), chains by Stubbs and Barth (2003) and N-gram by Banerjee and Pedersen (2003).

8- Concordance: 'A display of every instance of a specified word or other search items found in a corpus, together with a given amount of preceding and following context for each result or hit' (McEnery & Hardie, 2012, p. 241). This device allows the researcher to show the nodes under investigation within their contexts and provides a track to the original reference where each search word occurs. This search tool has potential importance in this study. According to McEnery and Hardie (2012), such automated analysis helps to give an accurate

and sophisticated reading of the data. The concordance and frequency data, they argue, do represent 'respectively qualitative and quantitative approaches that are quite important in linguistic studies' (McEnery & Hardie, 2012, p. 2).

Having summarized the basic concepts used in corpus linguistic analysis, the following section introduces the corpus software employed at the micro level of analysis and the differences between them.

3.3.1.2 Analytical Software

- *AntConc Software*

Due to the size of the corpus, the study utilises AntConc, a software program designed by Anthony (2014) to carry out the calculation of the recurrent lexis. AntConc is a multiplatform device that is essential in studies of corpus linguistics. This technique is highly recommended in CDA studies as it saves time for the analyst and reduces the effort required to identify the dramatically recurrent features (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). Moreover, this analytical tool is a free downloadable software, which requires no access to the Internet. The study uses AntConc to investigate the typical corpus linguistic features, namely the words' frequency, keywords, lexical clusters and concordances. However, collocations and their grammatical patterns are explored by using Sketch Engine as explained in the next section.

Keyword analyses with their associated lexical clusters at this level are utilised to determine the semantic macrostructures that commonly accompany each side of the conflict, that is, the anti- and pro-government social actors. The *semantic macrostructure* is an important notion in discourse analysis, introduced by van Dijk (2013). The term refers to the overall thematic reference or structure of a discourse. Van Dijk (1985, p. 107) states that semantic macrostructure is the overall meaning that 'formalizes the theme or the topic of the discourse as a whole' or the semantic meaning that a text or a discourse convey by their propositions or titles.

With reference to news reports, the semantic macrostructure can be perceived in the headlines (Brown & Yule, 1983) or expressed in the body of the report, either in the opening or concluding sentences. In the case of newspaper articles, leads are also a place where the semantic macrostructure is summarised (Bell, 1991). Thus, the notion of semantic macrostructure serves to create a sense of global semantic cohesion in a

text or a discourse (van Dijk, 2013a). At this micro level of analysis, the thematic structure is identified by tracing the frequent lexical patterns of the keywords denoting the two sets of social actors and their semantic references in their concordance lines (more details are provided in Section 3.3.1.3).

- *Sketch Engine*

Sketch Engine is an Internet-based analytical tool initiated by Kilgarriff et al (2004) and used for analysing large corpora. It shares the same search techniques as AntConc. However, Sketch Engine provides a more advanced analytical system for collocational analysis, the tool known as Word Sketch. This analytical method offers 'one-page automatic, corpus-based summaries of a word's grammatical and collocational behaviour' (Kilgarriff et al, 2004, p. 1). Therefore, the study opted to use Sketch Engine based on the properties that Word Sketch provides. It is worth mentioning, nevertheless, that Sketch Engine is not a free software but requires a paid subscription for users analysing data beyond one million words, as in the case of this study.

Therefore, AntConc is used to analyse the whole linguistic manifestation of the two sets of corpora, while Sketch Engine is mainly dedicated to collocational analysis. The procedures of analysis at this level follow certain steps explained below.

3.3.1.3 Steps of Analysis at the Micro-linguistic Level

The exploration of the data started by using the WordList tool to show the most common linguistic words and their frequencies in the coverage of each news agency. This step, as mentioned earlier, is necessary to establish the work of other functions in the software. However, the analysis at the micro linguistic level heavily depends on four corpus analytical tools: keywords, lexical clusters, collocations and concordances. The procedures conducted for the analysis follow the sequence of the research questions.

1. To address the first research question, which seeks to determine the common lexical patterns and the semantic macrostructures that identify the two warring sides, the anti and the pro-government social actors, the analysis included the following steps:
a) The keywords tool is used to find the most salient keywords in each corpus. The output of the keyword analysis is crucial in revealing the focus of each corpus

and the differences between them. Extracting the keywords is accomplished by comparing the WordList of the most frequent lexical items in the Fars corpus against its counterpart in Reuters. Using the two corpuses as a reference and target corpus and vice versa helped to identify the variations of the contexts that each corpus typically situates the social actors in. The keyword lists are calculated electronically by Antony's (2014) AntConc software and the saliency of the keyword output is derived using the log likelihood statistical measurement in the default setting of the software. The study accounts for the first top 20 keywords in each set of data in general. Then, the keywords are categorized according to their reference into either the anti-government social actors category or the pro-government social actors category.

b) Using a three-word span, the lexical cluster tool is employed. At this level, the cluster analysis traces the lexical choices that are commonly associated with each keyword. This empirical approach is of potential importance as it demonstrates the fixed sequence and the frequent lexical items that accompany the node, that is, the keywords under investigation, and then traces the discourses they are framed within. Identifying the semantic macrostructures of the key participants throughout lexical cluster patterns is based on the notion of the accumulated patterns effect. This notion says that 'an association between two words, occurring repetitively…is much better evidence for an underlying hegemonic discourse' (Baker, 2006, p. 13). Accordingly, the frequent lexical clusters that accompany the key social actors in the two news agencies' reports are indicative of the typical thematic frames that each agency tends to introduce the two warring sides within. This analysis technique, in addition, was motivated by Bakers (2006) analysis of the lexical clusters associated with *bars* in the brochure advertising the holidays in 2005 to figure out leaflet themes. Furthermore, it is important to indicate that the lexical cluster tool is triangulated with word sketch to give more efficient detail of the keywords' semantic macrostructures and discourse prosodies, considering that the statistical metrics behind them are different.

c) The concordance lines are investigated to examine the contexts of each lexical cluster and to make sense of the context-bound references of each pattern. Both the lexical clusters' output and the concordance lines are demonstrated by screenshot figures in the body of analysis, though space limits are considered.

d) Drawing on steps a, b and c, the semantic macrostructures, that is the aboutness or thematic frames, are identified. Each thematic frame is provided with selected examples recalling its semantic preferences.

2. The steps of analysis that address the second research question, which investigates common lexical collocations and the discourse prosodies they denote, are both quantitative and qualitative. The steps are explained below.

    a) The analysis utilises Word Sketch to calculate the most common collocations of the keywords denoting the two sets of social actors in each corpus. The collocations are ordered according to their salience. Collocates that obtained a log-dice score of six and above are considered.

    b) The analysis accounts for the grammatical positions of collocations where the social actors function as the subject of a verb, an object or a modifier.

    c) The concordance analytical tool is also employed at this level to allow more details into the context of the collocates. Examples of concordances are extracted and analysed.

    d) Drawing on steps a, b and c, the discourse prosodies are elucidated according to the context and patterns provided by the concordance lines.

7. To fulfil the third research question, which seeks to demonstrate if bias in news media exists and the relation between the agency's ideological system and the news representation of the incidents, the study:

    a) Compares and contrasts variations in the linguistic representation of anti- and pro-government social actors recovered from the findings of the keyword analysis, semantic macrostructures and discourse prosodies in each corpus aside and, drawing on this step,

    b) Foregrounds the negative and positive representations of the two warring sides in relation to the socio-political context. Thus, the ideological implications are clarified.

3.3.2 Qualitative Analysis

This level of analysis is concerned with the polarized news representation of the chemical attacks that occurred during the Syrian revolution. Adopting the CDA eclectic model diagramed below in Figure 3.2, the qualitative analysis proceeds to address the second set of the research questions below:

4. What socio-semantic representational choices were used to identify the participants who were involved in the chemical attacks?

5. What common transitivity processes did each news agency associate with the social actors they covered and the roles they were allocated with?

6. To what extent does each news agency's coverage reflect their adherence to their policy statements and their values of objectivity?
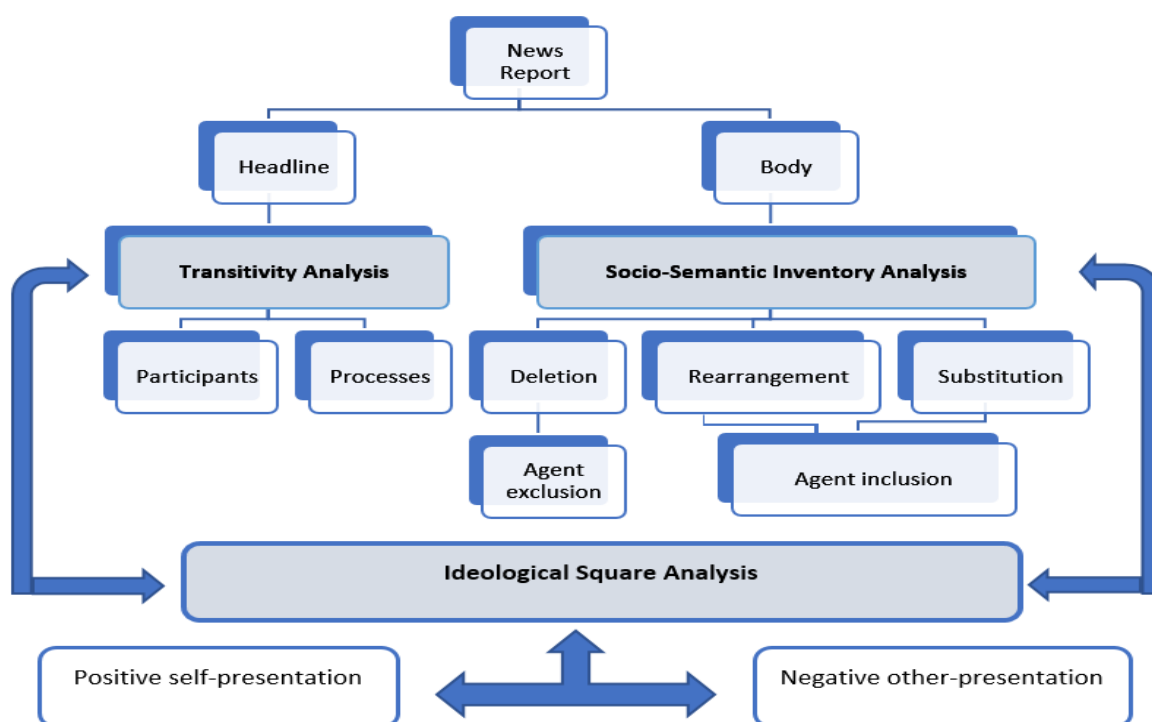
Figure 3.2 CDA analytical framework

Each of the analytical models: transitivity analysis, socio-semantic inventories and ideological squares diagramed in Figure 3.2 above are surveyed in the previous chapter (see Sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.2.3).

3.3.2.1 Bias Coding

Determining the bias in the CDA sample depends on analysing the reports within the focus of the eclectic model diagramed above (see Figure 3.2). Considering that our perception of the world and the construction of reality is made up of processes of 'going on, happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming' (Halliday, 1994, p. 106), the transitivity choices used in the headlines are analysed to decode how the reality of the chemical attacks is constructed in relation to the semantic aspects of the processes and agency, which is of great importance to explore which meaning is emphasized and which one is backgrounded in relation to participants (Simpson, 1993).

The main point of the analysis is to explore the causality of actions in relation to the participants involved in the processes. Thus, using Transitivity model, (see Section 2.2.2), the analysis followed certain steps:

1. The headlines are tabulated;
2. The participants are identified;
3. The roles of the participants are stated;
4. The processes are pointed out and then,
5. The constructions into passive or active are determined.

The quantification of the linguistic features at this level is not considered because the number of sample texts meeting the selection criteria is limited (see Section 3.1.2). However, the analysis will include some remarks about the number of linguistic features when required. With regard to the body of the reports, transitivity selections are considered as well as representational choices given to the SAs. In adopting van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic inventory model (see Section 2.2.1), the steps of the analysis are conducted as follows:

1. Select the clauses that only have anti- or pro-government participants;
2. Classify the participants according to the representational strategies suggested by van Leeuwen (2008) and
3. Point out the effects that these strategies made on the news representation,

Having determined the different representational choices of the SAs and their transitivity processes, the analysis goes a step further to discuss these choices in light of the four ideological moves, based on the van Dijk (1998) model, (see

Section 2.2.3), to point out the choices that were ideologically motivated and determine the possible bias in news reports.

3.4 Triangulation of the Methods

Studies in social science, linguistics and media advocate the investment of multiple methods (Jick, 1979). This type of eclectic methods is called triangulation. Triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to address the researcher's questions. As for the present study, quantitative and qualitative methods were used to anchor the results. Jick cites Denzin's classification of this combined approach as a 'between or across method' (1979). This integration of approach paradigms, Angouri (2010) argued, upgrades the research accuracy.

Denzin (1975) identified four types of triangulation that facilitate a stronger research setting. The first is the use of different methods throughout the research in analysing data (cross methods), while the second is employing more than one theory to obtain findings. The third is deriving data from different sources and the last type is the investigator triangulation, wherein more than one examiner is involved in testing the data (Denzin, 1970, p. 301). The triangulation of the data is comprised of the contribution of time, place and person (Denzin, 1970). These three variables represent data variety.

As for the present study, the different data sources are used for the sake of comparison to find out the deviancy in the news representation. Although this is not data sources triangulation, which Marchi & Taylor (2009, p. 5), define as gathering data from different periods of time, different places, or different social situations, however, the two news agencies from which the corpora were derived are of a great importance. They serve to upgrade the accuracy in determining the possible news bias, on the one hand, and facilitate accounting for ideology in the news agencies' discourse on the other.

The methodological triangulation is also applicable to the present study. The multilayered approaches, as Cohen and Manion (1994) stated, are one of the most important signs of successful research design. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed to decipher bias in the social representation of actors and actions in the study and hence, recover the ideological views of each news agency. Furthermore, the use of corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) methodology, which denotes the incorporation of corpus linguistics and the discourse analysis approach, was

part of this study. This type of combination is known as within methods triangulation because it is used as a technique to back up the quantitative approach (Jick, 1979).

Theory triangulation appears in the eclectic model created for the study. Three theories were utilised to account for the different aspects of the data in order to meet the research questions. Denzin (1970) points out that addressing multiple perspectives is an advantage of theory triangulation as it serves to address different aspects of the same study case. The use of the eclectic model in the current study allows to account for the linguistic manifestations and the thematic frames the news representation reflect about the Syrian revolution. At the same time, it explores the ideological dimension behind this representation to give a clearer perception of the issue.

3.5 Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological framework adopted for the corpus linguistic approach to critical discourse analysis. It also provided the steps of analysis along with the research questions. Further, the chapter elucidated the criteria adopted for building up the specialized corpora and the standards followed to downsample the data for the critical discourse analysis. The next chapter investigates the lexical semantic manifestations of the Fars corpus at the micro level, using the corpus-based linguistic approach.

CHAPTER FOUR

CORPUS-BASED LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE FARS ONLINE NEWS

4. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to decode the ideology of the news agency under investigation by exploring the discursive constructions of anti- and pro-government powers in the Syrian revolution. The analysis at this level focuses on examining the keywords, lexical clusters and collocational patterning of the key participants. The analysis then moves from the insights of these micro-linguistic features to an elucidation of the themes and discourse prosodies allocated to each side. Accordingly, positive and negative representation is explicated in relation to the agency's ideological mode. This chapter is organised as follows: Section 4.1 starts by presenting the focus of Fars news coverage of the Syrian revolution through an examination of the word frequency. Keyword analysis is presented in Section 4.2, grouped into two categories, the anti-government fighters and the pro-government counterpart, and analysed in two sections (Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). Within these sub-sections, each keyword is examined separately and further analysed using the lexical cluster tool and concordances to reveal the common lexical patterns and distinct semantic macrostructures. The collocations of the two warring sides are examined in Section 4.3. Finally, the overall findings are summarised in Section 4.4.

4.1 Frequency Counts

This step is conducted to reveal the main focus of Fars news coverage on the Syrian revolution, using the corpus analysis software AntConc. Excluding the functional words, the following table shows the top twenty most frequent lexical lemmas in the corpus. It is worth mentioning that the lemmas, i.e., different forms with the same root, are of potential importance in the analysis as they change the lexical frequency outcome that would result from using the word list tool alone. Another consideration is that the study excludes the verb *say* as this word was expected to appear at a high frequency as a verb that is commonly used in reporting within the news genre (Biber et al., 1999). The table below shows the top twenty most frequent lexical lemmas.

Table 4.1 The top twenty lexical lemmas in Fars Corpus

No.	Frequency	Lemmas
1	8417	Syrian
2	7667	Terrorist
3	7148	Army
4	6647	Syria
5	5386	Militant
6	4336	Group
7	3691	ISIL
8	3163	Kill
9	2918	Force
11	2675	Province
12	2380	Countryside
13	1756	Aleppo
14	1626	Government
15	1534	Damascus
16	1414	Nusra
11	2675	Province
17	2498	Sources
18	1754	Destroy
19	1469	Control
20	1392	Number

The entire list of twenty lexical items provided above indicates the focus of Fars corpus. Table 4.1 shows words referring to the people and the country, e.g., *Syrian* and *Syria*. Other terms convey power and authority, such as *army*, *force and government*. A number of lexical words describe people as *terrorist*, *militant*, *ISIL*, *groups* and *Nusra*, an anti-government armed group (see Section 1.1.2 for more information). Based on the contexts, the word *military* as well as the verbs *kill*, *destroy*, and *control*, are commonly associated with both parties. There are also words referring to the places where the events are taking place, such as *province*, *countryside*, *Aleppo* and *Damascus*. Another word, *number*, refers to an amount. The word *source* also appears among the frequent words in reference to the suppliers of either information or ammunition. Thus, these lexical items can be grouped into five main categories: authority power, anti-government power, violence, geographical places and quantity.

Regarding the influence of ideology on the representation of the two warring sides, a keyword analysis was conducted to determine how the social actors (SAs) are identified in the corpus and the types of discourses they are framed within.

4.2 Keyword Analysis

This level of analysis addresses RQ1. This question examines the salient lexical choices that characterise the news coverage of Fars in general and focuses on the thematic frames, alternatively called semantic macrostructures that are commonly associated with the keywords referring to the SAs, in particular. Scott and Tribble (2006) emphasised the importance of keywords, as an analytical tool, in revealing the aboutness of a text, on the one hand, and the characteristics of the writing style on the other. According to Scott (1999), the nouns, verbs and adjectives in a keyword list are expressive and strongly convey the discourse's aboutness (i.e., the content). Therefore, this level of analysis is both quantitative and qualitative. The keyword lists were analysed using AntConc software (2014) and the saliency of the keywords' output was derived using the Log likelihood statistical measurement to spot significant variations of the lexical frequencies in the target corpus (Fars) through a comparison with the reference corpus (Reuters). The first one hundred keywords were extracted. The analysis included those keywords that refer to the social actors, actions, places and words that contribute to construct the representation of social actors (see 3.3.1.3, point. A) while it excluded (i) the function words such as articles and prepositions and (ii) words denoting the source of the report, such as Tehran and FNA (the acronym for the Fars News Agency). The top twenty keywords of this list showed high keyness scores of 4-digits, the lowest score was that of Daraa (934.243) (see the following Table 4.2). The lexical items that came in the next 100 keywords showed a big difference in saliency, which dropped to score (277). Thus, due to this gap in keyness scores, the study focused on the first top 20 keywords. The table below shows the first twenty most frequent keywords in the Fars corpus

Table 4.2 Keywords in Fars Corpus

No.	Frequency	Keyness Score	Keywords
1	5214	7565.550	terrorists
2	7144	5730.869	army
3	4398	5135.191	militants
4	3691	4690.725	isil
5	2380	3360.138	countryside
6	1876	3103.147	takfiri
7	2453	2945.787	terrorist
8	2472	2145.345	province
9	1358	1505.100	destroyed
10	2690	1481.529	groups
11	1263	1400.047	operations
12	1244	1397.150	positions
13	756	1226.318	meantime
14	682	1147.275	lattakia
15	8155	1109.624	syrian
16	1306	1050.990	number
17	757	1036.497	injured
18	3044	1011.887	killed
19	1222	967.909	heavy
20	630	934.243	daraa

Obviously, the keyword list shows no difference to the output provided earlier by the wordlist tool (Table 4.1). The new lexical items in the keyword list are *operations* and *heavy*. Other words, like *Lattakia* and *Daraa*, are proper names for cities in Syria, thus they are categorised as words referring to geographical locations.

To determine the scope of the aboutness related to these keywords, the lexical clusters of each keyword are examined within a three-word span size. Then, the concordance lines of the most frequent lexical clusters are investigated to reveal their semantic macrostructures. This empirical approach is of a potential importance as it

demonstrates the frequent lexical items that accompany the node, the keywords under investigation, and then, shows the discourses they are framed within.

4.2.1 Anti-government Keyword Analysis

The relationship between language and ideology is enacted through the selection of certain lexical items over other linguistic choices (van Dijk, 1995). Therefore, the way people are identified 'can have significant impact on the way in which they are viewed' (Richardson, 2007, p. 49). Fars coverage uses a definite set of lexical choices to refer to the armed groups fighting against the Syrian government. These choices have received high keyness scores in the corpus, which means that they are significantly recurrent. Table 4.2 shows *terrorists*, *militant*, *ISIL*, *Takfiri* and *group* as the main keywords referring to the rebels. These lexical choices facilitate a clear negative representation of the anti-government social actors. The main keywords are ranked first, third, fourth, sixth and tenth, respectively, in terms of keyness scores. The fact that these words appear in the list of the top ten most frequent keywords shows the extent to which both the anti-government side of the conflict is a pivotal topic in the coverage and the language of the Iranian News Agency is negatively loaded. In the following sections, the lexical clusters and their concordance lines are examined.

4.2.1.1 Terrorists

The theme of security threats is the prevailing semantic macrostructure that Fars uses to introduce the anti-government fighters. The identity of the anti-government SAs is depicted in a single frame, which is criminality, using different lexical choices. Therefore, the lexical clusters of *terrorists*, *militants* and *ISIL* show quite similar lexical patterns, which inform the radical views of Fars against the rebels. Figure 4.1 below shows the most frequent lexical patterns associated with terrorists.

Total No. of Cluster Types		1345	**Total No. of Cluster Tokens**
Rank	**Freq**	**Range**	**Cluster**
1	391	202	the isil terrorists
2	309	177	the takfiri terrorists
3	206	142	of the terrorists
4	165	101	number of terrorists
5	134	108	tens of terrorists
6	128	95	isil takfiri terrorists
7	125	77	nusra front terrorists
8	124	87	of takfiri terrorists
9	104	77	al-nusra terrorists
10	98	67	of isil terrorists
11	87	57	group of terrorists
12	81	62	scores of terrorists
13	73	66	foreign-backed terrorists
14	55	49	that the terrorists
15	51	44	gangs and terrorists
16	50	44	dozens of terrorists
17	50	38	on the terrorists
18	40	32	with the terrorists
19	39	33	against the terrorists
20	35	31	by the terrorists
21	32	30	from the terrorists
22	29	28	force destroyed terrorists
23	28	27	destroyed the terrorists
24	28	24	of foreign terrorists
25	28	23	the dead terrorists
26	25	22	for the terrorists
27	24	24	to the terrorists

Figure 4.1 Lexical clusters of *terrorists*

Starting with the keyword *terrorists*, the recurrent patterns above link terrorists to specific names, such as *ISIL* (391 occurrences), *Takfiri* (309 occurrences) and *Nusra* (125 occurrences) (see Section 1.1.2 for more information about these fighting units). Other patterns associate *terrorists* with numbers or quantity, such as *number* (165 occurrences), *tens* (134 occurrences), and *scores* (81 occurrences). There are also some patterns which depict terrorists as supported groups, such as *foreign-backed* (73 occurrences) and as confronted groups represented by the prepositional phrase *against the terrorists* (57 occurrences). In addition, the figure shows two prepositional phrases: *of the terrorists* (206 occurrences) and *of Takfiri terrorists* (124 occurrences). An examination of the concordances of these phrases reveals that the two patterns are used to depict terrorists as passivated participants who are killed, injured and destroyed by government forces.

It is worth noting that analysing the keywords in this section depends on the referential meaning of the lexical item itself, i.e., the concept that the word semantically denotes. So, when I mentioned previously that *insecurity* and *threat* are the semantic macrostructure of *terrorists*, *militants* and *ISIL*, I based this inference on the direct meaning of the keywords themselves and their patterns. For example, a high recurrence of the terms *diseases*, *medicines*, *patients* and *drugs* in a corpus indicates that medical care is one of its semantic macrostructures. However, the meaning that the context

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implies will likely alter the semantic macrostructure of *terrorists* from security threatening to fragile power, as the context depicts them as defeated, killed and destroyed by the government. In this respect, the intended meaning is called the discourse prosody, not the semantic macrostructure.

Another concept that the frequent lexical clusters of the keyword *terrorist* reveal is the concept of quantity. This concept is clearly emphasised throughout various clusters, such as *number*, *tens*, *scores* and *dozens*, in lines 4, 5, 12 and 16 (Figure 4.1). The quantification of *terrorists* is linked to losses in ammunition, hideouts and fighters that terrorists have sustained from the government army. Given space limitations, the following figure projects a few concordance lines of *dozens*.

4	ovinces over the past 24 hours. Dozens of terrorists were killed and many more wer
5	d Damascus over past 24 hours. Dozens of terrorists were killed and many more wer
6	d. Hama The Syrian army killed dozens of terrorists in military operations in Ham
7	ovinces over the past 24 hours. Dozens of terrorists were killed and many more wer
8	e past 24 hours, the army killed dozens of terrorists in al-Maraneh, Job al-Ahmar,
9	ortheast of Daraa city, and killed dozens of terrorists and destroyed their arms and
10	r Nabbudah town, sources said. Dozens of terrorists were killed and injured in th
11	ISIL positions in Homs, leaving dozens of terrorists dead. Also, the Russian helic
12	f of Liwa Shuhadaa al-Yarmouk. Dozens of terrorists from both sides were killed o
13	ear Mount Abdulaziz and killed dozens of terrorists and destroyed several vehicle
14	, which resulted in the killing of dozens of terrorists, including Khaldoun al-Sawwas
15	sources said that the strikes left dozens of terrorists killed, injured many others w
16	har axis in al-Nabi Younis area. Dozens of terrorists were killed and injured\xA0du

Figure 4.2 Concordance lines of *dozen*

The concordances above show how the anti-government fighters are negatively represented by the pattern of quantity. The keywords used to name the anti-government fighters are also inherently negative. Moreover, a closer look to the lexical patterns of all the keywords reveals that they are intermingled. This means that *Takfiri*, *militant*, *ISIL* and *terrorists* are all clustered as premodifiers for one another. Therefore, the analysis will be selective when the patterns are repeated to avoid redundancy.

4.2.1.2 Militants

Militants is the second keyword employed within the anti-government lexis, which received a significant keyness score (5135.191), as shown in Table 4.2. Both *militants* and *terrorists* facilitate a negative identification of the rebels and denote an explicit danger. Examining the lexical clusters of militants reveals another emphasis on

the theme of threatening power, which is encoded in the nomination of the armed groups. See Figure 4.3 below.

Total No. of Cluster Types	1285		Total No. of Cluster Tokens	4398
Rank	**Freq**	**Range**	**Cluster**	
1	298	182	of the militants	
2	272	184	foreign-backed militants	
3	232	132	the takfiri militants	
4	213	123	number of militants	
5	96	83	tens of militants	
6	94	69	the isil militants	
7	69	56	of takfiri militants	
8	68	53	scores of militants	
9	65	59	supporting the militants	
10	58	55	backed takfiri militants	
11	55	46	on the militants	
12	49	44	by the militants	
13	41	28	units targeted militants	
14	40	38	against the militants	
15	40	34	operations against militants	
16	40	32	with the militants	
17	34	31	qaeda-linked militants	
18	33	29	that the militants	
19	32	27	to the militants	
20	30	27	nusra front militants	
21	29	26	and the militants	
22	26	23	groups of militants	
23	24	23	isil takfiri militants	
24	22	21	all the militants	
25	22	20	dozens of militants	
26	21	17	numbers of militants	
27	20	20	for the militants	

Figure 4.3 Lexical clusters of *militants*

The salient patterns in the above figure are those that frame the identity of the militants as based on belonging to illegal, notorious armed groups, such as *ISIL* (94 occurrences), *al-Qaeda-linked militants* (34 occurrences) and *Nusra front militant* (30 occurrences). These lexical patterns depict the anti-government fighters as organised cells of terrorism using globally recognised names for terrorist organization. Such representation suppresses the role of the Syrian rebels, who played a pivotal part in the revolution and by whom the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Opposition were formed.

The remaining patterns show a great similarity to the lexical cluster patterns associated with the previous keyword *terrorists* and inform the same thematic structure. Figure 4.3, for instance, describes militants as being militarily reinforced, as in *foreign-backed militants* (272 occurrences), *supporting the militants* (65 occurrences), *of arming militants* (61 occurrences) and *backed Takfiri militants* (58 occurrences). This sort of recurrent representation emphasises the theme of allied Western support of the rebels. The militants are introduced as backed, armed and supported by the foreign power. Moreover, the use of the lexical choice *foreign* to refer to the Western power has an evaluative meaning, which implies a sense of otherness. Reisigl and Wodak (2001) indicated that as a lexical choice, the term *foreigners* conveys negative predicational qualities, which inform a hostile perspective that depicts the SAs within the binary representation of victims and criminals. This perspective indicates that the

representation of the rebels' allies conforms to the negativity of the anti-government fighters' representation. In addition, the semantic macrostructure of quantification is also evident in the patterns of lexical clusters centred on militants. A number of lexical patterns associate militants with quantity expressions, such as *tens* (96 occurrences) and *scores* (68 occurrences), which, again, emphasise the number of deaths and losses among the militants.

On the other hand, militants are described as the agents of the crimes committed against civilians, as exemplified by the pattern of *by the militants* (49 occurrences). Among the semantic environments in which this phrase repeatedly exists are: *Chemical attack was carried out by the militants*, *massive raids by the militants* and *Lattikia was attacked by the militants*. It is worth mentioning that Lattikia had been assigned as the capital of Alawites during the French Mandate in Syria, yet the rate of Alawites in Lattikia residents was not clearly growing. However, when Hafiz al-Asaad subsequently became the president of Syria after his military coup in the 1960s, the inflow of Alawites increased until they formed the majority population in the city (Goldsmith, 2015). Therefore, the reference to Lattikia in this pattern is ideologically important. It implicitly conveys that militants are only targeting the Alawites' populated cities, thus hinting indirectly at the sectarian identity of the militants, on the one hand, and serving to distance the Syrian government from responsibility for the recurrent assaults against civilians in Lattikia on the other. The final set of patterns includes the lexical clusters of *units targeted militants* (41 occurrences), *against the militants* (40 occurrences), and *operations against militants* (40 occurrences), which represent the militants as the target of military operations carried out by the Syrian army. The following figure provides an example of this semantic environment.

3	in the future battles of the Syrian army against the militants.\x94 The Syrian army started
4	scene of massive operations of the Syrian army against the militants. The Navi-Al-Sheikh Maskin r
5	Meantime, the Syrian army staged massive attacks against the militants' gathering centers in al-Qun
6	that the Syrian Army has staged massive attacks against the militants' positions in the strategic
7	lsewhere, the Syrian army started massive attacks against the militants' stronghold across the North
8	uthern front after three years of constant battle against the militants. On Sunday, another prominen
9	uthern front after three years of constant battle against the militants. Also, Abu Mohammed al-Golan
10	station of al-Samra village after tough battles against the militants. Also in the past 24 hours,
11	Meantime, the Syrian troops continued their fight against the militants in Deir Ezzur, and claimed t

Figure 4.4 Concordances of against the militants

The representation of the militants is highly pertinent to the Salafi Jihadist armed groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIL, who are known for their fighting skills due to their

prolonged history of armed conflicts; however, this representation is juxtaposed with the military reactions of Assad's forces against them. The left concordance lines in Figure 4.4 emphasise the *massive attack* of the Syrian troops and stress their continuous efforts to push the militants back. This sort of juxtaposition is quite common in the representation of the anti-government fighters to tone down their power before the government forces.

4.2.1.3 ISIL

The representation of the rebels moves from assimilating them by using generic references to *terrorists* and *militants* to employing a more specific, individualised reference to *ISIL*, *the Islamic State of Iraq* and *Levant*. Accordingly, the construction of the rebels is performed within a particular ideological frame, which aims to amplify the danger of the rebels and implicitly legitimise mass killings among the civilians. The most frequent lexical clusters associated with ISIL are identified below.

	Clusters Results 3		
Total No. of Cluster Types 1417		**Total No. of Cluster Tokens** 3691	
Rank	**Freq**	**Range**	**Cluster**
1	274	162	of the isil
2	226	173	the levant (isil
3	137	92	against the isil
4	104	75	that the isil
5	86	68	by the isil
6	57	47	with the isil
7	52	45	from the isil
8	51	44	and the isil
9	39	35	to the isil
10	36	30	country. the isil
11	33	23	targeted the isil
12	31	27	on the isil
13	27	24	between the isil
14	27	22	number of isil
15	23	21	tens of isil
16	22	18	for the isil
17	21	20	as the isil
18	18	14	airstrikes on isil
19	17	11	against\xa0isil
20	17	15	airstrikes against isil
21	17	15	including the isil
22	16	15	group of isil
23	16	15	stormed the isil
24	14	13	back the isil
25	14	14	join the isil
26	14	13	meantime, the isil
27	14	13	syria. the isil

Figure 4.5 Three-word clusters of *ISIL*

The above figure shows the patterns created by the prepositional phrases, which yield no clear references by themselves, such as *of the ISIL* (274 occurrences), *against the ISIL* (137 occurrences), *by the ISIL* (86 occurrences), *with the ISIL* (57 occurrences), *from The ISIL* (52 occurrences) and the relative clause *that the ISIL* (104 occurrences).

Therefore, examining their contexts is necessary to determine their semantic denotation. The following figure shows the concordance lines for the *of the ISIL* and *against the ISIL* patterns.

8	29L air-to-surface missiles to conduct airstrikes against the ISIL militants, the Russian military s
9	in the past 24 hours, Syria conducted airstrikes against the ISIL terrorists in several areas in th
10	f its Arab allies have been conducting airstrikes against the ISIL inside Syria without any authoriz
11	US and its allies have been conducting airstrikes against the ISIL inside Syria without any authoriz
12	that the Russian military has launched airstrikes against the ISIL stronghold of Raqqa in Syria with
13	anwhile, the Russian military launched airstrikes against the ISIL stronghold in Raqqa with cruise m
14	Bashar al-Assad said the US-led airstrikes against the ISIL Takfiri terrorist group have fail
15	fighter jets carried out a series of airstrikes against the ISIL Takfiri terrorist group's positio
16	Russia had every right to carry out airstrikes against the ISIL on the country's soil. Kremlin
17	. The US-led coalition is carrying out airstrikes against the ISIL group in Iraq and Syria. The
18	d Kartapolov. Russia started precision airstrikes against the ISIL targets in Syria on September 30,
19	the ISIL. The second phase of Russian airstrikes against the ISIL positions comes 50 days after the
20	s," the Defense Ministry said. Russian airstrikes against the ISIL terrorist group in Syria started
31	airstrikes on the strongholds and command centers of the ISIL militants in Raqqa in recent days.
32	so, the Syrian airstrikes hit the command centers of the ISIL in Homs province, leaving a large
33	footages of air strikes on the command centers of the ISIL terrorist group located in Syria. "Tod
34	rces targeted positions and concentration centers of the ISIL Takfiri terrorists in Aleppo province
35	ed. Elsewhere, hideouts and concentration centers of the ISIL terrorists were hit in air strikes
36	Syrian air raids destroyed concentration centers of the ISIL, al-Nusra Front and other terrorist
37	the army troops stormed the concentration centers of the ISIL near Unq al-Hawa and killed
38	m. The Syrian soldiers attacked gathering centers of the ISIL Takfiri terrorists in Tal Asheihib, an

Figure 4.6 The concordances for *of the ISIL* and *against the ISIL* patterns

The above concordances reveal that ISIL is depicted as the target of the Syrian and Russian military airstrikes, which hit and destroyed the main strongholds of ISIL. The concordances also show the areas where ISIL are located, such as Raqqa, Homs and Aleppo, where Aleppo and Homs are among the three largest cities in Syria. This representation highlights the dominance of ISIL and its danger. It also positively foregrounds the government forces' operations to block ISIL's expansion. Along the same line, Fars reports represent ISIL as the agent of criminal and brutal actions throughout the pattern of *that the ISIL* (see Figure 4.7 below). It is worth noting that the two keywords *ISIL and terrorists* appear to be used interchangeably. However, *terrorists* can be said to be an elastic term, which represents any act against the government regardless of whether the act is undertaken to defend citizens or protect the rebels' areas from the blind sectarian offensive of the government army or not.

Therefore, the negativity toward the rebels in the reports is evident in the use of negative referential names and the allocation of the anti-government fighters to criminal

activities, such as seizing more areas from the locals, launching shells against cities and executing their fighters who have defected from their affiliations (lines 12, 13, 14 and 62) in the following concordances.

12	group affiliated to the dissident groups claimed that the ISIL Takfiri terrorists have occupied sev
13	Syria. Meantime, after the media reports claimed that the ISIL has gained control over 40% of Koban
14	alled Syrian observatory for human rights claimed that the ISIL group has executed some 200 defector
15	ian army in a statement rejected reports claiming that the ISIL had gained control over certain regi
61	\x92s branch in Afghanistan. The report said that the ISIL terror group is making inroads in
62	joint counter-assault operation. The sources said that the ISIL terrorist group launched another pow
63	have destroyed a surface-to-air missile launcher that the ISIL terrorist group previously captured
64	-man battle. In May, a Kurdish official disclosed that the ISIL terrorist group has set up special
65	. Meantime, the Syrian security sources disclosed that the ISIL terrorist group is using the state-

Figure 4.7 Concordances of *that the terrorists*

Another important aspect of the representation of the anti-government fighters is the negative stereotyping of the armed groups battling against the government. This depiction was elucidated through an investigation of the concordances of *ISIL terrorist and*, while checking the left lexical patterns of ISIL. The concordances show a number of anti-authority powers fighting against ISIL; however, they were targeted by the government forces, such as the *Al-Nusra terrorists/front*, *the Free Syrian Army*, *Al-Qaeda*, *Jeish Al-Fath terrorists* and *Islamic front*. It is worth noting that the *Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Kurdish fighter* are coupled with ISIL as terrorists and illegal armed groups. Nevertheless, the FSA and the Kurdish fighters are the two legal armed units in Syria, which have international recognition. According to Janaby (2015, p. 182), the UN Security Council stated that FSA adheres to international law and human rights rules in military operations against the aggressive attacks of terrorists and government forces.

Compared to the previous patterns of the terrorist and militant keywords, ISIL has been nominated as the perpetrators and the committers of war crimes. The numerous patterns that ISIL is associated with are all dedicated to identifying ISIL in relation to their violations of international law and extreme brutal actions, such as kidnapping, killing, stealing natural resources of gas and oil, smuggling foreign fighters, and causing unrest with the support of US and the Arabian Gulf countries.

4.2.1.4 Takfiri

Takfiri is the fourth-most recurrent keyword denoting the anti-government SAs. It is a belief-based classification and a transliteration of the Arabic word *kafir,* i.e., disbeliever (see Section 1.1.2). Thematically, Takfiri explicitly denotes an extreme religious movement. This concept legitimises excommunicating political leaders, governors and ordinary Muslims and defends sentencing them to death (Eikmeier, 2007). Therefore, the use of this lexical choice to identify the anti-government SAs is ideologically motivated. It first frames the rebels in relation to the hostile Takfiri stance against moderate Muslims who do not strictly adhere to the Islamic teachings, thus threatening the security of Muslim communities in general. Secondly, Takfiri ideology rejects all of the manifestations of Westernization, liberalism and the concept of democracy, considering them an indication of relegation to apostasy (Pieri and Zenn, 2016). Accordingly, framing the rebels within Takfirism informs two semantic macrostructures: religious radicalism and anti-West. Consider the following concordances in Figure 4.8.

10	to fight in Syria by a number of takfiri and terrorist organizations. Al-Hamwi stre
11	tivists from traveling abroad, it facilitates the Takfiri and \x93Jihadi\x94 terrorists\x92 transfer
12	score more gains in its push against the Takfiri armed-groups causing havoc in the Arab cou
13	Syrian military units gained the upper hand over Takfiri armed groups in Kfar Najed, Abu Dahour, Na
14	Syrian military units gained the upper hand over Takfiri armed groups in Idlib and Deir Ezzur provi
15	3 Syria in Last 24 Hours: Hezbollah Fighters Foil Takfiri Attack in Qalamoun * * * * TEHRAN (FN
16	fear," she said, referring to January's twin Takfiri attacks in the French capital and the subs
17	day hundreds of armed groups, including terrorist takfiri brigades affiliated with Al-Qaeda, are bat
121	that the army raided the strongholds of the Takfiri fighters in al-Herak, Jasem, Naheta, al-Ka
122	)- Saudi Arabia has sent a large number of Takfiri fighters in Syria to Ukraine to fight the
123	he European country. "A large number of terrorist Takfiri fighters in Syria, who bear Saudi and Chec
124	ry early on Monday, dismantling a network sending Takfiri fighters to Syria, a police source said. E
125	he sources said on Monday that over 1,000 trained Takfiri fighters were sent to Turkey from Jordan I
126	and liberated several areas from the grip of Takfiri group. According to reports, the joint for
127	in Syria for failing to weaken the ISIL Takfiri group, also urging Turkey to tighten its b

Figure 4.8 Concordance lines of *Takfiri*

The concordances in Figure 4.8 show that the anti-government fighters are described as Takfiri armed groups sent to Syria by Saudi Arabia and supported by the United States in lines 11, 22 and 123. They are also linked to *havoc in Arab countries* (line 12), the terrorist act undertaken in Paris (line 16) and are affiliated to al-Qaeda in line 17. This way of naming and framing the anti-government fighters serve to negatively

introduce the rebels and ideologize the revolution, representing it as a planned plot to overthrow the Syrian government. The reports also recall the twin Takfiri attacks in France, thus placing this group in challenge with the Western society.

On the other hand, examining the lexical clusters of Takfiri reveals a resemblance to the common patterns of the lexical choices associated with the aforementioned keywords. The Takfiri clusters quite commonly accompany *terrorists*, *militants* and *groups* in the corpus. See Figure 4.9 below.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	195	137	takfiri terrorists in
2	168	105	takfiri militants in
3	87	73	takfiri groups has
4	81	61	takfiri terrorist groups
5	70	61	takfiri terrorist group
6	61	57	takfiri extremists. washington
7	57	46	takfiri terrorists were
8	45	43	takfiri militants. the
9	40	32	takfiri militants were
10	36	32	takfiri terrorists currently
11	35	29	takfiri terrorists and
12	31	28	takfiri terrorists. the
13	27	21	takfiri groups in
14	27	25	takfiri terrorists on
15	25	23	takfiri extremists. \xa
16	21	18	takfiri terrorists have
17	20	17	takfiri terrorists' positions
18	19	19	takfiri militants dead
19	17	15	takfiri group in
20	15	13	takfiri terrorists from
21	15	15	takfiri terrorists to
22	14	12	takfiri militant groups
23	13	12	takfiri militants and
24	13	12	takfiri terrorists across

Figure 4.9 Three-lexical clusters of *Takfiri*

These recurrent patterns serve to prime the concept of radicalism. Baker (2006) talked about 'the incremental effect of discourse', stating that 'a single word, phrase or grammatical construction on its own may suggest the existence of a discourse' (p. 13). Thus, by looking at the common lexical patterns of Takfiri, one can conclude that the anti-government SAs are represented as religiously violent hardliners. This conclusion is reinforced by the interesting pattern that appears in lines 6 and 15 in the previous figure: the *Takfiri extremists*. The linguistic environment in which extremists' pattern is situated repeatedly correlates the existence of Takfiri extremists with the act of support given by the US. The full extract is provided below.

> '*As the foreign-backed insurgency in Syria continues without an end in sight, the US government has boosted its political and military support to Takfiri extremists. Washington has remained indifferent to warnings by Russia and other world powers about the*

> consequences of arming militant groups'. ("Senior MP: US War",
> 30 August 2013).

This extract shows an associative relation pattern, i.e., 'word use relation rather than semantic lexical relation' (Ferrand & New, 2003, p. 26), formed by linking the US government to Takfiri extremists. This sort of priming, according to psycholinguists, enhances memory recovery of the concept delivered by the recurrent use of a specific lexical pattern (McNamara, 2005). Thus, whenever the US support in the Syrian conflict is mentioned the Takfiri fighters are recalled. This type of lexical associative priming is more pertinent to discourse prosody, as it conveys the sort of pragmatic references that insinuate the existence of a foreign conspiracy behind the revolt

On the other hand, checking the concordances of the Takfiri militants and Takfiri terrorists indicates the prevalence of the geographical places' patterns in representing the armed Takfiri group. See the following figure:

Figure 4.10 Concordance lines of the patterns *Takfiri terrorists* and *Takfiri militants*

The two sets of concordances illustrate the spread of Takfiris across several important places in Syria, such as al-Qalamoun, a strategic city and al-Hasaka, which witnessed battles between the Kurdish armed groups, the YPG and the government forces. The two cities are inclusively inhabited by the Sunni sect. In addition, the concordances

show a recurrent reference to Aleppo province, which is the cradle of the Sunni population and the largest city in Syria (see lines 13, 14, 15 and 16). The left concordances, however, concern the government's military operations against Takfiri groups. Thus, in this pattern, the Takfiri rebels are represented in relation to the places populated by the Sunni faction.

With regard to the keyword *groups*, which is the last keyword representing the anti-government SAs, this keyword appears to be the node that is pre-modified by all the previous keywords for terrorists, militants and Takfiri, as Figure 4.11 demonstrates.

Clusters Results 6

Total No. of Cluster Types	544		Total No. of Cluster Tokens	2690
Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster	
1	354	130	the militant groups	
2	333	184	the terrorist groups	
3	111	94	in terrorist groups	
4	91	76	by takfiri groups	
5	90	70	the armed groups	
6	81	61	takfiri terrorist groups	
7	61	54	armed terrorist groups	
8	61	57	arming militant groups	
9	56	52	other terrorist groups	
10	51	46	of terrorist groups	
11	48	42	the takfiri groups	
12	43	30	popular defense groups	
13	39	33	the rebel groups	
14	33	27	and terrorist groups	
15	27	25	and armed groups	
16	24	22	s opposition groups	
17	23	23	backed militant groups	
18	19	16	rival terrorist groups	
19	18	18	rival militant groups	
20	17	17	different militant groups	
21	17	16	linked terrorist groups	
22	17	15	other militant groups	
23	14	12	takfiri militant groups	
24	13	13	backed terrorist groups	
25	13	12	of militant groups	
26	12	12	against militant groups	
27	12	11	by terrorist groups	

Figure 4.11 Three-word clusters of *group*

Therefore, this keyword offers no additional references or significance in terms of representing the anti-government fighters. However, the figure above shows that the word *groups* enacts a dual reference. It is first used to identify the foreign-backed opposition power against the government in examples like *the militant groups* (354 occurrences), *the terrorist groups* (333, 111 and 56 occurrences), *the Takfiri groups* (91 occurrences) and *the armed groups* (90 occurrences). In other contexts, *groups* is employed as a keyword to represent the defence force formed by local people loyal to the government in examples like *popular defence groups* (43 occurrences) and *national defence groups* (2 occurrences).

Thus, the frequency counts given by the lemma list for the word *group*s cannot be taken as a pure representation of anti-government SAs. Accordingly, checking the concordance tool is required to determine the various hints of this lemma and the exact frequency of each reference. Inspecting the concordance lines manually uncovers more than mere references to anti- and pro-government actors, among which are victims in examples like *only activist groups* (1 occurrence) and *all religious groups* (1 occurrence). The reference to outgroups in another country, e.g., *Chechen terrorist groups* (1 occurrence), does not refer to the protestors inside Syria. The term appears in a reported statement by Putin talking about threatening the Russian security. Other examples include coordinate loyal groups, e.g., *some defence groups* (1 occurrence), various groups (1 occurrence), *Palestinian resistance groups* (1 occurrence), *patriotic opposition group* (1 occurrence), *the Palestinians groups* (5 occurrences) *and moderate opposition groups* (1 occurrence). Finally, the word *group* has also been used to refer to the *human rights group* (1 occurrence), which is a non-governmental organization. After removing all of these references from consideration, as they are off topic, the pure frequency of the word *group*s used to represent the anti-government SAs is 4275.

So far, the above analysis has identified the main lexical keywords portraying the anti-government SAs as well as the overarching semantic-macrostructures they inform. The following section extends the analysis to examine the keywords representing the pro-government SAs.

4.2.2 Pro-government Keyword Analysis

This section investigates the keywords denoting the government as conveyed by the keyword output in Table 4.2, including *army* and *Syrian*. It also examines the common lexical patterns associated with the keywords and explores their semantic macrostructures. Further, this section investigates the keywords *destroyed*, *operations* and *killed* and traces their references.

4.2.2.1 Army

As the official defence body sponsored by the government, *army* received the second highest keyness score of 5730.869. This lexical choice is expected to represent the government in contrast to the militia and armed group references that suggest unsystematic gatherings of armed people. Examining the lexical clusters of the keyword *army* reveals a number of salient lexical patterns, as shown in Figure 4.12

Clusters Results 1

Total No. of Cluster Types		1976	Total No. of Cluster T
Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	219	124	army and the
2	137	71	army\x92s
3	124	102	army continued its
4	112	77	army units killed
5	93	53	army and popular
6	75	42	army and hezbollah
7	75	45	army units targeted
8	68	58	army units destroyed
9	65	52	army's operations
10	61	51	army units also
11	60	52	army and civilians
12	57	47	army regained control
13	56	48	army continued to
14	55	48	army made major
15	52	28	army and its
16	50	30	army, backed by
17	49	47	army backed by
18	48	44	army in the
19	45	42	army killed a
20	44	34	army destroyed a
21	43	37	army units took
22	40	40	army's military
23	38	33	army also targeted
24	38	38	army destroyed the
25	38	31	army troops and
26	37	30	army also destroyed
27	37	35	army also killed

Figure 4.12 Three-word lexical clusters of *army*

The above figure lists the highest frequency for *army and the* (219 occurrences). The concordances of this pattern are examined below in Figure 4.13 to elucidate its contexts. Another recurrent cluster is *army continues its* (124 occurrences). This pattern is always followed by a word sequence that denotes triumph and progress like '*major advances*, *anti-terrorism operations*, *mop-up operations*' and so on. Other patterns show material processes denoting military actions, like the *army units killed* (112 occurrences), *army unit targeted* (75 occurrences) and *army unit destroyed* (68 occurrences). With regard to the semantic environment of *army* in the first pattern of *army and the*, the concordance lines below reveal interesting references.

Hit	KWIC
1	town of Jadiyah was repelled by the Syrian army and the National Defense Forces (NDF). The ar
2	and the National Defense Forces (NDF). The army and the NDF fighter conducted a heavy counter
3	s driving the vehicle. Meanwhile, the Syrian army and the National Defense Forces, backed by th
4	attakia * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army and the National Defense Forces (NDF) thwarte
5	yya and al-Moadamyeh. Lattakia The Syrian army and the National Defense Forces won back a
6	st few days, FNA dispatches said. The Syrian army and the Kurdish popular forces seized back ov
7	he Syrian police, border guards, statesmen, army and the civilians being reported across the c
8	informed earlier in the week that the Syrian army and the Kurdish Popular Defense Committees we
9	t parts of the country. Elsewhere, the Syrian army and the Kurdish Popular Defense Committees ga
10	nwhile, clashes erupted between the Syrian army and the foreign-backed Takfiri militants in J
11	age in Idlib countryside. Lattakia The Syrian army and the National Defense Forces, backed by Ru
12	unday, military sources said that the Syrian Army and the Hezbollah, in their mop-up operations
13	assab. A military source said that the Syrian army and the national defense units have now seize
14	badani * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army and the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance fighter
15	he nearby Mayer city. Elsewhere, the Syrian army and the Hezbollah fighters attacked the Takfi
16	Southern parts of Idlib province. The Syrian army and the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance forces
17	borders with Turkey. Elsewhere, the Syrian army and the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance forces
18	n the Western parts of Zabadani. The Syrian army and the resistance forces' military operation
19	brist groups violated their ceasefire with the army and the Hezbollah troops in the Northwestern
20	ches clashes intensified between the Syrian army and the Tafkiri terrorists in several parts o

Figure 4.13 Concordance for the keyword cluster *army and the*

This pattern is used to establish the theme of the government's hegemonic allies. The syntactic structure of coordination is employed to list the loyal powers and affiliates of

the Syrian government. The figure shows a number of local allies, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance forces and National Defence Forces, which commonly align with the Syrian army and embody the two powerful pro-government supporters, as in lines 1, 14, 16 and 17 (for more information about pro-government allies, see Section 1.1.2). Another military group is *the Kurdish popular force*, known as PYD, which usually cooperates with the government to regain Kurds' lands from ISIL. The theme of government power is also reinforced by referring to the confronted armed groups, which the army fights against, such as *Takfiri terrorists* (line 20), while elsewhere in the concordances are *foreign-backed terrorists*, *foreign-backed militants*, *insurgents* and *ISIL.* This pattern is used to highlight the power of the army and its supporters over anti-government groups.

On the other hand, the coordinate structure in line 7 includes a set of conjuncts, which informs a different semantic macrostructure. The concordance indicates that the Syrian police, border guards, statesmen and the civilians are all the target of an international political plot aiming to instigate chaos in the country and rip it apart to exploit its natural resources. Thematically, this pattern denotes the Western conspiracy against Syria explicitly. Along the same line, it is worth noting that the army is frequently coupled with the keyword *Syrian*, while the rebels or the anti-government fighters are linked to the keywords *foreign-backed* and *non-Syrian*, leaving the impression that this revolution is a war between two different countries and that the Syrian army is defending the Syrian public against unknown invaders coming from outside the country.

4.2.2.2 Syrian

The keyword *Syrian* is mainly employed to emphasise the identity of the government officials and hence imply their right to represent the Syrian people and determine their political life. Fars uses this keyword to establish the semantic macrostructure of the legal governing authority in Syria. This finding has emerged through a review of the concordances. Consider the following figure:

Hit	KWIC		
1	in Damascus during a meeting on December 21 with	Syrian	Prime Minister Wael Nader al-Halqi. Without
2	eigners." Past reconciliation efforts between the	Syrian	government and the true opposition failed b
3	arming their \x93good terrorists\x94 or excluding	Syrian	allies (Iran and Russia), only to squeeze o
4	the crisis in Syria is impossible without the	Syrian	leadership. In an interview with the Czech
5	tuation. \xA0 \xA0 Wed Dec 24, 2014 4:4 Russian,	Syrian	Diplomats Discuss Prospects for Syria Polit
6	spects for the political settlement in Syria with	Syrian	Ambassador in Moscow Riyad Haddad on Wednes
7	meeting was held at the request of the	Syrian	diplomat, Itar-Tass reported. "The parties
8	Russia\x92s idea for holding the inter-	Syrian	preparatory contacts in Moscow to contribut
9	to contribute to launching a dialogue between the	Syrian	government and the opposition without preco
10	and Haddad also discussed "key issues of Russian-	Syrian	relations with the focus on expanding trade
11	captured its pilot, activists said. The so-called	Syrian	Observatory for Human Rights said the aircr
12	the Commonwealth of Independent States in Moscow,	Syrian	Arab News Agency reported. West impedes Rus
13	committing numerous war crimes against people and	Syrian	army soldiers throughout the country during
14	mascus Countryside * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- The	Syrian	army regained control of a very important a
15	in Damascus countryside in the last 24 hours. The	Syrian	army moved towards Al-Maliha in several fro
16	Thursday and Friday. Also in the past 24 hours,	Syrian	army units killed a number of terrorists, a
17	ng Kasab" and leveling unfair accusations against	Syrian	government, when it should have denounced t
18	bar neighborhood, Al-Alam reported. The so-called	Syrian	Observatory for Human Rights said 10 rebels
19	as the army command. In the coastal campaign,	Syrian	troops killed a Moroccan militant once deta
20	mascus Countryside * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- The	Syrian	army continued its advances in the Damascus
21	town of al-Zabadani in Damascus countryside. The	Syrian	army regained control of al-Abdallah Castle
22	untryside of Damascus. Also in the past 24 hours,	Syrian	government forces continued their mop-up op
23	wers and their regional allies voiced loudly that	Syrian	protests have no diplomatic solution and th
24	Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council, the	Syrian	Foreign Ministry criticized the world body\
25	crime which claimed the lives of scores of	Syrian	innocents (as well as) other terrorist crim
26	g Headway in Idlib * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- The	Syrian	army made advances in Idlib after starting
27	also made some advances in the city. The	Syrian	army started a new round of military operat
28	in the early hours of Thursday and the	Syrian	troops blocked all escape routes of the ter

Figure 4.14 Concordance for the keyword *Syrian*

The word sequences to the right display authority figures, pre-modified by *Syrian*, such as *Prime Minister*, *government*, *diplomat*, *ambassador*, *army soldiers* and *troops*. Another notable feature is the pattern verbal processes that are positively used to introduce the argument and speech of the governmental figure, such as *discussed* (line 1 and 5), *reported* (line 2), *contribute* (line 8) and *criticised* (line 24); elsewhere in the concordances is *dialogue meeting*. This tendency of lexical associations in this pattern constructs, to some extent, the identity of voice holders as the only loyal officials. Chen (2007) indicated that verbal processes can impose a significant effect in representing SAs when they are used to 'cast the sayer in a positive light, as authoritative, benign, decisive, or perhaps in some way seeming to occupy the moral high ground' (p. 32).

The concordances also show that *the Syrian protests* in line 23 are portrayed as a game initiated by the Western powers to incite insurgency against the government, while in line 25, *the Syrian innocents* are depicted as the victims of this Western-backed political game. This representation reinforces the thematic frame of an international conspiracy against Syria, which has already been established in the lexical patterns of *army*. Turning to the lexical clusters of *Syrian*, the analysis examines the left-column clusters instead of the right-column clusters because the left position is more appropriate for *Syrian*, as it functions as an adjective and a pre-modifier. Taking the right search term position, however, produces clusters like *of the Syrian*, *that the Syrian*

and [in the] *mean time the Syrian*, which makes it difficult to identify their patterns'
references. The figure below shows the lexical clusters of *Syrian*.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	478	194	syrian army and
2	231	149	syrian army's
3	217	130	syrian army troops
4	194	148	syrian army continued
5	165	113	syrian armed forces
6	139	97	syrian air force
7	128	109	syrian observatory for
8	126	97	syrian army in
9	123	61	syrian fighter jets
10	120	83	syrian government forces
11	113	90	syrian army has
12	108	86	syrian army killed
13	105	88	syrian president bashar
14	93	54	syrian army\x
15	83	70	syrian army made
16	83	66	syrian government and
17	79	60	syrian army units
18	78	67	syrian army also
19	76	67	syrian army (fsa
20	67	64	syrian army destroyed

Figure 4.15 Three-word lexical clusters of *Syrian*

The N-gram results show a number of clusters of *Syrian army and* (478 occurrences),
which shows the same lexical associations presented earlier in Figure 4.13 in depicting
loyal supporters of the army. *Syrian army* (213 occurrences) couples the keyword
Syrian to the army's allies and their military operations. Another pattern appears in the
following clusters: *the Syrian army troops* (217 occurrences), *Syrian army continued*
(194 occurrences), *Syrian armed forces* (165 occurrences), *Syrian air force* (139
occurrences), *Syrian army in* (126 occurrences), *Syrian fighter jets* (123 occurrences)
and Syrian government forces (120 occurrences). Semantically speaking, the set of
lexical items that follows *Syrian* is comprised of an almost all military-related lexis.
This recurrent feature serves to foreground the identity of military forces as being
Syrian while implicitly excluding the oppositions' powers and questioning their
identity. *The Syrian observatory* (109 occurrences) mainly refers to the Syrian
observance of human rights[20] in Syria. Inspecting the concordance lines of this pattern
manually reveals that it is only used to authenticate the military actions and crimes of
the anti-government fighters against civilians, which are reported by Fars.

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[20] It is a politics-free organization, which has no prejudiced ideological views, founded in 2006 and
seeking to establish 'a country, where all citizens are equal before the law' raising the logo of
Democracy, Freedom, Justice and Equality ("About Us", SOHR). URL
http://www.syriahr.com/en/?page_id=1030

Thematically, the excessive lexical preference of the government forces attached to *the Syrian* keyword informs the semantic macrostructure of the government's military power. This thematic frame is further enhanced by listing the successful operations carried out by the military forces. See the following figure:

46	litants in Yabroud * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army has killed hundreds of militants in re
47	offensive in Aleppo countryside. Sources said the Syrian army has killed the leader of al-Nusra
48	itants in Lattakia * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army has killed hundreds of foreign-backed
49	to sign a comprehensive deal very soon. The Syrian army has laid a complete siege on the
50	ts Hunted in Idlib * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army has launched a hunt of Takfiri terrori
51	antime, army sources announced on Monday that the Syrian army has launched new operations to gradual
52	a from ISIL's Grip * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army has launched a major offensive to full
53	province of Hasaka. The development came as the Syrian army has launched a major offensive to push
54	Qamishli in Hasaka province in heavy clashes. The Syrian army has liberated tens of villages and tow

Figure 4.16 Concordances of the keyword cluster of *the Syrian army has*

The concordances above emphasise the military war actions conducted against the anti-government fighters as represented by the material processes of *killed*, *launched*, *laid a complete siege* and *made advances*. Foreign-backed and Takfiri terrorists are quantified and represented as the goal of these military actions, which is a common dichotomous representation across the whole corpus. However, what is notable in these lines is the act of liberation presented in line 54. This representation presupposes the allegiance of the villagers, and that it is against their will to be the strongholds of the rebels fighting against the government. This representation completely suppresses the stance of the civilians and depicts them as victims waiting for the military to help liberate them. It further places the blame implicitly on the rebels for the suffering of the civilians in theses liberated towns and villages, implying that therefore, the mass killing among the anti-government fighters represented by the numerical reference of *hundreds* should remain unquestioned.

4.2.2.3 Killed and Destroyed

Killed and *destroyed* are among the common lexical lemmas that appear with high frequent in the Fars corpus (see Table 4.1). The salient keyness scores for these lemmas are shown in Table 4.2, where *killed* received the score of 1011.887, while *destroyed* was given the score of 1505.100. Both lemmas are used to represent the anti- as well as the pro-government SAs. However, thematically, they are encoded within different semantic macrostructures. As for the pro-government side, the keywords *killed* and *destroyed* are employed to activate the government forces as the agents of defence

actions, which aim to exterminate the progress of the armed gangs inside the cities and villages. The concordances below elucidate the common context of *killed*.

12	Aleppo * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army killed a commander of Nur Eddin Zanki Takfiri terr
13	attack in Eastern Ghouta in Damascus province and killed a group of militants, including senior comm
14	on Deir Ezzur Military Airport on Thursday, and killed a group of the Takfiri militants. Field sou
15	al-Kassara and Tal Ahmar in Quneitra, and killed a group of the militants. The other terrori
16	ter jets. Elsewhere, the Syrian government forces killed a group of terrorists, including a ringlead
17	attack in Eastern Ghouta in Damascus province and killed a group of militants, including senior comm
18	* * TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian government forces killed a group of terrorists, including a ringlead
19	the Northern countryside of Homs. The army also killed a group of terrorists of al-Nusra Front, "
20	heavy losses on the Takfiri militants. The army killed a group of terrorists, and destroyed their
21	-Sukhneh road in the countryside of Homs, and killed a group of the terrorists and destroyed a
22	Ghouta," the sources said. Hama The Syrian army killed a group of Takfiri terrorists and destroyed
23	Aleppo, inflicting heavy losses on them. The army killed a group of terrorists, and destroyed their
340	39 civilians, including women and children, were killed and another 205 wounded, including 14 in cr
341	ry source in Aleppo, over 40 ISIL combatants were killed and 7 armored vehicles were reportedly dest
342	Iraqi army started a series of operations and killed and arrested a large number of terrorists a
343	Early battlefield reports said 11 terrorists were killed and, at least, 34 others were injured in th
344	towns in Idlib province. Tens of terrorists were killed and dozens more were injured in heavy clash
345	over past 24 hours. Tens of ISIL terrorists were killed and dozens more were injured in the Syrian
346	here. Tens of foreign-backed terrorists have been killed and dozens more injured in heavy clashes ov
347	in Idlib and Hama. Tens of terrorists were killed and dozens more injured in fierce clashes w
348	ince, Northwestern Syria. Tens of terrorists were killed and dozens more injured in fierce clashes w
349	itant groups in Damascus. Tens of terrorists were killed and dozens more injured in heavy clashes wi
350	countryside of Lattakia. Tens of terrorists were killed and dozens more injured in the Syrian army
351	of Homs province today. Tens of terrorists were killed and dozens more were injured in the Syrian
352	Dara'a. Tens of the ISIL terrorists were killed and dozens more were injured in the Syrian
353	. Tens of terrorists from both sides have been killed and dozens more injured during the clashes.
354	-Zabadani town. Tens of Al-Nusra terrorists were killed and dozens more were injured in fierce clas

Figure 4.17 Concordances of the keyword *killed*

The figure above reveals that the quantity expressions again appear as a key theme that recurrently occurs with the verb *kill,* as shown in lines 16, 18 and 340 to 354. The passive structure is also evident in Figure 4.17 above. The key verb *kill* is recurrently used in a passive voice as demonstrated in lines 341 to 354 (see also the high frequency of the passive pattern in Figure 4.18, lines 1 and 2). This passive construction extends across all of the concordance lines, where *terrorists* and *ISIL* are the passive agent. On the other hand, the civilians, in line 340 are the passive agents of the *Killed*, while the terrorists are the actors who killed the civilians. Another set of concordances reveal that *killed* is used to represent the armed clashes among the different anti-government fighters, such as ISIL and the Free Syrian Army (line 353 is an example). In this pattern, the anti-government fighters are

constructed as self-contradictory and disorganised armed units. This representation, in turn, resonates with the systematicity of the government forces and their military power. Therefore, the semantic preferences of the verb *killed* when associated with the anti-government fighters reflect the theme of violence, while when coupled with the government forces, the verb seems to encode the discourse of the government's power. The following lexical-clusters figure provides more information.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	377	176	terrorists were killed
2	193	128	militants were killed
3	178	139	have been killed
4	112	77	army units killed
5	108	86	syrian army killed
6	100	84	the army killed
7	71	64	were also killed
8	37	35	army also killed
9	31	29	army troops killed
10	25	21	army unit killed
11	25	21	group were killed
12	25	22	had been killed
13	24	23	among the killed
14	24	23	reportedly been killed
15	21	21	members were killed
16	21	18	province, and killed
17	21	20	syrian troops killed
18	21	18	troops also killed
19	18	14	civilians were killed
20	18	17	province and killed
21	17	17	fighters were killed
22	17	17	of militants killed
23	17	13	rebels were killed
24	15	15	people were killed
25	14	13	far been killed
26	14	13	front were killed
27	14	14	isil terrorists killed

Figure 4.18 Three-word lexical clusters of *killed*

The figure shows that *army* is the active agent of *kill* as in *army units killed* (112 occurrences), *Syrian army killed* (108 occurrences), *army also killed* (37 occurrences) and *army troops killed* (31 occurrences). The figure also successively depicts terrorists and militants as passive agents of killing in the following clusters, *terrorists were killed* with counts (377 occurrences), and *militants were killed* (193 occurrences). More passive structures include *were also killed* (71 occurrences) and *have been killed* (178 occurrences), where the passive agents for this pattern are people and terrorists. In line 20, the pattern of *province and killed* shows the different cites targeted by the government army to strike the strongholds of the rebels.

Thus, it is apparent from the figure above that the keyword *killed* is more representative of the Syrian army than the anti-government fighters. The troops and army are strongly constructed as the active agent for the verb *killed*. However, in other

cases, *killed* becomes agentless, namely when people or civilians are the object of killing in the passive structure. The concordance lines of *killed* are highly suggestive of the concept of riot and unrest, which is reinforced by the repeated use of numerical references denoting the tolls of injured people and mass killing. Consider the following examples.

(a) *On April 9, at least 25 people **were killed** and more than 100 others injured **when two car bomb attacks** targeted a commercial street in the central part of Homs* (Fars, 533)

(b) *Reports say more than 150,000 people **have so far been killed** and millions of others displaced **because of the ongoing violence** plaguing the Muslim state* (Fars, 535).

(c) *Some 190 civilians **were also killed** in the **deadly infighting**, the observatory said* (Fars, 533).

Examples (b) and (c) show a radical suppression of the agent, an aspect that will be tackled next in Chapter 6. Fairclough (2000) pointed out that the transformation of transitive processes from active to passive, which is used to discard important information, serves ideological purposes. Thus, the use of passivation in reporting on the victimised civilians seems to be ideologically motivated. The examples above also reveal other transformational strategies that fulfil the same purpose of passivation, such as the use of circumstantial phrases where the passive agent is omitted, as in *bomb attacks* in example (a), and the attribution of criminal acts to abstract nouns, as in *ongoing violence* in example (b). The extracts magnify the object of the passive verbs, the killed mobs, using numerical references, while at the same time mystifying the agents to enhance their risk.

By the same token, the keyword *destroyed* has shown similar concordances; see Figure 4.19 below.

Hit	KWIC
1	itra. The terrorists\x92 arms and ammunition were *destroyed*. More terrorists were also killed and ot
2	* * TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army pounded and *destroyed* the terrorists' positions in Idlib count
3	percent of chemicals which have been evacuated or *destroyed* this far," A statement by OPCW said, add
4	Terrorist Commanders Killed, Bomb-Making Workshop *Destroyed* in Zabadani * * * * TEHRAN (FNA)- T
5	s killed several Takfiri terrorist commanders and *destroyed* an IED (improvised explosive device) man
6	day. The Syrian troops and resistance forces also *destroyed* an IED-manufacturing workshop in Barda s
7	army units killed tens of Takfiri terrorists and *destroyed* their arms and ammunition depots in Burs
8	Dara'a al-Mahatta. The Syrian army also *destroyed* the gathering centers of the Takfiri ter
9	with a variety of anti-aircraft machineguns, were *destroyed* by the army. The militant groups also fa
10	Homs on Thursday. Field sources said the army *destroyed* an ISIL terrorists' BMB vehicle bomb as
11	allies are advancing from the two hills and *destroyed* militants' vehicles. Hama Government tro
12	combat zone and lines of engagement. The army *destroyed* positions of the so-called "al-Izza Batt
13	, was identified among the dead. The army also *destroyed* four vehicles in the operation. Dara'a T
14	of Lattakia. Fri Dec 11, 2015 6:14 ISIL Positions *Destroyed* Badly in Russia Air Attacks near Syria-I
15	earlier today, which left many militants dead and *destroyed* their military vehicles. Albu Kamal is
16	them dead and injured. The army on Wednesday *destroyed* positions of al-Nusra terrorists in a fa
17	by Hezbollah fighters and the Russian air force *destroyed* terrorists' positions in Syria, Aleppo,
18	itants dead and injured. Lattakia The Syrian army *destroyed* a command post of al-Nusra Front terrori
19	and strongholds of al-Nusra Front terrorists were *destroyed* in Syrian army attacks in the province o
20	urge the country of terrorists. The Syrian forces *destroyed* positions and vehicles of al-Nusra Front
21	ilitants' machine gun-equipped vehicles were also *destroyed* in the military operations. Damascus The
22	them dead and injured. The army on Wednesday *destroyed* positions of al-Nusra terrorists in a fa
23	military vehicles, equipped with machinegun, were *destroyed* in the raid," the sources went on to
24	by Hezbollah fighters and the Russian air force *destroyed* terrorists' positions and inflicted heav
25	, a military source said. The Syrian troops also *destroyed* several terrorists' hideouts in various

Figure 4.19 Concordance for the keyword *destroyed*

It is notable that *destroyed* strongly signifies the government's terminating actions against the opposition. The concordance lines show that the Syrian army is the main agent (actor) processing this act of destructions, as in lines 2, 8, 9, 12, 13, 18, 20 and 25, taking both active and passive structures. The Syrian government's allies also appear as actors in lines 14 and 17, where the targeted object is the armed opposition group. Investigating the rest of the concordances demonstrates that *destroyed* is also allocated as a criminal act to the anti-government actors. The following lexical clusters show that pro-government actors are predominantly employed as the agents of the keyword *destroyed*,

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	62	61	the syrian army destroyed
2	27	25	the army units destroyed
3	27	23	vehicles were also destroyed
4	25	22	the army also destroyed
5	24	20	of militants and destroyed
6	23	23	army units also destroyed
7	23	23	russian air force destroyed
8	17	14	an army unit destroyed
9	17	16	of terrorists and destroyed
10	17	16	syrian air force destroyed
11	14	14	meanwhile, the army destroyed
12	14	14	syrian troops also destroyed
13	14	14	that army units destroyed
14	12	12	ammunition were also destroyed
15	12	7	syrian air raids destroyed
16	12	12	syrian army also destroyed
17	12	10	the air raids destroyed
18	10	10	the syrian troops destroyed
19	10	8	weapons were also destroyed
20	9	7	and vehicles were destroyed
21	8	6	and ammunition were destroyed
22	8	8	other army units destroyed
23	8	5	popular defense groups, destroyed
24	8	4	syrian forces also destroyed

Figure 4.20 Lexical clusters of *destroyed*

Based on these contexts, the material process of *destroy* thematically denotes military progress and achievement in the battlefield. The two keywords *kill* and *destroy* are commonly juxtaposed in the corpus:

(d) The army units killed tens of Takfiri terrorists and destroyed their arms and ammunitions (Fars, 580).

(e) The Syrian forces also killed and injured all members of a terrorist group and destroyed their arms (Fars, 578).

(f) The army also…, killed dozens of terrorists and destroyed their arms and equipment (Fars, 578)

This sort of lexical association is likely to prime the concept of government military power, on the one hand, and anti-government fighters' hazards on the other. In addition, juxtaposing the two keywords *kill* and *destroy* is also noteworthy. The concordances show that the killing undertaken by the government was conducted against the opposition groups due to the mass destruction ammunition the anti-government groups possess, while the killing undertaken by the oppositions was conducted against the civilians as a reaction to the government's destruction of their ammunition. This sort of correlation does, to some extent, back up the militarist ideology of the government in framing the conflict.

4.2.2.4 Operations

The keyword *operations* yields similar findings as it is strongly tied to pro-government military actions. The keyword has also been associated with *terrorists* i.e., the anti-government SAs. However, there are two marked patterns of *terrorist operations*. First, the Israeli operations enacted against Syria, as in the headline *the Zionists masterminding terrorist operations* ("Official: Zionists masterminding", 19 June 2015). This representation seems to be a marked imprint in the Iranian news in general. In his study on the construction of Iranian and British identity during the issuance of the Iranian nuclear program, Khosravinik (2015) pointed out that Iranian coverage always sought to ideologise the representation of the other in a manner that fit the binary Muslim/non-Muslim representation. He stated that 'This argumentative approach does not limit itself to the discourse on Iran's nuclear programme but applies to a broad range of other political or politically constructed discourses' (p. 166).

The second marked pattern of *terrorist operation* emphasises the unconscious mental state of those who commit operations against civilians, as in *the chemically manufactured drugs […] are merely given to the ISIL terrorists to hallucinate them for operations* ("Al-Qaeda losing Hope", 6 Jan 2014). However, the lexical clusters' output shows that the government army is the most frequent lexical choice associated with *operations*. The lexical clusters below display a recurrent use of *army's operations* (65

occurrences), *in/the/their military operations* (54, 40 and 31 occurrences), *the army's military operations* (24 occurrences) and *anti-terrorism operations* (27 occurrences). Another marked feature is the use of evaluative qualifiers, such as *massive*, *fresh*, *large-scale*, *Syrian*, *clean up*, *mop up*, *successful* and the like, which strongly reinforces the concept of power.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	89	71	mop-up operations
2	65	52	army's operations
3	54	47	in military operations
4	46	43	series of operations
5	42	40	s military operations
6	40	28	the military operations
7	31	26	their military operations
8	27	17	anti-terrorism operations
9	24	19	the army operations
10	22	20	during the operations
11	22	19	in the operations
12	21	21	its military operations
13	20	19	massive military operations
14	17	16	of military operations
15	15	14	conducted military operations
16	14	13	fresh military operations
17	14	13	large-scale operations
18	14	13	syrian military operations
19	12	10	wide military operations
20	11	10	of fresh operations
21	11	11	out military operations
22	10	10	clean-up operations
23	10	10	syrian army operations
24	9	8	carried out operations
25	9	8	of its operations
26	8	7	in their operations
27	8	6	of joint operations
28	8	6	of successful operations
29	8	8	of their operations

Figure 4.21 Lexical clusters of *operations*

The figure illustrates that the Syrian army and troops are the most frequent lexical choices that are coupled with operations in the first thirty patterns. The genitive marker ('s) in pattern 5 is also allocated to the Syrian army. Thus, the keyword *operations* reinforces the thematic framework of the military force's power.

By and large, it is notable that the anti-government SAs are portrayed as lawbreakers and fighters represented in the lexis as *terrorists* and *militants* or patterned as an opponent front, like *ISIL* and *Takfiri*. The focus of the government lexical clusters lies in emphasising their power and authority as represented by *Syrian* and *army,* which comprise the ultimate focus of the government and pro-government allies.

4.3   Collocational Analysis

As noted above, the cluster analysis shows distinctive patterns, which provide a comprehensive view of how both parties are represented. However, examining the collocational behaviour will provide more insight on the negative and the positive use of the lexical words under investigation. Based on the overall aim of the research, which seeks to elucidate the Syrian revolution in terms of how SAs are constructed and

represented in online news, this section answers the RQ2. It investigates the recurrent collocations of the keywords representing the two warring sides and their discourse prosodies. To this end, the analysis uses Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2004) to identify the salient collocates of these keywords.

4.3.1 Word Sketch and Discourse Prosodies of the Opposition

The analysis in this section focuses on the set of the keywords representing the anti-government SAs. It further considers the grammatical positions of collocates and the SAs' related lexis function as a subject of a verb, an object or a modifier. Such classification, which is typically called colligation, is of great significance in demonstrating how the SAs are represented in terms of the verbs they are allocated as the agent (subject) or patient (object) and the modifiers (adjectives or modifying nouns) they are attributed. The following table, adopted from Word Sketch, displays the collocates and the grammatical relations of the anti-government lexis: *terrorists*, *militants*, *oppositions* and *protestors*. Only words which received a log-dice score of 6 and above are considered[21].

Table 4.3 Anti-government lexical collocates and grammatical positions

Keywords	Collocates and Grammatical Relations					
	Subject of verbs	Salience	Object of verbs	salience	Modifiers	Salience
Terrorists	Control	9.91	Kill	12.39	ISIL	12.34
	Try	9.35	Push	10.71	Takfiri	12.24
	Use	9.12	Support	9.10	Al-Nusra	10.98
	Flee	8.93	Injure	8.61	Front	10.59
	Suffer	8.85	Eliminate	8.60	Foreign-backed	9.71
	Fire	8.65	Purge	8.55	Foreign	9.19
	Withdraw	8.64	Leave	8.48	Jeish	9.12
	Sustain	8.52	Prevent	8.45	Several	8.90
	Flock	8.52	Join	8.37	Dead	8.45
	Lose	8.03	Affiliate	8.35	Al-Fath	8.32
	Fight	8.13	Target	8.33	Al-Islam	7.94
	Attack	8.13	Destroy	8.16	Al-Qaeda-linked	7.86
	Retreat	8.13	Fight	8.11	Notorious	7.78
	Launch	8.03	Help	8.10	Al-Qaeda	7.26
	Plant	8.01	Train	7.88	Wounded	7.08
	Kill	7.70	Expel	7.77	Al-sham	7.02
	Start	7.55	Besiege	7.76	Non-Syrian	6.96
	Operate	7.43	Wound	7.75	Jabhat	6.95
	Come	7.29	Confront	7.70	Good	6.95
	Enter	7.20	Force	7.96	International	6.84

[21] Log-dice is a statistical metric utilised to determine the salience of the collocate relations (Curran, 2004).

	Include	7.16	Include	7.61	Well-armed	6.79
	Lay	7.01	Defeat	7.60	Saudi	6.72
	Attempt	7.00	Arrest	7.51		
			Send	7.48		
Overall Score	**27.49**		**24.24**		**47.50**	
Militant	Operate	11.07	Kill	11.66	Foreign-backed	12.16
	Suffer	10.38	Support	11.04	Takfiri	12.08
	Fight	10.34	Push	10.65	ISIL	10.82
	Fire	10.11	Target	9.09	Foreign	9.30
	Use	9.78	Train	8.67	Al-Qaeda-linked	9.22
	Surrender	9.35	Provide	8.60	Front	8.87
	Sustain	9.10	Expel	8.20	Al-Nusra	8.82
	Try	9.00	Help	8.08	Several	8.46
	Flee	8.65	Wound	7.97	Foreign-sponsored	8.46
	Turn	8.10	Attack	7.94	FSA	8.19
	Fuel	8.10	Force	7.93	Rival	8.05
	Launch	8.08	Leave	7.92	Injured	7.97
	Lose	7.92	Join	7.90	Anti-Syria	7.92
	Control	7.87	Battle	7.83	Wounded	7.89
	Capture	7.61	Want	7.82	Jeish	7.89
	Attack	7.55	Eliminate	7.73	Western-backed	7.45
	Take	7.51	Injure	7.70	Extremist	7.47
	Receive	7.43	Lay	7.62	Non-Syrian	7.40
	Gain	7.37	Affiliate	7.55	Armed	7.37
	Leave	7.32	Show	7.53	Al-Islam	7.18
	Seek	7.25	Clash	7.52	Anti-government	7.02
	Lie	7.07	Confront	7.51	Dead (post modifier)	12.97
	detonate	7.07			Al-Islam	7.18
Overall score	**32.31**		**21.83**		**38.64**	
Opposition	Want	10.14	Voice	10.72	Moderate	11.47
	Shift	10.07	Mediate	10.07	Foreign-based	9.89
	Widen	10.02	Exile	10.04	Foreign-sponsored	9.48
	Insist	9.39	Back	9.85	Domestic	9.40
	Set	9.80	Arm	9.57	Western-backed	9.23
			Support	8.91	Strong	8.53
			Join	7.69	Armed	8.17
					So-called	8.13
					Syrian	7.86
					Syria	7.61
					Political	7.53
Overall score	**9.07**		**10.34**		**23.77**	

Vulnerability. The table shows that as agents, anti-government SAs have been associated with verbs that signify checkmating and withdrawal, as exemplified by *flee*, *withdraw*, *retreat and surrender*. It is worth noting that although the threats to security and power is one of the major semantic macro themes the keywords introduce (see Section 4.2.1.1), the series of verbs collocated with anti-government actors as agents provides a negative discourse prosody. The discourse prosody derived from this pattern

is no longer implying an opposing power, but a fragile entity and powerless counterpart; the adjective *dead* also reinforces this finding. The following excerpt is indicative of this shift:

4.1 The ISIL **terrorists evacuated** the Raqqa province and **fled** to Iraq. "The ISIL militants, most of them from the Caucasus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Chechnya, together with their families have **left** Raqqa province for Iraq," a local source told FNA. The source noted that at least 220 ISIL families have **fled** to Iraq, and said, "**Notorious terrorists** such as Abu Talheh Hejazi from Saudi Arabia and ISIL religious police chief Abu Abdullah al-Akidi are among the militants who have **fled** Raqqa province." Meantime, hundreds of ISIL **terrorists fled** Syria to Jordan as the Syrian army continued march on militant-held regions, especially in the South. "Over 3,000 militants from the ISIL, Al-Nusra Front and Jeish al-Yarmouk have **left** Syria for Jordan after the start of the Syrian army's new wave of attacks and advances and the Russian airstrikes on ISIL positions," a military source said. The source noted that the Takfiri **militants** are **afraid** of the army's advances in all fronts that come with the Russians' air backup ("Air Forces Destroy", 2015).

Even the verbs that semantically denote violence, like *kill*, *attack* and *fight* in the subject-verb colligations as well as *rival*, and *FSA* in the noun modifier colligations, contextually reveal two distinct prosodies in these collocations. The first set of verb collocates highlights the acts of betrayal among the militants themselves from different opposition factions, which reinforces the discourse prosody of vulnerability. The second set of modifier collocates highlights the riots against the authority of the Syrian government, which denotes the illegality of these armed groups.

4.2 The assassination attempt on al-Shomali came two days after another Syrian commander of Ahrar al-Sham named Abu Hamzeh al-Hariri **was killed by the ISIL** *terrorists* in the Syrian city of Houran (Fars, 583).

4.3 Over 1,000 *terrorists* **laid down arms** and surrendered to the Syrian authorities over the past 24 hours in Daraa, the Syrian local sources also confirmed (Fars, 578).

4.4 Militants from the Al-Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) reportedly executed dozens of **rival militants** in their ongoing infighting in Syria (Fars, 534).

4.5 On Sunday, the ISIL and the **FSA militants** fiercely clashed in Idlib countryside in North western Syria (Fars, 534).

The examples above frame the anti-government fighters in a clearly negative set of collocations, which informs the explicit negative discourse prosodies. They are represented as assassinators who murder and deceive each other, as

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exemplified in 4.2 and 4.4. They are so weak and easily surrender before the power of the government's army, as in example 4.3. They are also represented as fragmented, uncohesive and disorganised, with no unity or clear goals, as in example 4.5. This representation, in turn, serves to define the government forces as a powerful, organised and unified body, which is one of the central semantic macrostructures as well as the discourse prosody of the pro-government SAs.

Along the same line, the grammatical patterning in the verb-object colligations also contributes to foregrounding the discourse of vulnerability. The set of collocations, including *push*, *injure*, *eliminate*, *purge*, *prevent*, *target*, *arrest*, *fight*, *expel*, *confront*, *besiege* and *destroy*, situate the opposition SAs as their object while assigning the agent function to the pro-government allies. This sort of colligation plays a dual role, as the two warring sides, the opposition and the government, are engaged in the pattern. The collocations construct the opposition as criminals who are undergoing the purging, while the government is constructed as the saviour of the civilians and the defenders of the country. The following examples are representative of this framing:

4.6   The Syrian army also **targeted** *terrorists* around Karam al-Tarab neighbourhood in Aleppo city (Fars, 578).

4.7   The Syrian Arab Army's Air Force **eliminated many** *terrorists* from Jaish al-Fateh and destroyed their vehicles, artillery and mortar (Fars, 580).

4.8   The Syrian army **purged the** *terrorists* from a strategic region near the Ain Tarma town (Fars, 535).

4.9   Meantime, the Syrian army **expelled Takfiri** *militants* from the shrine of Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) dignified companion, Hujr Ibn Adi al-Kindi, in the town of Adra (Fars, 534).

4.10 Ford **told the Syrian** *opposition* figures that "Bandar's plan for the Syrian conflict, put in 2012, had catastrophic repercussions on Syria and the region. It had made of Syria a powerful hub for al-Qaeda that the US cannot confront (Fars, 534).

In the above examples, the anti-government fighters are represented in relation to the violent military actions of the government forces. They are represented as the goals of the allied air forces' strikes, enduring elimination and expelling in examples 4.6 to 4.9. The anti-government fighters are also represented as participants with no political experience who are being warned

of the devastating consequences of their political plans in example 4.10. Moreover, the manipulation of the dehumanised negative lexical choices manifested in the sets of modifiers colligations, such as *Takfiri*, *notorious*, *non-Syrian* and *foreign-backed*, serves to legitimise the severity and brutality of the Syrian army's actions against the rebels, on the one hand, and to frame the anti-government fighters in terms of negative criminal boundaries on the other.

Jeffries (2010) pointed out that noun phrases and attributes can be manipulated to establish the intended background. He argues that presupposition can be established in the utterance by packaging it within the attributes and nominalisations so that the intended information appears as a given fact. Thus, the set of negative modifying collocations used to identify the anti-government SAs in Table 4.3 are highly ideological. This representation recalls what Gerbner (1991) stated in his study of terror and violence, namely that 'calling some people barbarians makes it easier to act barbarian to them […] Labelling a large group terrorists seem to justify terrorising them' (p. 3).

As a discourse prosody, **threat** is also evident in the Word Sketch of the modifiers category summarised in Table 4.3. The table shows collocates that are politically motivated, such as *ISIL*, *Al-Qaeda*, *anti-government*, *Al-Nusra* and *political*, and these collocates demonstrate a clear classification of the anti-government SAs according to the affiliates they belong to. They are not protestors, rebels or civilians but fighters and gangs who are *well armed* and politically organised in *Jeish and Jabhat*, i.e., the army and front, respectively. Other collocates are religiously motivated, as in *Takfiri*, *Al-Islam* and *extremist*, and this type of collocate semantically denotes belief and religion. However, pragmatically, these collocates denote radicalism and violence. The following excerpts show the effect of these lexical collocates in identifying the anti-government fighters.

4.11 People continued their protests **against** the **Takfiri terrorists** in Eastern Ghouta for the fourth consecutive day on Tuesday. On Friday, People **poured** to the streets of the town of Hamouriya in Eastern Ghouta and **rallied against the presence** of terrorist groups in their town (Fars, 583).

4.12 The Observatory's Rami Abdel Rahman said Naameh was likely to have been **detained** because of his recent **criticizing** statements against the **brutal acts of extremist** *militants* (Fars, 534).

The two excerpts emphasise the danger of those religiously incited militants by describing them as committing *brutal acts* and *detaining* people who *criticise* them. The public stance is evident in rejecting the existence of those radical people by *railing against* them. The use of the metaphor *poured* is also important; it suggests a plethora in the number of civilians protesting against those extremists. These lexical choices support each other to enhance the discourse prosody of threat and riots. In addition, the subject-verb colligation allocated by *kill*, *attack*, *launch*, *detonate* and *seek* enhances the threat discourse in various contexts, as in the following examples:

> 4.13 The ISIL **terrorists killed** 7 civilians and injured 20 others during their mortar attacks on the Kurdish town of Afrin in the Western parts of Reef (countryside of) Aleppo in Northern Syria (Fars, 186).
>
> 4.14 Hundreds of **al-Nusra terrorists attacked** at least 10 Hezbollah bases along a mountainous range close to the Syrian border (Fars, 534).
>
> 4.15 A reporter working for Britain's Sky News has obtained documents showing that the Turkish government has stamped passports of foreign **militants seeking** to cross the Turkey border into Syria to join **the ISIL terrorists** (Fars, 536).

The civilians and the pro-government ally Hezbollah are the objects being attacked and killed by the anti-government actors in examples 4.13 and 4.14. The Turkish government is accused in example 4.25 of facilitating the smuggling of militants into Syria, which reinforces the threat discourse, on the one hand, and rationalises the government's critical attitude toward Turkey on the other.

Racial Exclusion. The collocates that denote the discourse prosody of social exclusion are evident in the adjectives indexing nationality, e.g., *non-Syrian* and *Saudi*, or emphasising the foreign political interference, as in *foreign-backed*, *foreign*, *foreign-sponsored*, *anti-Syrian*, *Western-backed* and *foreign-based*. Such a set of collocations does communicate a sense of separation and non-belonging. The negative discourse prosodies of these lexical collocations rotate around two key arguments:

I.   They are not citizens (*non-Syrian*). They have an unknown identity.

II.   They are paid invaders sponsored by the West (*Western-backed* and *foreign-backed)*. They came based on a certain political agenda (*anti-Syrian).*

It is worth mentioning that Saudi and Iran are both Muslim nations. However, they follow different Islamic denominations, Sunnah and Shia. They also descended from two different ethnic races, Arabic and Persian. Thus, using *Saudi* in describing the opposition implies an attitudinal sectarian reference that contributes to excluding the rebels from the overall government identity. Bearing in mind that the Syrian government is identified as a Shi'ite body, the collocation of *non-Syrian* then becomes more ideological.

> 4.16 The army conducted different operations in different parts of the Aleppo countryside and killed at least 30 **Saudi Takfiri terrorists** after destroying their gathering centres (Fars, 536).

> 4.17 Killing and injuring a huge number of **militants,** many of them are **non-Syrian intruders**, according to SANA (Fars, 535).

In example 4.16 above, the collocate *Saudi* modifies both *terrorists* and the religious-based adjective *Takfiri*, which denotes radicalism. This sort of lexical association is highly ideological, depending on the Islamic faction identity of the Syrian government. They contribute to deepening the sense of alienation using faith and ethnic values. It is worth mentioning, as well, that collocating Takfiri with Saudi implies a reference to their danger to the West as it is pertaining to the radical Islamism movement of al-Qaeda. The pattern also conveys that the people forming the opposition are not civilians but outsiders, who are described as *intruders* in example 4.17. The lexical choices of *militants*, *non-Syrian* and *intruders* all cluster to emphasise the sense of otherness and separation. Another important collocate that functions to obfuscate the identity of the opposition as an unrecognised organisation is the phrase modifier *so-called.* In the following example, the Syrian government seems to deny the existence of Syrian oppositions:

> 4.18 Saudi Crown Prince Sheikh Salman bin Abdulaziz, whose country is a major supporter of militant and terrorist groups fighting against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government, also accused the world of "betraying" **the so-called Syrian opposition** by failing to arm them (Fars, 536).

The colligation *so-called* in example 4.18 reflects the government's negative attitude toward the Syrian opposition. This sort of representation is ideological,

as it serves to question the opposition's legitimacy and foreground the government's legal political position. In addition, identifying Saudi Arabia as *a supporter of terrorists* and using the qualifier *major* to describe the size of their support serves to enhance the negative stance and widen the gap between the government and the opposition members who are seeking to reach a compromise with the government and settle the dispute at the political level. Examining more concordances reveals that *so-called* is used to legitimise the government's military response against the opposition fighters being supported by the US and Saudi Arabia.

Anti-Arabian Gulf discourse prosody, Fars news employs a set of collocations indexing negative views toward the Arabian Gulf countries. The news agency couples Arab nationalities, for instance, with adjectives denoting radicalism, as previously illustrated by the use of *Saudi Takfiri* and *extremist*, on the one hand, and on the other, uses the collocational pattern of *government and protests* to describe a state of conflict between the government and its people instigated by the Arab governments, as example 4.19 below shows.

4.19 The crisis could be solved through dialogue between **the government and protestors**, but interferences of certain **western countries** and their **regional allie**s pushed the country towards a four-year-long civil war (Fars, 580).

4.20 The letters also said the Security Council should "punish" **Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey** for supporting the **Takfiri terrorists** operating **against Syria** and turning a blind eye to the UN body's resolutions on counterterrorism (Fars, 533).

4.21 Zaoralek warned of the US and western plans on supporting members of **what they call "moderate opposition"**, stressing that those and extremist groups cannot be differentiated (Fars, 533).

4.22 Syria criticised UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay for being biased towards **Syria opposition** and accusing Damascus of committing human rights violations (Fars, 536)

The examples attempt to create a context of conspiracy led by the West and supported by the Arabs while the oppositions are mere tools to play with. This representation overlooks the main role of public protest that sparked the revolution against Assad's government. This narrative attempts to situate the morality of the revolution within the context of an immoral treachery conducted against Syria. Therefore, the sole reference to the *protest* in the whole corpus appears in example 4.19. The keyword *protestors*

received the lowest keyness score (1.682), which actually denotes the complete absence of the civilian protest and demonstration movements that have been upheld in most of the Syrian cities and countryside since the revolution erupted in 2011.

Khosravinik (2015) argued that Iranian news generally tends to negatively stereotype the political issues that do not fit its interests, stating that Iran possesses a radical view of Arab countries in criticizing them as 'American protectorates' (p. 141). This is evident in examples 4.19 and 4.20, where Fars places the blame for the four-year civil war on Saudi Arabia and Qatar as the main supporters of the Takfiri terrorists. By the same token, the reports use satirical expressions whenever they refer to the Syrian opposition, such as *what they call* and *the so-called*, as in examples 4.21 and 4.22, to frame their identity as suspect in emphasising their relationship to the West in terms of financing and arms.

The verb-object patterns are also utilised to depict the relationship between Arab governments, the terrorists and armed groups in Syria. Collocates such as *join*, *affiliate*, *help*, *support* and *train* are employed to construct the Arab governments as violators of international law that require international sanctions. It is worth noting that the discourses of threat, vulnerability and power are intermingled. The threat can be identified in the discourse of power as the objectification of the opposition SAs as lawbreakers who are killed and destroyed, which in turn indexes the discourse of vulnerability.

Overall, the characteristics of the collocational patterns allocated to the anti-government SAs reveal a sense of bias in Fars representation of the anti-government side. This is evident in the ideological description of the SAs, which identify the fighters and their local allies in terms of unbalanced beliefs and *Takfirism*, which denotes an extremely hostile attitude. Moreover, Fars news omitted the rebels' role in the revolution and ignored their demands, which created a gap filled by magnifying the presence of ISIL, Takfiri jihadists, al-Qaeda-linked terrorists and the non-Syrians. Accordingly, the armed reactions of the anti-government fighters against the government are depicted as unlawful. The whole scenario, then, is turned into a proxy war wherein Fars attempts to depict Syria as a country occupied by foreign-backed militants and the so-called opposition.

4.3.2 Word Sketch and Discourse Prosodies of the Government

Contrary to the anti-government collocations, the sets of collocations associated with the pro-government related lexis, *army*, *government and Al-Assad*, display different discourse prosodies. The table below shows the common collocates classified according to the three grammatical categories mentioned earlier.

Table 4.4 Pro-government lexical collocates and grammatical positions

Keywords	Collocates and Grammatical Relations					
	Subject of verbs	**Salience**	**Object of verbs**	**Salience**	**Modifiers**	**Salience**
Army	Continue	11.20	Back	11.25	Syrian	12.95
	Kill	11.10	Fight	9.03	Free	10.32
	Destroy	10.96	Enable	8.74	So-called	8.31
	Make	10.60	Join	8.19	Lebanese	7.55
	Target	10.21	Support	7.92	Iraqi	7.47
	Regain	10.05			Israeli	6.83
	Gain	9.56			Turkish	6.35
	Thwart	9.18			Arab	5.82
	Repel	9.09				
	inflict	9.02				
	Seize	8.99				
	Start	8.93				
	Take	8.87				
	Storm	8.85				
	Intensify	8.74				
	Launch	8.71				
	Announce	8.70				
	Push	8.43				
	Manage	8.36				
	Strike	8.34				
	Conduct	8.30				
	Add	8.28				
Overall score	**36.34**		**7.06**		**42.63**	
al-Assad	Issue	10.42	Topple	11.99	Bashar	13.06
	Submit	9.94	Overthrow	11.41	President	12.80
	Vow	9.32			Syrian	9.89
	Meet	9.27			Hafez	8.49
	Affirm	9.26				
	Stress	9.16				
	Win	8.68				
Overall score	**28.24**		**9.30**		**183.39**	
Govern ment	Blame	10.50	Topple	11.13	US	11.59
	Have	10.31	Overthrow	10.71	Turkish	10.62
	Defend	9.74	Accuse	10.62	Syrian	10.49
	Receive	9.03	Fight	10.60	Damascus	9.95

	Use	8.34	Help	9.64	Transitional	9.10
	Do	8.26			Assad	8.66
	Deny	8.24			Interim	8.33
	Force	8.23			Qatari	8.10
	Accuse	8.19			Legal	8.09
	Be + doing	7.86			Western	7.71
Overall score	**40.55**		**11.80**		**46.72**	

As a keyword, *army* received the highest keyness score among the pro-government keywords that strongly index the discourse of **dominant power**. The subject-verb pattern, for instance, displays a set of collocations denoting power and control, like *continue*, *killed*, *destroy*, *target*, *thwart* and so on. The following examples are indicative of this finding.

4.23 The army **killed scores** of the ISIL terrorists and injured others, and **destroyed** one of their armoured vehicles, **killing** all terrorists on-board in a military operation to the Northwest of al-Sha'air oil field, a military source said (Fars, 583).

4.24 The *army* has **thwarted** a militant group's infiltration attempt into secure areas in Salaheddin and al-A'zamiyah in Aleppo on Saturday, leaving a number of militants killed and wounded (Fars, 535).

4.25 The Syrian army **continued to gain** more advances in its fight against the armed groups (Fars, 583).

4.26 The country's army and **government did not take even one** step back in their anti-terrorism campaign (Fars, 534).

In examples 23 to 26, the *army* and *government* are represented as the dynamic active agent, which undertake massive military actions against terrorists. The examples depict the army as the agent of material processes and the anti-government fighters as the direct goal of these actions, which result in scores of killed and injured terrorists. This pattern of collocation serves dual functions. It foregrounds the army's capacity to control and crack down on the militants and at the same time it depicts the counterpart fighters as the weaker side. This is also evident in the collocates *free* and the *so-called* in Table 4.4, which refers to the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The two collocates construct the FSA as the goal of the government's military offensives, depicting them negatively as hidden ISIL militants.

However, the representation of the government army lacks a causal relation that explains the reasons behind the rebels' armed reactions against the government. The pattern focuses only on the actions of the army, which are represented as protective and defensive military operations to save the country from the armed groups. The discourse prosody of the government power also proceeds with the verb-object colligations of *army* to represent the military support the army receives from the government's allies. See the following examples:

4.27 The Syrian army **backed by** Hezbollah fighters and the Russian air force
destroyed terrorists' positions in Aleppo, Damascus, Homs, Hama, Sweida,
Dara'a, Deir Ezzur and Lattakia provinces over the last 24 hours (Fars, 148).

4.28 Large numbers of militants defecting from their armed groups and **joining the army** (Fars, 533).

The two previous examples show that the positive representation of the army co-occurs simultaneously with the negative depiction of the anti-government social actors. Example 28, for instance, represents the Syrian army as the sole power, which shelters and protects the militants who defected from their foreign-backed affiliates. This framing indirectly highlights the weaknesses and disputes among the different opposition groups that are fighting against the government. Such representation informs a typical ideological representation, which introduces the 'conflict in a radically polarised way as a struggle between the good guys and the bad guys' (Nohrstedt et al., 2000, p. 384). Moreover, the set of nationality collocations coupled with *army* in the noun modifier pattern, such as *Lebanese* and *Iraqi*, enhances the discourse of power in terms of the local allies' support, as the following examples show:

4.29 The source added that the Syrian Arab Republic stresses its support and solidarity with the **Lebanese *Army*** in confronting the terrorist groups and eliminating them, expressing conviction that the brotherly country of Lebanon will triumph in this battle (Fars, 533).

4.30 **Kurdish fighters** in Iraq and Syria are battling the ISIL terrorists in a common ground with the Syrian and **Iraqi** armies (Fars, 583).

In the above examples, it is notable that the Syrian army is always represented as being backed by official armies. Therefore, the two nationalities in the previous examples, Lebanese and Iraqi, are used to convey the substantial support of the authorised armies

of these neighbouring countries for the Syrian regime in thwarting the terrorists' attacks and ISIL fighters across all of the concordances. By contrast, Fars introduces the anti-government fighters as conflicting armed groups with no unified goals who are experiencing internal political and military fragmentation.

Legitimate authority and social inclusion. The identity of the government is significantly emphasised in the corpus, stressing the ethnic value of *Arab* and the nationality of *Syrian*. The following excerpts are representative examples:

> 4.31 **We** say clearly that... **we** will not permit anyone to violate **our national** sovereignty by intervening to fight IS(IL)," Muallem said. **"The Syrian Arab army** is honourably undertaking this task" (Fars, 578).
> 4.32 Iranian Supreme Leader's top adviser for international affairs Ali Akbar Velayati lauded the Kurdish citizens for their joint efforts with **the Syrian army in the war** on ISIL (Fars, 583).
> 4.33 The **Syrian** *Army* has staged massive attacks against the militants' positions (Fars, 583).

The use of the inclusive pronouns *we* and *our* and the modifier of *national* reinforces the sense of authority and social inclusion. It also presupposes that the sovereignty is still held by Assad's government, while ignoring the internationally recognised opposition front of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC). Therefore, the representation of the government and its allies tends to firmly emphasise the roles of the government's political figures, such as the Syrian diplomat *Muallem* in example 31, as well as *the Iranian Supreme Leader's top adviser* in example 32. In the same vein, the Syrian president is represented more in terms of the actions he undertakes than in terms of the effects of the actions he experiences. This means that he is introduced positively as a SA who has the power to act and influence others rather than being passively represented. Table 4.4 shows a set of subject-verb colligations that reflects privileged presidential, acts such as *issue*, *submit* and *vow*. The following examples are also indicative of this framing:

> 4.34 On December 12, some 20 wanted Takfiri terrorists in Hama province gave up fight and turned themselves in to the authorities to enjoy the general **amnesty issued by President Bashar Al-Assad** (Fars, 580).
> 4.35 **Syrian President Bashar Hafez al-Assad submitted** an application to the Supreme Constitutional Court announcing his candidacy for the upcoming presidential election in the country (Fars, 533).

4.36 **Syrian President Bashar *al-Assad* vowed** to press for the second round of peace
　　talks between representatives from the government, domestic opposition, as well
　　as foreign-based opposition in Russia (Fars, 578).

The attributes collocated with Al-Assad, in the previous examples, and the verbs coupled with him as an agent do communicate a sense of authoritative power. These collocates stress two values, the first being the ethnicity and identity that is confirmed by the modifier *Syrian* in contrast with the non-Syrians and foreign-backed fighters of the opposition. The second is his dominant governing power as represented by the use of the honorific political address *president*. These collocates provide an ideological evaluation of Assad constructed as a given fact that is not open for debate. The framing also serves to give him the right to act upon its power privilege. Therefore, the set of material processes that are associated with Assad in examples 34 to 36 convey a sense of supremacy, which is usually tailored to authority figures. Accordingly, Assad is represented as an actor who has the power to grant amnesty for people, nominate himself for the presidency and vowing to hold peace talks.

In a similar way, the subject-verb collocates associated with the government represent an executive power that index an ongoing capacity for political and policy decision. The following examples are indicative of this framing:

4.37 The Syrian *government* has criticised US-led air strikes in Syria for failing to weaken
　　the ISIL Takfiri group, also urging Turkey to tighten its border controls (Fars, 534).
4.38 The **Syrian *government* is likely to release** the names and crimes committed by the
　　Saudi, Turkish and Qatari officers in the near future, they added (Fars, 535).
4.39 Syrian *government* **has long been calling on** the United Nations Security council to
　　act on multi-national militant groups which are fighting in the country (Fars, 536).

The collocates associated with the government in the previous examples serve to establish the discourse prosody of a **conspiracy against Syria**. This representation distances the Syrian government from any responsibility and places the blame on others with respect to the riots and mass killing. For instance, the Syrian government is implicitly represented as firmly controlling the advances of ISIL while criticising the US-led air strikes for being unable to do so, as in example 37. Similarly, the government is introduced as condemning the crimes committed by Saudi and Turkish officers in example 38.

This representation in turn backgrounds the government's violation of human rights, using the chemical attack as one case, and implicitly presents the government as a democratic non-brutal body. Examining more examples reveals a consistent positive representation that constructs the government as defending the country against insurgents, blaming the outlaws for the civil disturbance and denying the use of violence or chemical weapons against the rebels. However, this representation overlaps with the ideological labelling of the rebels and their allies as terrorists and depicts them as the main instigators who are responsible for the civil war in Syria. The following examples support these findings:

4.40 This shows that the plots to destroy Syria are still in place and the **US and Turkish governments don't care for** the political solution demanded by the Syrians (Fars, 583).

4.41 Tel Aviv, Washington, Ankara and some Arab capitals have been staging various plots to **topple President Bashar *al-Assad***, who is well known in the world for his anti-Israeli stances (Fars, 533).

4.42 The **US government has boosted** its political and military support to Takfiri extremists (Fars, 148).

The set of modifier collocates in the previous examples constructs the Syrian government as a parallel counterpart working against the rebels' allies. The representation depicted above is radically polarised. It frames the Syrian government as an Islamic, anti-Israeli and anti-terrorist government, while at the same time indirectly representing the Arab and Turkish governments as terrorist, pro-Israeli governments working with the US and Tel Aviv to escalate the plot to unseat Assad. Ideologically, this representation serves two discourse prosodies. The first is the Arab-Western conspiracy against Syria, which is evident from the previous examples 37 to 42. The second is the government's powerful stability and resistance, given the scale of US military power combined with the Arab and Turkish allies. The representation also distances the Syrian government from the civil war taking place and its current repercussions.

4.4 Summary

This chapter provided the results of analysing the linguistic manifestations of the Fars corpus at the micro-linguistic level. It addressed RQ1 and RQ2, which sought to investigate how the Fars news agency has represented the Syrian revolution. The analysis focused on two socio-semantic relations: the semantic macrostructures and the

discourse prosodies, which were elucidated by examining three corpus linguistic features, the keywords, lexical clusters and collocations. Thus, the chapter began by analysing the keywords that are used to represent the anti-government SAs and examining the most common lexical clusters that are associated with these keywords, utilising AntConc (Antony, 2014) software. Based on the concordances of these keywords and their lexical associations, the semantic macrostructures were highlighted. Then, Word Sketch (Kilgarriff et al, 2004) was used to reveal the most frequent collocates of the key anti-government participants and tag their grammatical relations. Accordingly, the negative and positive discourse prosodies were examined by analysing the concordances of the collocational patterns. The same steps of analysis were conducted to examine the representation of the pro-government SAs.

The first stage of analysis revealed that Fars constructed the anti-government fighters in a negative way. The news agency used ideologically loaded keywords and lexical choices to identify the anti-government fighters. They were identified as terrorists, ISIL, al-Qaeda-linked, foreign-backed and Takfiri groups. Thus, Fars excluded the two major globally acknowledged bodies that represent the Syrian public: the opposition and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). It also omitted the rebels who sparked the revolution against the current government. In addition, thematically, the anti-government fighters were strongly framed within security threat, danger, brutality, anti-moderate Muslim and radicalism semantic macrostructures.

With regard to the collocational analysis, the anti-government SAs were conveyed based on a radically attitudinal representation. They were identified more in terms of modifier grammatical relation with an overall score of 47.50 (see Table 4.3). This means that Fars tended to use evaluative attributes and naming to identify the opposition more extensively than any other grammatical relation. This, in turn, allowed the reporters to frame their opinions and judgement of the intended social actors as a presupposed background. Therefore, the set of modifying collocates predominantly illustrated the negative discourse prosody of conspiracy and hostility. They were also constructed as the subject of actions which index the discourse prosody of vulnerability, such as flee, suffer, withdraw, retreat, surrender and leave. The verb-object set of collocates was employed to reflect the loyalty of the terrorists to the West and the anti-government Arab allies, which referenced social exclusion and betrayal, as in support, join, affiliate, help and train. Moreover, it was used as a legitimation strategy to

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rationalise the Syrian army act of purging rebel strongholds in the populated cites. Moreover, the same set of colligation was used to construct the fighters as the goal of the powerful military actions carried out by the government's forces, Russia and Hezbollah.

Contrasting this representation to the ideological and political background of Iran reveals that Fars news agency is not independent from the Iranian government. The influence of Iran's political stance against the rebels is highly explicit in the polarised representation of the anti-government fighters and their allies. Therefore, the big picture of the Syrian revolution given by Fars news agency is represented as a number of paid terrorist groups armed by the West and financed by the Arabian Gulf countries smuggled into Syria to oust Assad and exploit the country natural resources.

In contrast, the government and its allies were positively represented. They were introduced with formal titles, such as President, diplomats, leaders and ministers. The forces were depicted as the official Syrian army and the government was framed as being controlled and headed by Bashar al-Assad. Thematically, they were introduced in an overall semantic macrostructure of legal authority. The thematic frame of the government emphasised the loyalty of the public and the power of the army. This framing was supported by the subject-verb collocational patterns of the key participants, the *army*, *Assad* and the *government*, which stressed the stability of the government and the defending power of its army. The analysis, moreover, revealed that the modifying colligation of Assad received the highest score of 183.39. This pattern identified Assad as the Syrian President using his full name, Bashar Hafez al-Assad, which referenced his hereditary ruling system. Therefore, the umbrella discourse prosody associated with the collocational patterns informed the Arab-Western plot against the legal government of Syria. The next chapter will examine the construction of the two warring sides in Reuters' coverage of the Syrian revolution.

CHAPTER FIVE

CORPUS-BASED LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE REUTERS ONLINE NEWS

5. **Introduction**

This chapter explores how UK Reuters news agency reports the Syrian revolution in terms of the construction of the two conflicting sides (Assad's side and the rebels' side). The aim of this chapter is to investigate if there is any reflections of the UK political stance as an ally against the Syrian government on the Reuters' coverage of the revolution in Syria. The analysis focuses on the micro-linguistic features of the corpus: the keywords, lexical clusters and collocations, using two corpus linguistic analytical tools AntConc (Antony, 2014) and Sketch engine (Kilgarriff et al 2004). The chapter is organized as follows. Section 5.1 investigates the general focus of the Reuters corpus in its coverage of the revolution, using the wordlist tool. Then, the keywords characterizing the Reuters' reports are analyzed in two subsections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, each of which is dedicated to analyze one side of the conflict, the anti-government side and the pro-government side. In Section 5.3 the collocations associated with each side are analyzed considering the roles of their grammatical relations in two subsections, 5.3.1 and 5.3.2. The analysis further elucidates the semantic macrostructures and the discourse prosodies informed by the lexical cluster' patterns of the keywords and the collocations of the key participants. Finally, the chapter is concluded by a brief summary for the findings.

5.1 Frequency Count

Within the time scope of the Syrian conflict between 2013 and 2015, the word list tool displays the highest recurrent lexical words in the corpus to display the focus of the news reports. Considering all the linguistic forms, lemmas, related to each lexis, the table below shows the top twenty lexical words. The function words are excluded.

Table 5.1 The top twenty lexical lemmas in Reuters Corpus

No.	Frequency	Lemmas
1	8936	Syria
2	6699	Syrian
3	6025	Assad
4	5424	Rebel
5	2890	Opposition
6	2879	Force

7	2692	Government
8	2319	Weapon
9	2262	People
11	2170	President
12	2127	Group
13	1955	War
14	1900	Unite
15	1876	Damascus
16	1862	Fighter
11	1820	Arm
17	1765	Year
18	1751	Military
19	1701	Fight
20	1656	Kill

From a bird's eyes view, the table above shows a number of words referring to the places where the conflict is taking place, as in *Syria* and *Damascus*. Others refer to the people, as in *Syrian*, *group and people*. The authority is referred to using lexical choices like *government, president* and *Assad*. Some words point at the counterpart, e.g., *opposition* and *rebel*, while other words denote power, such as *force*, *arm* and *military*. Words like *war*, *fighter*, *fight*, *weapon* and *kill* denote violence, while *year* refers to the period of different incidents in the revolution. The last word, *unite*, gives a sense of collaboration and alliance. Accordingly, the coverage in general shows neutral references to the two conflicting sides exemplified in the *opposition*, *rebels*, *President Assad* and the *government*.

Based on this step, the keyword analysis is run utilizing the keywords tool in AntConc, the analysis below provides the top twenty keywords in Reuter corpus. This level of analysis is vital as it establishes a base for comparison and contrast by utilising the differences which are assigned according to the ranks of significance (Demmen and Culpeper, 2015).

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5.2 Keyword Analysis

Keywords analytical tool in this section is utilised to show the statistically salient lexis in one corpus when it is compared to a reference corpus (McEnery and Hardie, 2012). This step of analysis, as mentioned before in chapter 3 and 4, helps to point out the aboutness, i.e., 'the general view' or the themes that are prevailing in a text or a corpus (Cao, Tian and Chilton 2014, p.81). Identifying the themes in this section is not based on a certain theory, but rather inferred from the most marked information in the reports in relation to the keywords' output. The theme classifications here fit Van Dijk's definition as 'the summary, gist, upshot or the most important information' in a given text (Van Dijk, 2013b, p.31). Thus, in addressing the research question RQ 1, which seeks to investigate the common lexical patterns associated with pro-government social actors and anti-government social actors, the analysis utilises three analytical tools, the keywords, lexical clusters and the concordances. The keywords tool is used to uncover the significant lexis while the lexical clusters tool is employed to spot the patterns, i.e., the common lexical associations frequently accompany the keywords. Then, the concordance lines are reviewed to decipher the contexts of the resulted keyword clusters and hence determine the themes. The following table shows the top twenty keywords in the corpus.

Table 5.2 Keywords in Reuters Corpus

No.	Frequency	Keyness	Keywords
1	6025	3681.595	Assad
2	3381	1430.715	Rebels
3	2043	1235.283	Rebel
4	2890	1155.254	Opposition
5	924	1042.792	Shi'ite
6	1856	889.673	United
7	945	865.159	Sunni
8	794	753.633	Islamist
9	1597	719.997	Chemical
10	906	709.977	Civil
11	1387	552.240	Conflict
12	1569	499.710	Bashar
13	438	494.311	Alkhatib
14	2160	490.249	President
15	793	461.945	Refugees
16	741	461.508	Activists
17	398	449.168	Qusair
18	457	448.348	Alawite
19	406	419.926	Uprising
20	427	386.586	Sectarian

The table shows a number of important keywords which are absent in the previous wordlist output above. There are lexis denoting Islamic factions, such as *Shi'ite*, *Sunni*, *Alawite* and *sectarian*, ranked fifth, seventh, eighteenth and twentieth, respectively. Other keywords describe people fleeing the country as in *refugees* and people advocating political and social changes such as *activists*. The state of civil unrest is also emphasized in the corpus by the keyword *conflict* and *civil*, where *civil* is used as a premodifier to the civil disorder. *Chemical*, as well, is an important keyword, which refers to the chemical allegations and attacks against civilians in Syria. It is important to remember that the target corpus of the above keywords is Fars corpus. Therefore, the keywords that appear in Table 5.2 have got their significant keyness scores by comparison with Fars corpus. This means that these keywords reflect the marked differences between the wordlists of the two corpora, Fars and Reuters.

With reference to the anti-government fighters, they are represented by a number of keywords such as *opposition*, *Islamists, rebel* and *Alkhatib*, the first president of the Syrian opposition forces. The keyword *uprising* is also representative of the anti-government side as it denotes a state of civil disturbance against the government. It is worth noting that *rebel* has appeared in the singular and plural forms and is among the first three highest keyness scores. This may connote that *rebel* is an important concept which characterises the opposition side on one hand and a crucial subject in Reuters news on the other. Authority, on the other hand, is represented by a different set of keywords such as *Assad*, *Bashar* and *President*. *Qusair* is another keyword. It is a name of place of high strategic value. According to Naumescu, 2014, Qusair is the hometown of Shi'ite and the crucial passage that connects the Syrian border to Lebanon where Hezbollah, the local ally of Assad's government, resides. The keyword *united* refers to both the United Nations and US, as the concordances reveal.

To trace the semantic macrostructures, i.e., the thematic differences representing the two sides of the conflict, the keywords list is grouped into two sets of lexis as demonstrated in the following sections. Both the lexical cluster tool and the concordances are utilised to spot the common contexts associated with each keyword and identify their references. The analysis inspects manually all concordance lines generated for each keyword. However, given the space limits, the screenshot of the concordance lines will be for the marked pattern references.

5.2.1 Anti-Government Keywords Analysis

According to the keyword results above, Table 5.2, the anti-government social actors are represented in the following set of lexical choices, *rebels*, *rebel* and *opposition*, which occupy the second, third and fourth top ranked keywords in the corpus. Then come *Sunni* and *Islamists*, which ranked seventh and eighth respectively. *Refugees*, *Al-Khatib* and *uprising* are the last keywords representing the opposition side and ranked fifteenth, thirteenth and nineteenth in the second set of ten keywords. This step uses the cluster analytical tool to find the most frequent lexical pattern in which the opposition keywords are located and hence examine the themes these patterns introduce. The analysis of the lexical clusters in this section follows two steps. First, it identifies the most frequent lexical clusters, as given by AntConc. Second, it examines their contexts to determine the themes they introduce. Keywords are numerated for ease of reference.

5.2.1.1 Rebels

Rebels in Reuters are represented as unarmed civilians raged against the violence of the government security forces. They are mainly constructed as Syrian Sunni Muslims facing ethnic cleansing. The description of the rebels comes within the thematic frame of sectarianism. However, examining the lexical clusters of rebels reveals different facets of Reuters' representation.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	128	7	to the rebels
2	73	6	arming the rebels
3	68	7	arm the rebels
4	61	8	sunni muslim rebels
5	59	7	to syrian rebels
6	56	7	the syrian rebels
7	50	9	for the rebels
8	43	10	east syrian rebels
9	41	8	and the rebels
10	38	5	government and rebels
11	37	9	of the rebels
12	33	7	syria's rebels
13	32	7	beirut syrian rebels
14	30	6	arm syrian rebels
15	29	8	by the rebels
16	29	8	forces and rebels
17	28	8	said the rebels
18	25	5	arming syrian rebels
19	24	7	east syria rebels
20	24	6	mainly sunni rebels

Figure 5.1 Three-word lexical clusters for *rebels*

Figure 5.1 shows a strong association between rebels and arming in line 2 and 3, *arming the rebels* (counted 73 times) and *arm the rebels* (68); lines 14 and 18 are also indicative

of this association. On the other hand, *rebels* are identified on a religious rather than a political basis. They are linked to a sectarian faction, for example, *Sunni Muslim rebels* (61) in line 4 and 20.

The figure also displays the nationality as a benchmark denoting the *rebels*. They are identified as *Syrian* and not foreigners in line 6 (56), 14 (30), 18 and 19 (25 and 24) respectively. This pattern also recurs in line 22, 23, 29, 30 and 47. The remaining set of lexical clusters, which exist within two syntactic structures: the coordination and the prepositional phrases share similar references. Examples of these structures, as Figure 5.1 displays, include *government and rebels*[22] (38) in line 10, *and the rebels* in line 9 (41 times) and *forces and rebels* (29 times). The prepositional phrases, on the other hand, shown in line 1 include *to the rebels* (counts 128), *for the rebel* (counts 50 times), *of the rebel* (37) and *by the rebels* (29). The concordances of these sets of lexical clusters highlight a number of themes frequently reported in the corpus such as the effect of the conflict on the neighbouring Arab countries, the crimes committed by the two warring sides, and the Moscow-Washington peace conference for Syria. However, the two prevailing semantic macrostructures are the chemical weapon attacks and the West-Arab support for the rebels.

With reference to the rebels' representation, the concordances of *by the rebels* and *for the rebels* reveals that Reuters tends to emphasize the political position of the rebels in the international community to legitimize providing them with lethal and non-lethal aids.

Concordance Hits	50	
Hit	KWIC	
1	FSA, the original umbrella group	for the rebels, were never able
2	hold back on practical support	for the rebels despite endorsing the
3	, to destroy any hiding places	for the rebels as the army
4	on Wednesday to increase support	for the rebels if Assad refused
5	frontier that are vital both	for the rebels and for Hezbollah.
6	unlikely to ramp up support	for the rebels, even if its
7	that it had taken months	for the rebels to overrun a
8	has called in the past	for the rebels to be armed,
9	support to non-lethal aid	for the rebels who, despite receiving
10	," the government's standard term	for the rebels. Adra, close to

Figure 5.2 Concordances of *for the rebels*

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[22] The word 'Beirut' refers to the branch of Reuter news agency in Lebanon. It has not clustered with rebels in the body of the report but rather appears as a news source reference above the heading.

Rebels in line 1 are characterized in relation to their official body, the Free Syrian Army (FSA). This identification serves to positively represent the *rebels* as belonging to an organization, which is globally acknowledged as a politically moderate opposition in Syria. Further, *rebels* are introduced as holding a confrontational camp against ISIL fighters. Such representation highlights a positive standpoint towards *rebels* as being non-hardliners. The Supreme Military Command of the FSA is also introduced positively as 'a non-ideological moderate' founder of the opposition army ('Syria's rebel groups', 2014). In line 10, the report ironically introduces *terrorists* as the name granted to the *rebels* by the Syrian government.

It is worth mentioning that the representation of the *rebels* juxtaposes with identifying the *Shabbiha* (counts 19 times in the corpus), a word used sometimes by Reuters when referring to the President's militant supporters. *Shabbiha*, as mentioned previously, is an Arabic word or, rather, a slang term which means ghosts. At its official website, BBC News describes them as *thugs*. They are 'a notorious mafia-like organized crime syndicate' dressed like civilians to shoot and kill people in their demonstrations ('Who are the Shabiha?' 2012, para.7). This parallel identification of the two opposing supporters enhances the discourse of violence against the civilians and serves to legitimize the Western and Arab support for arming the rebels.

Another important lexical cluster of rebels is the coordination structure of *government and rebels*, which introduces the theme of chemical attack. The use of missiles filled with nerve gases against the civilians and the horror escalated among people are described. Throughout this semantic macrostructure, the news identifies rebels as victims of the regime while constructing the government as the active agent of a series of transactive activities, such as bombing the refugees' camp near Damascus and conducting nine mass killings in Sunni communities. The news conveys a sense of sympathy towards rebels, who are represented as victimized, while negatively criticizing the government's role in criminal activities. A number of war crimes are also allocated to rebels, such as 'murder, hostage-taking and shelling of civilians' ('Syrian Forces responsible', 2013). Nevertheless, Reuters foregrounds these crimes in relation to the existence of Islamists and Al-Nusra Front fighters, who are globally classified as terrorists, in its coverage of rebels.

The theme of the chemical attacks reveal the indifference of the government to meeting and speaking with rebels. The news further quotes the President's words to highlight the government's negative attitude towards the requirements of the rebels, which is evident in one particular quotation the news delivers: 'puppets made by the West' ('Syrian Government Ready', 2013). Examining the concordances of *government and rebels* shows a great emphasis on using the chemical weapons. Consider the following figure.

8	Aleppo incident, in which the government and rebels accuse each other
9	President Bashar al-Assad's government and rebels accused each other
10	not confirm that. Assad's government and rebels accused each other
11	1 of 3 right BEIRUT Syria's government and rebels accused each other
12	-year-old conflict. The Syrian government and rebels accused each other
13	Reuters in Geneva. Syria's government and rebels accused each other
14	known in Syria, Syria's government and rebels accused each other
21	-Assad's government. Assad's government and rebels blamed each other.
22	further," he said. The Syrian government and rebels each accused the
23	could trigger intervention. The Syrian government and rebels each accused the
24	of coordination between the Syrian government and rebels enabled 1,800 civilians to
25	Syria, and that both the government and rebels had committed atrocious
26	weapons". CHEMICAL WEAPONS The Syrian government and rebels have accused each
27	two dozen people. Both the government and rebels have blamed each
28	, was fired by rebels. The government and rebels have blamed each
29	northern city itself split between government and rebels. It was very

Figure 5.3 Concordances of *government and rebels*

The right concordance lines above show a strong association between the lexical cluster and verbs expressing indictment, like *blame* and *accused* in line 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 20, 21 and also throughout most of the remaining lines. Accusations of using chemical weapon are reciprocally claimed by the two parties. This accusation is also introduced in a negative structure using *unlikely* and *not* in the prepositional phrase pattern *by the rebels*. In this pattern Reuters, ironically, reports the declaration of the head of the joint UN-OPCW mission, saying that: 'It's highly doubtful the rebels would have the capacity to do that' ('Residents are seen', 2014). The report implicitly conveys that chemical attack is the government's own responsibility while directly excludes the rebels by utilising the pre-modifying intensifiers *highly doubtful*.

5.2.1.2 Opposition

The concordances of the second keyword, *Opposition* also emphasize the identity of the Opposition social actors. They are represented as Syrian citizens and civilians who are calling for their demands. Figure 5.4 below displays the common lexical clusters,

which stress on the nationality of the Opposition in examples like *the Syrian opposition* (counts 193), *Syria's opposition* (79) *the civilian opposition* (counts 10), and *national coalition opposition* (7).

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	193	10	the syrian opposition
2	132	9	of the opposition
3	82	8	to the opposition
4	79	8	syria's opposition
5	53	10	east syrian opposition
6	42	7	that the opposition
7	39	8	in the opposition
8	37	7	and the opposition
9	35	8	with the opposition
10	31	7	according to opposition
11	31	6	for the opposition
12	27	8	the armed opposition
13	26	8	by the opposition
14	25	5	the pro-opposition
15	23	8	east syria opposition
16	21	7	government and opposition
17	20	8	from the opposition
18	18	6	a syrian opposition
19	18	4	help the opposition

Figure 5.4 Three-word lexical clusters for *opposition*

The figure displays a number of prepositional phrases which recur repeatedly, such as *of/to/in/with/for/by/from the opposition*. Syntactically, the prepositional structures function to express the relation between two lexical items. These recurrent lexical clusters are used to give more details about the opposition and the various political issues in Syria. Based on the concordance analysis, the most common thematic frames associated with the opposition include the following:

a) The departure of the president as the first demand of the opposition
b) The participation in peace talks at the Geneva 2 conference
c) The massacre in the villages supporting the opposition
d) Lifting the ban on arming the opposition, especially after the chemical attacks
e) The areas regained by the opposition

It is worth mentioning that the lexical cluster *of the opposition* is not solely referring to the anti-government SAs but rather, a number of times to 'the opposition of veto-wielding' that Russia uses to rebut US military interference against the Syrian regime ('Obama Says Most', 2013). However, Inspecting the concordances of the lexical clusters denoting, *the Syrian opposition*, reveals that the Opposition's political activities is the dominant semantic macrostructure that Reuters introduces the Opposition within.

It is constructed as the legal representative of the anti-government public stance. This thematic frame also includes references to issues related to the US-Arabs requirements for arming the Opposition's fighters such as banning the presence of Islamic fighters among the Opposition SAs and negotiations around the lethal and non-lethal support to the them.

The *Opposition* is also characterised in terms of the alliances between the different armed groups within the opposition itself. This is one of the main pivotal semantic macrostructures in Reuters, where the issues of Islamists and jihadists are raised. The following concordances show the pattern of *the armed opposition* through which these issues are introduced:

1	", a term it uses for the armed opposition. Members of Assad'
2	have become increasingly powerful among the armed opposition. Abdelrahman said Islamist
3	is the main complaint of the armed opposition, a disparate array
4	" could participate. Their definition excludes the armed opposition or any group
5	as a dominant force in the armed opposition, and the possibility
6	government side and representatives of the armed opposition. Kruesi said the
7	at the government level, where the armed opposition and government have
12	the dominance of Islamists in the armed opposition, Liwa al-Islam
13	plenty of ways to support the armed opposition without giving weapons."
14	the dominance of Islamists in the armed opposition, Liwa al-Islam
15	-Assad broke out in 2011, with the armed opposition increasingly capturing milita
16	much evidence to show that the armed opposition was using sexual
17	: "Our understanding has been that the armed opposition does not have
18	are a main player in the armed opposition. He was chosen
19	-Assad broke out in 2011, with the armed opposition increasingly capturing milita

Figure 5.5 Concordances of *the armed opposition*

This pattern explicitly denotes a sense of reluctance among the opposition groups against the dominance of Islamists as demonstrated in line 12 and 14. Reuters foregrounds a number of non-moderate armed groups that are Internationally recognized as terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda linked groups, the Salafi brigade, Al-Nusra Front and Liwa al-Islam, which are among the powerful armed units under the umbrella of the armed opposition. This representation is correlated with the US' arms supplies that are conditional for the moderate opposition only, as opposed to the Islamists and jihadists. Further, the news reports highlight the International Criminal Court's condemnation of al-Qaeda linked groups' crimes. This pattern reveals the discourse of Islamists' power and dominance.

The concordances also display another pattern in lines 1 and 22. Both feature the noun phrases of *a term it uses* and the *government's term for*. Based on their contexts, the *terrorists* is the term these patterns highlight as the preferred name, which the Syrian government uses to describe the opposition. This sort of reference has also appeared in the previous keyword of *rebel*. The pattern expresses the government stance towards the opposition, which is extremely negative. For instance, line 4 refers to the definition the government uses to identify the parties who could participate in establishing the new parliament, which is formulated in a way that explicitly excludes the armed oppositions. Another important lexical association with *the armed opposition* pattern is *chemical weapons*, which appears in the remaining concordances, lines 25 and 26. The concordances reveal another reference to using chemical weapons in Aleppo province where, again, the government declares itself free of responsibility and accuses rebels of committing this attack. This representation serves to reveal the big gap between the Syrian government's officials and their counterpart officials in the Opposition.

5.2.1.3 Sunnis

The theme of sectarian conflict is one of the most distinctive semantic macrostructures that Reuters introduces the anti-government SAs in. The construction of the fighters in this respect goes beyond the limits of the Syrian nationality. The fighters are identified in relation to their Islamic Ideological orientation. As a reminder, Sunni is an offshoot of Islam and the counterpart of Shi'ite; *Sunnis* form the majority of the Syrian population. The figure below displays the Sunni's common lexical clusters.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	61	8	sunni muslim rebels
2	60	8	sunni muslim majority
3	30	6	sunni-shi'ite
4	24	7	sunni and shi
5	18	4	sunni muslim cleric
6	10	5	sunni muslim gulf
7	8	4	sunni muslim fighters
8	8	6	sunni muslim insurgents
9	7	5	sunni islamist fighters
10	7	4	sunni muslims and
11	7	4	sunni-led revolt
12	6	5	sunni islamist rebels
13	6	4	sunni muslim heartland
14	6	3	sunni rebels have
15	6	3	sunni-led opposition
16	6	4	sunni-ruled arab
17	5	3	sunni backlash and
18	5	2	sunni divide in
19	5	3	sunni militants have

Figure 5.6 Three-word lexical clusters for *Sunni*

The figure demonstrates various lexis that are linked with *Sunni*, describing either lands or fighters. As noted above in the figure, *Sunni* is clustered with *Muslim rebels* (61 times) and *Muslim majority* (60) with *Shi'ite* (30 & 24 times) respectively in lines (3) and (4). *Muslim cleric* is also linked with *Sunni* (18). *Muslim Gulf* and *Arab states*, which refer to the Arabian Gulf countries, recur (10 & 4 times) respectively. Other clusters include *Muslim fighters* (8), *Muslim insurgents* (8), *Islamist fighters* (7), *Sunni Muslims and* (7), *Sunni led-revolt* (7) and *Sunni Islamist rebels* (6). Regarding the most recurrent pattern, *Sunni Muslim rebels*, the figure shows the following:

Concordance Hits	63		
Hit	KWIC		
1	, have pushed back the mainly	Sunni Muslim rebels	and foreign jihadis
2	civil war in Syria, where	Sunni Muslim rebels	are fighting to
3	war pitting Syria's majority	Sunni Muslim rebels	against Assad, who
4	any Israeli threat. The mostly	Sunni Muslim rebels	, loosely grouped in
5	into civil war, pitting mostly	Sunni Muslim rebels	against a state
6	offer him asylum. The mainly	Sunni Muslim rebels	have seized territory
7	major town held by mostly	Sunni Muslim rebels	near the Lebanese
8	Adra in December when mainly	Sunni Muslim rebels	took over part
9	years of fighting led by	Sunni-Muslim rebels	trying to oust
10	-Assad. The conflict pits mainly	Sunni Muslim rebels	against a president
11	's war, which pits mainly	Sunni Muslim rebels	against Assad, a
12	, fearing revenge by the mostly	Sunni Muslim rebels	if he is
13	its role in channelling Islamist	Sunni Muslim rebels	to southern Syria,

Figure 5.7 Concordances of *Sunni Muslim rebels*

The concordances show a consistent depiction of *Assad* against *Sunni Muslim rebels* in the right concordance lines, as in lines, 3, 10, 11 and elsewhere in the concordances lines 14, 19, 22, 24 and 25. These patterns also represent *Assad* as a subjected social actor who is confronted by the *Sunni-Muslim rebels* and suggests lack of agency for Assad. According to the context, this pattern emphasizes the sense of sectarianism. It highlights the issue of the conflict among the two Islamic factions and the various ethnic minorities in Syria. The concordances point out that *Sunni* is constructed as an Islamic faction majority fighting against Assad's minority sect ('Syria Assad says', 2013). Using the intensifying adverbs *mostly* and *mainly* as pre-determiners preceding *Sunni Muslim rebels* places more emphasis on the concept of religious-based division.

Another concept this pattern validates is the political stance of the Sunni rebels. The concordance analysis reveals that the Sunni opposition attitude towards the government is not purely political but rather ideological, which is religiously rooted. The pattern of *Sunni Muslim majority* in Figure 5.6 accentuates this dogmatic division. The analysis shows that the military and political supports given to the two sides of the conflict

mainly depend on the religious background of each one. Shi'ite Iran, for instance, is the powerful supporter of the Shi'ite in Syria while the Sunni rebels receive their aid and arms from all Sunni countries. The armed support of Syrian minorities, like Christian and Druze communities, is confronted by the massive Islamist backing to Sunni rebels who led the uprising. This sectarian split is further highlighted in the pattern below.

Hit	KWIC
1	by Iran, has intensified regional Sunni-Shi'ite tensions already running
2	in Lebanon itself and deepen Sunni-Shi'ite sectarian rifts in
3	, with anger flaring across the Sunni-Shi'ite faultline that divides
4	announced he had stopped advocating Sunni-Shi'ite reconciliation and was
5	Iraq, with recent histories of Sunni-Shi'ite civil wars of
6	leave Syria divided along the Sunni-Shi'ite fault line. That
7	in a region where the Sunni-Shi'ite faultline has been
8	grown more sectarian, deepening the Sunni-Shi'ite divide in the
13	a possible shift in the Sunni-Shi'ite balance of power
14	theatre for a region-wide Sunni-Shi'ite sectarian conflict, complicated
15	is fuelling instability and deepening Sunni-Shi'ite rifts across the
16	in a region where the Sunni-Shi'ite faultline has deepened
17	the deadliest month since the Sunni-Shi'ite slaughter of 2006-2007, the
18	almost five decades, deepening the Sunni-Shi'ite divide in the
19	, too afraid to come out. SUNNI-SHI'ITE TENSIONS Davutoglu said
20	's Syria victory risks wider Sunni-Shi'ite conflict BEIRUT	BY

Figure 5.8 Concordances of *Sunni-Shi'ite*

The *Sunni-Shi'ite* concordance lines denote the ethical gap that is widening dramatically among Sunni and Shi'ite communities. *Sunni* is used as a reference term for the opposition rebels while *Shi'ite* denotes the government supporters. The figure shows a number of important lexical clusters, such as *deepening sectarian refit* (line 2), *anger flaring* (line 3) and *stop advocating reconciliation* (line 4), that to some extent enhance the discourse on sectarian conflict.

In addition, the representation of *Sunnis* encompasses name references to prominent religious figures who boosted the sectarian conflict up. Reuters has reported Youssef Al-Qaradawi's call for 'a day of rage' against President Al-Assad for the brutal crimes the security forces committed against Syrians ('In Mecca, Saudi Cleric', 2013). Using quoted words from popular religious figures would have more impact on readers than restating their words. Youssef Al-Qaradawi is a well-known Muslim cleric and the one who calls for Jihad, i.e., holy war against the Syrian regime. Another important name is *Saoud al-Shuraim* the Saudi Muslim scholar, the official Imam of the grand holy

mosque in Mecca who has condemned the brutality of the Syrian security forces against Sunnis. Moreover, there are a number of numerical references used to denote the number of civilians killed or injured in the sectarian clashes. All these patterns reinforce each other to highlight the discourse on sectarian-based conflict.

5.2.1.4 Islamists

Another religious-based keyword is *Islamist(s)*, which is not an offshoot of Islam but rather an Islamic movement made up of Sunni Muslims who split from the current Muslim Brotherhood. This movement aims to establish the Islam laws in the political life and replace the 'official electoral institution' (Nugent, 2014). In the context of Syrian conflict, Islamists always reference fighters who adhere to the Fundamental Islamic principles. The figure below displays its lexical clusters.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	14	6	of radical islamists
2	12	6	of hardline islamists
3	7	4	by radical islamists
4	5	3	of militant islamists
5	4	3	dominated by islamists
6	4	4	hardline sunni islamists
7	4	3	middle east islamists
8	4	4	radical sunni islamists
9	3	2	and the islamists
10	3	3	dominance of islamists
11	3	1	including radical islamists
12	3	3	influence of islamists
13	3	3	liberals and islamists
14	3	2	rebels and islamists
15	3	2	weapons to islamists
16	2	1	also hardline islamists
17	2	2	and curbing islamists
18	2	2	by the islamists
19	2	2	currently battling islamists
20	2	2	from radical islamists
21	2	2	from syrian islamists
22	2	2	independently of islamists
23	2	1	number of islamists
24	2	2	of the islamists

Figure 5.9 Three-word lexical clusters for *Islamist*

There is a sort of association between *Islamists*, *radical* and *hardline* in line 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 16 and 20. These clusters emphasise the concept of radicalism, particularly in Islamist fighters. Another pattern is evident in *Islamists and dominance* in lines 5 and 10, denoting power and control. Islamists are also characterised by their number, as in *number of Islamists* in line 23, which are activated by intensifiers such as *growing* and *rising*. Regarding the first frequent pattern, *of radical Islamists*, the concordance analysis reveals some patterns:

Hit	KWIC	
1	Eastern diplomat said. The strength	of radical Islamists, nearly three years
2	could fall into the hands	of radical Islamists. "The best tool
3	East and created a risk	of radical Islamists seizing power. Although
4	sceptical about. On the activities	of radical Islamists, officials said there
5	Yair Golan said "many hundreds"	of radical Islamists were fighting in
6	wary of the growing presence	of radical Islamists in the rebel
7	, fearful of the growing influence	of radical Islamists in the Syrian
8	who, alarmed by the growth	of radical Islamists in rebel-held
9	some 10,000 fighters to the exclusion	of radical Islamists, Spiegel reported. "The
10	of concerns over the presence	of radical Islamists among the rebels
11	units and curb the influence	of radical Islamists. Idriss's Supreme
12	secular forces at the expense	of radical Islamists who are gaining
13	of fragmentation and the presence	of radical Islamists in the ranks
14	also frets about the rise	of radical Islamists among the insurgents,

Figure 5.10 Concordances for *of radical Islamists*

The left concordance lines display lexis which denote a sense of power and increase, such as *growing influence*, *growing presence* and *many hundreds* in lines 4-6, as well as *growth* in line 8 and *the rise* and *the strength* in lines 1 and 14. The phrase *seizing the power* in the right concordance lines also supports this lexis. The remaining lines also denote the impact of *Islamists*, such as with *the risk* in line 3, *the influence* and the *presence* recurring in lines 10 and 11.

The discourse of *Islamists* dominance in the corpus seems to go beyond the fear of Islamists' impact on Syrian lands. Reuters quoted information provided by the German weekly newspaper Der Spiegel about the US military training of the rebel fighters in Jordan, which references global concern over the spread of Islamists in Syria. The concordances show a recurrent reference to moderate fighters as the sole recipients of Western and Gulf countries' aid. The example below is the context of line 9 in Figure 5.10 above. The concordance line shows the military preparation in Jordan, a boarding country to Syria, which sheds more light on the *Islamists'* risk and the turmoil in the whole region.

1. Jordanian intelligence services are involved in the programme, which aims to build around a dozen units totalling some 10,000 fighters to the exclusion of radical Islamists, ('Americans are training', 2013).

The other two lexical patterns, *of hardline Islamists* and *by radical Islamists*, display a number of themes that contribute to building up the discourse of Islamists dominance, such as the recurrent issue of ceasing lethal support to the rebels, the increasing power

of Islamists in Syria, the interior division among rebels caused by *Islamists* and the fear among minorities that Syria will be ruled by hardline Islamists. It is worth mentioning that Islamism, as a political movement cannot be considered as representing the true Islam. This movement possesses an anti-Semitic and anti-Western stance, which enhances the negative identification of Islamism in Western media. However, it 'strives to derive legitimacy from Islam' (Cagaptay, 2010, para. 2). This reality may contribute additional insights on the negative global representation of *Islamists*.

5.2.1.5 Refugees

The discourse of *refugees'* migration crisis is an important theme in Reuters' representation of the anti-government social actors. This aspect has dramatically influenced the security and the economic life of the host countries. The number of Syrian *refugees* estimated from the beginning of the revolution in 2011 is more than 11 million around the world. However, the number of registered *refugees*, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), is 4.8 million Syrians, who have escaped to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordon, Egypt and Iraq. One million have sought asylum in different European countries ('UNHCR: Total Number of Syrian Refugees', 2015). Thus, *refugees* represent a tangible facet of the Syrian revolution. The following figure shows the common lexical clusters that could aid in tracing the type of discourse occurring around *refugees*.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	33	8	refugees have fled
2	19	8	refugees who have
3	14	5	refugees in lebanon
4	12	5	refugees in the
5	10	6	refugees from the
6	9	2	refugees wait to
7	8	5	refugees from syria
8	8	4	refugees in jordan
9	7	3	refugees (unhcr) antonio
10	7	4	refugees antonio guterres
11	6	4	refugees and rebels
12	6	4	refugees in neighbouring
13	6	3	refugees who fled
14	6	2	refugees, fleeing the
15	5	3	refugees are children
16	5	4	refugees have been
17	4	2	refugees (unhcr), told
18	4	3	refugees and the
19	4	2	refugees answers a

Figure 5.11 Three-word lexical clusters for *refugees*

The figure above shows a number of patterns depicting the common images associated with refugees. The first frame in which the *refugees* are introduced is fleeing, as shown

in the first lexical cluster, *refugees have fled* (33). This concept is again emphasised in line 13 and 14. Another common frame is geographical places introduced in the lexical clusters of *refugees in Lebanon* in line 3, *from Syria* in line 7, *in Jordan* in line 8 and *in neighbouring* in line 12, which denote the countries they are going to and the places they are fleeing from. The refugee agency UNHCR is common in this context, appearing in line 9 and 17 as the official humanitarian organisation for *refugees* worldwide. In considering the most frequent pattern, the concordance shows the following:

1	years of conflict. Two million refugees have fled abroad and another 6.5
2	an estimated half million Syrian refugees have fled to escape the
3	* * * * * * AMMAN Around 20,000 Syrian refugees have fled to neighbouring Jordan
4	5 right GENEVA More than 700,000 Syrian refugees have fled to other countries
5	within Syria and more than 700,000 refugees have fled to neighbouring countries
6	been killed, more than 2 million refugees have fled abroad and another 6.5
7	the demonstrations. More than 3 million refugees have fled the country, and
8	say. More than a million refugees have fled the country and
12	the demonstrations. Nearly two million refugees have fled the sectarian-tinged
13	Pinheiro. More than 1 million Syrian refugees have fled abroad and 2.5 million
14	displacement. More than 1 million Syrian refugees have fled abroad and 2.5 million
15	say. More than a million refugees have fled the country and

Figure 5.12 Concordances of *refugees have fled*

The left concordance lines show a sort of quantification pattern emphasizing the large number of civilians fleeing the country. Semantically, the overall concordance patterns associated with the *refugees* tend to explain their critical situation and the consequences which followed their migration. For instance, they are described as *escaping* in line 2 and *have fled the sectarian* struggle in line 12. Line 13 and 14 inform readers about the huge numbers of refugees extending beyond the limits of the neighbouring countries, showing their destination by the word *abroad*.

In lines 7-9, the conjunction structure coordinates fleeing the country with the number of killed people in Syria. These patterns do reinforce the cataclysmic situation of the *refugee's* movements crossing the borders and foreground the *refugee* crisis in the discourse. Other supporting patterns include *refugees are children* and *refugees wait to*, which elucidate the urgent need for humanitarian aid and shelter for their mass movement. These two patterns are introduced in terms of the causes driving these influxes and the political pressure these refugees would impose on neighbouring countries.

On the other hand, refugee in its singular form is also used as a pre-modifier adjective describing camps and agencies, which are two important aspects of refugees' life. The concordance lines show a great focus on Al Zaatari camp in Jordan, a neighbouring country, which shelters more than 100,000 refugees, most of whom are children suffering major health problems. In this context, the agencies denote the international humanitarian organisations appealing for aid and money donation, which reveals an overt discourse of *refugees* as victims.

5.2.1.6 Al-Khatib

Al-Khatib is constructed as a recognized political player in the Opposition body. Therefore, this keyword underpins the theme of the vital political presence of the Syrian Opposition against the government. *Al-Khatib* is a prominent figure in Syria even before the revolution broke out. He worked as an Imam for Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. He is considered a moderate Sunni Muslim, possessing non-extremist or Islamist views. Therefore, he was assigned as a president for 'the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, founded in Qatar in 2012' (Sadiki, 2014, p.157). The lexical clusters demonstrated below (Figure 5.13) reflect the political role of *Al-Khatib*.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	21	5	alkhatib's initiative
2	14	5	alkhatib said he
3	10	5	alkhatib's offer
4	8	3	alkhatib said the
5	7	5	alkhatib and the
6	7	4	alkhatib said in
7	7	3	alkhatib speaks to
8	7	3	alkhatib will visit
9	7	2	alkhatib's resignation
10	7	3	alkhatib, a cleric
11	6	2	alkhatib came under
12	6	2	alkhatib has headed
13	6	2	alkhatib met the
14	6	5	alkhatib, a moderate
15	5	3	alkhatib formulated the
16	5	4	alkhatib said on
17	5	2	alkhatib to urge
18	5	3	alkhatib told reuters
19	5	1	alkhatib, a sunni
20	5	3	alkhatib, who had

Figure 5.13 Three-word lexical clusters for *Al-Khatib*

The lexical patterns introduce *Al-Khatib* positively as an active agent of acts denoting political commitment. *Initiative*, *offer*, *formulated* and *urge* are indicative examples. Such lexical associations can be considered a pattern denoting decision-making. He is represented as a voice holder, as exemplified in the clusters of s*peaks to*, *met the*, *said in* and *told Reuters.* The lexical clusters also construct his identity positively as *a cleric*, *a moderate* and *a Sunni.* It is worth noting that *moderate* is used commonly to modify the Sunni faction, rather than Shi'ites. It is also utilised to represent the rebels under the FSA.

Taking the most frequent lexical cluster of *Al-Khatib's initiative*, the figure below displays its concordance lines:

Hit	KWIC		
1	the coalition's politburo said	Alkhatib's initiative	had popular support
2	have not responded directly to	Alkhatib's initiative	-- formulated in broad
3	12-member politburo in Cairo endorsed	Alkhatib's initiative	, although it set
4	backing by the coalition to	Alkhatib's initiative	would give it
5	statement it was opposed to	Alkhatib's initiative	because it ignored
6	backing by the coalition for	Alkhatib's initiative	gives it more
7	said a coalition approval of	Alkhatib's initiative	could help change

Figure 5.14 Concordance pattern for *Al-Khatib's initiative*

In the figure, *Al-khatib* is identified in relation to the supporting coalition, lines 4 and 6 are representative. Taking into consideration that Al-Khatib is the leader of the national coalition, the pattern in turn serves to represent the opposition positively as a unified entity with planned political policies guided by a national coalition politburo. Other concordance patterns reveal Reuters' construction of *Al-Khatib* as an authority acknowledged internationally.

On the other hand, Reuters highlights the stance of the Syrian government towards the *al-Khatib*. The concordances reveal that the Syrian Information Minister responded to *Al-Khatib's* initiative with a call for '*national dialogue*' in '*Damascus to discuss Syria's future*' ('Opposition would talk', 2013). The minister's response serves to represent the Syrian regime as the representative of Syrian national identity while constructing *Al-Khatib*'s coalition as outsiders and un-national gatherings. This sort of we-labeling, according to De Cillia et al (1999), serves as 'a basis for appealing directly or indirectly to national solidarity and union' (p. 160). This may recall Al-Assad's own

identification of rebels as *terrorists* and *non-Syrian*, which Reuters quotes (see example no.5 and line 10 in Figure 5.2)..

Moreover, examining the concordances of the lexical cluster: *Al-Khatib said he*, reveals that *Al-Khatib* is activated as an active agent for all verbal processes such as *said*, *asked* and *address* in which the addressees are organisations and political figures such as John Kirby, the US Secretary of State and the Arab League Summit. This pattern stresses on the role of *Al-Khatib* as an acknowledged and legal political figure. He is also constructed in an attributive structure with adjectives denoting a sense of control and power such as *he was willing*, *ready* and *prepared*. It is worth mentioning that Al-Khatib is also constructed as struggling to gain more support from the West to back up rebels in Syria. This representation is correlated with the presence of Islamists among the armed groups of the Opposition, which hinders their backing to the rebels. As pointed out earlier, *Al-Khatib* and Opposition both contribute to construct the same theme. However, the individualization of *Al-Khatib* and the functionalization of his political status have enhanced the positive representation of the Opposition as a political body and highlighted its international recognition.

5.2.1.7 Uprising

Uprising is the last keyword representing the opposition as well as the thematic frame through which Reuters foregrounds the reactions of the anti-government side. It is introduced as a response against the violence of security police towards the marchers of demonstration where the government forces cracked them down and arrested their families. This, in turn, intensified the horror among the civilians, who began to flee and protect themselves by arming. As a result, the civil war started, and the country was torn up. The following lexical clusters, Figure 5.15, provide an idea of the points of interest, that Reuters tends to prioritize.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	50	9	of the uprising
2	28	6	year-old uprising
3	25	8	syria's uprising
4	24	5	two-year uprising
5	23	8	since the uprising
6	16	6	month-old uprising
7	15	4	in the uprising
8	14	6	an armed uprising
9	13	4	the syrian uprising
10	10	6	during the uprising
11	10	5	the 22-month uprising
12	8	3	before the uprising
13	8	4	since an uprising
14	6	2	in an uprising
15	6	2	into the uprising
16	6	3	of syrian uprising
17	5	3	on the uprising
18	5	4	when the uprising
19	4	3	a popular uprising
20	4	3	supported the uprising
21	3	1	a 22-month uprising
22	3	3	anti-assad uprising
23	3	2	battling an uprising
24	3	2	crush an uprising
25	3	2	elsewhere. the uprising
26	3	3	sunni-led uprising

Figure 5.15 Three-word lexical clusters for *uprising*

The uprising is described in terms of duration using numerical references, such as *two years old*, *two-year uprising*, *22-month uprising* and *since the uprising*, which emphasise the time period of the uprising getting more and more extended. Reuters also identifies the *uprising* as a religious-motivated movement, as in *Sunni-led uprising* and *Sunni Muslim uprising*. This sort of identification, which labels the whole *uprising* as a sort of ideological conflict, draws the reader's attention to its sectarian background and reinforces the discourse of sectarian conflict. Moreover, the use of the proper name *Assad* in the lexical cluster *Anti-Assad uprising* serves as a metonymic reference to the current Syrian regime. However, using *Assad* in particular, instead of anti-government or anti-regime, may hint at the dynastic ruling system of the Syrian government or rather the Islamic offshoot of Alawite to which Assad belongs.

The highest frequent lexical cluster, *of the uprising*, also shows a number of patterns displayed in the following figure:

Hit	KWIC
1	year in Homs, a centre *of the uprising* against Assad in 2011
2	province of Deraa, the cradle *of the uprising*. Defectors from Assad'
3	protests in the early months *of the uprising*, before it turned
4	appeal on the second anniversary *of the uprising* against President Bashar
5	imminent downfall since the start *of the uprising* in March 2011. But
6	, have been at the forefront *of the uprising* against Assad, whose
7	it views Damascus's suppression *of the uprising*. Noting at the
8	fastest influx since the start *of the uprising* against President Bashar
9	, has been at the heart *of the uprising* and armed insurgency
10	of people since the start *of the uprising* against Assad 22 months
11	nationwide in the early days *of the uprising* - is drowned out
12	in Syria since the start *of the uprising* against Assad, the
13	Syria shortly after the start *of the uprising* against Assad three
14	among rebels since the start *of the uprising* against President Bashar
15	than 300,000-strong at the start *of the uprising* two years ago,
16	-democracy demonstration at the beginning *of the uprising* in the Sunni

Figure 5.16 Concordances for *of the uprising*

The concordances again shed light on the time length of the *uprising*, as exemplified in the left concordance lines such as *the second anniversary line* (1 & 30), *since the start ... in 2011* (line 5, 14) and *at the beginning ... in 2011 in line* (21 & 25). Monitoring the *uprising*'s duration may shed light on its political consequences at the global level. Mason et al (1999) argue, on the scale of duration, that rebels usually win the battle when the conflict ends early, a couple of years from the beginning of the conflict, while the government would regain its control when the civil war extends up to five years or more (as cited in Brandt et al, 2008). This may elucidate the US' early call for a unified rebel coalition and the massive support of the Gulf countries to the rebels when the revolution broke out in 2011.

The right concordance lines also show a recurrent pattern using the surname of the Syrian President, *Assad*, which is used as a symbol for the whole Syrian regime. Examples include *against Assad* and *against President Bashar Al-Assad* in lines, 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 13. The correlation between *the uprising* and *against Assad* signifies the Assad's quarter of a century governing, which started in 1971 by Hafez Al-Assad, the father of the current president of Syria. The *uprising* is also characterised in terms of places, specifically where the demonstrations take place as *a center of the uprising* and *the worst-hit region*, referring to Homs, a commercial city near Damascus known for its agricultural activities, which is populated by Sunnis; and the *cradle of the uprising*, referring to Deraa, where the first protestors marches occurred (line 1 and 2). In addition, *the heart of the uprising* in line 9 is a metaphorical reference that highlights the importance of Homs as the heart of the uprising which turned into civil war.

In *an armed uprising* lexical cluster, there is a consistent association between the number of the people killed during their demonstrations and the formation of the armed uprising. Examples include phrases like '*130.000 people have been killed'* and *'60.000 people have been killed'* in lines 2, 9 and 12 in the figure below.

Hit	KWIC
1	Assad in 2011 which turned into an armed uprising and civil war
2	by security forces led to an armed uprising. More than 130,000 people
3	by security forces led to an armed uprising. (Editing by Kevin
4	military crackdown and escalated into an armed uprising aimed at toppling
5	military crackdown and escalated into an armed uprising aimed at toppling
6	is slipping as it battles an armed uprising could trigger Israeli
7	street protests and evolved into an armed uprising against his rule.
8	supported Assad as he battles an armed uprising in which 60,000 people
9	President Bashar al-Assad throughout an armed uprising, and any understandings
10	is slipping as it battles an armed uprising could trigger Israeli
11	were met by bullets, sparking an armed uprising that turned into
12	supported Assad as he battles an armed uprising in which 60,000 people
13	democratic reforms but turned into an armed uprising after months of
14	by security forces, leading to an armed uprising. The army has

Figure 5.17 Concordances of *an armed uprising*

The *uprising* is also characterised as a backlash against the violence of military forces. This is evident in the recurrent use of *military crackdown* and *met by bullets* exemplified in lines 5, 6, 10 and 11-14. In addition, the set of lexical choices used, such as *escalated* in line 4, *evolve* in line 7 and *turned into* in lines 8 and 9, gives a sense of moving from one state to another. It denotes a change from the peaceful marches of demonstration to a bloody, armed *uprising*. These recurrent references to the atrocious acts of the security forces towards the protestors, the number of victims and the consequences that have led to the armed *uprising* construct the discourse of military force violence. The use of chemical weapons and refugees fleeing the country, as previously mentioned, do support this type of discourse.

Thus, based on the analysis of recurrent patterns of the keywords explored throughout the whole section above, Reuters' representation of the anti-government social actors are thematically linked to the sectarian conflict, chemical attack, refugees migration, International military support of the rebels, political activities of the Opposition and the spread of Islamists among moderate rebels.

5.2.2 Pro-government Keywords Analysis

Based on the keyword results, in Table 6.2, the keywords representing the government are *Assad*, *Shi'ite*, *Alawite*, *Bashar* and *President*. The two keywords, *President* and

Al-Assad, both denote the same person, the President of the Syrian Republic. The proper name, *Bashar*, however, has a dual reference. It denotes the Syrian President and another vital social actor in the political realm, *Bashar Ja'afari*, the representative of the Syrian government at the UN.

Assad had the highest keyness score and was thus ranked as the first keyword in the corpus. The *Shi'ite* came next in the fifth rank, denoting an offshoot of Islam which always clashes with and differs from the Sunni Islamic offshoot. The proper name keyword *Bashar* and the term of address *President* represented the twelfth and fourteenth ranks of keyness scores respectively. Alawite was ranked eighteenth. It is a specific faction of the Shi'ite offshoot to which the President Al-Assad belongs.

5.2.2.1 Assad

Reuters tends to represent the Syrian President, the government and its official apparatus in a formal way. Therefore, the representation of *Assad* does not include any negative referential names or attributes such as dictator or tyrant. Thematically, *Assad* is commonly introduced in relation to power. Examining the lexical clusters of *Assad* shows the following patterns.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	653	10	assad's forces
2	246	10	assad's government
3	76	9	assad and his
4	69	8	assad family rule
5	62	8	assad's alawite
6	52	10	assad's main
7	47	8	assad's minority
8	41	7	assad's rule
9	38	8	assad's foes
10	38	6	assad's opponents
11	37	8	assad in the
12	33	8	assad's troops
13	31	7	assad's army
14	31	6	assad's father
15	30	7	assad's regime
16	27	6	assad's air
17	26	6	assad's exit
18	21	8	assad's military
19	21	6	assad's removal
20	20	6	assad to step

Figure 5.18 Three-word lexical clusters for *Assad*

It is worth indicating that the software counts the genitive marker ('s) as a word as seen in the figure above. Froehlich (2015, para 44) has indicated that AntConc considers that the possessive marker (apostrophe's) is 'indicative of another word'. With reference to

the patterns, the figure shows different patterns, which denote different aboutness. For example, *Assad* is identified in relation to his power and control in examples like *Assad forces* counts (653), *Assad's troops* (33), *Assad's army* (31), *Assad's military* (21) and *Assad's air forces* (27). He is also linked to using chemical weapons represented by *Assad's chemical*, which comes in line 34 and counts (14). *Assad* is also characterised by authority, as represented by the examples of *Assad's government* (246), *Assad family rule* (41) and *Assad's regime* (30). There are a number of lexical clusters that emphasise the religious background of Al-Assad, such as *Al-Assad's Alawite*, which recurs (62) times, *Assad's minority* (47) and *Assad whose Alawite* (20). Assad is also identified in relation to the concept of enemy, as in *Assad's foes* and *Assad's opponents*, which both recur (38) times each.

However, what is noticeable in the above figure is the excessive use of the possessive structure expressed by the genitive marker ('s). These possessive patterns depict *Assad* as the possessor and owner while the government, forces, troops and army are his possessions. This representation reflects a typical autocratic governing system. Therefore, one of most distinctive features of Reuters representation of *Assad* is foregrounding the reasons behind the public revolt against him. Backing this representation is the reference to the prolonged family ruling exemplified in the pattern of *Assad's family rule*, in the previous figure line 4. Consider the following concordances.

Figure 5.19 Concordances of *Assad family rule*

Reuters in the above concordance lines sets a plain argument, which links the uprising against the government to the four decades of *Assad* family rule. *Assad* is constructed as a ruler who clings to the power and refuses to step down. Reuter's representation of *Assad* also focuses on the priority of Alawites, 'who have made up

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most of the political and military elite in Syria' ("Islamist rebels kill", 2013). This representation elucidates the accumulated effects of the *Assad*'s racist discrimination upon the Sunni majority in Syria, which has claimed more than half a million lives within the first three years of the civil war.

Another facet of Reuter representation for Assad is identifying him in relation to violence. This is evident in the discourse of chemical attacks, which is coupled with the most frequent lexical cluster, *Assad's forces*, the figure below demonstrates its context:

Hit	KWIC
1	attack a nearby military academy. " Assad's forces punish civilians for
2	are based. Syrian activists accuse Assad's forces of launching a
3	earlier this month again accused Assad's forces of using poison
4	. The Obama administration has accused Assad's forces of carrying out
5	forces. Syria's opposition accused Assad's forces on Wednesday of
6	, MIDDLE EAST Syrian opposition accuses Assad's forces of new poison
7	the era of fear." ADVERTISING Assad's forces are intent on
8	in recent weeks and after Assad's forces tightened a siege
9	before the offensive began, after Assad's forces distributed leaflets by
10	that came to being after Assad's forces withdrew to concentrate
11	its Iranian backers, days after Assad's forces launched an offensive
12	residents had already fled after Assad's forces had overrun the
13	in a makeshift hospital after Assad's forces entered Jdeidet al-
14	will restore rebel momentum after Assad's forces seized the initiative
15	to rescue the rebellion after Assad's forces scored important military
16	protests but turned violent after Assad's forces shot at demonstrators. (
17	protests but turned violent after Assad's forces cracked down on
18	protests but turned violent after Assad's forces tried to crush

Figure 5.20 Concordances of *Assad's forces*

Sorting the concordances three places to the left reveals a pattern represented in the clause of accusation mentioned in lines 2-6. The context conveys the mass killing of civilians caused by a nerve gas attack, one where activists, the US and the opposition put Assad's forces in charge of this attack. Although the cluster of Assad's forces is passivized in this pattern, taking the patient slot, it is activated as an agent in relation to launching the gas attack. Another aspect of Assad's violence is the blockade around Qusair. The pattern is expressed in active forms, as in *tightened a siege* and *intent on seizing* in lines 8 and 7. The pattern is also emphasized in a number of concordance lines taking different forms, such as *capture*, *besieged* and *fighting for*. It is worth noting that Qusair appears as a keyword in Table 5.2, which denotes its importance as a geographical place. This city is also a vital location for the rebels, serving as the passageway for ammunition coming from Lebanon to the rebels (Naumescu, 2014).

This may justify the intensified military operations around this city and backs up the discourse of violence.

Assad's violence is also evident in the remaining concordances, lines 16-18 are representative. The transactive verbs allocated to Assad's forces, such as *shot at*, *cracked down* and *crushed*, denote an extreme aggression against armless demonstrators. Examining the concordances reveals more occurrences of the clause pattern (*Assad*'s forces + *transactive* + protestors), in which the transactive verbs encompasses a set of material processes, such as *arrest*, *suppress crushed*, *shot* and *cracked down*. This pattern represents protestors as victimized, a target of the forces' military operations, while *Assad*'s forces are victimizers. Backing this discourse is the pattern of *civil war* associated with *Assad's forces* in the remaining concordance lines. The pattern is formed within a causality structure, where *Assad's forces* are agentalized, portrayed as doing the actions and the demonstrators as affected by their actions. The form of cause and effect is utilised to highlight the relationship between *Assad*'s forces and the prolonged civil war in Syria.

In a similar way, the pattern of *Battling against* is also coupled with *Assad*'s forces. *Assad*'s forces are constructed as resisting the backlash attacks from the rebel armed groups. For instance, the Kurdish fighters, an ethnic minority, are struggling to save their lands and push *Assad*'s forces back. Al-Nusra and Islamists, the most powerful armed groups, are also introduced as battling against *Assad* to topple him. Rebel fighters, who are identified as moderate, are depicted as battling to save Sunni civilians and oust *Assad*. In this pattern the *Assad*'s forces are passivated.

In addition, inspecting the concordances of the *Assad's government* reveals that the government is constructed as the perpetrator of the chemical attacks. This negative depiction is conveyed covertly throughout describing the government's replies towards the chemical attack's allegations. Reuters uses patterns like *has denied using*, *has dismissed the accusation* and *blame each other,* which reflects the government's involvement in the issue of the chemical attacks. Likewise, the recurrent use of the lexical items such as *attack*, *accusation* and *accused* denotes a sense of an illegal act being committed by *Assad*'s government. and frames a discourse of condemnation, which, in turn, manifests Reuter's viewpoint. The negative construction of *Assad*' government comes within the semantic macrostructure of the international

condemnation of alleged chemical attacks. This representation is backed up by quoted statements of prominent political figures such as the declaration of the former US Secretary of State, John Kirby,

2. 'If a thug and murderer like Bashar Al-Assad can gas thousands of his own people with impunity, it would set a bad example for others such as Iran and North Korean'. ('US says World Cannot', 2013).

The quotation raises two key propositions. The first is the accusation against the Syrian President of being a thug and killer who eradicates his own people with gas. The second is the political consequences of this act if it has not been given the supposed international military reaction. According to Li (2009), the use of direct speech in reporting events serves to identify the news' stance towards the issue in relation to the source cited (p. 107). Thus, such an argument may designate Reuter's critical standpoint in this respect. Backing the discourse of condemnation is *Assad's government* refusal of Al-Khatib's call of authority transition. This pattern is introduced by the recurrent use of *has not responded*, which resulted in escalating the tension between the two conflicting sides at the political level.

Other recurrent patterns that serve as post-modifiers for *Assad's government* are *dominated by Alawites* and *backed by Shi'ite Iran*. This sort of identification highlights the religious dimension of the conflict and reinforces the discourse of sectarianism. Another supporting pattern is *Assad's minority Alawites*. This pattern does not introduce *Assad*'s minority as having the common characteristics shared among minorities in the world, such as being supressed, unacknowledged and striving for their rights. Rather, the group is identified as an Islamic faction that possesses the power to rule, oppress and pose control over the majority. *Assad's minority* is similarly coupled with two lexes, *dominated* and *control*. Both are utilised to foreground the power of the Shi'ites who dominate the security forces and their repression of the Sunni majority in the country.

Reuters stresses on the discourse of the sectarian conflict among the regional allies as well. The concordance analysis of the pattern *Assad's foes* reveals that the concept of an enemy is associated with patterns denoting external support of the rebels, such as *Arab backers*, *regional backers* and *Coalition…body* in lines 2, 3 and 13 in Figure 5.21.

This pattern is likely to be motivated by the factional religious divisions between Sunni and Shi'ites. Arab countries' supporters, as mentioned earlier, are Sunni majority while the main allies of *Assad* in the Middle East are Shi'ites, Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Hit	KWIC
1	city fully under control of Assad's foes. But the Syrian
2	weeks, showing growing antagonism between Assad's foes. "Last Friday, the
3	for Syrian rebels, would embolden Assad's foes seeking his overthrow.
4	, would embolden President Bashar al- Assad's foes seeking his overthrow.
5	Coalition, the closest body that Assad's foes have to an
6	that Syrian President Bashar al- Assad's foes are bent on
7	that would bar many of Assad's foes who live in
8	talk of supplying weapons to Assad's foes, nervous of arms
9	infighting The latest infighting between Assad's foes erupted four days
10	understandings they might reach with Assad's foes could help overcome
11	collapse after President Bashar al- Assad's foes failed to cut
12	. for Syria falls short of Assad's foes GENEVA	BY TOM
13	offensive against President Bashar al- Assad's foes, residents and a
14	so far by divisions among Assad's foes. Walid Bunni, one
15	been a glaring weakness of Assad's foes, who have little

Figure 5.21 Concordances of *Assad's foes*

The figure above also displays another common pattern that denotes the division among *Assad's foes*. Examining the concordances reveals the dramatic cleft among the opposition armed groups, who are ironically *Assad's foes*, after the formation of Islamist fronts, such as Jabhat al-Nusra and Islamist Ahrar al-sham. The discourse of infighting among the opposition is introduced through the recurrent use of a number of noun phrases in the left concordance lines, such as *the growing antagonism between Assad's foes* (line 2), *infighting between* (line 9), *division among* (line 14) and *glaring weakness of Assad Does* (line 15). These patterns may recall the main issue raised by the US when rebels asked for more arms support to halt the progression of Assad's forces.

5.2.2.2 Bashar

The keyword *Bashar*, as mentioned earlier, denotes the Syrian President *Bashar* Al-Assad as well as the Syrian republic ambassador to the United Nations, *Bashar Ja'afari*, counting (1482 & 35) respectively. The lexical cluster denoting *Bashar* Al-Assad has been discussed above. Thus, considering *Bashar Ja'afari*, the following figure displays its concordances:

Figure 5.22 Concordance pattern for *Bashar Ja'afari*

Bashar Ja'afari is identified by his institutional role as an ambassador, which is evident in the left concordance lines. He is also represented in terms of his actions and reactions towards the opposition. He is activated as an agent of unspecified reactions, such as with *did not respond* in lines 10-13 and 34. Following van Leeuwen's classification (2008, p.57), reactions which show no definite response that can be described or identified, such as 'respond and react', are categorised as unspecified reactions. The context shows that *Bashar Ja'afari* is recurrently linked to non-trasnactive responses towards the actions motivated by the opposition. The following examples are indicative of this link:

3. Syria's UN Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari **did not respond** to a request for comment on the Syrian National Coalition's decision to open the offices in the United States. ('Syrian opposition group', 2013).

4. Syria's UN ambassador, Bashar Ja'afari, **had no specific comments** on the matter. ('Iran steps up weapons', 2013).

The bolded lexis in the previous examples indicate how *Bashar Ja'afari* is portrayed in terms of his passive reactions towards the government-opposition negotiations. On the other hand, the type of transactive verbs allocated to Ja'afari, such as *accuse* and *blame*, serves to free his government of responsibility for actions he attributes to the other side in lines 2, 7, 18 and 19. The following examples are representative of this finding:

5. Syria's UN Ambassador **Bashar Ja'afari also accused** 'armed terrorist groups' of spreading powder from plastic bags – which he described as 'probably a kind of

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chemical material' – among crowds in the northern city of Saraqeb on Monday. ('Syria says does not trust', 2013).

6. Syria's UN **Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari blamed** terrorism and sanctions imposed by the European Union, the United States and others for the plight of its people. ('United Nations say', 2013).

The bolded verbs suggest a sort of judgement as the speaker represents an authoritative voice, while at the same time they serve to exclude the government from the proposition of the chemical weapon attack and attribute it totally over the anti-government SAs. It is worth noting that Ja'afari is identified as belonging to the Syrian President and government, lines 20 is indicative. The use of the possessive pronoun *his* serves to classify him as a part of the government, which has been already identified as an Alawite-led government, thus establishing a factional attitude, reinforcing the discourse of sectarian conflict.

5.2.2.3 Shi'ites and Alawites

The next two keywords representing the government and its allies are *Shi'ites* and *Alawites*. Both refer to the Shi'ite sect; however, the former denotes the overall term used for this Islamic faction while *Alawite* refers only to a branch of the Twelver school of Shi'ites. Thus, to avoid repetition, the analysis will better display the lexical clusters of the two keywords in two separate figures, then identify the patterns each keyword provides. Next, the patterns that provide different representations will be selected for concordance analysis. In the lexical clusters of the two keywords, the following figure starts with the *Shi'ite* keyword:

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	190	9	shi'ite islam
2	60	9	shi'ite iran
3	54	9	shi'ite muslim
4	30	6	shi'ite hezbollah
5	29	3	shi'ite villages
6	26	7	shi'ite militant
7	26	7	shi'ite militia
8	21	5	shi'ite fighters
9	21	7	shi'ite-led
10	20	8	shi'ite muslims
11	18	7	shi'ite group
12	15	6	shi'ite and
13	12	5	shi'ite lebanese
14	12	4	shi'ite militants
15	12	7	shi'ite power
16	11	5	shi'ite militias
17	9	3	shi'ite-sunni
18	8	4	shi'ite allies
19	8	3	shi'ite shrine
20	7	3	shi'ite ideology

Figure 5.23 Three-word lexical clusters for *Shi'ite*

Shi'ite is recurrently used as a pre-modifier to identify a branch of Islamic religion to which minorities inside Syria adhere. The concept of Islam is emphasised and coupled frequently with Shi'ite, as in *Shi'ite Islam* counts (190), *Shi'ite Muslim* (54) and *Shi'ites Muslims* (20). The lexical clusters also introduce Shi'ite as powerful force represented in a military supporting force fighting along with the government, such as *Shi'ite Militia* (26), *Shi'ite fighters* (21) and *Shi'ite militant/militants*, which respectively include (26 and 12) *Shi'ite group* (18) and *Shi'ite power* (12). Along with this pattern are the lexical clusters that identify the government's loyal allies who adhere to the Islamic offshoot, as in *Shi'ite Hezbollah* (30), *Shi'ite Iran* (60), *Shi'ite Lebanese* (12) and *Shi'ite allies* (8). It is worth noting that the whole government is characterised as a *Shi'ite-led* government. This may legitimize Reuters' focus on the discourse of sectarianism.

Looking at the lexical clusters of *Alawites*, on the other hand, reveals differences in representation. *Alawites* are identified as a small group of people represented by *minority*, as in the Alawite minority sect (14). It is worth noting that the concept of minority in relation to *Alawites* is emphasised across the whole lexical cluster; see Figure 5.24, lines 5, 6, 12 and 17-20. Demographically speaking, Alawites in Syria form only 15% of the whole population, which can be estimated roughly as 3 million people (Goldsmith, 2015).

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Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	73	8	alawite sect, an
2	19	5	alawite sect is
3	14	6	alawite minority sect
4	11	6	alawite sect and
5	9	6	alawite minority is
6	9	6	alawite minority, an
7	9	6	alawite sect. the
8	6	3	alawite faith is
9	5	3	alawite sect in
10	4	2	alawite faith derived
11	4	1	alawite heartland on
12	4	2	alawite minority has
13	4	2	alawite offshoot of
14	4	2	alawite sect derives
15	3	1	alawite heartland overlooking
16	3	3	alawite human rights
17	3	3	alawite minority to
18	3	3	alawite minority's
19	3	3	alawite minority, have
20	3	3	alawite minority. the

Figure 5.24 Three-word lexical clusters for *Alawite*

Alawite is also characterised as an Islam-based faction represented by *sect*, with (73) counts, *faith* (19) and *offshoot* (4). According to Goldsmith, (2015), Alawite is considered the radical branch of the Twelver Shi'ite School. It is also used as a pre-modifier to identify people in official organisations, such as *Alawite human rights campaigners* (3) or governmental forces, e.g., *Alawite led-army* (3) or places such as *Alawite villages* (3).

Thus, based on the patterns of *Shi'ite* and *Alawite* shown above, the following concordance analysis will extract the patterns that provide different lexical associations and hence different representations, as mentioned earlier. The following figure shows the concordance lines of *Shi'ite Islam*, the highest-frequency lexical cluster in Figure 5.23.

Hit	KWIC
1	-century schism between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam, relations have been
2	century rift between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam has fuelled violence

Figure 5.25 Concordances of *Shi'ite Islam*

In the first two lines Shi'ites are constructed as an antagonistic counterpart of Sunnis. The use of *schism*, *rift* and *violence* enhances the sense of division between the two factions. *Shi'ite Islam* is also identified in relation to Alawites. In this context, Reuters' coverage of the clashes between rebels and the government is reported in accordance with the Islamic factional beliefs of the two conflicting sides. The following example is illustrative:

7. Pro-Assad armed groups from the **Shi'ite Muslim** villages of Fua and Kefraya seized four vehicles carrying men and women from the **Sunni Muslim** villages of Saraqeb, Sarmeen and Binnish […]. The rebels come mainly from Syria's **Sunni majority**, while the Alawites follow a faith derived from **Shi'ite Islam** ('A Free Syrian Army Fighter', 2013).

This sort of labelling extends further to identify conflicting Middle East allies. They are categorised into Shi'ite countries supporting Assad's government and Sunni countries backing up rebels against Assad. The following example is indicative of this categorisation:

8. **Saudi Arabia, Qatar** and some others have thrown their support **behind the mostly Sunni Muslim rebels** in Syria, partly to weaken **Shi'ite Iran**, the main regional **ally of Assad,** whose minority **Alawite sect** is distantly derived from **Shi'ite Islam** ('Syrian Opposition Opens', 2013).

The faith scale representation of the Syrian allies in the previous example is evident in the lexical choices used to identify the rebels and Assad's allies.

The anti-government allies, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are depicted as supporting rebels that are mainly *Sunni*. On the other hand, Iran is identified as *Shi'ite* and Assad as belonging to the *Alawite* sect. In the left concordances, lines 9-19, the figure shows a recurrent use of the pattern in *the Alawite faith derived from*, *Alawite sect* and *whose Alawite sect springs from*, which introduce the discourse of sectarianism again and represent the various Shi'ite offshoots as one community. Other supporting lexical patterns include *offshoot of Shi'ite*, *strain of Shi'ite* and *minority linked to Shi'ite*.

The next most frequent lexical cluster associated with Shi'ite is *Shi'ite Iran*. The concordance lines are shown below.

Figure 5.26 Concordances of *Shi'ite Iran*

Both the right and the left concordance lines identified *Shi'ite Iran* in terms of their support of the Assad's government, e.g., *Assad's main regional ally* in line 1 and *backed by* in lines 20-27. Shi'ites are also identified in relation to the Sunni Islamic faction, which gives the sense of a religious-based conflict. Other supporting patterns are *Sunni Muslim Syrian rebels*, *Saudi Arabia* and *sectarian lines* in the remaining concordances. This sort of identification goes along with the previous representation of Shi'ite Islam (Figure 5.25) and reinforces the discourse of sectarianism. Examining *Shi'ite Hezbollah*, *Shi'ite militants* and *Shi'ite militia* in Figure 5.23 reveals a similar representation.

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Shi'ite Hezbollah as an ally, for instance, is characterised by its arms support and fighter supplies to Assad's government as a border power located in Lebanon. It is also introduced as a fatal counterpart against Sunni rebels. *Shi'ite Hezbollah* comes as a pre-modifier to identify a series of lexis denoting people at war, such as *guerrillas*, *militia*, *militants*, *fighters* and *movement*, which are consistently framed as an anti-front against Sunni rebels. Hezbollah is also linked to Shi'ite Iran to represent the local allies of Assad's government. This consistent religious-based identification of the fighters, allies and rebels thematically introduces and reinforce the sectarian dimensions of the Syrian conflict.

Refer back to the lexical clusters of *Alawites*, which is the second keyword denoting the sect of Shi'ite. The figure below shows similar patterns giving a comparable representation to what Shi'ite clusters yield. Taking, for instance, *Alawite sect*, *an*, the concordance lines show the following:

Hit	KWIC
1	himself is from the minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shi'
2	to Assad's own minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shi'
3	supported Assad, including his own Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shi'
4	, a member of the minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shi'
5	to the country's minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shi'
6	dominated by Assad's minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shi'
7	are mostly from Assad's Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shi'
8	housing forces from Assad's Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shi'

Figure 5.27 Concordances of *Alawite sect, an*

The right concordances kept one pattern, *an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam*, embedded as an oppositional phrase to define the Alawite sect in lines 1-8. This pattern holds across the remaining concordances, emphasising the relationship between Alawite and Shi'ite and linking Shi'ite to Islam as previously shown in Shi'ite clusters (see Figure 5.25). The same applies to *Alawite faith* and *Alawite offshoot*.

However, considering the salient lexical cluster, *Alawite minority sect*, Reuters constructs the Alawite minority as the ruling class in Syria, which can be seen from the concordance lines in Figure 5.28 below.

Figure 5.28 Concordances of *Alawite minority sect*

Starting with the left concordance lines, Assad is identified as being an Alawite in line 5. In addition, the possessive noun structure *Assad's* is mainly used as a pre-modifier phrase to identify the Alawite minority. This adjacency between Assad and the minority in lines 2, 3 and 4 grants Alawite minority a sense of power and authority. On the other hand, Reuters refers to the influence of Alawites' violence against the Syrian Sunnis on the Sunni sect in Lebanon. They are constructed as escalating the tension between Sunnis and Shi'ites, which resulted in armed clashes in Tripoli (line 6). In addition, Reuters indexes Alawites as a stimulus for inflaming the civil war in Lebanon for 15 years. This thematic frame characterises the Alawite minority as worsening the sectarian conflict, which denotes a clear negative representation.

So far, the pro-government social actors are identified and the distinctive semantic macrostructures are analysed. The following section is dedicated for the collocational analysis of the two warring sides.

5.3 Collocational Analysis

This part investigates the collocational features of the keywords representing anti and pro-government social actors for the purpose of revealing the discourse prosodies, i.e., the hidden meaning the collocations contextually convey. This type of analysis, according to Heikkinen (as cited in Laviosa, Pagano, Kemppanen & Ji, 2017), is crucial in 'verbalizing ideological meanings. The following subsections investigate the discourse prosodies and the linguistic behavior of the collocates of the key participants in each warring side.

5.3.1 Word Sketch and Discourse Prosodies of the Opposition Side

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the word sketch of anti and pro-government keywords will focus on three grammatical relations: the subject of verbs (s-verb henceforth), object of verbs (o-verb henceforth) and modifiers (adjectives or modifying

nouns). Starting with anti-government keywords, the table below displays the common collocations associated with *rebels*, *opposition*, *Sunni* and *Islamist*.

Table 5.3 Anti-government lexical collocates and grammatical positions (Reuters)

Keywords	Collocates and Grammatical Relations					
	Subject of verbs	**Salience**	**Object of verbs**	**Salience**	**Modifiers**	**Salience**
Rebels	Fight	11.16	Arm	12.14	Syrian	11.17
	Seize	10.51	Help	10.27	Sunni	10.94
	Detonate	9.35	Support	9.86	Muslim	10.27
	Clash	9.16	Back	9.57	Islamist	9.91
	Hang	9.14	Pit	9.51	Anti-Assad	8.75
	Battle	9.04	Accuse	9.49	Moderate	8.61
	Attack	9.00	Push	9.26	Armed	8.08
	Advance	8.98	Train	9.01	Western-backed	7.97
	Capture	8.79	Kill	8.91		
	Push	8.37	Join	8.86		
	Fight	7.75				
	Control	7.50				
	Take	7.20				
	Accuse	6.99				
	Hold	6.98				
	Try	6.73				
Overall score	**47.33**		**25.87**		**34.87**	
Opposition	Accuse	9.34	Help	10.81	Syrian	10.57
	Want	8.90	Support	10.38	Armed	10.30
	Need	8.82	Divide	10.08	Political	9.67
	Blame	8.79	Back	10.07	Civilian	9.53
	Remain	8.68	Arm	9.83	Western backed	8.96
	Postpone	8.63	Strengthen	9.64	Moderate	8.83
	Renew	8.57	Invite	9.39	Sunni-led	8.16
	Hold	8.53	Bolster	9.27	Fractious	8.15
	Take	8.52	Represent	8.82	Mainstream	8.13
	Use	8.22	Recognize	8.59	Fractured	7.94
	Hope	8.22	Accuse	8.57	Non-jihadist	7.93
	Set	8.19	Allow	8.11	Sunni	7.08
	Struggle	7.94	Urge	7.99		
	Do	7.88	Give	7.70		
	Plan	7.86	Lead	7.69		
	Fight	7.76				
Overall score	**17.45**		**11.31**		**23.73**	

Keywords	Collocates and Grammatical Relations					
	Subject of verbs	Salience	Object of verbs	Salience	Modifiers	Salience
Sunnis	Form	9.64	Anger	11.09	Majority	12.05
	Fear	9.20	Pit	10.87	Rich	9.30
	Settle	9.19	Unite	10.07	Bad	9.32
	Inhabit	9.06	Alienate	9.30	Poor	9.19
	Lead	8.83	Execute	8.82	Hardline	9.52
	Give	8.48	Displace	8.04	Radical	7.52
	Join	7.72	Prevent	7.39	Lebanese	7.07
	Live	7.67	Hold	7.29		
	Support	7.34	Urge	7.13		
	Fight	7.12				
	Go	6.97				
	Include	6.80				
	Try	6.67				
	Come	6.66				
Overall score	45.05		29.73		31.53	
Islamist	Dominate	11.57	Elect	9.67	Radical	12.08
	Seize	8.56	Include	8.57	Hardline	11.70
	Hold	8.30	Help	7.95	Moderate	10.24
	Try	8.08			Militant	10.15
	Kill	7.79			Sunni	9.06
	Take	7.63			Independent	8.43
	Fight	7.59				
Overall score	9.75		7.93		21.01	

Threatening power, the colligation of s-verb collocates in the table yields a set of verbs which semantically denote a sense of resistance and power, such as *seize*, *capture*, *battle*, *attack*, *advance*, *clash*, *fight* and so on. Referring back to the semantic macrostructures demonstrated in Section 5.2.1, there is no thematic frame of power where the rebels are introduced. An analysis of the concordances of these collocates reveals the pervasive advance of rebels in the battlefield and the series of conquests they achieved on the ground, which are given a predominantly positive representation. The following examples are indicative of this depiction:

9. **Rebels seized** an **air defence base** near Syria's strategic southern international highway on Saturday, activists said. (Reuters, 446).

10. Rebels **attacked a main highway** in northern Syria on Wednesday, opposition groups said, to try to choke off a major supply line for President Bashar al-Assad's forces in the region. (Reuters, 440)

11. Rebels who now **control many parts of the country** are blamed for similar abuses by rights groups, including torture and harsh punishments imposed by religious courts. (Reuters, 440)

12. **Rebels detonated 60 tonnes of explosives** packed underneath a large Syrian army base, blowing a hillside hundreds of metres (yards) into the air. (Reuters, 445)

Rebels in the previous examples are agentalized and coupled with transactional material verb processes where the patients are places of strategic value, such as *air defence base* and *highway* in examples 9 and 10, or a hugely destructive material, such as *60 tonnes of explosives* in example 12. This sort of representation may reveal an underlying reference to the rebels as a threatening power. According to Teo (2000), the extent to which the social actors are identified as strong or weak is pertinent to the material processes they are allocated to. Examining the concordances shows that rebels are highly activated in relation to reactions which reflect resistance and power.

The discourse prosody of threat is also reinforced by the subject-verb collocates of *Islamists*. As mentioned earlier, the Islamist movement has radical views towards non-Muslims. They are usually linked to Al-Qaeda bases (Cagaptay, 2010). Their jihadist acts exceed the borders of Syria and extend to the Western world. Globally, they are not considered moderate rebels but rather, an armed militia which has a political agenda. Thus, intuitively *Islamists* are represented negatively across the whole corpus. The verb collocates of *Islamists* in the table show material transactional processes, such as *dominate*, *kill*, *fight* and *take*. Although these verb collocates have a great deal in common with those of the rebels, they do not offer the same implications. Considering the Islamists' political background, these collocates pragmatically signify confrontation and hostility. The following examples are representative of this signification:

13. Members of other minorities have been reluctant to do so, **fearing** that a post-Assad Syria could be **dominated by radical Islamists**. (Reuters, 444)

14. The **strength** of **radical Islamists**, nearly three years after popular revolt broke out against Assad**, has caused** Western powers **to hold back** on practical support for the rebels despite endorsing the goal, shared with Sunni Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, of overthrowing the Syrian president. (Reuters, 441)

15. **The United States**, **concerned** by the **rising influence** of **hardline Islamists**, has pressed the Syrian National Coalition to resolve its divisions and bring more liberals into the fold. (Reuters, 446).

The examples show the security threat, which Islamists escalate among the minorities in the places they occupy. Looking at the modifier collocates of Islamists, such as *radical and hardline*, one can visualize an image of violence and terrorism. In example 13, *Islamists* are activated in relation to *dominated*. The use of the pre-modification *radical* also serves to activate the role of extremism in relation to Islamists. The lexical choices used in the examples, such as *fearing*, *strength* and *rising influence*, reveal a distinct discourse **prosody of fear of Islamists or Islamist threats**. This is reinforced, to some extent by the thematic frame of Islamists dominance, which displays high recurrent lexical clusters referencing the Islamists' brigades among the opposition (see Figure 5.6). This sort of identification seems to be ideologically motivated as the causal relation in examples 14 and 15 point out the correlation between ceasing US lethal support to the rebels and the presence of Islamists among rebel fighters.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that transactive verb collocates of *opposition* in the s-verb structure do not involve the common verbs used in war affairs, which semantically denote conflict except for *fight*. In contrast with the *rebels'* and *Islamists'* collocates, which include verbs like *kill*, *detonate*, *battle*, *fight*, *seize* and the like describing forceful actions of war. The verb collocates used are *postpone*, *hold*, *use*, *set* and *plan*, with the high log-dice score ranging between 8.63 and 7.86. This sort of collocates could be attributed to the role of the *opposition* as a representative political body for the Syrian rebels. Therefore, the table shows verbal process collocates in the s-verb structure, such as *accuse* and *blame*, which hold government forces responsible for the criminal acts, as the examples below indicate.

16. Syria's opposition **accuses government forces** of **gassing** hundreds of people by firing rockets that released deadly fumes over rebel-held Damascus suburbs, **killing** men, women and children as they slept. (Reuters, 448).

17. The opposition **accuses** President Bashar al-Assad's forces **of firing rockets** before dawn on Wednesday loaded which poison gas in the midst of a fierce offensive on the rebel-held suburbs that ring the capital. (Reuters, 447).

18. The opposition has **blamed President Bashar al-Assad's forces** for that **strike** and also wants the **UN team** to look into other alleged chemical attacks by the government. (Reuters, 448).

The use of *accuse* and *blame* in the previous examples serves to background the involvement of the opposition in the crises of gas attack and the mass destruction of the country. This representation is ideologically motivated as it positively represents the opposition while activating the role of the government forces in the crime of gassing civilians. The call for an authoritative source, the UN team, in example 18 enhances the credibility of the opposition claim. This set of recurrent verbal processes, with high log-dice scores of 9.43 and 8.79, established a causal relation between the government forces and the atrocities conducted against civilians. Such a representation implies **a discourse prosody of Syrian government's war crimes**.

The table also shows a number of cognitive processes allocated to *opposition*, such as *want*, *need* and *hope*.

19. The **opposition wants** to focus on forming a transitional government which it insists must not include Assad. (Reuters, 441)

20. The agreement, from which the United States hopes a wider political settlement can emerge, has reduced the likelihood of a US strike on Assad's forces that the **opposition had hoped** would weaken him militarily and force him to attend a planned new peace conference. (Reuters, 443).

The previous example uses the cognitive process *want* which semantically denotes the participant's firm intention. This verb is used to demonstrate the opposition's stance against Assad in establishing a new elected government, where Assad is excluded, in example 19. The cognitive processes in example 20, *hoped*, also serves to highlight the opposition's standpoint in relation to the US military plan against Assad. Both the verbal and the cognitive processes in the s-verb collocation foreground a positive discourse prosody referencing **the strong political presence of the opposition** on the

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international level. This implication is reinforced by the other set of s-verb collocations, which report the opposition progress on the political level, such as *held* talks in Moscow, *takes* further ground, overrunning military bases and *elected* a new leader. The s-verb colligation shows a positive representation of opposition in contrast with Islamists, who are also considered an anti-government SA.

Looking at the modifier colligation, which represents one of the most key markers of positive and negative representation as the node word is described in terms of bad or good attributes. Table 5.3 shows that *rebels*, *opposition* and *Sunni* are classified into five main categories. The first category, nationality, such as *Syrian* and *Lebanese*, scored (11.17 and 7.07). The second category, included religious offshoots, such as *Sunni-led* (8.16), and *Sunni* (7.08). Sunnis are also identified in relation to their population as in *majority* (12.05). The third category, social status, as in *poor* and *rich*, scored (9.30 and 9.19) respectively. The fourth category is relation or relational identification adopting van Leeuwen's terms (2008), as in *Western-backed* scoring (7.97). The fifth category is evaluation, as in *moderate* (8.61), *fractious* (8.15), *fractured* (7.94) and *bad* (9.32). Examining the concordances reveal some references.

21. Clashes between government forces and allied militia and a range of insurgents which include al Qaeda's Syria wing Nusra Front, Islamist brigades, foreign fighters and **Western-backed rebels.** (Reuters, 442).

22. At least 70,000 people have been killed in the civil war, which is increasingly pitting **majority Sunnis** against the **minority Alawites**, who have controlled Syria since the 1960s. (Reuters, 448).

23. 'There are **no good Sunnis**. There are **only the bad Sunnis**, who don't carry weapons, and the **worst Sunnis**, who do,' said a fighter from the valley who called himself Johnny. (Reuters, 443).

In example 21, *rebels* as a fighting group is placed adjacent to different types of anti-Assad fighters, such as *Nusra Front*, *Islamist brigades* and *foreign fighters*. However, rebels are identified in relation to the West, including the US, as a major ally. Van Leeuwen (2008) emphasises the importance of lexical choices in identifying social actors as they may

establish or uncover an ideological reference. Rebels, for instance, in this particular context could have been identified in terms of Syrian nationality or the Islamic Sunni faction, as commonly identified by Reuters. However, the news agency's choice of *Western-backed* collocation is ideologically significant scoring (7.97). It implicitly foregrounds the incomparable power of rebels in relation to the different anti-Assad's armed groups. This, in turn, emphasises the political weight in making decision and provokes a sense of a challenge among rival groups. Such representation reinforces, to a great extent, the discourse prosody of rebels as threatening power discussed earlier.

In addition, the awful suppression against majority Sunnis is highlighted in example 22. The numerical reference to the death toll among Sunnis caused by the Alawites minority depict them as being victims of a brutal regime. This representation is backed up by the *good* and *bad* collocates, which show to what extent the loyal regime minorities possess a very negative attitude towards the Sunni majority. Other supporting collocates are the s-verb *fear*, *settle*, *live* and *inhabit* that depict Sunnis as a persecuted majority who *fear* the expansion of Shi'ites along the Sunnis' *inhabited* places and who always seek other places to *settle* in. This sort of representation denotes a discourse prosody of **the government's political racism**. It also functions as a legitimization for the neighbourhood interference along with the Sunni rebels.

The concept of division among the opposition is frequently raised. The collocations *fractious* and *fractured* and the v-object colligation *strengthen* show a clear negative representation of the opposition, presenting them as an unorganized and unsettled body due to the struggle among the different armed groups. This issue is highly important as it determines receipt of the international aid and facilitates the Western offer of lethal support for the rebels. Pragmatically, the correlation between the opposition division and the allies' supports serves to enhance the dangers of the division's consequences.

It is worth noting that Islamists and the opposition recall different modifying collocates, as Table 5.3 shows. While Islamists are modified as *radical*, with the log-dice score of (12.08), *hardline* (11.70) and *militant*

(10.15), the opposition, on the contrary, is modified as *Syrian* and scored as (10.57), *political* (9.67), *civilian* (9.53) and *non-jihadist* (7.93). These lexical choices play a vital role in constructing realities. According to Wenden (2005), they have an impact on people's perception of the world. For instance, both *Islamists* and *opposition* are described as *moderate*, and examining the concordance analysis reveals that *Islamists* are categorised into radical Islamists, who antagonize Western powers and moderate Islamists, who are the only participants acknowledged by the Opposition to participate in the political issues. The following excerpts provide representative examples of this categorisation:

24. The opposition Syrian National Coalition **elected a moderate Islamist as provisional prime minister** on Saturday, hoping to avoid being side lined as world powers renew diplomatic efforts to end the civil war. (Reuters, 446).

25. 'The United States is committed to building the capacity of **the moderate opposition**, including through the provision of assistance to vetted members of the moderate armed opposition,' she said, the National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan. (Reuters, 445).

26. **The United States** is gaining more insight into **Syria's moderate opposition** but must watch carefully to determine when occasional collaboration with Islamist radicals might turn into real alliances, the top US military officer said on Monday. (Reuters, 448).

27. Clashes broke out last week between a faction linked to al Qaeda and more **moderate Islamists** and Free Syrian Army fighters in Tumhe's Deir al-Zor province bordering Iraq, according to opposition sources. (Reuters, 449).

The previous examples set *moderate Islamists* and *opposition* on the same line as a homogeneous camp. In example 24, *moderate Islamists* are participating in the political formation of the Syrian National Coalition, which is the representative political coalition of the Syrian opposition. Example 27 points out, however, that *moderate Islamists* are no longer linked to Al-Qaeda, which has always been the main military and ideological base of radical Islamists. The concept of *moderate Islamists* is also emphasised in other colligations, e.g., *elect* in the object-verb frame and *independent* in the

modifier frame. This representation enhances a good discourse prosody of moderate Islamists, denoting the sense of an ideological system in the selection process of the opposition's representatives.

Generally speaking, Islamists are dichotomised into two distinct ideological parties: the extremists and the moderates (Emerson et al, 2009). The extremist Islamists, he argues, usually hold intimidating views, which instigates turmoil to overcome the situation or to change it. The second group possesses a more moderate attitude and commits to the political processes. Therefore, in Reuters reports, Islamists are always identified in terms of radicalism or non-radicalism, as the o-verb collocates indicate in the following examples:

> 28. Assad is battling a two-year-old uprising in which rebel forces**, including radical Islamists**, have taken swathes of rural territory and attacked army posts near the Golan frontier. (Reuters, 440)
> 29. Russia's foreign minister said on Wednesday that efforts to isolate one side in the conflict would wreck the chances of a negotiated solution and **help militant Islamists**. (Reuters, 440).

Contextually, the two previous examples imply a warning tone. In example 28, all the anti-government fighters are given one umbrella identification term, *rebel forces*. However, Islamists are excluded. The o-verb collocation *include* serves to reference a more specific type of rebels, the *radical Islamists*. The same applies to example 29, where Russia is reluctant to maintain the plan as this would risk the negotiation and *help militant Islamists*. The two examples activated *Islamists* using the qualifying adjectives *radical* and *militant*. This representation supports the negative discourse prosody of the Islamist danger.

Moderate opposition, on the other hand, always recalls the support of the *US*, as examples 25 and 26 show. The extended concordance lines show a strong word-use relation between *moderate* and *United States* support. This kind of correlation creates a sense of priming the reader in that the existence of one word entails a reference to the other. Reuters strongly emphasises the concept of moderates (rebels/ opposition/ Islamists).

The o-verb colligations show a common set of verb collocates between *rebels* and *opposition*, such as *arm*, *help*, *support*, *bolster* and *back*, with all scoring above 9, a high log-dice score demonstrating a preference for the concept of international support. The collocates' references conform to the thematic frame of Western-Arab support discussed earlier (see the semantic macrostructure in Section 5.2.1.1). However, this set of semantically related collocates not only references the rebels' needs for support but foregrounds **a positive discourse prosody of the massive power behind rebels** and their huge international support in terms of aid, arms and training that global super powers provide. On the other hand, the o-verb collocations of Sunnis show a totally different set of verb collocates. *Sunnis* are passivized as undergoing suppressive actions by the government, such as *alienate* scoring (9.30), *execute* (8.82), *displace* (8.04), *anger* (11.09) and *prevent* (7.39). The following examples are representative of this passivized frame:

30. Meanwhile, Lebanese **Shi'ite militant** group Hezbollah and **Shi'ite militias** from Iraq have sent men to fight alongside **Assad's forces**, **angering Sunnis** across the region. (Reuters, 448).

31. Hamada, the Islamic law scholar, claimed Iran had set up Shi'ite centres with government help on what he called Sunni land and **prevented Sunnis** from studying their religion. (Reuters, 443).

32. The protests were met by bullets, sparking an armed uprising that turned into a civil war mainly **pitting majority Sunnis** against the Alawite sect, which has controlled Syria since the 1960s. (Reuters, 449).

The previous examples activate the Shi'ites and Assad forces in relation to various oppressive actions. In example 31, for instance, the religious discrimination is evident in the government's act of preventing Sunnis from practicing and learning their Islamic teachings. Sunnis are passivated in example 30 and 32 as experiencing the criminal actions of Assad's forces and his ally, Shi'ite Hezbollah. The keyword *Sunni* seems to serve as a stimulus triggering all aspects of the schism's actions. The following collocational extracts are supporting: *Sunnis are executed*, *Iran-backed Hezbollah … have alienated many Sunnis in the region* and *Sunnis are displaced*. This sectarian-based representation of Sunni SAs does invoke a negative attitude, backing up the **political racism** discourse prosody.

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5.3.2 Word Sketch and Discourse Prosodies of the Government Side

The next set of collocational analysis is the pro-government lexical collocations represented in *Assad*, *Shi'ites* and *Alawite*. the analysis excludes the first name, *Bashar*, and the term of address, *President*, as they are highly coupled with *Assad* (see Section 6.2.3). Thus, to avoid repetition, the following table will focus on the three previously mentioned lexis, *Assad*, *Shi'ites* and *Alawite*.

Table 5.4 Pro-government lexical collocates and grammatical positions
(Reuters)

Keywords	Collocates and Grammatical Relations					
	Subject of verbs	**Salience**	**Object of verbs**	**Salience**	**Modified by Assad**	**Salience**
	Make	9.23	Topple	11.38	President	9.06
	Loose	9.16	Overthrow	10.38	Bashar	8.05
	Tell	8.63	Support	10.06		
	Belong	8.24	Back	9.67		
	Try	8.21	Help	9.65		
	Use	8.19	Remove	9.46		
	Fall	8.08	Oust	9.36		
	Refuse	8.00	Force	9.06		
Assad	Face	7.93	Shield	8.96		
	Warn	7.91	Quote	8.90		
	Deny	7.86	Insist	8.82		
	Control	7.64	Punish	8.79		
	Play	7.48	Offer	8.78		
	Send	7.42	Accuse	8.77		
			Want	8.71		
			Believe	8.58		
			Urge	8.19		
			Oppose	8.13		
			Defeat	8.08		
			Allow	8.07		
Overall score	19.90		16.57		7.16	
	Back	11.23	Deepen	10.21	Lebanese	11,59
	Bankroll	11.04	Weaken	9.89	Iraqi	10.92
Shi'ite	Support	8.50	Target	9.86	Iranian-backed	9.72
			Protect	9.48	Powerful	9.56
			Recruit	8.58	Militant	9.15
			Condemn	8.28	Hezbollah	8.65
			Destroy	8.05	Regional	8.57

			Kill	7.72	Iran-backed	8.13
			Seize	7.37	Pro-Assad	7.65
					Minority	7.42
					Foreign	7.24
Overall score	3.28		12.99		25.54	
Alawite	Support	9.14	-	-	Prominent	10.02
			-	-		
			-	-		
Overall score	5.45		-		3.08	

Most of the s-verb collocates of Assad are material processes that highlight the responsibility of *Assad* in relation to his actions. Table 5.4 shows *Assad* as an agent collocated with verbs, which semantically denote the collapse of his government, such as *fall* and *lose*. Verbal collocates are also present in the table, such as *warn*, that convey a sense of power and threat. The following examples are representative of this tone:

33. **Assad has lost** control of large swathes of **northern and eastern Syria** to Islamist rebels and foreign jihadists. (Reuters, 445).

34. The US military has also completed planning for going into Syria and securing its chemical weapons under different scenarios, including one in which **Assad falls from power** and his forces disintegrate, leaving **weapons sites vulnerable to pillaging**. (Reuters, 443).

35. Last week, **Assad warned Jordan** it would be playing with fire by supporting the rebels, saying the Western-backed kingdom was just as **vulnerable** as his country to **al Qaeda militants**. (Reuters, 448).

These collocational patterns include implied references. A closer look at the concordances of *Assad-lose* collocate, for instance, reveals a negative discourse prosody denoting the **dreadful consequences of Assad's government end**. In example 33, the eastern and northern regions are foregrounded. Specifying these two parts of Syria is ideological, as the eastern regions are where most of the crude oil reservoirs existed, and the Syrian opposition and the government are struggling to regain control of 'two kinds of territories, these of strategic values … and these having symbolic value' (Naumescu 2014, p.449). Moreover, Syria is considered to be the sole

country producing crude oil among Arab countries on the East Mediterranean belt, including Palestine, Jordon and Lebanon, based on the Oil and Gas Journal ("The Syrian Energy", 2013). Thus, the example indirectly shows the instability of the government's state as it is losing power sources.

Supporting this point is the *Assad-fall* collocate in example 34. The concordances show a sort of cause and effect relation in this pattern. The fall of Assad as a cause will lead to a series of consequences, among them chemical weapons looting by Islamists, building up the Islamic caliphate and a prolonged conflict between different ethnicities and sects. Therefore, *Assad's fall*, to some extent, primes readers for the concept of Islamists' terrorism. The verbal collocate *warn* in example 35 may also support this meaning. The verbiage emphasises the danger of supporting militants. The qualifier *vulnerable* is activated in relation to both Syria and Jordon while *al Qaeda* is foregrounded as causing hazard. The whole context shows a negative discourse prosody, implying **political escalation.**

The other set of verbal collocates is *deny* and *refuse*. All are framed in the political negotiation of Assad stepping down from the government and the accusations of chemical attack. The following examples are indicative of this framing:

36. The original drive for a political solution to the conflict, dubbed the 'Geneva' plan and calling for a transitional government with full power, went nowhere as **Assad refused to cede power**, and the opposition insisted that he could not be a part of any new political order in the country. (Reuters, 446).
37. **Assad denies** responsibility for the **gas attacks**, which hit rebel-held district. (Reuters, 446).

Semantically, the verbal processes *refuse* and *deny* denote a sense of negation and rebuff. The verb collocate *refuse* in example 36 shows, again, a causal relation between Assad's refusal to resign and the lack of a political solution. The concordances show that Assad's refusal reaction is motivated by international legal actions, such as the sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime or the calls for peace talks. More examples display Assad's refusal to politically discuss the end of his forces' violence as well as rejecting to allow the UN team check sites for chemical weapons. This negative representation

is supported by the verbal collocate *deny*, which again recalls the crises of chemical attacks referenced in example 37. This collocate serves to bewilder the agency of gassing civilians by refuting the attack claim. Identifying Assad in relation to his attitude in the international negotiations has an ideological function, as this negative representation may serve to legitimize Western interference to support rebels against Assad.

The next verb collocates *face* and *play* serve to reinforce the discourse prosody of **Assad's vulnerability**, along with *fall*, *lose* and *deny*, as previously mentioned. The concordances of *face* show a recurrent pattern denoting suffocating political situations, for instance, Assad is facing: political pressure to step down from the government, challenges to maintain his reign, revolt against him and so on. *Play*, on the other hand, emphasises the non-existent role of Assad in the political scene.

38. Combined with a steady fight back in the southern province of Deraa, it highlights **the challenge Assad faces** in trying to restore his authority across Syria. (Reuters, 448).

39. The opposition wants the talks in Switzerland to create a transitional authority for Syria in which **Assad plays no role**, but his government says it will not surrender power and that the president will remain in control. (Reuters, 445).

In the previous examples, Assad is collocated with actions, which has no material effect. *Face* and *play* in examples 38 and 39 relate Assad to the abstractions of *challenges* and *no role*, while the opposition is foregrounded as a dynamic agent in example 39. On the other hand, the verb collocate *try* is associated with a set of non-finite clauses, which overtly represent a pattern of extreme violence against the civilians protesting him, such as *tried to*: *crush the revolt*, *smash street protest* and *tighten his grip on*. These transactive verbs activate Assad's agency in relation to the criminal acts against uprising marches and the rebels demands for reform. The verb collocates *use* and *send* are reinforcing in the following examples:

40. Sunni militant groups have risen to the fore of the rebel movement over the past year, which **Assad has used** to justify his long-held accusations that the revolt is a 'terrorist' plot. (Reuters, 446).

41. **Assad has sent** reinforcements to the northern city of Aleppo, much of which has been in rebel hands for a year. (Reuters, 448).

The concordances *use* and *send* foreground the atrocities against rebels and civilians in examples like *Assad used: tanks*, *weapons*, *troops and chemical weapons* on the one hand, *and Assad send: air forces* and *reinforcements*, on the other. However, the verb *use* in example 40 conveys a sense of satire. It shows the label Assad uses to identify the rebels as *terrorists*, which serves to legitimize the army's violence against them. Both *use* and *send* provide a negative representation of Assad and reinforce the **discourse prosody of Assad's force criminals**.

On the other hand, the non-transactive verb collocate *belong* serves to identify Assad in terms of his Islamic faction. The concordances of this collocate show an emphasis on those who are loyal to Assad belonging to the Shi'ite group and those who are against Assad identified as Sunnis. The modifier collocate of *president and Bashar* represent a common strategy of identification for Assad, as the following examples indicate:

42. […] tensions between the **Sunni Muslim majority** that has led the uprising and the **Alawite minority** to which **Assad belongs**. (Reuters, 446).

43. Ban was 'disappointed that the speech by **President Bashar al Assad** on 6 January does not contribute to a solution that could end the terrible suffering of the Syrian people,' UN spokesman Martin Nesirky said of the president's Sunday speech at the Damascus Opera House. (Reuters, 448).

The previous examples show three different strategies used in identifying Al-Assad. The first is classification represented by *Alawite*, which is used to categorise a person in terms of his ethnicity, religion, age or gender van Leeuwen's (2008). The second is nomination, e.g., *Bashar* and the third is categorization, where a person is identified in terms of the role one practices, such as *President* in example 43 (van Leeuwen, 2008). *Alawite*, for instance in example 42, shows that sectarian offshoot is a major sign for Al-Assad in this conflict, yielding a high log-dice score 8.24. The concordances show that sectarian-based identification is further used to modify the affiliated countries backing Al-Assad and those regional powers backing the rebels. This

recurrent pattern highlights the role of sectarianism in rousing the conflict and foregrounds the discourse prosody of **Al-Assad's racist attitude against his Sunni people**. A concluding remark of the Assad s-verb colligation shows that Assad is depicted as a passive actor who tries to block any attempt to halt the war or quit the rule.

However, Assad is explicitly affected as a participant in the v-object collocations. Table 5.4 above displays a set of material processes denoting a coup against Assad, such as *topple*, *overthrow*, *remove* and *oust*, and the other set shows antagonism and combativeness, as in *fight*, *force*, *punish*, *accuse*, *pressure* and *defeat*.

44. US President Barack Obama decided a week ago to provide military aid to rebels trying to **overthrow Assad**, citing use of chemical weapons by government forces. (Reuters, 443).
45. But President Vladimir Putin's Middle East affairs envoy was quoted as saying in December that the rebels could **defeat Assad** and that **Russia** was preparing **evacuation plans.** (Reuters, 443).
46. Western powers are preparing for a possible attack against Syria to **punish Assad for alleged poison gas attacks against civilians**. (Reuters, 440).

Based on these concordance lines, the causal relations, which correlate Assad as a participant to the sets of verbs identified above, express the consequences of the war crimes committed by the government forces. Example 44 and 46, for instance, activate Assad as an agent of gassing civilians who brings about the reactions of overthrowing and punishing. The verb *defeat* in example 45 reveals the government's critical situation being reinforced by the noun phrase *evacuation plans*, which expresses the Russia's attempt to rescue Assad.

In the *Shi'ite* and *Alawite* collocations, the s-verb structure have depicted them as backers of the Syrian government either financially or through the provision of arms and fighters, e.g., *back*, *bankroll* and *support*. The patients of these transactional verbs are Assad and government's fighters. The collocates give them a positive representation and show the sectarian-based loyalty to the regime. However, the discourse prosody of the **danger of**

widening the sectarian cleft is emphasised in the v-object collocate set, such as *deepen*, *weaken* and *target*, as the following examples indicate:

47. With the minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam, dominating power in Syria, **the conflict has deepened the Shi'ite-Sunni divide** in the Middle East. (Reuters, 440).
48. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and some others have thrown their support behind the mostly Sunni Muslim rebels in Syria, partly to **weaken Shi'ite Iran**, the main regional ally of Assad. (Reuters, 440).
49. Syrian rebels threaten **to target Shi'ite villages in Aleppo.** (Reuters, 448).
50. Egypt's most senior Muslim cleric, a leading voice of mainstream Sunni Islam across the Middle East, has **condemned Shi'ites for engaging in 'hateful sectarian strife' in Syria**. (Reuters, 440).

The examples above show one concept, clearly denoting the Sunni-Shi'ite struggle in the area. The Shi'ites are constructed as a patient undergoing the challenge of the counter Sunni countries aiming to weaken them by supporting rebels in example 48. Shi'ite villages are passivized as undergoing a threat from Syrian rebels in example 49. Shi'ites are depicted as the cause of the Shi'ite-Sunni cleft in examples 47 and 50. They are controlling the power of the country while being the minority and engaging in conflict that serves to deepen the gap between the two sects. The remaining collocates, *protect*, *recruit*, *destroy*, *kill* and *seize*, all support the same concept. The concordance lines show that forces are *recruiting* Shi'ites to form armed units fighting against Sunni rebels, while the Sunni rebels are fighting them back, *killing Shi'ites* in different provinces. So, all the v-object collocates depict an image of a reciprocal dispute and fight between Sunnis and Shi'ites, which contributes to the overall negative representation of Shi'ites as a minority dominating the group in power.

The set of modifier colligations displays a few collocates, which foreground a number of ethnic-based attributes that serve to characterise Shi'ites. They are identified as *Lebanese*, *Iranian-backed*, *Iran-backed* and *Hezbollah*. Lebanese Shi'ites and Iran-backed Shi'ites represent the two regional supporters of Assad. Hezbollah is the political and military base of Lebanese Shi'ites.

5.4 Summary

So far, this chapter has examined the salient keywords, which characterize Reuters' representation of the anti-and pro-government social actors. It explored their semantic macrostructures and discourse prosodies across the analysis of the lexical clusters and collocational patterns of the keywords referring to the two warring sides. Exploring theses corpus linguistic features and their socio-semantic relations is meant to address the first and second research questions of the study.

Reuters' representation of the anti-government social actors is characterized by using neutral key words, which do not show any prejudices towards or against the represented participants. Reuters generally uses the names that are globally recognized for each armed group (see Sections 5.2.1.1; 5.2.1.2; 5.2.2.1; 5.2.2.2 and the word sketch for Assad in Table 5.4.). Accordingly, it identified the armed protestors as rebels, whereas the political body representing them as the Opposition and used the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to reference the Opposition's official force. Moreover, Reuters indexed Islamists, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra as radical armed groups that do not belong to the moderate opposition side, however, they are constructed as anti-government fighters who are fighting along with the moderate rebels when there are shared interests. Therefore, Reuters' construction of the anti-government fighters reflects a heterogeneous collection of armed groups that cannot be indexed collectively. Thematically, Reuters introduced the anti-government fighters in two prevailing themes: the sectarian conflict and the West-Arab support.

On the other hand, the collocational analysis revealed Reuters' acute characterization of the armed groups, which was demonstrated throughout the colligational patterns used to represent each armed group. The analysis, for instance, revealed the positive representation of the rebels and Sunnis who were constructed predominately in the subject-verb relation with log dice scores of 47.33 and 45.05 respectively. This means that the rebels and Sunnis were mainly identified in terms of their actions, which reflect a firm resistance against the government and enhance the discourse prosody of

threatening power. Contrary to the representation of rebels, the opposition and Islamists were more identified in the modifier colligation scoring 23.73 and 21.01 respectively. The sets of modifier patterns were used to characterize the moderate and radical views of each party.

Along the same line, the representation of the government social actors showed no attitudinal stance against the government. The president, the government and the political figures were all identified in terms of their own names or political status. However, Reuters uncovered the sectarian difference between the president's faction and the rebels'. Therefore, thematically, Assad was framed within the concept of Alawites' sovereignty. Similarly, the government was introduced in relation to its Shi'ite allies, which broadened the thematic frame of sectarianism. However, the army was represented within the semantic macro-structure of violence and human rights' violation, which emphasized the army's use of chemical weapons.

With regard to the collocational analysis, the findings revealed the negative discourse prosodies associated with the key participants of the government. Assad and his Alawite minority were more represented in relation to their actions. Assad, for instance, was agentialized in relation to the verbal processes that served to escalate the political tension in the region such as refusing to attend the peace talk, refusing to negotiate with opposition and refusing to allow the UN inspectors in. Thus, Assad's subject-v patterns enhanced the negative discourse prosody of political escalation and the racism against the Sunnis. However, Alawites' and Shi'ites' subject-v patterns are more pertinent to the local allies' support to the Assad's government and enhancing the cleft between the two different factions. Finally, the modifier collocates of both Alawite and Shi'ites are used to construct their ethnic minorities. Having, investigated the micro linguistic features of Reuters' corpus, the following chapter will analyse the data at the macro level within the paradigm of critical discourse analysis.

CHAPTER SIX

Part I

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF CHEMICAL ATTACK REPORTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the news coverage of chemical attack incidents reported via the Fars and Reuters news agencies. The selected samples are informed by the corpus-based linguistic outcomes surveyed in the following sections. The aim of this chapter is to investigate whether and to what extent media bias exists in these reports on the crisis caused by chemical attacks in Syria. However, the analysis conducted in this chapter is qualitative and undertaken within the paradigm of critical discourse analysis, utilising an eclectic model, which comprises van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic model, the transitivity model (1994) and van Dijk's Ideological Square (1998).

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part I addresses a selected sample of Fars news reports, while Part II deals with Reuters reports. The analyses in each part are divided according to the analytical framework used. The following sub-sections further define the context of the events under investigation. Section 6.1.1 introduces reflections on the corpus-based linguistic analysis, which guided the process of topic selection and the downsizing of the sample. Accordingly, Section 6.1.2 defines the context of the selected sample.

6.1.1 CL Insights

The previous chapters presented analyses of the linguistic manifestations of news discourse at the micro-linguistic level to trace the ideological implications encoded throughout the lexical choices, semantic macrostructures and collocational patterns, which yielded various representations of the two conflicting sides. These results are utilised in this chapter to map out the reports of chief incidents for a closer CDA analysis for the purpose of downsampling (see Baker et al, 2008 and Mautner, 2007).

Starting with Reuters, the corpus linguistic analysis is closely focused on the chemical attack issue. The focus was revealed initially by the Word List output, where *weapons* was one of the top 10 most frequently used lexical items in Reuters (see Table 5.1 in the previous chapter). In addition, *chemical* appeared as the ninth most common keyword and had a high keyness score (see Table 6.2). The discourse relating to the chemical attacks was heavily elaborated afterwards throughout the lexical clusters and collocational patterns. It (the chemical attack) is a basic semantic macrostructure, which thematically introduced both the government and the opposition (see Tables 5.3 and 5.4 and the analysis of Figures 5.3, 5.22 and 5.24). It is also used to represent the discourse

prosodies of Syrian government war crimes and the political escalation discussed in the collocational analysis (see examples. 44-46). However, the keywords lists of Fars and Reuters reports in Table 6.1 below reveal a complete absence of any mention of the chemical attacks by Fars:

Table 6.1. Top 10 keywords used in Fars and Reuters reports

Rank	Fars	Reuters
1	Terrorists	Assad
2	Army	Rebels
3	Militants	Rebel
4	ISIL	Opposition
5	Countryside	Shi'ite
6	Takfiri	United
7	Terrorist	Sunni
8	Province	Islamist
9	Destroyed	Chemical
10	Groups	Civil

Table 6.1 above shows a set of lexis denoting the pro- and anti-government SAs, which are expected to be the two warring sides involved in the revolution. Nevertheless, the Fars keywords do not include any reference to the chemical attacks. This does not mean that Fars agency did not release reports about the chemical attacks, but rather indicates that such incidents were not among its foci.

Hall (1970) argued that news selection is inherently prejudiced: It is subject to a preconstructed image of the audience and society and is commonly motivated by a specific ideology. In addition, Baker (2006, p. 92) pointed out that the absence and the presence of a linguistic pattern might reveal the 'ideological stance' behind it, and Van Dijk (2001) argued that 'theoretically omission is only a relevant property of a discourse when it can be shown that the omitted information is the part of mental model' (p. 106). It is also worth mentioning that the Fars Word List did not include any reference to *chemical* or *weapons*, though chemical attacks are a major issue which has attracted a considerable media attention worldwide since the late 2012 when the first chemical weapons use in Syria was reported (The Independent, 2017). The act of marginalising an event, Fowler (1991) stated, is not neutral; he argued that the press and other types

of media process ideas and incidents through fully saturated news values which implicitly reflect their perspective.

6.1.2 The Chronology of the Chemical Attacks

Considering the political and the social context in CDA is very important in revealing ideology and understanding the underlying discourse (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). This section, therefore, sets the scene of the chemical attacks in Syria. The survey gives a brief account of the dates of the chemical attacks, the areas hit, the areas to which the warring parties belong and the reports released about Assad's involvement.

According to a report published by the Arms Control Association (2018), Syria sustained 11 chemical attacks between the beginning of the revolution in 2011 and 2018; seven of these occurred within the time limit of the study, between 2013 and 2015. The time line of these incidents is displayed in Table 6.2 below:

Table 6.2 Timeline of Chemical Attacks between 2013 and 2015

NO.	Date	Area(s) Hit	Controlled by
1	March 19, 2013	The Khan al-Assal and al-Atebeh	Opposition
2	March 24, 2013	Adra	Government
3	April 13, 2013	Aleppo and Sheik Maqsood	Opposition
4	April 29, 2013	Saraqeb	Opposition
5	August 21, 2013	Ghouta, Ein Tarma, Zamalka and Muadhammiya	Opposition
6	April 11, 2014	Kafr Zita	Opposition
7	March 16, 2015	Idlib, Qmenas	Opposition

According to Kawashima (2018), the death tolls of such attacks range from the hundreds to several thousand; the majority of casualties are non-combatant civilians, children and women. These chemical attacks have caused a series of international responses and repercussions. The United States, France and the United Kingdom called for an urgent UN investigation to the alleged gas attacks. Then, in March 2013, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the mission to investigate the areas hit by the chemical weapons in corporation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). However, Syria refused the UN plan on the basis of the proposed areas and scope. The matter was then stalled for four months until another chemical attack occurred in August, despite huge international community pressure and the United States' decision to engage in military

action in Syria. The government finally gave permission to the UN to conduct an investigation while denying the use of any chemical weapons.

According to *BBC News*, a number of reports were released in August and early September 2013 by the UK Joint Intelligence Committee, the White House and France confirming that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons against civilians. On September 16, 2013, Ban Ki-moon declared that sarin nerve gas has been used in large areas. The report was supported by sample evidence from the affected areas ('Syria chemical "attack": What we know', 2018). The OPCW released another report stating that chlorine gas had been used in previous attacks. Neither the UN nor the OPCW made any reference to who was responsible for these chemical attacks. However, John Kirby commented that the use of aircraft to launch chemical bombs pointed strongly to the Syrian regime as the perpetrator (Kawashima, 2018).

These successive chemical attacks and the involvement of the international community show the global effect and scope of this incident, which in turn explains why the chemical attack became the nodal discourse in Reuters. Therefore, the following sections present a detailed analysis about the construction of chemical attacks in relation to the social actors and their actions in the two sets of selected samples.

Part II

Fars Representation of Chemical Attacks

6.2 Introduction

Focusing on the Fars news agency, this section is structured as follows. It starts with an exploration of the transitivity choices used in the headlines. The body of the reports in terms of the representational choices used to depict the anti- and pro-government social actors is then analysed. Finally, the transitivity processes of each party and the roles of participants as they are commonly framed within are examined. Throughout the analysis, the ideological traits manifested in the dichotomous representation of the in-group (positive) and the out-group (negative) are elucidated.

6.2.1 Transitivity selections in Fars headlines

Because headlines have 'the capacity to encapsulate the story' (Reah, 1998, p. 14), starting this analysis with them shows the extent to which they reflected the chemical attack issue at the time of the crisis. The analysis presented below explores two semantic aspects: the transitivity choices and the roles allocated to the participants in the headlines. Table 6.3 below displays the reports' headlines along with their transitivity selections (processes and constructions, including participants).

Table 6.3 Transitivity choices in Fars headlines

No.	Headlines	Participants	Roles	Process	Type of processes	Construction
1	Hersh: Turkey Behind Sarin Attack in Syria	Turkey	Carrier	(Is) implicit	Relational	Active
		Behind the Sarin Attack	Attribute			
2	Army Makes Major Advances in Eastern Ghouta	Army	Actor	Makes	Material	Active
		Advances	Goal			
3	Army Regains Control of Strategic Town in Ghouta	Army	Actor	Regains	Material	Active
		Control of strategic town	Goal			

4	Deputy Leader of Syrian Journalists' Union: Iraqi Plants Producing Chemical Arms for Rebels	Iraqi Plants	Actor	Produces	Material	Active
		Rebels	Beneficiary			
		Chemical arms	Goal			
5	Sources: Terrorists in Syria Receive Cargo of Chemical Substances	Terrorists	Beneficiary	Receives	Material	Active
		Cargo of chemical substances	Goal			

Starting with the participants, the headlines fail to mention the Syrian government, despite the fact that the Assad regime stands accused of using chemical weapons by the whole of the international community. On the other hand, *Turkey* was represented as a carrier or, syntactically speaking, a subject of a sarin attack in the first headline. The omission of a copula verb is a type of elliptical technique used for economy (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Thus, the recovered structure of the headline is 'Hersh: Turkey *is* behind Sarin Attack in Syria', where the preposition *behind* denotes responsibility. In addition, *Iraqi Plants* is given the actor role in providing the rebels with chemical arms in the fourth headline. However, the chemical attack is completely excluded in headlines 2 ('Army Makes Major Advances in Eastern Ghouta') and 3 ('Army Regains Control of Strategic Town in Ghouta'), placing the army in the foreground as an actor who succeeded in making progress in Ghouta, which was hit by chemical missiles.

The above headlines indicate a virtually full consensus about the rebels being the actors responsible for using chemical weapons, while excluding the government forces of Syria. Moreover, the credibility of this information is strengthened by the implementation of a deictic reference to the external authentic voices represented by the indirect speech of *Hersh*, the American political journalist mentioned in headline 1, and *the deputy leader of Syrian journalists' union* mentioned in headline 4. Stating the perspectives of Hersh and the deputy of the Syrian Journalists' Union serves to highlight Fars' own voice, which implicitly represents the Syrian government's perspective.

Considering this processes, Table 6.3 shows that material processes are prevalent and are used to express the involvement of the rebels in chemical attacks. In the same vein, the sole relational process used in the headline also attributes the responsibility for the chemical attacks to Turkey. The use of verbal processes in the headlines also serves another important function: Headlines 1 and 4 involve verbal processes represented orthographically by the colons following *Hersh* and *the deputy leader of Syrian journalists*. As a punctuation mark, the colon commonly functions as an alternative choice for reporting verbs such as 'says' or 'states'. The implied verbal processes in these two headlines enhance the truthfulness value of their contents by giving the name and the social status of the source. It is worth noting that the two headlines have a unified thematic content, which is to accuse the rebels of using chemical weapons while implicitly distancing the Syrian officials from the matter. Headline 5 ('Sources: Terrorists in Syria Receive Cargo of Chemical Substances') also shows an active agent deletion manipulated by omitting the by-phrase, whereas the word *terrorists* is given the role of the beneficiary provided with chemical weapons in Syria. This omission serves to sharpen the focus on the beneficiary rather than the actor. However, in mentions of the army, the actors are brought to the foreground, as seen in examples 2 and 3.

This sort of manipulation is highly ideological. Considering the cognitive function of ideology, which serves to tailor social practices to the specific beliefs of the members of a particular group (van Dijk, 1998), the representation of anti-government social actors in the headlines is polarised to highlight the rebels' practices and legitimise the government's reactions. Therefore, the headlines ascribe the negative actions of using and producing chemical weapons to the anti-government SAs—in this case, Turkey and the rebels—while highlighting the army's good qualities by using positive words such as *major advances* and *regain control*.

According to Fowler (1991), as 'transitivity makes options available, we are always suppressing some possibilities, so the choice we make […] indicate our point of view' (p. 71). Accordingly, the tendency to accuse the rebels in the headlines denotes the viewpoints that Fars intends to highlight. Therefore, the reality constructed in the headlines about the chemical attacks, which mention the involvement of rebels, Iraqi plants and Turkey, is highly ideological. When one considers that the ruling party of Iran and the ruling family in Syria belong to the same religious faction, the Shi'ites,

while Turkey, the Syrian rebels and the Iraqi Ba'ath belong to the opposing Sunni faction, the ideology underpinning this representation becomes more obvious.

6.2.2 The Representation of Anti-government Social Actors

In discourse analysis, it is important to remember that the text's segment is the unit of analysis; this reveals the variations of sentence constructions in terms of absence and presence of agency (Richardson, 2007). It is also worth remembering that the concept of agency in van Leeuwen's (2008) model is sociological, which sometimes goes beyond the common function of the agent in grammar (for more information, see Section 2.2.1). Moreover, the analysis of the social representation of actors focuses on the linguistic transformation processes achieved by deletion, substitution or rearrangement, where the inclusion and the exclusion of the agent are ideologically motivated. This is because the deletion of agents is sometimes intended to avoid repetition and redundancy; therefore, accounting for the occurrences of the linguistic transformation in such cases is impractical.

The representational choices in the subsequent analysis are examined in order to explore the influence of the ideology and political stance of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the news coverage of the Fars agency, if any exists. Thus, starting with the active and passive roles of the anti-government SAs, Table 6.4 shows the frequency of each role in the sample.

Table 6.4 Roles allocated to anti-government SAs

	Anti-government SAs	
Role allocations	Activated	Passivated
Number of occurrences	117	67

Table 6.4 indicates that anti-government SAs are allocated active roles more frequently than passive roles. This means that anti-government SAs are represented as a dynamic power capable of making changes more often than they are passivated, i.e. receiving the effects of others' actions. It should be noted that passive and active roles in this context are sociological (van Leeuwen, 2008), which are not only confined within the grammatical definitions of active and passive constructions but also consider the process of pre-modification, the use of prepositional phrases which signify the actor's role and post-modifying phrases or clauses. A typical example of activation is '*The army units targeted and destroyed...terrorist groups in al-Kamb*'. In this example

'*groups*' is passivated, represented as experiencing the action of the destruction committed by the army; however, they are also activated as actors who terrorise the people via the premodifier *terrorist* (see Section 2.2.1.1.1 for the linguistic realisations of active and passive social roles).

Examining the lexical choices of which agents are included shows that Fars coverage employs a wide range of representational techniques to depict the people involved in chemical attacks in a way that legitimises condemnations of rebels' involvement. Anti-government SAs are often activated in relation to the action of the production of chemical substances, as the following example shows:

1. 'Last December Seymour Hersh wrote that the CIA knew that <u>Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda affiliated fundamentalists</u> in Syria, were capable of producing sarin and were likely the ones who used it last August in Ghouta near Damascus.' ('Hersh: Turkey Behind', 2014)

The example mentions a set of nominated social actors. *Jabhat al-Nusra*, for instance, is agentalised in the material process of producing sarin gas. The post-modifying phrase *al-Qaeda affiliated fundamentalists* serves to enhance the negative depiction of the nominated SAs. Hersh, on the other hand, is implemented as an expert authoritative voice to delegitimise the United States' accusation that the Syrian government used chemical weapons. This representation is a means of manipulating readers' perception, as it excludes the involvement of the Syrian government and highlights Jabhat al-Nusra as the accused perpetrators.

Tracing the nominated SAs in Fars reports reveals an abundance of examples of an authorial voice committed to a specific ideology. The following excerpts are representative of this tendency:

2. 'Putin's remarks confirmed a detailed report by the FNA in May which said former <u>Ba'ath regime officials</u> are involved in the production and procurement of such weapons to the Syrian terrorists.' ('Deputy Leader of Syrian Journalists', 2013).

3. 'Even though experts have strongly warned against such [a] move, stressing that groups such <u>as al-Qaeda</u> will undoubtedly seek to acquire such technology of war.' ('Army Regains Control', 2014).

4. 'Local residents in Ghouta in [the] Damascus countryside accused the <u>Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Bandar bin Sultan,</u> of providing chemical weapons to an <u>al-Qaeda linked rebel group</u>.' ('Terrorists in Syria', 2014).

The nominated SAs underlined in examples 2 and 3 are activated in relation to the use of chemical weapons. In example 2, the *Ba'ath regime officials* are identified as involved in the production of chemical weapons utilising the relational process *are*. In the third example, *al-Qaeda* is agentalised in the material process *seek* to gain the technology of such weapons. Example 4, however, passivates the nominated social actor *Saudi intelligence chief* as being subject to the accusation levelled by the people of the city of Ghouta. The term *al-Qaeda-linked rebel group* in the same example is passivated as beneficialised actors who received chemical weapons, while the Saudi prince is activated as the actor who provided the weapons in the material process.

The nomination of the Ba'ath, Saudi official and al-Qaeda is reiterated and the juxtaposition between al-Qaeda and the Saudi prince is ideologically motivated. Fars attempts to create a negative perception of Saudi Arabia as the local ally of the Syrian rebels. Therefore al-Qaeda, one of the world's best-known terrorist groups, is linked to Saudi Arabia using the words *Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Bandar bin Sultan*. This representation consequently activates the negative depiction of Saudi Arabia by emphasising that both al-Qaeda and Saudi Arabia adhere to the same Sunni offshoot, while inherently distancing Iran and the Syrian government because they are Shi'ite, the counterpart Islamic offshoot. Ba'ath also is nominated to activate the repercussions of this party on the political, economic and social life of Iraqi people, which recalls the atrocities of Saddam Hussein during his 20-year rule. The following examples are supportive:

5. 'Early last month, informed sources told FNA that <u>the innocent people killed</u> in the Khan al-Assal area of rural Aleppo in northwestern Syria were…victims of the chemical weapons supplied to the <u>terrorists by a Saddam-era General working under head of the now outlawed Ba'ath party Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri</u>.' ("Deputy Leader of Syrian", 2013).

6. '"Also, at his order, <u>several former Iraqi military industries engineers</u> trained the Syrian terrorists on how to use these chemical weapons," the source said.' ("Deputy Leader of Syrian", 2013).

Example 5 uses a number of representational strategies to represent the actor accused of suppling terrorists with chemical weapons. To start with, the actor is activated first by the pre-modifying phrase *Saddam-era* and second by circumstantialisation, which agentalises the actor using a by-phrase in the passive construction. The pre-modifying noun phrase bestows a relational identification on him while bringing his political

relationships, first to President Saddam and then to the head of the Ba'ath party, to the foreground. Van Leeuwen (2008) indicated that the relational identification strategy can be used to identify a person in terms of his/her family or work relationships.

It is worth noting that the relational identification strategy is employed in the sample to serve two purposes. First, it highlights the kinship between the rebels and their interviewed family members. Thus, the witnesses to the rebels' actions and crimes become more reliable and unquestioned, as reflected in the statement '*the father described the weapons as having a tube-like structure*' ("Sources: Terrorists in Syria", 2015). Second, it emphasises the political and the military affiliations of the accused Iraqi actors, such as Saddam Hussein, the Ba'ath party and al-Qaeda-linked militants, so that the accusation of producing chemical weapons against the Iraqi participants is further legitimised, particularly given the historical chemical offensives on Kurdish cities during the Iran-Iraq war in 1980s. Considering this point, the nomination of Iraqi officials such as Saddam Hussein, who died nearly eight years before the Syrian revolution erupted in 2011, shows a sense of personal involvement, which, according to Soffer (2009), leads to the deviation from 'describing the world "as it is" and damage[s] neutrality and fairness' (p. 479).

In example 5, the actor, *Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri,* is functionalised by determining his military career as a general. This representation sharpens the focus on the identity of the accused actor in terms of his political affiliation and military status, as well as the nomination of the prominent Iraqi political figure, al-Douri. All these representational choices work ideologically to legitimise the accusation that Iraqi officials were involved in the production of chemical missiles. This intensified focus on the actor also serves to distance the Syrian military forces from the United States' allegation that the Syrian government deployed chemical weapons. The example includes a number of attitudinal expressions which reflect the interference of the authorial voice: This can be traced through the lexical choices which demonstrate criticism of the Ba'ath party, such as 'outlawed' and the emotional expression 'innocent', which describes the collectivised victims.

The reported speech in example 6 employs utterance autonomisation to impersonalise the actor credited with the quotation, who is represented as an unnamed aide. Responsibility for the reported accusation is therefore attributed to the utterance itself. The accused actors are also functionalised as 'engineers', aggregated by 'several' and classified as being of 'Iraqi' nationality. Stubbs (1996) indicated that 'whenever

speakers or writers say anything they encode their point of view towards it' (p. 197). This example thus functionalises the social actor as 'engineers' to legitimise the accusation of being specialised trainers working with chemicals—they are aggregated to justify the ample chemical attacks on Syrian cities. The social actors in the two examples are allocated to material processes, 'supplied' and 'trained', which endow them with a kind of power and skill.

The rebels are also presented as agitators who fight against their own government. This representation utilises lexical choices which are negatively laden. The following examples are indicative:

7. 'In 2012 the CIA build a rat-line to provide weapons from Libya via Turkey to the <u>Syrian insurgents</u>.' ('Hersh: Turkey Behind', 2013).

8. 'Turkey obviously supports the current onslaught on Lattakia […]. Recently over 1<u>,000 mercenaries</u> were flown from north Jordan to Turkey to join the fight.' ('Army Makes Major Advances', 2014).

9. 'A recent UN report revealed that terrorists from 29 countries have infiltrated into Syria to fight against the Damascus Government, most of whom are <u>extremist Salafists</u>.' ('Army Makes Major Advances', 2014).

The above examples employ an appraisement strategy to represent the rebels negatively as *insurgents*, *mercenaries* and *extremists*. These overtly negative expressions are passivated in the first two examples. *Insurgents* are constructed as beneficialised actors in example 7, who again receive weapons from Libya, whereas the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is activated as an actor who carries out the action of providing the weapons for them. In example 8, the mercenaries are constructed as a goal in a passive voice where the actor is excluded and not identified. In addition, the passive construction in *were flown* places the actor who took charge to make the mercenaries cross the borders in the background and increases the focus on mercenaries.

It should be clarified that examples 7 and 8 represent the Fars interpretation of what Hersh said about the Turkish interference in the Syrian conflict. Thus, these examples clearly reflect the authorial voice of Fars, which detracts from their objectivity. This is evident in the attitudinal expressions used to describe the rebels and the misrepresentation of the Turkish support of the rebels as support of the onslaught.

Soffer (2009, p. 479) stressed the importance of suppressing the 'reporter's own voice' to avoid biased reporting. However, these examples reflect personal evaluations which demonstrate the news agency's alignment with the Syrian government.

On the other hand, the representation of the rebels in example 9 is ideologically based. Using the term 'extremist Salafists' emphasises the Sunni faction and identifies their opponents as violent extremist enemies. This ideological representation alludes to the concept of jihadism, which is commonly associated with Salafists (see Section 1.1.2 for more information). In turn, this depiction further validates Fars' claim that rebels are using chemical weapons in Syria. Another term which denotes the religious-based classification strategy is *Takfiri*, one of the most radical identifications of the Syrian rebels (see the background explained in Section 1.1.2 for more information about).

Fars tends to assimilate all anti-government groups under the umbrella term *terrorists*; these factions are also commonly collectivised as *Syrian* (see example 2) or militants smuggled in from other countries (see example 9). Other examples of assimilated expressions used in the coverage are *armed groups* and *forces supported by the West*, both of which are collectivised and given a generic reference, although the latter example is activated by the post-modifier clause.

Another strategy used to construct the image of anti-government social actors in Fars news is impersonalised abstraction, where the reporter identifies SAs in abstract expressions which reflect a negative or positive stance, as in the following example:

10. 'The Turkish prime minister had bet all his cards on the Syrian insurgency.' ('Hersh: Turkey Behind', 2013).

The word *insurgency* here denotes an illegal rejection of authority. It is a highly attitudinal expression which serves to delegitimise civilians' right to demonstrate and deprives the revolution of its supreme goals of resisting suppression and social inequality. Another use of abstract expression is exemplified below:

11. [The] citizens of Ras al-Maara, al-Jibeh and Assal al-Ward towns in al-Qalamoon took to [the] streets Saturday [to affirm their] support [of the] Army against terrorism. ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

In example 11, the rebels are now passivated. They are identified with *terrorism*, which signifies a laden negative evaluation. Van Dijk (1995) argued that lexical choices which imply polarised evaluation always signify the dominant political ideology. The sample includes a number of other similar examples, such as *deadly violence* and *threat*.

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With regard to impersonalisation, substituting social actors with the tools they are associated with is common in reports concerning the involved actors. Consider the following examples:

12. '"The 80mm mortar shells which landed in Khan al-Assal and killed dozens of people were armed with the latest product of Dulaimi's hidden laboratories sent to the Nusra members for testing," the source added.' ('Deputy Leader of Syrian Journalists', 2013)

13. '…the chemical mortar shells, which the source said were fired at Khan al-Assal from the Nusra-ruled Kafr Dael in Northwestern Aleppo.' ('Deputy Leader of Syrian Journalists', 2013).

14. 'His remarks alluded to Putin's comments earlier this week that laboratories in Iraq are producing chemical weapons for the terrorists in Syria.'. ("Deputy Leader of Syrian Journalists", 2013)

The anti-government actors mentioned in the above examples are represented in relation to the weapons used in the chemical attacks: *mortar shells* and *laboratories*. This sort of identification is used to strengthen focus on the tools rather than the social actors. Although this strategy is used to supress agency, the circumstantial post-modifier clause with a possessive noun (*Dulaimi's hidden laboratories*) serves to identify these impersonalised entities as belonging to Dulaimi, the former Iraqi military General. The pre-modifier adjective *hidden* gives a sense of danger and *laboratories* are activated in relation to *hidden*. They are represented as plants which are built out of sight and deal with prohibited substances. This sort of identification explicitly refers to the Iraqi officials' involvement in the attacks carried out against the people of Khan al-Assal. The two underlined representational choices in example 12 are activated in relation to the material processes *landed* and *killed*, but passivated in example 13 through the use of the passive voice in *were fired*. The agent in example 14 is excluded for economy, as it is identified earlier.

The examples above utilise external voices. The direct quotation in example 12, for instance, is not identified. The report introduces the quotation as an indeterminate source, stating that *informed sources told FNA*, which avoids giving authority to anyone. The indirect speech in example 13 is attributed to the same unidentified source. However, the reported speech in example 14 gains its authority from the political status of the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. According to Busa (2014), direct and indirect quotes are usually employed when the reported information is unexpected or a bit

surprising. Therefore, utilising the reported speech of Putin, a loyal ally of Syria, is important in validating Fars' claim of Iraqi plants being involved in the chemical attacks in Ghouta and Khan al-Assal (see Table 6.2 for the areas hit by chemical missiles).

The depiction of anti-government social actors goes beyond being Syrian insurgents or rebels: They are identified negatively as armed groups backed by foreign countries, as illustrated in the following examples.

15. 'In April 2014, the <u>foreign-backed militants</u> fired mortar shells, containing poisonous chemical substances, on several residential areas in the city of Homs.' ('Sources: Terrorists in Syria Receive Cargo of Chemical Substances', 2015)

16. '<u>The foreign-sponsored militants</u> had earlier released footage in which rabbits were killed by inhaling poisonous gas.' ('Deputy Leader of Syrian Journalists', 2013)

17. '"This was use[d] on the part of the <u>Opposition</u>, the rebels, not by the Government authorities," she added, speaking in Italian.' ('Deputy Leader of Syrian Journalists', 2013).

In examples 15 and 16, the militants are identified in terms of the goals and interests they (temporarily) share with the West and are therefore represented as being supported and armed by foreign countries. This strategy is called association. The anti-government actors in the previous examples are activated as actors of the material processes *fired* and *released*, which emphasises their involvement. In addition, example 17 identifies the rebels by the acknowledged legal name of their association, the Opposition. However, this representation is very negative, as it attributes responsibility for the chemical attack to the opposition. This accusation supported by UN Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte's direct speech. Moreover, the use of the adverb *not* is intended to compare the opposition's actions to those of government authorities, thereby highlighting the government's ideals in contrast with the atrocities attributed to the opposition. This representation clearly reflects the binary ideological representation of 'us' as good and 'them' as bad. Other representational strategies are exemplified below.

18. 'Abdel-Moneim said his son and <u>12 other rebels</u> were killed inside of a tunnel used to store weapons provided by a Saudi militant, known as Abu Ayesha, who was leading a fighting battalion.' ('Terrorists in Syria Receive Cargo of Chemical Substances', 2015)

19. 'Interviews with people in Damascus and Ghouta, a suburb of the Syrian capital, where the humanitarian agency Doctors Without Borders said <u>at least 355 people</u> had died in late August from what it believed to be a neurotoxic agent, appear to indicate as much, Infowars.com said in a report written by Dale Gavlak and Yahya Ababneh.' ('Terrorists in Syria Receive Cargo of Chemical Substances', 2015).

20. '"The Syrian army intends to restore full security to Aleppo and Daraa in order to endorse its control <u>over 70 percent of the militant-ruled areas</u> in the country," the sources told [the] FNA.' ('Army Regains Control of Strategic Town in Ghouta', 2014).

21. '[In the] meantime, [the] Spokesman of Kyrgyzstan's National Security Committee announced that <u>a large number of Kyrgyz citizens</u> are now fighting for the ISIL terrorist group against the Damascus Government in Syria.' ('Army Makes Major Advances in Eastern Ghouta', 2014).

The aggregated representation in Fars is utilised to identify two types of actors: anti-government fighters and victims. As the above examples show, the quantifiers associated with anti-government actors in example 18 represent them as a fragmented force who are often killed and arrested *en masse* by the government. The quantifier *large number of* is employed in example 21 to highlight the involvement of non-Syrian fighters in the front lines battles with the terrorist group ISIL, which implicitly alludes to the concept of conspiracy.

The high percentage of regained areas in example 20 is mentioned to emphasise that the rebels' military power is insufficient to keep their territory, indicating that aggregation is typically used to report the rebels' loses and the number of their causalities. Nevertheless, in representing the victims, aggregation is also employed to highlight the number of civilians killed by the rebels. Example 19 states that *at least 355 people had died*: The use of the qualifier *at least* serves to intensify the minimum number of people killed by the rebel attack. Examples 18–21 include similar instances such as *local residents* in example 4, which is collectivised and activated by the post-modifier prepositional phrase 'in Ghouta', which identifies the locals as people belonging to the area shelled by chemical missiles, thereby authorising them as witnesses. The aggregation shows additional different patterns, such as *dozens of people*, *scores of militants*, *too many militants* and so on.

According to Caldas-Coulthard (1994), reporters choose the information they want to emphasise and overlook those parts which do not further their intended purpose. Examples 18–21 above therefore employ external voices (including a direct quotation from an unidentified informed source), all of which serve to emphasise that what has been mentioned is factual information. It is worth noting that no source is utilised to represent the rebel fighters' views or to defend them. Using quotations, van Dijk (1987) argued, can be biased when they are employed to serve the interests of those in power and their ideology. Less powerful people, he pointed out, may accordingly be presented negatively in such quotations.

Indetermination is also employed in different positions when the reporters' aim is to generalise or make assumptions which lack substantial evidence. The following examples are indicative of this:

22. 'Many believed that certain rebels received chemical weapons.' ('Terrorists in Syria", 2015).

23. '"They merely used some ordinary rebels to carry and operate this material", he said.' ('Terrorists in Syria", 2015).

24. 'Doctors who treated the chemical weapons attack victims cautioned interviewers to be careful about asking questions regarding who, exactly, was responsible for the deadly assault.' ('Terrorists in Syria", 2015).

The purpose of the indetermination employed in example 22 is to accentuate the proposition using the aggregated quantifier *many*, as the actors are not identified. One might ask: who are the people who believe that rebels are responsible for these chemical attacks?. The allocation to the cognitive process *believe* serves to strengthen the tone of certainty regarding the rebels' use of chemical weapons. The SAs in example 23, *some ordinary rebels*, are anonymised. The example is a direct quotation from a rebel leader who is disclosing al-Nusra militants' mechanics in fulfilling their military goals using the term *ordinary rebels*. Anonymising the social actors here connotes al-Nusra's firm control over other rebels, who are categorised as *ordinary*. This sort of representation depicts the anti-government social actors in a hierarchical structure, where the al-Nusra Front masterminds the attack plans and *ordinary* rebels are used to execute them. The quoted speaker is functionalised as a leader, although he is not identified. He is given an obscured identity represented by the letter *J*. The representation of al-Nusra militants as skilled fighters who use ordinary rebels to work out their plans valorises the ideas of proxy war and conspiracy. Another illustrative example is presented below:

25. '[Meanwhile], <u>an Egyptian young man</u> fighting for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist group in Syria reportedly committed a suicide attack at the Kurdish-Syrian city of Kobani.' ('Army Makes Major Advances in Eastern Ghouta', 2014)

The social actor in example 25 is indeterminate. He is classified as having Egyptian nationality, but at the same time he is represented as an unknown person. He is introduced as belonging to ISIL and has been allocated the material process of committing a suicide assault. It is worth mentioning that Kobani, where the suicide attack occurred, is under the control of the Kurdish People Protection Units, or YPG, which adhere to the Sunni faction. As discussed earlier (see Section 1.1.2), this group is fighting neither for nor against the Syrian government, but to save its Kurdish lands and establish its independence. It sometimes cooperates with the Syrian government and Free Syrian Army to push ISIL back, but it does not allow the Syrian military troops or the Free Syrian Army to advance across its lands. Representing the fighter as Egyptian in this case might serve to distance the Syrian forces from the scene and therefore maintain the Kurds-Assad relationship at this critical time. It should be remembered that Turkey is fighting against the Kurdish YGP Units in Syria to prevent them from reuniting with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey.

The above analysis examined the various representational choices used to establish the image of the anti-government actors in Fars coverage. This representation is achieved through the roles the social actors are given in specific contexts and the ways they are socio-semantically categorised, classified, functionalised, abstracted, impersonalised and assimilated, which constitutes an overall negative depiction.

6.2.3 The Representation of Anti-government Social Actions

Examining transitivity choices can reveal the types of processes with which social actors are commonly allocated. Van Dijk (1995) argued that ideologically based views can be expressed differently by playing with participants' roles. Table 6.5 below shows the type of processes allocated to anti-government social actors and civilians throughout the whole sample. It also shows the frequency distributions of the verb processes in relation to civilians and anti-government actors.

Table 6.5 Occurrences of transitivity choices—anti-government -Fars

Social Actors	Process Types			
	Material	Verbal	Mental	Relational
	Number of Occurrences			
Civilians	3	3	0	0
Anti-government	66	8	1	9

Table 6.5 shows that civilians were associated three times with material and verbal processes but never with mental or relational processes. With regard to anti-government actors, material processes recurred often (66 times) compared to verbal, mental and relational processes, which occurred 8, 1 and 9 times, respectively.

The low number of processes associated with civilians indicates that Syrian civilians are not included in the focus of the chemical attack coverage. The material processes allocated to civilians represent them as loyal to the Syrian government, marching in the streets to back up the army. Material processes are also employed to record civilians' witnesses in the chemical attack: for example, statements such as *our investigators have been in neighbouring countries interviewing victims* and *from the way the victims were treated*. Victims are depicted as a goal, introduced as being interviewed by investigators and treated by the doctors. They are passively represented, used as a tool to confirm the government's accusation against the rebels. They are also employed as actors in non-interactive processes, as in *355 people had died.* The verb *die* shows a non-causal relation which depicts the action as a natural process, thereby also enhancing the passive representation of the victims.

Similarly, verbal processes are utilised for two purposes: First, to present civilians as witnesses against the rebels through public interviews, as in *'Ghouta town people said'*, and second, to represent them as supporting the government and the army in verbal processes such as *affirms support* and *hail the army*. This indicates that verbal processes are utilised to depict civilians as an pro-government front. Considering the ethnic and sectarian backgrounds of the Syrian population, which includes Sunni, Shi'ites, Alawites, Druze, Christians and Kurds (see Section 1.1 for more information about the diversity of Syrian society), in this respect the verbal pattern serves to radically exclude other counterpart voices, which informs Fars' ideological preferences.

The dominance of material processes associated with anti-government fighters, however, indicates different roles. As actors, they are represented as causing destruction and firing shells into populated areas, as demonstrated in the following examples:

26. 'The foreign-backed militants <u>fired mortar shells</u>.' ("Terrorists in Syria", 2015)

27. 'The terrorists <u>attacked</u> the cities.' ("Army Regains Control", 2014)

28. 'Abu Ayesha, who was <u>leading a fighting</u> battalion.' ("Terrorists in Syria", 2015)

29. 'Fighters <u>handled</u> the weapons improperly.' ("Army Regains Control", 2014)

30. 'A militant group <u>tried to infiltrate...</u>' ("Terrorists in Syria", 2015)

31. 'A tunnel used to store weapons <u>provided by a Saudi militant.</u>'

The examples depict anti-government SAs as responsible for the devastation of the cities and killing civilians. They are activated as capable of brutal actions such as firing mortars, attacking, infiltrating and providing weapons. At the same time, they are portrayed as cooperating with terrorist organisations to provide them with chemical substances, thereby taking the role of beneficiary, as shown in the following examples:

32. 'The <u>Takfiri terrorist groups have received</u> dangerous chemicals.' (Terrorists in Syria", 2015).

33. <u>'Certain rebels received</u> chemical weapons via the Saudi intelligence chief.' ("Terrorists in Syria", 2015)

34. 'Chemical plants in Iraq are <u>producing chemical weapons</u> <u>for the terrorists</u> in Syria.' ("Deputy Leader of", 2013)

35. 'The victims of the chemical weapons <u>supplied to the terrorists by a</u> <u>Saddam-era General.'</u> ("Deputy Leader of", 2013)

Matthiessen and Painter (1997) explained that the beneficiary is the participant(s) who gain the benefit or advantage from the processes. In examples 32–35 the anti-government party is represented as those who receive the chemical weapons provided by the actors. This representation is ideologically motivated. The examples serve to assert the anti-government fighters' relationship to terrorist organisations while distancing the Syrian government from the scene. The pattern of transitivity apparent in these examples represents the rebels as betrayers who have given their loyalty to those who should be their enemies. It is worth noting that those participants who are given the role of actors are outsiders, specified as belonging to other countries. Such

representations serve to camouflage the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons, which was sanctioned through the UN program of the chemical stockpiles transfer. This sanction came after confirmation from the US State Department, which declared that Syria has nerve agent chemicals and mustard gas (Kanat, 2016).

The participant's role as a goal is also utilised in material processes to represent anti-government SAs in relation to illegal acts, such as turbulence and violations of other countries' policies:

36. 'We have <u>arrested 36 terrorists</u> over the past two years and tried them on charges of radicalism.' ("Army Makes Major", 2014).
37. '…the Lebanese army raided Tariq al-Jdideh neighborhood and <u>arrested four Syrians</u> on suspicion of belonging to a terrorist organization.' ("Army Makes Major, 2014).
38. '…the war <u>turned against the insurgents</u>…' ("Hersh: Turkey Behind", 2014).
39. '<u>tens of militants were killed</u> and dozens more injured in heavy clashes in Hama.' ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

The preceding examples depict the anti-government SAs as destabilising security in Kyrgyzstan and Lebanon. Example 36 is a quotation from a Kyrgyzstan National Security Committee spokesman stating that a number of Kyrgyz nationals who joined ISIL had been arrested. Typically, repeating statements from authoritative voices serves to impose unquestioned legitimisation. Van Leeuwen (2008) indicated that using verbal declarations from experts and authorities do not require reasons or justifications. The same strategy is used in example 37: The Lebanese forces had arrested the Syrian rebels for infiltrating Tariq al-Jdideh, a place within Lebanon's borders. In this pattern, Fars activates the goal in relation to negative attributes, terrorism, border violations and radicalism. Fars intends to highlight the danger posed by anti-government SAs by presenting them as a threat to the other countries, a strategy legitimised by authoritative announcements.

This representation works ideologically to frame Syrian rebels as part of a unified indiscriminate group of actors who commit acts of terrorism. Knowing that the anti-government actors encompass an array of armed groups in which ISIL (including Jabhat al-Nusra) and al-Qaeda are the only illegal fighting groups, this representation carries the ideological implication of presenting anti-government forces as terrorists and suppressing other alternatives such as rebels, the opposition, moderate fighters and

so on. Examples 38 and 39 also represent anti-government fighters as weak counterparts who endure clashes with the government army which causes them many casualties and deaths. This depiction foregrounds the government's powerful military response to the rebels, which is implicitly legitimised in the description of them as insurgents and terrorists. The passivated role of anti-government is also evident in the following examples:

40. 'His intelligence service MIT was <u>supporting not only the Free Syrian Army but also al-Nusra</u>.' ("Hersh: Turkey Behind", 2014)

41. 'The western powers and their regional allies—especially Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey—are reportedly <u>supporting the militants</u> operating inside Syria.' ("Army Makes Major", 2014)

42. '…engineers <u>trained the Syrian terrorists</u> on how to use these chemical weapons.' ("Deputy Leader of Syria", 2013).

43. 'Turkey <u>trained al-Nusra</u> on the production of Sarin and provided the precursor chemicals.' ("Hersh: Turkey Behind", 2014).

44. 'They merely <u>used some ordinary rebels</u> to carry and operate this material…' ("Terrorists in Syria", 2015).

The passivation in examples 40–44 above serves ideologically to authenticate the accusation of the Syrian government regarding the rebels' charge of the chemical attacks. The passivated role given to anti-government warriors presents them as terrorists who are used as tools by countries plotting against Syrian government. In examples 40 and 41 anti-government fighters are passivated as being supported by anti-government allies domestically and internationally, and in examples 42 and 43 as being unskilled fighters who are trained by engineers to use chemicals. They are also represented as a mere medium or tool to carry out the premade attack plans. The role of the goal in the exemplified material processes above shows a consistent pattern which greatly intensifies the negative portrayal of the anti-government social actors.

With regard to the verbal processes, the anti-government fighters are associated with a number of verbal processes denoting the involvement of the Saudi intelligence in the Syrian turmoil, as shown in the example below:

45. 'When Saudi Prince Bandar gives such weapons to people, he must give them to those who know how to handle and use them,' <u>she warned</u>. ("Terrorists in Syria, 2015).

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46. 'More than a dozen rebels interviewed <u>reported that</u> their salaries came from the Saudi government.' ("Terrorists in Syria", 2015).

47. '…rebels and local residents in Ghouta in [the] Damascus countryside <u>accused the then Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Bandar bin Sultan,</u> of providing chemical weapons to an al-Qaeda linked rebel group.' ("Terrorists in Syria", 2015).

Example 45 includes a quote from a female anti-government fighter incorporating the verbal process *warn*, which denotes alerting others to a possible risk. The context includes an explicit reference to the Saudi prince Bandar as the actor providing the rebels with weapons. In the same vein, example 46 associates the aggregated rebels with the verbal process *reported*, stating that Saudi Arabia is paying their salaries. Then, in example 47, the rebels and civilians together *accused* the head of Saudi intelligence of arming al-Qaeda in Syria with chemical weapons. The focus on the involvement of Saudi Arabia makes the verbal pattern in the above examples ideologically laden. It stereotypes Saudi Arabia as dominating the anti-government fighters who instigate riots and pay armed groups to shell inhabited areas with chemical missiles. It should be noted that the reports first established a good relationship between the two sides. The reports presented Saudi Arabia as the rebels' major domestic ally who always supports them politically and financially, and then, to make the proposition plausible, less resistant and need no evidence, Fars stated the rebels' comments against Saudi Arabia.

Concerning mental processes, example 48 shows a mental process allocated with a female anti-government SA as well:

48. 'She, like other Syrians, <u>[does] not want to use [her] full [name]</u> for fear of retribution.' ("Terrorists in Syria", 2015).

Although she belongs to an anti-government armed group, the female fighter mentioned in example 48 is represented as having no desire to reveal her name. She is depicted as experiencing pressure, which legitimises her fear of mentioning her name. This legitimisation is structured in a prepositional phrase, *for fear of retribution*, where the lexis retribution is nominalised, thereby excluding the agent of retribution and hence the identity of those who cause the female fighter's fear. Accordingly, the agent could be the armed groups fighting against the government or, on the contrary, the government officials.

Examining the relational processes reveals the very negative representation of the anti-government fighters (the following examples are selective):

49. 'Many believed that certain rebels […] <u>were responsible</u> for carrying out the dealing gas attack.' ("Terrorists in Syria", 2015).

50. '…former Ba'ath regime officials <u>are involved</u> in the production and procurement of such weapons to the Syrian terrorists.' ("Deputy Leader of Syrian", 2013).

51. '…terrorists from 29 countries have infiltrated into Syria to fight against the Damascus government, most of whom <u>are extremist Salafists</u>.' ("Army Makes Major", 2014).

52. 'The Syrians <u>are suspected</u> of belonging to a terrorist group.' ("Army Makes Major", 2014).

Examples 49–52 above represent the anti-government SAs as possessing morally bad attributes. Example 49, for instance, describes rebels as being *responsible* for chemical assaults, while they are *involved* and *suspected* in examples 50 and 52. These three attributes denote being guilty and having directed the alleged crime. The lexical choices which evaluate human behaviours from a legal perspective and in terms of a country's policy are considered judgemental, and thus encode the writer's or speaker's attitude. Accordingly, these relational attributes reflect a sense of absolute certainty towards the accusation attributed to the anti-government actors.

In example 51, *extremist Salafists* is used as an ideology-based modifier relating to the Sunni group. Using this phrase, which represents the main counterpart of Shi'ite faction to which Assad belongs, is highly attitudinal. The example also equates the terrorists with Salafists and evaluates them negatively by using the noun intensifier *extremists*. Such representation clearly denotes an overtly negative representation. The pattern of relational processes thus works ideologically to foregrounding the negative attributes and sectarian background of anti-government SAs.

Having analysed the transitivity selections and the representational choices of the anti-government social actors, the following section presents an examination of pro-government social actors within the same analytical framework.

6.2.4 The Representation of Pro-government Social Actors

In contrast to the representation of the anti-government party, pro-government social actors represent different occurrences of activation and passivation in the sample, as Table 6.6 illustrates.

Table 6.6 Roles allocated to pro-government SAs

Pro-government SAs		
Role allocations	Activated	Passivated
Number of Occurrences	64	14

The information presented in Table 6.6 demonstrates that pro-government SAs are activated three times more often than they are passivated. This also denotes that they are represented as an active effective force more often than as passive non-effective participants. Examining the representational choices employed in the two roles show that pro-government SAs are represented in a more elevated manner than their fighter counterparts. Nomination and functionalisation are the most frequent categories used to represent the pro-government social actors. The following examples are selective:

53. 'After several sarin incidents, one of which killed some <u>Syrian soldiers</u> Erdogan pushed the White House to react to the supposed breach of Obama's red-line.' ("Hersh: Turkey Behind", 2014).

54. 'Also in the past 24 hours, <u>the Syrian army</u> made fresh advances in its operations against ISIL.' ("Army Makes Major", 2014).

55. 'Putin questioned the credibility of allegations by the US, UK and France <u>that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces</u> had used chemical weapons.' ("Deputy Leader of Syrian, 2013).

The pro-government SAs in examples 53 and 54 are functionalised—both *soldiers* and *army* denote military functions administered by the government and are represented by their military ranks, which emphasise their legality and lawful positions. The pro-government SAs, meanwhile, are passivated as being victims of sarin assaults in example 53 but are activated in relation to the actions denoting defence and advances against the notorious anti-government organisation ISIL in example 54. The ideological representations in the two examples are clear: The SAs are represented both as good people working in within a military apparatus aiming to protect civilians from ISIL and as being targeted by anti-government fighters launching chemical assaults.

Forces in example 55 is also functionalised in terms of what these fighters do as a military body and activated as belonging to or being owned by Assad, realised by the possessive noun. Thus, the forces are represented as an organisation controlled by Assad, who is nominated formally as Bashar al-Assad, titled honorifically as President and classified as Syrian. This representation serves to strongly emphasise Assad in

relation to his position of authority as a president as well as to his power over Syria's military forces. The same example reflects the nomination of the United States, the United Kingdom and France as anti-government allies while Putin is individualised and nominated as a pro-government partner.

Other examples of nomination elsewhere in the sample are *Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad*, *Vice-Chairman of the Syrian Journalists' Union Mostafa Meqdad*, *Russian President Vladimir Putin*, *Damascus government*, *army troops*, *army units* and *Syrian officials*. The three last choices—troops, units and officials—are also collectivised, signalling the government's power in terms of its plethora of armed forces. A remarkable use of collectivisation strategy is the use of the first-person plural in Putin's statement: *we know that opposition fighters were detained*. The progovernment SA here is collectivised by the inclusive 'we', which reflects the level of Russia's commitment toward the Syrian conflict.

It is worth noting that the pre-modifier *Syrian* is used in the examples above as a classification strategy to identify soldiers, the army and the president. This strategy plays an important role in representing pro-government SAs and serves to emphasise the Syrian identity of the in-group (as opposed to the foreign-backed outgroup). Van Dijk (1995) stressed the importance of the mental schemata of group members, such as their perspective, values, identity and goals, in representing their ideology. Accordingly, the repeated attribution of Syrian nationality to pro-government SAs contributes ideologically to depicting the revolution in Syria as a war between the Syrian government and non-Syrian militias backed by foreign countries. Indetermination is commonly employed in references to pro-government SAs as impartial bystanders while emphasising the involvement of the anti-government fighters in the gas offensives, as seen in the following examples:

56. 'Early last month, <u>informed sources</u> told FNA that the innocent people killed in the Khan al-Assal area of rural Aleppo.' ("Deputy Leader of Syrian", 2013).

57. '[…] rebels used the deadly nerve agent, according to <u>a lead investigator</u>, who also stressed that there's no evidence yet that the Syrian military used Sarin.' ("Deputy Leader of Syrian", 2013).

58. '"The chemical weapons used in the attack on Khan al-Assal area had been prepared by former Iraqi Military Industries […]", <u>an informed source</u>, who

asked to remain anonymous for fear of his life, told FNA on May 6.' ("Deputy Leader of Syrian", 2013).

The previous examples report an explicit accusation levelled against the rebels by various sources; leaving them unnamed makes it impossible to determine their reliability. Example 56 attributes the death of innocent people to a terrorist chemical attack; the same accusation is repeated in example 57, and Iraqi industries are accused of providing chemical substances to the fighters in example 58. All three accusations are reported by anonymous SAs. This sort of representation identifies social actors by means of reported utterances, technically called utterance autonomisation. This technique allocates the responsibility of the sayer to no one, thereby helping to skew the information provided and reinforce the recommended negative attitude towards the rebels. This also is strengthened by the use of process noun *fear* in example 58, which constitutes a moral legitimisation for hiding the source's name. The nominalisation of fear indicates that the actor who causes the fear cannot be the informed source. However, this nominalisation also logically depicts anti-government fighters as implicit agents who inflict horror and state of insecurity on people.

Another type of representation is the impersonalisation of pro-government SAs, as seen in the following example:

59. 'The Syrian air force pounded the militants' positions in Naimeh and Daraa.' ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

This example represents the SA as an instrument: the *air force.* The pre-modifier *Syrian* is used here to give a sense identification to the air force used by the government to hit the militants, as opposed to the air forces of anti-government allies which were used to hit the Syrian government. This representation denotes a highly advanced armed force, which foregrounds the Syrian government's hegemony and power.

The previous examples demonstrate the strategies that Fars adopts to represent pro-government SAs: They are nominated, functionalised, collectivised and instrumentalised. Each of these representational choices is a typical positive representation to the pro-government warriors. Thus, to give a more comprehensive view of the pro-government portrayal in the chemical attack coverage, the analysis below examines the patterns of transitivity used to represent their actions.

6.2.5 The Representation of Pro-government Social Actions

With regard to transitivity choices, the table below displays the type of processes associated with the pro-government SAs together with their occurrences.

Table 6.7 Occurrences of transitivity choices – pro-government- Fars

Process types	Material	Verbal	Mental	Relational
Number of occurrences	49	10	4	2

Table 6.7 shows that the most frequent of the remaining processes is material processes, which occur 49 times; of the other processes, verbal processes are used 10 times, mental processes 4 times, and finally relational processes, which are used twice. Examining the material processes reveals that pro-government actors take two participant roles, the actor and the goal. Starting with the goal, government participants are always represented as victims of a Western conspiracy, as seen in the following examples:

60. 'The aim is to shift the balance of power in favour of Syria's rebel groups and <u>topple Syrian President Bashar Al Assad</u>, *Islam Times* reported.' ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

61. <u>'Syria has been gripped</u> by deadly violence since 2011.'("Army Makes Major", 2014).

62. 'This incident pushed Obama to declare that the red-line had been crossed and that he would <u>use air attacks against the Syrian government</u>.' ("Hersh: Turkey Behind", 2014).

63. 'Erdogan pushed the White House to react to the supposed breach of Obama's red-line <u>against the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government</u>.' ("Hersh: Turkey Behind", 2014).

The four material processes used in examples 60–63 depict violent actions against the Syrian government. The material process *topple* in example 60, for instance, represents Syria's President Assad as the goal subject to the hostile antagonism of the United States, Saudi Arabia and their allies, which aim to overthrow him. *Gripped* in example 61 is another material process employed in the passive voice, which gives the government participant represented by the metonymic reference *Syria*, the role of goal. Syria is passivated as being caught and controlled by deadly violence at the hands of anti-government actors.

The Syrian government is also passivated in example 62 as being targeted by US air attacks. This example also includes an implied reference to Western interference in Syria's internal affairs, which is ironically referenced by Obama's statement that his *red-line had been crossed*, which is used to justify the air assault on Syria. This view is reinforced in example 63, where the Syrian government is represented as a victim of a Turkish conspiracy to provoke the United States to attack the Syrian government based on allegations of using chemical weapons.

On the other hand, in the role of participant, the actor functions to positively represent the Syrian government as heroic. The following examples are illustrative:

64. 'The army units also killed a number of militants and destroyed their cars.' ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

65. '[The] Syrian army targeted armed groups in many provinces and destroyed their weapons, hideouts and equipment.' ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

66. 'The Syrian army won back control over the town of Zobdin in Damascus countryside after pushing back the terrorists from their positions…' ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

67. 'The army units regained control of Zobdin in Eastern Ghouta' ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

68. 'The army units have so far restored security to [the] al-Qalamoun region.'("Army Regains Control", 2014).

The above examples employ material processes to represent the Syrian government as an effective and protective power in relation to their fighter counterparts. Van Dijk (1994) pointed out that asymmetrical power relationships in a given situation influence the production of text and contribute to legitimising their actions. In examples 64 and 65, for instance, the material processes explicate the military operations carried out by the Syrian army against the militants, i.e. *killed*, *targeted* and *destroyed.* The last three examples, however, depict the Syrian army as a controlling power which brings safety and security and expels threats.

Van Dijk (1995) indicated that the pattern of representation in news reporting used to depict social actors is often controlled by people in power who seek to develop a certain attitudinal stance which supports their perspective. This sort of identification of the Syrian government as the saviour of the Syrian civilians and the land some of the time and as a victim of aggression on the part of Western powers and paid rebels the rest of the time creates a context which raises a discourse of anti-rebels. This discourse

was initiated from the very beginning through the disgraceful lexical choices used to identify the rebels, which contrasted with the laudatory references used to identify the government. The following example is indicative of the relational process used by pro-government actors:

> 69. 'Provided with physical probes from the incident via the Russians and the British[,] U.S. government laboratories found that the Sarin used in Ghouta did not match the Sarin the <u>Syrian government was supposed to have.'</u> ("Hersh: Turkey Behind", 2014).

The verb *to have* in the above example expresses a possessive relationship, one of the relationships expressed by the relational process, which includes equivalence, attributes and possession (see Section 2.2.2 for more information). This example represents the Syrian government as possessing a type of Sarin gas (possession) different from that used in Ghouta. The relational process in this example is used to refute the accusation that the Syrian government used chemical weapons. The process is further reinforced by evidence produced by specialised laboratories. A similar example is *we have information*, where the sayer is Putin and the verbiage represents evidence that an Iraqi laboratory has produced chemical weapons for rebels.

Another important point in example 69 is the use of the evaluative verb *supposed*, which serves both to denote the invalidity of the rebels' and the United States accusation that the Syrian government used chemical weapons and to create a sense of sympathy towards the supposedly falsely accused Syrian government. Moreover, the probes are attributed to both Russian (pro-Syrian government) and British-US (anti-Syrian government) laboratories. The structure of the relational clause serves two ideological functions: First, it distances the Syrian government from having any influence on those conducting the investigation, and second it delegitimises the United States' allegation against the Syrian government, thus establishing a positive image of Syria.

The mental processes in examples 70–72 below are utilised to reflect the firm resolution of the Syrian government to win the war:

> 70. '<u>The Syrian army is planning </u>a massive, phased offensive to take back control over two-thirds of the areas currently controlled by…foreign-backed militants by end of 2014.' ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

> 71. '<u>The Syrian army intends</u> to restore full security to Aleppo and Daraa.' ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

72. '<u>Military sources believe</u> that Mourek is no less important than the town of Yabroud.' ("Army Regains Control", 2014).

The mental processes used in these examples (*planning, intend* and *believe*) are mainly cognitive and refer to one unified phenomenon—regaining control of the mentioned territories and targeting militants. It is worth noting that these cognitive processes represent the Syrian army as reacting to anti-government operations, as examples 70 and 71 state: *to take back control* and *to restore full security*. This pattern depicts anti-government social actors as invaders who snatch lands and introduce in turn the Syrian army as a guardian.

With regard to the verbal processes of the pro-government actors, the following examples are selective:

73. 'Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad <u>said</u> foreign-backed terrorist groups are using chemical weapons such as chlorine gas in their fight against the government forces.' ("Army Makes Major", 2014).

74. 'Mekdad <u>said</u> the Syrian government had never used such weapons during the war against the militants. He <u>emphasized</u> that terrorist groups "have used chlorine gas in several of the regions of Syria and Iraq".' ("Army Makes Major", 2014).

75. 'The Syrian official's comments <u>underscored</u> what appeared to be the OPCW's next major challenge as it fully eliminated Syria's chemical stockpile.' ("Army Makes Major", 2014).

76. 'Damascus has vehemently <u>denied</u> the accusations, <u>saying</u> the attack was carried out by the militants themselves as a false-flag operation.' ("Army Makes Major", 2014).

The above examples show various verbal processes which in a way give a sense of attitudinal stance. Example 73 uses a common reporting verb, *said*, to directly communicate statements which have been made. However, the sayer is given a high-ranking political position, *Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister*. The verbiage is thus legitimised by the reference to the sayer's political status. According to van Leeuwen (2008), the utterances of prominent social actors with any kind of public authority are legitimised by references to their social status. The next two verbal processes used in examples 74 and 75 are *emphasised* and *underscored*. Both reflect a strong endorsement of what is being said. Again, the sayers are the Syrian officials who endow the verbiage

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with a degree of validation attributed to their authority. The verbal process in the last example, *denied*, reflects a sense of challenge towards the accusation. In addition, the process is emphasised by the qualifier adverb *vehemently*, which conveys a kind of forceful rejection of the chemical attack allegations. It is worth mentioning that the strategy of introducing disclaimers is controlled by implicit ideology, which works towards rendering a good self-definition of the participants (Tedeschi, cited in van Dijk, 1995). Therefore, the sayers as participants are positively defined in terms of their political positions, besides being the most predominantly quoted sources.

The previous verbal examples represent the Syrian government and its representative officials as being confidently beyond any risk of indictment. Moreover, the pattern of verbiage is marked by the denial of the allegations and accusations of anti-government armed groups. The use of intensifiers such as *never* in example 74 and *vehemently* in example 76 serve to enhance the tone of power in the Syrian authorities' verbal declarations. The aforementioned analysis of transitivity selections thus elucidate the patterns and roles commonly attributed to each side of the conflict. It also explains how these transitivity features have contributed to the biased representation of the two warring sides, influenced by the ideological perspective of the news agency. The following section is a full summary of the analysis at the three levels.

6.2.6 Summary

Part I was an exploration of how Fars coverage reported the chemical attacks which occurred in Syria between 2013 and 2015. The analysis aimed at uncovering the possible bias, if any exists, in reports on the chemical attacks by investigating the representational choices used to represent the warring sides involved: anti-government fighters and their allies on the one hand and Syrian government officials and their allies on the other. Transitivity processes were also explored to determine which patterns were used most frequently and how they contribute to the images presented of the two warring sides. The analysis also elucidated the ideological references incorporated in some aspects of Fars' representations.

Examining the representational choices revealed a clear polarised identification of the rebels on the one hand and the Syrian government on the other. Rebels and their allies were introduced using a negative frame denoting conspiracy, terrorism, betrayal and interference in Syria's internal affairs, while the Syrian government was positively introduced as the legal authority and the defender of Arab lands. At the semantic level,

nomination was the most frequent strategy employed to depict rebels using notorious names such as ISIL, al-Qaeda, Ba'ath and so on, while the progovernment social actors were individualised and positively functionalised as ministers and officials.

The polarised representation was also highly evident in the use of ideology-laden lexical items which served to enhance the danger of the rebels, such as extremists, takfiri, insurgents and so on. Such representations reveal a clear authorial voice and inform the news agency's sectarian ideology. Rebel allies such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia were negatively represented while the government was topicalised as being a powerful force which has eradicated militants and regained control over territories they held. The overall representational choices tended to activate rather than passivate both rebels and the government, although anti-government social actors were predominantly activated as part of activations of the government.

With regard to transitivity selection, the analysis revealed that civilians received the least attention in Fars' coverage. They are represented as victims in material processes and as witnesses in the verbal processes, but each of these types of process occurred only three times. Anti-government social actors, on the other hand, were given three roles in material processes. As actors, they were represented as causing civil disturbances and committing terrorist acts, while as a goal they were introduced as a counterpart who had been killed and defeated. The beneficiary role was also utilised to demonstrate that the rebels dealt with chemical substances and received weapons. The government, meanwhile, was depicted as a victim targeted by the actions of the rebels and their allies, although it is also activated as an actor of material processes, denoting defence and protection.

The verbal processes associated with the government are also used to nullify the accusations levelled by anti-government social actors and to express the causal relationship between rebel allies such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey and the chemical attacks in Syria. However, the verbal processes allocated to the rebels are ironically used to relay their accusation that Saudi Arabia and Iraq are their main suppliers of chemical weapons. Moreover, the relational processes were used to stereotype the rebels and lay the full responsibility of the attack on them and their allies. Rebels are described as insurgents, threats and foreign-backed.

To conclude, Fars coverage is clearly polarised in its representation of the rebels as bad while presenting the government in a positive light. This coverage informs to a great extent the polarised discourse regarding the influence of the Iranian government's

view of the Syrian revolution and its sectarian ideology. These dichotomous features that appear throughout Fars' lexical choices and transitivity selections diminish the coverage's objectivity and make it biased.

Reuters' Representation of Chemical Attacks

6.3 Introduction

This part investigates the existence of media bias, if any, in the UK Reuters' coverage of the chemical attacks in Syria. The analysis is divided into three main sections. The first section analyses the headlines in terms of transitivity selections and the roles of participants. The second section explores the reports in relation to the representation of the two warring sides within the socio-semantic inventory model, the transitivity processes and the role of the participants involved in the chemical attacks. The third section discusses the results of the analysis in relation to the ideology within the ideological square model. The part concludes with a brief outline of how Reuters depicted the issue of chemical attacks based on the linguistic features analysed across the whole part.

6.3.1 Transitivity Selections in Reuters' Headlines

Investigating the processes and roles of the participants is intended to shed light on the focus of the sample headlines, (see Appendix B), in reporting the chemical attacks in Syria, which in turn reveals the ideological perspective underlying these representations. Table 6.8 below shows the constructions of the headlines and their transitivity choices. The headlines are listed in accordance to the timeline of the chemical attacks.

Table 6.8 Transitivity choices in Reuters' headlines

No	Headlines	Participants	Roles	Process	Type	Construction
1	Dogged rebels the target of Syria gas attacks – activists	Dogged rebels	Token	Implicit (are)	Relational	Active
		the target of Syria gas attacks	Value			
2	UN's Ban says all claims of chemical arms use in Syria need investigating	UN's Ban	Sayer	Says	Verbal	Active
		all claims of chemical arms use in Syria need investigating	Verbiage			
3	France says ready to act over Syria, despite British refusal	France	Sayer	Says	Verbal	Active
		ready to act over Syria, despite British refusal	Verbiage			

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4	UN confirms chemical arms were used repeatedly in Syria	UN	Sayer	Confirms	Verbal	Active
		chemical arms were used repeatedly in Syria	Verbiage			
5	Exclusive: Chemical weapons used by fighters in Syria – sources	Chemical weapons	Goal	Used	Material	Passive
		Fighters	Actor			

The participants' roles in headlines 1 and 3 are framed in a manner that reflects an indirect accusation against the Syrian government. The rebels, given their token role in headline 1, are identified as the target of the chemical assaults. This framing implicitly denotes the involvement of the counterpart warring side, i.e., the government opposition. In addition, France, the anti-government ally, is introduced as a sayer stating its willingness to conduct a military action against Syria in headline 3. The two headlines are introduced as statements of external voices representing the activists and the France, respectively.

On the other hand, headlines 2 and 4 show plain announcements, which give no attitudinal view for or against the two warring sides. The verbiage role in headline 2 states the need for more probes to approve the use of chemical arms, while headline 4 asserts the use of chemical weapons in Syria; however, the headline does not attribute responsibility to anyone. The headlines are ordered chronologically from 2013 to 2015. Thus, they show a sense of sequential relation to the progress of issues related to the chemical attacks. The use of an authorised source, the UN, enhances the credibility of the two reports.

Surprisingly, the fifth headline explicitly states the involvement of the anti-government fighters in using chemical weapons, *Chemical weapons used by fighters*. The passive voice foregrounds the use of chemical arms and activates the fighters as agents of the action. It is worth noting that the five headlines start by representing the rebels as victims targeted by chemical weapons in headline 1 and end up framing them as victimisers in headline 5. Relating the release dates of the two reports, 1 and 5, in the previous table to the timeline of the chemical attacks (see Table 6.2 in the current

chapter) shows that the two reports were issued after the gas assaults, which targeted the rebel-held areas, in 2013 and 2015, respectively. Accordingly, the accusation of the anti-government fighters seems illogical as the affected areas hit by the missiles were controlled by the rebels. Moreover, Reuters used unnamed sources in this headline, which does not allow for any evaluation of the truth value of the source. However, this might be clarified more in the report's body.

Table 6.8 displays the relevant relational, verbal and material processes. The relational process is utilised to depict the rebels as the target of the chemical attack, which connotes a fatal situation for the rebels in headline 1, while the material process is employed to express the involvement of the anti-government fighters in the chemical attacks in headline 5. However, the verbal processes are the most frequent ones. They are employed to convey the UN declarations, where the sayer is the humanity organisation of UN itself in headlines 2 and 4, and to express the announcement of military response against Syria where the sayer is France in headline 3. The verbal process is also used, in headline 5, to accuse the opposition of using chemical weapons, as indicated earlier.

Thus, drawing upon the previous points, the transitivity selections in the headlines show no polarised representation. Both the rebels and the government are depicted as being involved in the chemical attacks. Moreover, the reliance on the verbal processes allows for external voices that express different views in favour of as well as against the two warring sides and prevents prejudiced attitudes. The UN voice, however, shows a neutral perspective in this respect.

6.3.2 The Representation of Anti-government Social Actors

This section examines the various representational choices used to construct the image of the social actors (SAs) involved in the chemical attacks. The aim of this analysis is to find out traces of opinion-based representations or ideologically motivated depictions of SAs that deviate from the values of objective reporting in news agencies and hence from the Trust Principles of Reuters. In examining the socio-semantic roles allocated to the anti-government SAs, the following table displays the frequency distribution of the activated and passivated roles.

Table 6.9 Role allocations of the anti-government SAs in Reuters

Anti-government SAs		
Role Allocations	Activated	Passivated
Number of Occurrences	70	23

Table 6.9 indicates that anti-government fighters are activated three times more than they are passivated. This finding means that the anti-government SAs are represented more as active influential participants than as passive non-participants enduring the effects of the actions. Both the activated and passivated roles denote the inclusion of the SAs. Examining the representational choices of the two types of role allocations (passive and active) shows that Reuters relies heavily on assimilation and categorisation in representing the anti-government fighters as the following examples show:

1. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had been trying for some time, in vain, to dislodge <u>rebels</u> from the areas not far from central Damascus that were <u>hit by</u> suspected chemical weapons last week. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

2. France, the former colonial power in Syria, has backed the <u>opposition rebels</u> since the start of the conflict. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

3. Russia, an ally of Syria, has supported Damascus against demands from <u>Western powers</u> that the investigation be widened. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

4. '<u>We</u> are ready. We will decide our position in close liaison with <u>our allies</u>', Hollande said. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

5. France and Britain have become close <u>diplomatic allies</u>. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

The above examples show that Reuters uses plural collectivised terms to refer to the anti-government warriors, such as *rebels* in example 1. This representational choice is highly recurrent in the selected sample and commonly employed as an overall reference to the anti-government side unless there is a need to specify the name of the armed group, as will be demonstrated during the analysis. Example 2 also collectivises the rebels and nominates them by the representational choice of *opposition*.

It is worth noting that the two referential strategies do not reflect negative views toward the anti-government fighters. *Opposition*, for instance, is the label provided

for the armed rebels who are recognised by the international community as the legal representative organisation of the moderate Syrian rebels. The use of the lexical choice *rebels* also does not reflect a prejudiced standpoint. The semantic preferences of *rebels* in Reuter's corpus shows a positive representational context (see Section 5.2.1.1). Similar examples of collectivised SAs include *rebel groups*.

Allies are also neutrally identified in the reports. In example 3, *Western powers* denote the anti-government allies. The reference to the allies comes in the form of a generic collectivised term, *powers*. However, the premodifier *Western* has activated the *powers* by classifying their identity as belonging to the West. Therefore, the use of the inclusive *we* in example 4 serves to individualise the anti-government allies. *Our allies* in the same example is also indicative of the same representational choice, the individualization. The use of the possessive pronoun *our* has upgraded the plural generic identification of allies to be more individualised. In addition, the indefinite quantifier *several* is also used to aggregate the number of Western powers when projecting their views or doubts, as in *Several Western governments have expressed doubt*. Thus, the use of *several* has served to exclude any generalisations that might be inferred about the Western stance if the aggregated adjective is absent.

The most important representational choice found in the reports is religious-based naming, which is a type of categorisation strategy, as demonstrated in the following example:

6. The <u>rebels of Ghouta</u>, mostly from <u>the Sunni majority</u> that opposes Assad and his minority Alawite sect elite, were among the first areas in the country to take up arms.

Reviewing the above example shows that the rebels are activated by the possessive attributive prepositional phrase *of Ghouta*. This identification gives the rebels a sense of individualised identity, as it attributes them to the place hit by the chemical weapons, which was famous for the Ghouta massacre. Thus, identifying the rebels in relation to Ghouta indirectly informs a kind of agitated rebel starving for revenge. In addition, the use of *Sunni* in this example does not inform an ideologically prejudiced representation, but rather a sort of identification with the demographic distribution based on the sectarian factions. It is a sort of factual information required to perceive the nature and

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the dimensions of the conflict. This representation serves to legitimise the rebels'
reaction in *taking up arms* against the government, as the chemical missiles target the
rebels strongholds.

It is worth remembering that the structure of ideology in a text is evident in the
'positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation', which is devoted to
changing opinions and affecting attitudes (van Dijk, 1998, p. 25). Therefore, identifying
the rebels in terms of their sectarian background in example 6 does not seem to fit the
framework of polarised representation. In the same vein, the classification strategy
proceeds to represent the rebels in relation to the nationality of their ally, as the
following example shows:

7. The rebel groups there include the <u>Saudi</u>-backed Liwa al-Islam Brigade.
   ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

This representational choice is both nominated and classified. The example shows no
attitudinal views. The two examples, 6 and 7, do not include any evaluative lexis which
informs an authorial voice. On the other hand, Reuters opts for nomination and
functionalisation when specifying certain armed groups among the rebels. The
following example is indicative of this practice:

8. The rebel groups there include […], <u>Saladin Brigade</u>, <u>Jobar Martyrs Brigade</u>,
   and <u>Tahrir al-Sham</u>, a unit headed by <u>Firas al-Bitar</u>, an officer who defected
   from Assad's army and has a reputation as a good military planner. ("Dogged
   Rebels the Target", 2013).

The example identifies the armed groups of the Ghouta rebels, who were hit by
chemical missiles. It functionalises them as *brigades*, a term which denotes systemic
military battalions and a high possible threat against the government. The example also
functionalises the head of the brigade through a post-modifying appositive clause, *an
officer who defected from Assad's army and has a reputation as a good military
planner*. The head is functionalised as an officer and appraised as a *good* military
planner. Reuters also uses disassociation strategy to describe the head of the brigade as
someone who defected from the government's army and individualises him by his name
Firas al-Bitar.

The representational choices used in this example show a positive representation of the rebels. The evaluative adjective *good* in the example is attributed to the head having previously served as a military officer in the Assad army, known for his military character. Thus, the positive representation is based on factual information not on the reporter's subjective estimation. The nomination strategy is also common in Reuters' reporting and a similar example elsewhere in the sample shows the SAs are individualised by their names and honorific titles, such as *President Francois Hollande*, *British Prime Minister David Cameron*, *US President Barack Obama*, *Britain*, *France*, *opposition* and *Islamic State.*

With regard to the Islamic state fighters, they are sometimes referred to negatively as *insurgents.* This lexical choice might not be considered a prejudiced representation because the armed Islamic State groups are already recognised as terrorist groups by the international community. Therefore, using this identification strategy fits the historical and political background of Islamic State fighters. It is also worth noting that differentiation strategy is employed in order to distinguish the ISIS group from the remaining armed rebels as in *the clashes between Islamic State and another rebel group*.

In addition, the reports use aggregated representation, albeit through quoted and indirect speech, to foreground the causes behind the government assaults against the rebels, on the one hand, and the causalities of the chemical attacks on the other. This type of representation also assimilates the rebels, but in the form of quantity and numbers. The following examples are illustrative of this representation:

9. 'When you have a large number of well-organised rebel fighters in an urban area with lots of cover, using chemical weapons becomes very tempting', a Middle East based diplomat said. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

10. 'There are 32 persons showing symptoms of illness and are currently being treated following exposure to the weapons who are willing to be examined by the inquiry', the letter said. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

Example 9 expresses the power of the rebels. The aggregated expression *large number* serves to emphasise the firm resistance of the rebels against the government military operations. The example contains a number of judgmental expressions, which evaluate the effective structure of the rebels as in *well-organised*, and describe the government's

inclination to launch gas attack as in *very tempting*. Both reflect an authorial voice interference and connote an implied accusation against the government. However, this identification is introduced as a direct quotation attributed to a *Middle East based diplomat*. The speaker is functionalised but not named. However, the political status of the speaker authorises the given proposition.

The aggregated representation is also employed to represent the casualties among people hit by the chemical weapons in example 10. It is also a quoted statement, where the source is identified as the utterance autonomisation *the letter*. However, the report clarified that the letter came from *opposition campaigner Basma Kodmani.* This indicates that the people being gassed are members of the rebel groups and civilians but not the government forces. Thus, the functionalisation and the classification of Basma Kodmani as a campaigner belonging to the opposition serve to orient the accusation toward the government authorities. Reuters shows no alignment for or against the propositions stated in examples 9 and 10. Both are direct quoted speeches, which, according to Richardson (2007), are assumed to honestly convey what has been stated. Furthermore, the two examples use the simple reporting verb *said*, which reflects no attitudinal stance and allows for no implied interpretation (Richardson, 2007).

Another representational choice that Reuters employs to refer to the anti-government side is abstraction. This strategy allows the news agency to represent the SAs by the marked quality that identifies them. The following examples are illustrative of this choice:

11. The hundreds of deaths caused by the August 21 attacks have also drawn <u>threats</u> of military retaliation from Western powers. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).
12. Russia, which has used its veto on the Security Council to counter Western <u>pressure</u> on Syria … etc. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).
13. 'The regime has been throwing everything he has at the Ghouta, but it remained a <u>thorn</u> in its side'. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

In example 11, the word *threat* is used to refer to the allies of the anti-government fighters. The allies are impersonalised as an intimidating power. *Threat* in this context is used to legitimise the expected violent reaction of the Western powers against the Syrian government due to the massacre of chemical attack that occurred on the 21st of

August. This abstracted representation is reinforced by *Western pressure* in example 12, where Russia postpones the US military reactions against Syria by its veto right. The two abstracted representations signify the stance of the international community toward the escalation of violence in Syria.

As discussed in Chapter two, (see Section 2.2.1.1), van Leeuwen (2008) pointed out that abstraction strategy is commonly employed to assign another implied meaning to the represented entity and serves to 'background the identity' of the SA (p. 47). However, the role of abstraction in the previous examples deviates a bit from the van Leeuwen effect. The abstracted lexical items, *threat* and *pressure*, are activated by the post-possessive attributive phrase in example 11 namely: *of military retaliation from Western powers* and the pre-modifying adjective, *Western*, in example 12. Thus, the identity of the abstracted expressions is clearly framed as Western powers.

Soffer (2009), indicated that the 'objective ideal' entails reporting 'a fixed message' to honestly 'transfer an exact description of reality' while 'distancing the reporter from the phenomenon being reported' (p. 478). This reporting scheme is to some extent reflected in the use of the abstracted terms. *Threat* and *pressure* in examples 11 and 12 project the critical situation of the Syrian government upon the repercussions of the series of chemical attacks against the rebel-held areas. Thus, abstraction here serves to convey the seriousness of the reported scene not prejudices against the Syrian government. In the same vein, the rebels, in example 13, are represented as *a thorn in its side*, which is a highly evaluative expression that denotes a negative attitude toward the government as a thorn symbolises pain and annoyance. Nevertheless, this representation is provided as a direct quotation and ascribed to an unnamed Middle East diplomat.

On the other hand, the exclusion of agency is mainly employed when reporting on the areas hit by the chemical weapons. Reuters avoids making accusations against either of the two warring sides. The following examples, taken from the Reuter report ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013), are indicative of this exclusion:

14. Even some locals in rebel-held areas <u>hit by the strike</u>.
15. The hundreds of deaths <u>caused</u> <u>by the August 21 attacks</u>.
16. The district was <u>hit</u> <u>with nerve gas</u>.

The three examples above, 14 to 16, narrate the same story of gassing people and rebels. None of the examples identify the actors of the chemical crisis. Example 14, for instance, suppresses the SA by passive agent deletion. The agent in the passive voice is substituted by nominalising the strike. In the same example, 14, the civilians are identified in terms of their limited number and unknown identity with the use of the quantifier *some*, thus excluding the agent while the nominalised verb still refers to the action. The same process is utilised in example 15. The action of the attack is nominalised to obscure the actors who caused *the hundreds of deaths*. The aggregation of deaths denotes the large number of people killed. The agent in example 16 is instrumentalised by the prepositional phrase *with nerve gas*, where the agent is also suppressed.

Excluding the SA in this context is case sensitive. Reuters is keen to support the news of chemical crisis with the appropriate evidence from the most authentic source. Therefore, the news agency depends on the declarations of the UN's investigation team in this respect rather than on those of the US and Assad governments. Nevertheless, the UN refuses to blame any side, stating that the mission of the UN is to confirm the use of chemical weapons in the alleged areas only. Thus, mentioning the agent in this respect may connote a sense of alignment if the reference is based on the allegations of the conflicting sides. Therefore, Reuters excludes the agent to remain unbiased.

6.3.3 The Representation of Anti-government Social Actions

The analysis so far has investigated the representational choices that Reuters employs to construct the anti-government SAs based on socio-semantic categorisation. The analysis below proceeds to examine the transitivity choices pertaining to the anti-government fighters and allies to determine the common pattern that best represents them and the sort of perspective they imply. As demonstrated earlier in chapter two (see Section 2.2.2), investigating transitivity choices serves to uncover the ideational meaning intended by the news agency. This investigation is used to explore the causal relation between the different participants to determine how the chemical attack is described and hence to identify any ideology underpinning this representation

The following table displays the common processes associated with the anti-government SAs, including fighters and allies as well as the people referred to as victims, locals, persons and civilians.

Table 6.10 Occurrences of transitivity choices – anti-government- Reuters

Social Actors	Process Types			
	Material	Verbal	Mental	Relational
	Number of Occurrences			
Civilians	13	-	-	-
Anti-government	16	17	8	9

Table 6.10 above shows that the material processes are dominant in representing the civilians a total of 13 times, while the verbal, mental and relational processes are absent. On the other hand, verbal processes are the most frequent processes associated with the anti-government SAs, occurring 17 times, followed by the material processes, which recur 16 times. The relational processes are used nine times, while the mental processes are presented 8 times, representing the least recurrent category. Thus, the table indicates that Reuters' focus on the anti-government SAs is greater and more frequent than its focus on the civilians.

Examining the material processes associated with the civilians reveals that they are depicted as passive participants who are enduring the violence of the government. They are represented as the people who *were exposed to sulphur mustard* and *killed* in the passive constructions, on the one hand. On the other hand, the civilians are activated as actors in relation to the material process, such as in phrases concerning people who *had fled* to other places and *9000 civilians have remained* in the suburbs of the cities, using the active voice. This pattern of material process depicts the civilians as people with no human rights and targets that had no choice but to flee and escape or be killed and gassed.

In contrast, the material processes associated with the anti-government fighters are used to construct the rebels in terms of their military operations in the battlefield and the support they receive from their Western allies. The following examples reflect this construction:

17. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had been trying for some time, in vain, <u>to dislodge rebels</u> from the areas not far from central Damascus. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

18. A unit <u>headed by Firas al-Bitar</u>, an officer who <u>defected from Assad's army</u>. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

19. Rebel brigades […], <u>managed to open</u> a supply corridor to the besieged Damascus neighborhoods of Barzeh. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

20. Rebels <u>have seized</u> all kinds of weapons from military depots across Syria. ("U.N. Confirms Chemical", 2013).

21. France most likely would <u>deploy</u> Rafale and Mirage fighter jets. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

Example 17 depicts the rebels as the goal of the material process *dislodge*, where the actor is President Assad. The rebels in this example are passivated as they are represented as undergoing the effect of the action of displacing and removing undertaken by the president. However, the rebels are activated as actors in examples 18 to 20 as powerful independent actors who are able to make changes and resist the government's oppression. In example 18, Bitar is associated with the material process of defection as an actor. Rebels, as well, are activated as actors who were able to *open* a supply corridor near Damascus and *seize* military ammunitions from the government in examples 19 and 20. In example 21, France, the anti-government ally is given the role of the actor who has the authority of *deploying* fighter jets against the Syrian government. Another pattern of material processes is used to represent the Islamic State fighters, as the following examples indicate:

22. '(IS) <u>gained</u> the ability to make it themselves, or it may have come from an undeclared stockpile <u>overtaken by IS</u>'. ("Exclusive: Chemical Weapons", 2015).

23. Islamic State insurgents <u>were battling</u> another group. ("Exclusive: Chemical Weapons", 2015).

24. The Islamic State group <u>has obtained</u>, and <u>is using</u>, chemical weapons in both Iraq and Syria. ("Exclusive: Chemical Weapons", 2015).

25. Kurdish authorities said earlier this month that <u>Islamic State fighters fired</u> mortar rounds containing mustard agent at Kurdish Peshmerga fighters. ("Exclusive: Chemical Weapons", 2015).

The material processes associated with the Islamic State (sometimes referred to as IS, ISIS or ISIL) are commonly used in contexts which raise doubts regarding the IS's involvement in using chemical weapons. Example 22, for instance, is a direct quotation of a diplomat source, which activates ISIS as an actor who is being suspected of *making* or *overtaking* chemical arms in their battles. Example 23 is also reinforcing the same proposition. The example uses the material process of *battling* to inform the setting in which the chemical weapons are used, thus activating ISIS in relation to the banned war weapons, which violate the UN's 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention. Example 23 is also an indirect quotation introduced as *a report by an international watchdog seen by Reuters*, which authenticates the reported proposition.

In the same vein, examples 24 and 25 confirm the actual use of chemical weapons by ISIS according to substantial evidence obtained by OPCW and the Kurdish authorities. In addition, the examples show no authorial voice as all the mentioned propositions are ascribed to definite nominated sources. Thus, the previous examples 22 to 25 foreground ISIS as the main actor in the chemical assaults.

However, the chronology of the chemical attacks should be considered in this regard because the chemical assaults were first launched by the Syrian government in 2013, according to the Joint Intelligent Committee (JIC) (Aldrich, 2014). The development and repercussions of this incident are complicated, therefore reducing the scope of the story of chemical crisis in ISIS is far from accurate. The report cited in the previous example was released in 2015, which witnessed a massive spread of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Thus, the time line in the previous examples is a key factor in validating Reuter's representation of ISIS.

In addition, some of relational processes show dissonant representations of the anti-government SAs. Consider the following examples:

26. Hollande […] told *Le Monde* France had 'a stack of evidence' that Assad's forces <u>were behind last week's gas attacks.</u> ("France Says Ready", 2013).
27. Assad has strongly denied carrying out chemical attacks, telling Russian newspaper […] that the rebels <u>were responsible</u> for what could be the world's worst poison gas strike in 25 years. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

Examples 26 and 27 above reflect contradictory views toward the culprit of the chemical attacks. Both are direct quotations of presidential answers. In example 26, the

president of France describes Assad's forces as the perpetrators of the gas attack. This negative representation is upgraded by the evidential noun phrase *a stack of evidence*, which echoes the reliability and plethora of the evidence President Hollande obtained. On the other hand, in example 27, President Assad identifies the rebels as being *responsible* for this crisis.

This representation shows a balanced view in projecting the reality. Reuters provides the commentaries of the two warring sides upon the allegation of chemical attacks against civilians. According to Schudson, 'using official sources limits the range of opinions presented in the press' (cited in Soffer, 2009, p. 480). Therefore, these extracted representations serve to distance Reuters from the views of both sides and at the same time reflect Reuters' adherence to the Trust Principles as it does not suppress one voice at the expense of foregrounding another.

By the same token, relational processes are utilised to identify the social structure of the rebel fighters, as demonstrated in the following examples:

28. The rebels of Ghouta, mostly from <u>the Sunni majority</u>. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).
29. The rebel groups there <u>include the Saudi-backed Liwa al-Islam Brigade, Saladin Brigade, Jobar Martyrs Brigade, and Tahrir al-Sham</u>. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

The rebels of Ghouta are identified in terms of their Islamic offshoot, the Sunni faction, in example 28. They are further represented in relation to their domestic affiliate. The rebels are identified as having brigades that are backed by Saudi Arabia. Identifying the offshoot of the rebels in the Ghouta attack serves to foreground the sectarian identity of the two sides of the conflict. Thus, the relational pattern in these examples functions to elucidate the background of the rebels in terms of their offshoot, allies and the place they demographically reside in. Along the same line, the relational processes are employed to describe the political scene, as the following examples show:

30. France and Britain <u>have become close diplomatic allies</u> in the years since their disagreement over joining the 2003 US-led war in Iraq and coordinate closely in defence operations. ("France Says Ready", 2013).
31. '<u>We are ready</u>. We will decide our position in close liaison with our allies', Hollande said. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

32. <u>France has some 20,000 nationals</u> living in Lebanon, myriad companies operating there and a peacekeeping force of around 800 soldiers. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

Examining this type of processes serves to highlight polarised representations presented in attributes and values that show opinions and hence determine biases. The relational processes in the previous examples, 30 to 32, construct the anti-government allies in relation to their political partners and interests in the region. In example 30, for instance, France and Britain are identified as *diplomatic allies* using token-value relation. The circumstantialisation specifies the reasons for their alliance and elucidates the France-Britain stance toward the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In this example, the relational processes contain factual information and no authorial evaluation.

In addition, the quotation in example 31 shows a carrier-attribute relation. The inclusive plural pronoun *we* denotes the countries that have the authority to impose a punitive penalty against governments committing violations of international law. Thus, the attribute *ready* reflects a sense of power and supremacy. The two examples identify the anti-government allies as a unified entity, which has the capacity to influence the politics of other countries. The relational processes are also utilised in example 32 to foreground the ample interests of France in Lebanon, such as the companies, forces and French citizens dwelling there, which illustrate France's firm stance against the Syrian government. Thus, the pattern of relational processes in the above examples provides neither a positive nor negative attitudinal evaluation in the construction of the anti-government SAs and hence no polarised representation.

On the other hand, verbal processes are utilised to express three main propositions, which are the accusation of using chemical weapons, voting for military action against Syria and declaring doubts regarding the chemical stockpiles submitted by the government. Examining the verbal processes has also shown no authorial voice is expressed in the context of the verbal processes. The following examples are representative of this conclusion:

33. The opposition has <u>blamed</u> President Bashar al-Assad's forces for that strike. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

34. France, Britain and the United States <u>said</u> the technical details of Sellstrom's initial September report on the August 21 attack <u>pointed to</u> government culpability. ("U.N. Confirms Chemical", 2013).

35. An offer of assistance came from opposition campaigner Basma Kodmani, who <u>told Sellstrom</u> in an undated letter that tissue samples had been gathered from six alleged victims of chemical attacks on March 24 in the villages of Adra and Ateybeh. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

36. Rebels <u>say</u> Assad's forces used chemical munitions. They also <u>blame</u> the Syrian government for the incident near Aleppo. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

Examples 33 to 36 show that verbal processes, *blamed, said, pointed to* and *told*, are employed to explicitly condemn the Syrian government for using chemical weapons. The accusation in examples 34 and 35 are reinforced by evidence provided by Sellstrom, who headed the UN investigation team in Syria. It is worth noting that the speakers in examples 33 to 35 represent legal political bodies, such as the opposition, Britain and France, which grant the accusation an authoritative tone. Thus, the verbal pattern serves to negatively represent the Syrian government and free the rebels of responsibility. Other examples, included elsewhere in the sample, show reciprocal accusations of using chemical weapons between the rebels and the government, such as *accused each other* and *blame each other.*

On the other hand, the verbal processes are used to foreground the consequences of the chemical attacks, as the following examples illustrate:

37. President Francois Hollande <u>said</u> a British parliamentary <u>vote</u> against taking military action in Syria would not affect France's will to act to punish Bashar al-Assad's government. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

38. Hollande <u>told</u> the daily *Le Monde* he still supported taking firm punitive action over an attack <u>he said</u> had caused irreparable harm to the Syrian people <u>and said</u> he would work closely with France's allies. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

Example 37 shows two different verbal processes, *said* and *vote.* The former represents the *president of France* as the sayer, the participant's role in verbal processes, who exerts his power against Assad's government, while the latter depicts the *British parliamentary* as the sayer objecting to the punitive reaction against Syria. However, the example as a whole reflects a firm negative position against Syria. Example 38

emphasises France's intention to execute a military reaction against Syria. The verbal pattern here reflects the perspective of the anti-government allies, which in turn highlights the militarised ideology of the Western allies. In addition, the following examples introduce the legitimisation of the international sanctions against Syria.

39. <u>Western powers say</u> the rebels do not have access to chemical arms. ("U.N. Confirms Chemical", 2013).
40. 'Only the Assad regime has helicopters', US State Department <u>spokesman John Kirby said,</u> referring to President Bashar al-Assad's government. ("Exclusive: Chemical Weapons", 2015).
41. Several Western governments have <u>expressed</u> doubt that the government of President Bashar al-Assad declared its entire arsenal. ("Exclusive: Chemical Weapons", 2015).

Examples 39 to 41 provide the reasons for the rebel allies' call for military actions against Syria, which are expressed via the verbal process *say* and *expressed.* The first legitimisation justifies the allies' accusation against the government by referencing the fact that the government has chemical stockpiles, while the rebels do not have access to them. By the same token, John Kirby expresses the invalidity of the government accusation against the rebels, stating that *only the Assad regime has helicopters*, referring to the witnesses' reports about the existence of the helicopters during the attack. Example 41, furthermore, reflects the distrust between the Western governments and the Syrian government upon the recurrent incidents of chemical offensives. These legitimisations highlight the social function of the allies' ideology, which works to protect the rebels and control the abuse of power of the government against the rebels and civilians. However, using the verbal processes expressed by the direct quotation of John Kirby and the Western powers serves to distance Reuters from prejudicial involvement in the expressed opinions.

Examining the associated mental processes also shows that the selected reports have focused on expressing the views of three main speakers, functioning as sensers: President Hollande, the opposition and the Britain-France coalition. The following examples are representative of this finding:

42. Diplomatic sources say Paris <u>fears</u> Assad's forces could attack its interests there in retaliation for strikes. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

43. 'I <u>believe</u> punitive action must be carried out against a regime that is doing irreparable harm to its people', he said. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

44. 'We will <u>decide</u> our position in close liaison with our allies', Hollande said. ("France Says Ready", 2013).

Reuters is keen to provide the relevant details that are needed to illustrate a specific stance without showing partiality toward the represented actor. Therefore, the mental process in example 42 above informs the political background of France's interference in the Syrian conflict while quoting President Holland's statement. Thus, based on the political motivation behind France's intervention, the use of the emotional process *fears* semantically denotes panic, yet serves to pragmatically highlight an extreme state of protection for France's interests in Lebanon, the neighbouring country of Syria. Therefore, the Hollande quotation in example 43 reflects an intensive attitudinal language. The cognitive process *believe* in the example denotes confidence and certainty, which is upgraded by the use of the epistemic modality *must* and the evaluative lexis *regime*. The cognitive process *decide* together with the epistemic modality *will* shows a firm commitment toward the action that is going to be conducted against the Syrian government. Thus, Hollande is represented as the main supporter of the military action initiated by U.S against Syria.

45. The opposition […] also <u>wants</u> the UN team to probe other alleged chemical attacks by the government. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

46. Britain and France <u>want</u> to broaden the UN investigation to include Homs and Damascus, where rebels say Assad's forces used chemical munitions. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

The representation of the opposition, Britain and France in examples 45 and 46 involves a negative representation of the Syrian government. The mental process *want* denotes the need for more investigation to detect the practice of using chemical weapons, where the Syrian government is the accused participant. The sensers require the interference of the UN investigation. The mental processes in examples 42 to 46 project the shared political cognition of the anti-government fighters and their allies.

6.3.4 The Representation of Pro-government Social Actors

Examining the representational choices employed to portray the Syrian government and its allies reveals different representational strategies. The following table displays the distribution of the socio-semantic roles, i.e. activation and passivation, that are allocated to the pro-government SAs.

Table 6.11 Role allocations of the pro-government - Reuters

Pro-government SAs		
Role allocations	Activated	Passivated
Number of Occurrences	47	19

Table 6.11 above shows that the pro-government SAs are more often activated than passivated. This means that they are represented more in relation to the actions they undertake (47) than the actions they undergo (19). These roles are presented through the lexical choices used to identify the participants involved in the chemical attacks. Thus, examining the representation of the pro-government SAs indicates that Reuters tends to individualise the pro-government SAs and functionalise them. These two strategies are the most frequent representational choices used in framing the government and their allies, as in the following examples:

47. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government agreed to destroy its chemical weapons arsenal after the August 21 Ghouta attack. ("U.N. Confirms Chemical", 2013).

48. Assad has strongly denied carrying out chemical attacks. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

49. An exchange of letters between Syria's UN Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari and UN disarmament chief Angela Kane showed that the two sides are far from agreement, UN diplomats said on condition of anonymity. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

50. Ja'afari has insisted that the inspectors only investigate the Aleppo incident. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

51. Assad and his minority Alawite sect elite. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

The Syrian government authorities in the previous examples are introduced by their names and functions. The *government* in example 47 is activated by the premodifier possessive phrase, which identifies the government in relation to *President Bashar al-Assad*. It is important to recall that the aim of examining the representational choices employed to represent the SAs is to identify either positive or negative biases in their representation..

The first three examples, 47 to 49, have individualised the SAs by their political status as *President* and *UN ambassador* as well as by their names. They are all activated as actors of their actions. The SAs in examples 50 and 51 are represented formally by their surnames, *Ja'afari* and *Assad*. Thus, it is clear that Reuters tends to be formal in representing the Syrian authorities. The examples show no negative or positive representation in terms of the lexical choices used to represent them except for the word *elite* in example 51, which is employed to reference the Alawites' dynastic rule of Syria. Similar examples include *Syria's Foreign Ministry* and *Bashar Al-Assad,* where the former is objectivated as it substitutes the name of Walid Al-Muallem, the minister of foreign affairs, with the department, *the ministry*.

In addition, the individualisation strategy is sometimes coupled with collectivisation and functionalisation to represent the government's military apparatus and its officials, as the following examples show:

52. Locals […] have questioned the rationale for such an attack so close to Assad's own forces and just a few days after UN weapons inspectors arrived in the city to investigate previous allegations of chemical weapon use. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

53. Diplomats and rebels interviewed by Reuters said Assad's generals had been trying for some time to push the rebel units back to the southern ring road. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

54. Over the past four decades, Syrian authorities have confiscated much of Mouadamiya to expand the Mezze military airport. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

The first two examples, 52 and 53, show collectivised representations of the military *forces* and *generals*. Both are activated by the premodifier *Assad*. The *authorities* in

example 54 are classified by the nationality of *Syrian*. The three representational choices reflect a neutral identification of the SAs being represented. However, the use of the premodifier *own* in example 52 enhances the possibility of the rebels' involvement in the chemical incident as the gas offensive occurred near the government-held areas. In this respect, Reuters seeks to provide a balanced view of the incident as it conveys the viewpoints for and against the two warring sides.

In addition, the Syrian president is sometimes objectivated, as the following examples show:

55. 'The <u>regime</u> attacked Mouadamiya with chemical weapons because it is strategic and because after nine months of siege, it found no other way', he [an Opposition activist] said. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).
56. 'It shows there are hidden intentions ... which violate <u>Syrian sovereignty</u>', said a statement on state television. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).
57. <u>Russia</u>, an ally of <u>Syria</u>, has supported <u>Damascus</u>. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).
58. <u>Syria</u> has asked the United Nations only to investigate what it says was a rebel chemical attack near Aleppo. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

The word *regime* in example 55 impersonalises the military forces. It represents them as an abstract concept, which implies a sense of dictatorship. This lexical choice, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, has a negative connotative meaning as it refers to a rigid government that is mainly authoritarian. Although this expression has alternative uses that are neutral in other domains, especially nutrition, the political register has granted the regime this gloomy negative connotation since it emerged in the French revolution [23]in 1789. In addition, Channell (2000, p. 46) stated that 'within Britain, regime is used to attack one's political opponents', which clearly denotes the semantically negative prosody of this nominal choice. It is important to note that this representational choice is introduced as part of a quotation by an Opposition activist, as seen in example 55.

On the contrary, the abstraction strategy in example 56 represents the government rule as *sovereignty*, which denotes a high state of authority. The example narrates a direct quotation from the Syrian foreign ministry, thus informing Reuters' lack of

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[23] Online Etymology Dictionary, 2013.

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commitment to the statement. The two abstractions in examples 55 and 56 reflect a sense of escalation in representing the Syrian government. *Sovereignty* gives a positive representation, while *regime* denotes a negative implication. In reflecting the views of anti- and pro-government parties from the official sources of both sides across the whole corpus reveals that Reuters is agenda-free and only devoted to providing a clear vision of the chemical issue.

Through the same manner of representation, the use of *Russia*, *Syria* and *Damascus* have impersonalised the pro-government SAs. They objectivate them by representing them in relation to places. In example 57, Russia is activated as an actor who provides support to Damascus. Both Russia and Damascus represent the governments of Putin and Assad respectively. It is important to note that using Syria, as spatialization strategy, to refer to the Syrian government, in example 58, might be interpreted as alignment towards Assad's government, especially that the country is torn apart between the government and the opposition and no longer controlled cohesively by Assad. However, using the whole to represent a part is a common journalistic practice, especially when reporting the politicians' actions (Riad and Vaara, 2011).

The final representational strategies are appraisement and aggregation. Regarding appraisement strategy, the Syrian government is represented negatively as *perpetrators* in the following example:

59. Hollande may now feel an even stronger duty to carry through on a promise to punish the <u>perpetrators</u> of the poison gas attack. ("France Says Ready", 2013).
60. The last of <u>1,300 </u>tonnes of chemical weapons declared to the OPCW was handed over in June 2014. ("Exclusive: Chemical weapons", 2015).

Example 59 shows a reported speech which conveys the French president's views about the sanctions against those responsible for the gas attack, as reported by diplomatic sources. The Assad government is passivated in example 59 in being represented as undergoing the effect of the punishment action. The lexical choice *perpetrators* denotes the criminals who have committed the chemical offensive. This representation is extremely negative and expresses an explicit accusation against the Assad government. On the other hand, the aggregation of the chemical weapons in example 60 implies a reference to the Syrian government. Here, the Syrian government is aggregated by employing the definite numeric reference *1300* and at the same time is objectivated in

being represented in relation to the chemical stockpiles they are sanctioned to submit. This sort of identification places more emphasis on the chemical arms coupled with the Syrian authorities rather than focusing on the government itself. The suppression of agency in *declared to the OPEC* and *handed* is not a radical exclusion of the agency because the whole context refers to the Syrian government. However, the suppression here serves to foreground the instrumentalised representation of the Syrian government.

6.3.5 The Representation of Pro-government Social Actions

The analysis below extends to examine the transitivity selections of the material, mental, verbal and relational processes that are combined with the pro-government SAs. As mentioned earlier (see Section 6.3.3), examining the transitivity selections is crucial in uncovering the ideological motivation behind the construction of the social actions. The following table displays the frequency distribution of the four transitivity processes.

Table 6.12 Occurrences of transitivity choices – pro-government - Reuters

Social Actors	Process Types			
	Material	Verbal	Mental	Relational
	Number of Occurrences			
Pro-government	14	19	6	3

Table 6.12 shows that the pro-government SAs are represented in verbal and material processes more than by the mental and relational processes they are associated with. Verbal process appeared with the highest frequency, with 19 occurrences, followed by the material process, with 14 occurrences. The mental and the relational processes recurred six and three times, respectively. Thus, the table demonstrates that Reuters pays more attention to the verbal behaviour of the Syrian government and their allies through phrases such as allegation, accusation, declaration and so on. Reuters also focuses on the material action carried out or experienced by the pro-government SAs.

Examining the material processes shows that Assad and his forces are commonly associated with actions which denote regaining control over preoccupied areas overtaken by the rebels. The following examples are representative of these associations:

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61. The praetorian units entrusted with defending his seat of power, <u>mounted </u>a major push to retake the four areas. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

62. 'The regime <u>has been throwing</u> everything he has at the Ghouta'. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

63. The rebels of Ghouta, […] <u>opposes Assad and his minority Alawite</u> sect elite. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

Examples 61 and 62 agentalise the *praetorian units* and *regime* in relation to the material actions *mounted* and *throwing*. The two actions are undertaken by the forces for the purpose of snatching areas from the rebels. This representation reveals that rebels are forcefully defending their areas that Assad forces have lost control over. It gives a sense that the power of the two warring sides is to a great extent symmetrical. Furthermore, the post-modifying clause following the *praetorian units* in example 61, *entrusted with defending his seat of power*, describes the role of the government troops metaphorically as defending the seat of Assad, which was kept for 4 decades since Assad's father, Hafez, became President of Syria in 1971. This clause shows negatively that saving Assad's own interests is the goal of the material process *defending* in the modifying clause. It is important to realize that 'downplaying' the important aspects of news stories might be considered bias (Baker, 2016). Baker indicated that 'a negative representation is acceptable as long as it is not the majority representation' (Baker, 2016, p. 253). Therefore, identifying Assad forces as defending his seat of power is to some extent realistic considering the political background of the Syrian government. On the other hand, Assad is represented in relation to the Sunni sect in example 63. Assad is passivated as being the goal of the material process *opposes*, where the actors are the militarised operations carried out by the Sunnis. The material process *opposes* gives rise to the sectarian representation of the Sunnis on one side and the Alawites and the Assad loyalists on the other.

Another set of material processes takes the city of Mouadamiya as a goal for the military actions and the Assad forces as the actor. The following examples are indicative of this framing:

64. Over the past four decades, Syrian authorities have <u>confiscated</u> much of Mouadamiya to expand the Mezze military airport and compounds for the

Republican Guards and Fourth Division, which now surround the town. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

65. Most of Mouadamiya's residents had already fled after Assad's forces had <u>overrun</u> the suburb several times in the last year. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

66. The regime <u>attacked</u> Mouadamiya with chemical weapons. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

Examples 64 to 66 represent Mouadamiya as an objectivated SA representing the rebels and the civilians in relation to the strategic town of Mouadamiya. The town is presented as experiencing the government oppression for decades. It is chosen as the area for the military airport in example 64. Therefore, the material process allocated to the *Syrian authorities* reflects a sense of power abuse represented by the verb *confiscated* and reinforced by the circumstance *over the past four decades*. In addition, the material process *overrun* associated with Assad's forces, in example 65, denotes a powerful force that spreads over the suburbs of the city. The aggregation of time in *several times* denotes the intensive operations conducted in this city. Along the same line, the material process in example 66 informs an extremely vicious military operation against Mouadamiya. The *regime* is represented as the actor of the material process *attacked* and the circumstance reveals the type of the weapons used for this action, *chemical*. This set of material processes represents the Syrian authorities and their forces as an inhumane brutal regime.

In addition, the material processes allocated to Russia, which represents the main Western ally of the Syrian government, have depicted Russia in terms of actions denoting political and military support. The following examples are indicative of this depiction:

67. Russia, an ally of Syria, has <u>supported</u> Damascus against demands from Western powers. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

68. Russia, which has <u>used</u> its veto on the Security Council to counter Western pressure on Syria. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

69. The UN Security Council adopted a resolution in September to enforce the deal, <u>brokered</u> by the United States and Russia. ("U.N. Confirms Chemical", 2013).

The examples above activate Russia as the actor who has the capacity to make changes in the political scene. Example 67 informs the Russian rejection of the Western powers' demand to widen the areas of the UN's investigation in Syria. Examples 68 and 69 represent Russia as an influencer through the material processes denoting the political solutions initiated by Russia to save Syria, such as *used its veto* in example 68 and *brokered* in example 69.

On the other hand, the mental processes used to represent Assad have been quoted from the opposition fighters Khalid Omar as a consequence of the chemical attack conducted in Ghouta.

70. 'Assad <u>would have loved to gas</u> Barzeh and Qaboun as well, but they are too interconnected with loyalist areas', said Khaled Omar, a member of the opposition Local Council of Ain Tarma. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).
71. 'By hitting Ghouta, Assad <u>thinks</u> he is preserving Damascus and destroying a popular incubator of the revolution', he added. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

The representation of Assad in example 70 is satirical. The mental process expresses the wish of Assad in a conditional clause stated by an opposition fighter. The mental process *would have loved* denotes the incapability of Assad to gas Barzeh and Qaboun due to being near the cradle of Alawites areas and his loyalists' areas. The mental process *thinks*, as well, identifies Assad as being concerned about saving Damascus, the capital city, against the massive progress of the rebels in example 71.

This pattern reflects the mental model that the rebels use to depict Assad. For the rebels, Assad has exerted, in vain, all his possible tactics to stop the rebels' advance toward Damascus. Therefore, Assad wishes to be able to gas rebels. Van Dijk (1995) indicated that one way of manipulating the mental model is by selecting the piece of information that is meant to be foregrounded. He stated that the structure of the mental model may influence how the news is perceived through 'emphasis(ing) or deemphasis(ing) the causes or the consequences of events' (p. 15). Thus, the representation of Assad in these two examples reflects a certain mode of representation. Assad, accordingly, is represented negatively. In addition, the decrepitude of the Assad force is implicitly compared to the dogged rebels' power.

The mental process is also used to represent Ja'afari, the Syrian Permanent Representative to the UN. The following examples are indicative of this process:

72. He [Ja'afari] <u>wants</u> the Syrian government to approve members of the mission. ("U.N.'s Ban Says",2013).

73. [Ja'afari] <u>wants</u> duplicates of any of samples taken, the diplomats told Reuters. ("U.N.'s Ban Says",2013).

Ja'afari is associated with the mental verb *want*. The phenomenon in examples 72 and 73 expresses Ja'afari's concerns regarding the results of the UN's investigating mission. The two examples show a sense of instability and suspicion because the consequences that would follow the investigation are militaristic and devastating. Therefore, the phenomenon in example 72 stresses the need for the Syrian government to approve the UN's members who were selected to undertake the investigation in Syria and the phenomenon in example 73 requires a copy of the sample being tested by the UN. Thus, the pattern here demonstrates that Syria is at risk.

Examining the verbal processes shows that the pro-government SAs are introduced within four main verbal contexts. These contexts show the denial of accusation, doubts around the UN's intentions regarding the investigation mission, the government's demands from the UN team and the declarations about the destruction of the chemical arsenal. The following examples illustrate these processes:

74. Assad has strongly <u>denied</u> carrying out chemical attacks. ("Dogged Rebels the Target", 2013).

75. Syria and Russia <u>blamed</u> the rebels. ("U.N. Confirms Chemical", 2013).

76. Kurdish authorities <u>said</u> earlier this month that Islamic State fighters fired mortar rounds containing mustard agent at Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in northern Iraq during clashes in August. ("Exclusive: Chemical weapons", 2015).

The verbal processes in examples 74 and 75, *denied* and *blamed*, are used to represent the firm rejection of the accusation by the Syrian government and the intensifier *strongly* is used to enhance the tone of the denial. The examples show that the speakers are the president Assad and his ally Russia. It is worth mentioning that the denial of the accusation is frequently recurrent in the sample, taking similar forms. The verbal process in example 76 shows a different sayer and a different verbiage. The Kurdish

authority is allocated the verbal process *said*, while the verbiage accuses the ISIL. Thus, this set of verbal processes informs a pattern of voicing the firm rejection of the allegation of using chemical weapons, while at the same time accusing the rebels. A similar example is evident in the framing that Syria has not *confirmed* or *denied* that it has chemical weapons.

OPCW, on the other hand, has refuted the claims of the Syrian government, as the following example shows:

77. The third report by the OPCW fact-finding mission to Syria <u>said</u> the team had so far been unable to substantiate claims from the Syrian government that its forces had been targeted by insurgents using chemical weapons. ("Exclusive: Chemical Weapons", 2015).

The verbal process *said* in example 77 is not associated with a pro-government participant, yet the verbiage informs something about the government. The nominalisation of *claims* has been activated by the post-modifying prepositional phrase *from the Syrian government*, which serves to agentalise the government in relation to the claims. The lexical choice *claims* shows a low degree of endorsement, which reflects the weak position of the government in terms of the allegations of chemical attacks. Moreover, assigning OPCW as a speaker authenticates the given verbiage and enhances its credibility.

In contrast to the OPCW views, the verbal processes have shown a great emphasis on the government's attitude toward the chemical investigation team. Consider the following examples:

78. Syria's Foreign Ministry <u>compared</u> efforts to broaden the probe to the UN's role in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq by the United States. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

79. It is 'at odds with the Syrian request. It shows there are hidden intentions ... which violate Syrian sovereignty', <u>said</u> a statement on state television. 'Syria cannot <u>accept</u> these maneuvers'. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

80. Russia […] has <u>suggested</u> that Western powers are using the specter of weapons of mass destruction to justify intervention in Syria, as they did in Iraq. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

The previous examples raise the government's concerns about the real purposes of the UN's investigation. The verbal process in example 78, *compared*, recalls the miseries that followed the UN mission in Iraq in 2003. This representation informs the fears of the *Syria's Foreign Ministry* of facing a similar illegal war conducted by the US. Accordingly, the verbal process in example 79, *cannot accept*, expresses the Foreign Ministry's refusal of the UN's interference, which is legitimised by the comparison expressed in the verbiage of example 78. This process has been reinforced by the negative evaluative judgment *maneuvers*, which denotes a sense of suspicion around the UN's role in Syria. In addition, the verbal process associated with Russia, *suggested*, supports the reference to the hidden intentions behind the UN's mission. The use of the metonymical expression *specter* reflects the Russians' stance toward US interference in Syria's conflict.

By the same token, the verbal processes proceed to convey the Syrian authorities' demands from the UN, as the following examples show:

81. Syria has <u>asked</u> the United Nations only to investigate what it <u>says</u> was a rebel chemical attack near Aleppo. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).
82. Ja'afari has <u>insisted</u> that the inspectors only investigate the Aleppo incident. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).
83. [Ja'afari] <u>insists</u> on appointing an observer to accompany the inspection team. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).

The set of demands presented in examples 81 to 83 above informs the Syrian government's critical situation. The Syrian government *asked* the UN to confine its investigation to one area, which was Aleppo, and to exclude all the remaining areas hit by the chemical arms. Syria is assigned the role of sayer in example 81 and the use of the quantifier *only* places more emphasis on the chosen area. The example also verbalises an accusation against the rebels by using the process *says*. Examples 82 and 83 show the same verbal process *insist* and call for the same proposition, which is investigating Aleppo besides assigning a witness observer to assist the UN team. The verbal pattern in these examples projects the illogical demands of the Syrian government and presents the Syrian authorities as insecure. In addition, the pro-government SAs have also expressed their stance toward the program of chemical weapons removal in Syria. The verbal process *agreed* is likewise used in the context of

the destruction of chemical weapons associated with the Syrian government. The process denotes a complete adherence to the sanctioned program.

In the relational processes, Assad's government is represented in terms of its compliance with the OPCW convention, which aims to control and eliminate the use and production of the chemical weapons ('Chemical Weapons Convention', n.d.). The following examples are representative of this depiction:

84. Syria <u>is one of</u> just eight countries that have not joined the convention. The others are Angola, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea, Somalia and South Sudan. ("U.N.'s Ban Says", 2013).
85. 'Witnesses reported hearing helicopters overhead at the time the chemical munitions exploded. Only <u>the Assad regime has helicopters'</u>, US State Department spokesman John Kirby said, referring to President Bashar al-Assad's government. ("Exclusive: Chemical Weapons", 2015).

The relational processes in examples 84 and 85 above have established the basis upon which the international community has accused Assad's government of using the chemical weapons. Syria is identified throughout the token-value relational process as being the country which has *not joined the convention* of OPCW, as in example 84. Thus, the relational process in this example is employed to legitimise the reactions of the international community, including the accusation against the government, the threat of military operation and the destruction of chemical weapons sanctioned later. In addition, the quoted speech of John Kirby has represented Assad in terms of the arms he owns. The possessive relational process *has* associated with Assad's regime indicates the relation between the regime's helicopter and the chemical attacks. The premise, which Kirby states, *Witnesses reported hearing helicopters overhead at the time the chemical munitions exploded*, has a persuasive function and serves to authorise the accusation and rationalise the consequences of the incident. Another use of relational process is exemplified below.

86. A joint UN-OPCW investigative mission has been enacted to determine who <u>was behind</u> those attacks. ("Exclusive: Chemical Weapons", 2015).

The relational process in example 86 assigns no carrier for the attribute *behind those attacks*. The de-agentalisation in this example conforms to the overall neutral voice in

Reuters' reports, which reflects no alignment with Kirby's statement or the rebels' accusation in the previous examples. Thus, the relational processes are utilised to characterise the facets of the Syrian government in relation to the OPCW convention and the chemical attacks.

6.3.6 Summary

This chapter has so far investigated Reuters' coverage of the chemical attack conducted in Syria between 2013 and 2015. The aim of the analysis is to reveal the existence of bias in representing the participants involved in the chemical attack in terms of the inclusion and exclusion of the SAs and the socio-semantic strategies used to identify them. The analysis also examines the representation of the social actions in terms of the transitivity patterns intended to identify the anti- and pro-government SAs. The chapter, moreover, traces any ideological traits in the resulting representation.

The analysis shows that that the anti-government SAs have been activated as dynamic prevailing fighters who are able to bring change more than they have been passivated. Reuters' representation of the rebels and the Western allies tends to be more collectivised than individualised. The referential strategies used to depict the rebels shows the typical identification of protestors revolting against the brutality of their government. Therefore, the representation of the anti-government SAs in the selected sample has been neutral and showed no prejudiced alignment. Reuters does not introduce any of the two warring sides within a positive or negative frame, but rather depicts each side by its own unique identity, such as opposition, ISIS, France and Putin, using nomination strategy or by categorisation i.e., segmenting them according to their ethnic and Islamic offshoot as Sunni, Alawite and Kurds based on the diversity of the Syrian community. The only negative representation that Reuters shows is *insurgents* that is used to reference ISIS, which is globally identified as a terrorist group.

Moreover, in representing the two conflicting sides, Reuters has used either direct quotations or reported speeches. The news agency also depends on the official sources that represent each side of the conflict. Thus, Reuters distances itself from the personal views, attitudes or opinions that these sources voice against each other. In addition, de-agentialised actions are commonly employed when reporting on the victims and losses resulting from the chemical attacks to avoid assigning responsibility to any side.

On the other hand, the pro-government SAs are individualised and functionalised by their political or military functions. Reuters shows a very formal representation of the Syrian authorities through the use of nomination and honorific titles, such as *president*, *ambassador* and so on. The collectivisation is used to refer to the military forces or Syrian authorities. The negative representations of the government, such as *regime* and *perpetrators*, are introduced in the quoted speech, which serves to distance Reuters from the quote. All in all, the socio-semantic representation of the anti- and pro-government SAs in Reuters reflects a balanced unbiased representation, which seeks to project the views of each party without mitigation.

Exploring the transitivity selections revealed Reuters' provision of a comprehensive image about the roles of participants involved in the chemical attack and its repercussions for the international community. Therefore, verbal processes have been predominantly employed to represent the two warring sides, which showed the variations in the perspectives of each side of the conflict. The Syrian government and their allies, for instance, are evident in the verbal processes denoting blaming, accusing, denying and doubts around the UN's investigation mission, whereas the rebels and their allies are contextualised in verbal contexts denoting voting for sanctions, threatening military action and suspecting the remaining chemical stockpiles in the government's arsenal.

In addition, the material processes allocated to the two warring sides have identified them as symmetrical opposing powers that are highly activated as actors of military operations. However, the material processes allocated to civilians have depicted them as powerless passive participants who are undergoing the consequences of the war. On the other hand, the relational processes are used to express the reciprocal accusations between the rebels and the government. The relational processes allocated to the rebels have also identified their military structure and sectarian offshoots, while the government's relational processes have identified it as lacking the OPCW's convention membership, which served to rationalise the international community's rage against the government after the chemical attack. Finally, the mental processes have been used to express the demands of the two warring sides from the UN. The pattern of mental processes allocated to France has revealed its political interest and the

motivation behind its insistence on conducting the military operation against Assad's forces.

In conclusion, Reuters' depiction of the chemical attack showed no prejudicial representation favouring or opposing either of the two warring sides. To further reveal more aspects of the unbiased representation of Reuters' coverage, the next chapter will discuss the findings in relation to Fars' representation to uncover the variations in the coverage of the two news agencies.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

7. Introduction

The previous three chapters analysed the two sets of corpora, Iranian Fars and UK Reuters. Each of these chapters provided separate analyses and findings. While Chapters 4 and 5 examined the corpora at the micro-linguistic level by investigating the keywords, semantic macrostructures, collocations and discourse prosodies that characterized them. On the other hand, chapter 6 examined the data within the CDA paradigm at the macro-linguistic level. Part I and II in chapter 6 tackled a sample from the chemical attack coverages released by the two news agencies to explore the representation of the chemical attacks in terms of the participants involved in this issue, their roles, transitivity processes, which are all examined in relation to van Dijk (1998) ideological square. The current chapter aims to discuss the findings that were determined in previous chapters and to connect them to this research's overall aim. This will be achieved by performing a systematic comparison between both the micro-linguistic and macro-linguistic findings on the two sets of corpora. The inclusive purpose of this study is twofold. First, the study seeks to uncover media biases (if any) that were represented in the coverage of the Syrian revolution by exploring how the government's ideology impacted news production, and second, the study aims to clarify the roles of the linguistic representational choices that were made and influenced by any underlying ideologies. As such, this chapter is divided into the two sections that follow: Section 7.1, which discusses the micro-linguistic results of the lexical and collocational variations that the two news agencies used in their coverage of the revolt; and Section 7.2, which examines the differences and similarities between the macro-linguistic features of each news agency's representation of the event.

7.1 Bias Reflections at the Micro-Level

The micro-linguistic analysis of the two corpora revealed various differences in their representations of the Syrian revolution. The discussion at this level presents the findings in line with the following research questions (RQs) that are addressed by the corpus-based approach.

1. What are the salient keywords that characterize the news coverage of each news agency? What are the common semantic macrostructures associated with the keywords that the coverage employs to refer to the two conflicting sides?

2. What are the most recurrent collocational features that accompany the keywords and characterize the two agencies' discourses on the Syrian revolution? What prosodies do they imply?

3. How do these linguistic manifestations contribute to the biases in news media (to the extent that these can be identified)?

For the keyword analysis, which answered the first RQ, the findings reflected a number of substantial differences between how Iranian Fars and UK Reuters constructed social actors. These variations informed the different perspectives of the two news agencies. Consider the following diagram (Figure 7.1):
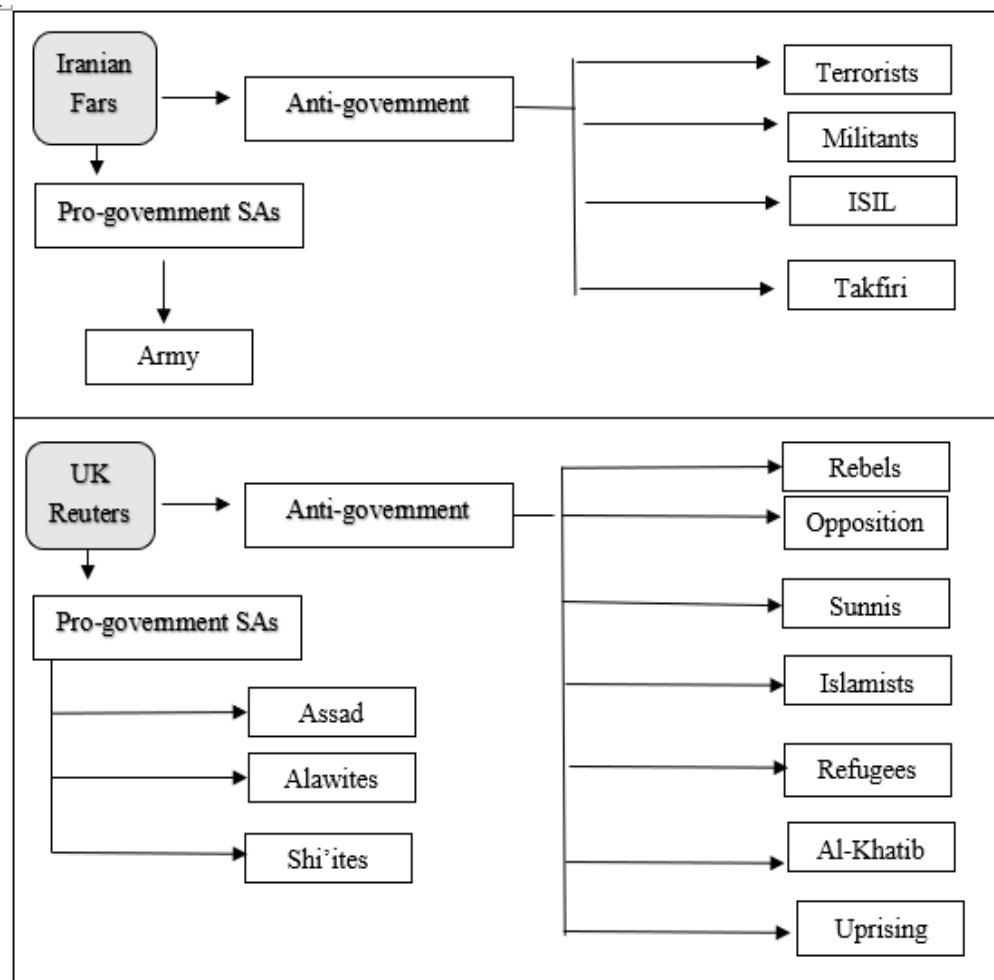

Figure 7.1 Keyword variations in how each news agency represented the two conflicting sides.

Iranian Fars used a propagandistic technique to depict anti-government fighters as SAs. The rebels were framed within a collective identity of terrorism as all of the referential strategies used in the figure above such as militant, ISIL and Takfiri fulfilled the same metonymic reference of terror. They are all given one inclusive label, which

encodes danger and threat, while the army is depicted as the sole key representative of the government. On the other hand, UK Reuters' construction of anti-government actors was more diagnostic. It labelled them into categories that distinguished each armed group from the other. The rebels were depicted as protestors who were forced to carry arms to defend themselves from the violence of the army. The opposition was then formed as an internationally-recognized political body to represent the rebels. In addition, UK Reuters individualized Al-Khatib as the leader of the rebels and placed the Islamic faction of fighters in the foreground by identifying them as Sunnis. The second label UK Reuters used was Islamists, who were further classified as moderate or radical. In reference to pro-government SAs, UK Reuters also highlighted offshoots of the Alawite and Shi'ites to which Assad and his supporters belonged. Moreover, UK Reuters prioritized Assad as the primary representative of the Syrian Government.

A comparison between the construction of SAs by Iranian Fars and UK Reuters reveals Iranian Fars' biased representation of the news. First and foremost, while Iranian Fars lacked a sectarian identification of the embattled rebels, UK Reuters disclosed this information by identifying the revolt as a Sunni-led uprising (see Section 5.2.2) and by noting that Assad descended from Alawite minority (see Section 5.2.2.1). Fars glossed over the reality of the Sunni offshoot and excluded their political representative institution, i.e. the Opposition. The rebels were represented as criminals and militants who possessed extremist Takfiri belief and the negativity appeared as a key news value in representing the rebels. Alawite fighters were also supressed, and the reality of Shi'ite domestic allies of Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon were backgrounded. This representation echoes the idea of the 'preferred model', wherein the identification of participants, the selection of news stories and the structure of events are reported in a way that supports the 'interests of the elites', i.e., the message that Iranian Fars intended for its readers (van Dijk, 1995, p.14). In turn, these strategies served to hide the reality of the sectarian war against the Sunni community in Syria and legitimized the army's violence against the rebels who were being represented as terrorists.

As mentioned earlier, UK Reuters' representation of the SAs who were involved in the Syrian revolution showed the true identities of the various armed groups. UK Reuters supported this representation by explicitly indexing the Islamic sect of the key word *uprising*. The lexical choices that accompanied this keyword such as Sunni-led revolt, contributed to disclose information about the factional rift that motivated the revolution. Unlike the anti-government SAs, the pro-government actors were referred

to with a certain formality. UK Reuters identified pro-government SAs by their surnames, political roles (e.g., diplomat, leader, president, etc.) or collectively by the governmental bodies to which they belonged (e.g., Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Defence Force, the Syrian Interior Ministry, etc.). Therefore, the referential strategies that UK Reuters used to construct the SAs were less biased. Reuters was also impartial in its introduction of the Islamic ideologies the two conflicting sides followed (Sunni and Shi'ite) and the legal authorities that they possessed (President Assad and the Opposition). In summary, it did not focus on the features of one side at the expense of the other.

A comparison of the semantic macrostructures in Iranian Fars and UK Reuters (see Sections 4.2 and 5.2) reflects significant discrepancies. To start, Iranian Fars' representation of the anti-government SAs revealed two thematic frames. The first is the discourse of conspiracy and the security threat and the second is the discourse of insurgents infighting. This first discourse was created by manipulating various lexical patterns that stereotyped the rebel fighters into foreign-backed terrorists or ISIL Takfiri militants. By indexing the existence of a covert foreign invasion and the spread of radicalism and danger, these two lexical patterns were recurrently used to encode the discourse of threat and conspiracy (see Section 4.2.1). On the other hand, discourse on insurgent infighting was introduced as an inclusive indicator of the opposition fighters, who had already been stereotyped as terrorists. This theme was nested in the representation of ISIL, or the Islamist fighters, who had been foregrounded in relation to defections and the series of executions they undertook against other anti-government fighters.

By comparison, UK Reuters thematically framed the anti-government SAs into several categories of discourse. These are comparatively diagrammed in the figure below.
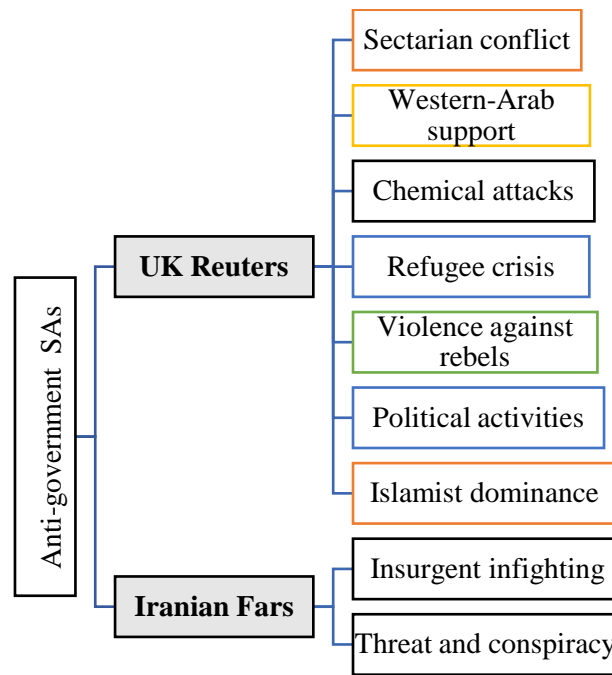
Figure 7.2 Network of anti-government thematic frames.

UK Reuters' anti-government thematic frames fully illustrated the platform of the conflict. The involvement of the fighters, their allies and the civilians were covered in a way that revealed the different facets of the struggle. UK Reuters highlighted the sectarian identity of the conflict, the Western powers' support for the rebels in response to the brutality against them, the issue of the chemical attacks and the army's violence against the rebels. It also shed light on the refugees who fled the country to escape the sectarian violence and find security. UK Reuters also covered the Opposition's political efforts to broker peace with the Syrian Government (Section 5.2.1 illustrates the thematic frames that are associated with the key SAs that were involved here). By comparison, Iranian Fars focused solely on the conspiracy against Syria and the internal division amongst anti-government fighters.

While both UK Reuters and Iranian Fars provided coverage within the thematic frame of Islamist danger, UK Reuters represented Islamism as both an anti-Syrian Government force and as a movement that threatened the West (Section 5.2.1.4). The lexical clusters that were used to characterise the Islamists were negative. They were not depicted as rebels but rather as a divided, high risk group, hardliners and agents of discord in the rebel rows. It is worth mentioning that this discourse about Islamism is not new to the Western media. Fear of the influence of Islamists can be dated back to the attacks that took place on September 11, 2001, a day which triggered the spark of war against Islamists. With that in mind, Iranian Fars represented Islamists (referred to

as ISIL, terrorists, Takfiri and Al-Qaeda) as the primary players who initiated the civil disturbance in Syria while marginalizing the rebels' role in the conflict. This focus on the Islamist armed forces legitimized Assad's military operations and the Russian Air Force's interference in the country. (Section 4.2.1.3).

More importantly, the aforementioned contrast across the keyword lists and the semantic macrostructures of the anti-government SAs revealed a set of 'meaningful absences' in terms of the discursive construction of reality. According to Schroter and Taylor (2018), absences in discourse are perceived 'when there is a potential for them to be significant and, therefore meaningful' (p. 5). This means that when the absence does not contribute meaningfully to the current context, it is empty and inexpressive. Following this line of thought, the analysis revealed the absence of Sunni rebels' discourse and the Sunni-Shia tension discourse in Iranian Fars. This has been established by examining the distribution of the religious factions in the Syrian community and the political parties representing them on the one hand (see Section 1.1 and 1.1.1), and by contrasting the representation of the anti-government players in the two corpora on the other. The absence of these discourses were enacted by the full exclusion of the factional and ethnic identification of the involved rebels (i.e., Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds), while being present in UK Reuters. Considering the socio-political context of the conflict, Iranian Fars had to adhere to this radical suppression in its coverage in order to avoid provoking all Islamic Sunni countries, constituting 85% of the Islamic world, against the Syrian Alawite government and Iran

Iranian Fars, in addition, suppressed the human rights violations that were carried out by the Syrian army and Shabiha against the rebels and Sunni civilians. It also glossed over the leading political initiatives of the Opposition towards compromise between the two sides. In addition, it depicted the Opposition as a non-Syrian organization that was backed by the West and plotting against Assad, placed the consequences of the refugees' mass migration in the background of its coverage and completely excluded the faction-based reality of the conflict. As such, Iranian Fars' representation of the conflict highly favoured the government.

In regard to the thematic frames of the pro-government SAs, the two news agencies tended to introduce the government by talking about its authority and power (see Figure 7.3). All the same, the elements that contributed to these thematic frames were ultimately dissimilar.
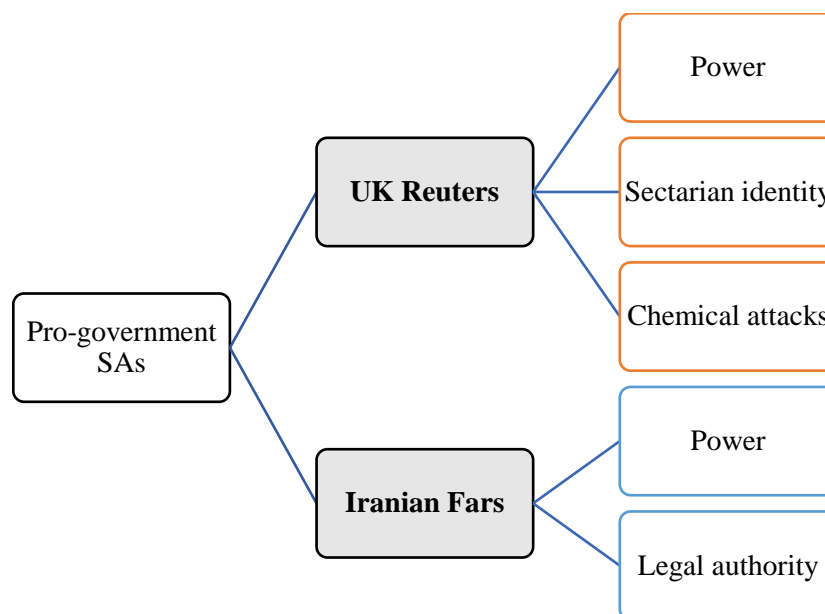
248

Figure 7.3 Network of pro-government thematic frames.

The semantic macrostructure of power that UK Reuters established was made up of a set of topics that foregrounded the autocracy of the Syrian Government. This was achieved by depicting Assad as an absolute power and by identifying the army, armed forces, officials and government in relation to him (e.g., Assad's army and Assad's government (for more information, see Section 5.2.2.1)). The discourse on power was also enacted through its repeated references to the dynastic rule of Assad's family and his Alawites' ruling sovereignty, which governed Sunni communities with an iron fist. Mention of the Russian Air Forces' support of the Syrian Army was also used to index the discourse on power. Unlike UK Reuters, Iranian Fars highlighted the government's power by emphasizing the army's advances in the battlefield and their military operations against terrorists. Iranian Fars also discussed the massive support the government gained from its Russian and Iranian allies.

These differences in discourse show how the Iranian Fars corpus visibly favoured the Syrian Government and played down the inherent structure of the government's Shi'ite identity. The omission of these defining features in the semantic macrostructure of power shows how Iranian Fars' coverage was biased. It is worth noting that while Iranian Fars identified Syrian governmental institutions using 'Syrian' as a premodifier, UK Reuters used the genitive case to link the country's institutions to Assad (e.g., Assad's forces). This difference reflects the dissimilar views of the two sources, Fars representation informed unity and authority while Reuters' possessive

representation connoted split between the Syrian people and the government, which is no more the Syrian government but Assad's.

In regard to RQ2, the collocational analysis yielded additional insights into the two agencies' perspectives, reflected in their collocational patterns and discourse prosodies. The analysis revealed a range of discourse prosodies, which to some extent, correspond with the semantic macrostructures that have been discussed earlier in this chapter. This can be attributed to the similarities between the denotative semantic meanings of those lexical items and their context-based pragmatic references. To give an example, Iranian Fars' use of keywords, like terrorists, extremists, militants and ISIL, semantically informed the concepts of terrorism and danger. By the same token, the concordance-based analysis of these keyword collocates revealed the same pragmatic references to danger, terrorism and threats. Therefore, to avoid redundancy, the comparison in this section will focus on the discourse prosodies, which gave different pragmatic implications than those that were informed by the semantic macrostructures discussed earlier. The following diagram summarises the sets of discourse prosodies associated with the key participant collocates based on the word sketch analysis that was provided in previous chapters (Sections 4.3 and 5.3).
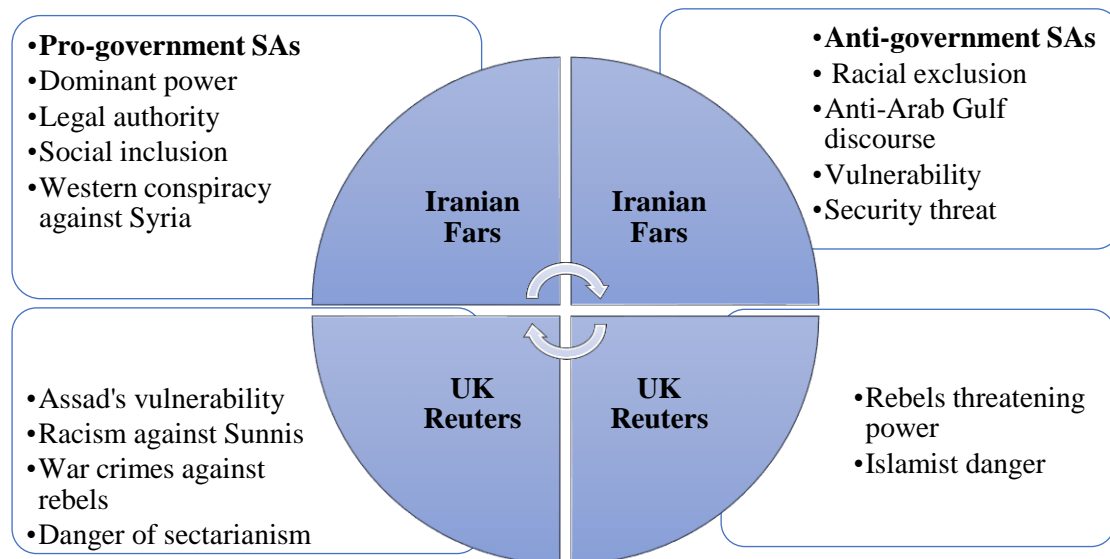

Figure 7.4 Discourse prosodies associated with the two warring sides.

The figure demonstrates that the common discourse prosodies nested around anti-government SAs in Fars have a clear negative representation, which denotes the news agency biased perspective. for instance, the discourse prosody of racial exclusion, was encoded throughout the collocational patterns that signify the nationality such as,

non-Syrian, anti-Syria, intruders and Saudi (denoting implicitly the Sunni Islamic branch). Moreover, the discourse prosody of security threat was established by collocating the Opposition's SAs with ISIL and Takfiri, which have globally been identified as extremist terrorist organizations. These two discourse prosodies were interwoven within the modifiers' collocate sets. Thus, the argument against anti-government fighters was passed on as a given fact by employing negative adjectives and modifying nouns. This sort of discourse structure, van Dijk (2003) argued, is highly ideological, as it packages its intended information as presupposed knowledge. As such, it becomes 'like icebergs of which only a small amount of meanings (propositions) are actually expressed, and of which most other information may be tacitly presupposed, and hence remain implicit' (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 25).

According to the findings on UK Reuters' discourse prosodies for anti-government fighters (see Figure 7.4), there are notable similarities between the direct semantic macrostructures and the collocations' pragmatic references. A key finding, which illustrates this similarity, based on the comparative analysis is that Fars relied heavily on the modifier collocates to represent the anti-government fighters while Reuters offered more coverage to them in the subject-v colligation (See Table 4.4 and 5.4.) This means that Reuters depended more on facts of each participants' actions and reactions without influencing its readers by estimating if those actions were good or bad. As a point of comparison, Iranian Fars' excessive use of evaluative collocates gave its reporters authorial voice and personal involvement in the representation of the SAs.

The differences between the discourse prosodies in the two corpora also casts light on the discourse about the western conspiracy against Syria that has been manifested in the collocational patterns of foreign-sponsored and western-backed reporting. This discourse prosody informs the impact of Iranian political background on Fars' perspectives, which are influenced by the tense relationship between the US and Iran. The relationship between the US and Iran was derailed in the mid-20th century when an Iranian religious scholar called for the US to relinquish control of Iranian oil. The matter became more complicated when the US accused Iran of possessing a nuclear bomb reactor and breaking the 'Non-Proliferation Treaty' (Aldasam, 2013, p. 21). The anti-west and conspiracy discourse prosodies have since been heavily emphasized at a thematic and pragmatic level. This finding also validates Khosravinik's view (2015) that the anti-western stance is an inherent value that has been established by Iranian politicians and voices of authority. It should also be noted that the set of collocations

that denote anti-Western and anti-Arabian Gulf discourse are interwoven within the context of international conspiracy.

In the same vein, Iran's drive to impose its sovereignty over the Arabian Gulf underlies the negative representation of the Gulf states (see the Syria-Iran Alliance in Section 1.1.2). Therefore, the anti-Arab Gulf discourse prosody, which was indexed by the collocates of Qatar, and Saudi being associated with extremism and terrorism is ideologically motivated. In summary, the Iranian Fars news agency has acted not as 'a detached non-partisan- voice' that marks objective news but as a mouthpiece for the Syrian Government's policies (Soffer, 2009, p. 478).

While the UK and Syria's relationship has not been imbedded in UK Reuters' depiction of Assad, his racist nature has been encoded by certain collocational patterns, identifying him by his relationships to his minority sect and Syria's governing system. As such, UK Reuters introduced Assad as a president who practiced oppression against the Sunni civilians and rebels. He has often been depicted as a passive actor in the political scene and has been agentialized to his refusal of international calls for peace talks, his rejection of negotiations with his opposition and his prevention of UN investigations into Syrian chemical weapons sites. UK Reuters has negatively represented Assad with a set of discourse prosodies that include vulnerability, inefficient political presence and hostility against offshoots of the Sunni sect. Among other remaining ethnic and sectarian groups, such as the non-Arab Kurds, Christians, Druze, Turkman and various factions of the Shi'ites, UK Reuters has represented the Sunnis as the faction that the Syrian Government has targeted in its v-object collocations. UK Reuters has frequently highlighted Assad's discrimination against the Sunnis and has often depicted them as an excommunicated and alienated people who are not allowed to learn or teach their beliefs.

On the other hand, Fars' representation of the government showed that social inclusion is one of the most important prosodies that associated along with the representation of the government. The pairing between the government SAs and 'Syrian' is a form of inclusion discourse prosody that involves all of the government's representatives and excludes all who are against it. The references to the Turkish, Qatari and US Governments' support of the militants and their intrigue in overthrowing the Syrian Government contributed to the positive representation of the government as the true defender of the country. Authority and power are both evident in the thematic and discourse prosodies' references to Assad's and the government's collocates.

Across its use of keywords, semantic macrostructures, collocations and discourse prosodies, Iranian Fars' representation of the Syrian revolution conforms with the ideological division between positive self-presentation and the negative representation of others. As such, the news agency's bias is evident in its representation of anti-government fighters as a homogenous (terrorists) and racially excluded (non-Syrian) group and in its positive valuation of Arab and Syrian nationality through its construction of pro-government SAs. Iranian Fars' prejudice representation is also evident by the suppression of the Sunni-Shi'ite conflict and downplay of the chemical attacks.

By comparison, UK Reuters offers a balanced representation of the two warring sides. As it categorizes the anti-government SAs as either moderate or radical, its identification of these actors is more critical and less stereotyped. In addition, its identification of government SAs is neutral and formal. The negative representation of the government was idexed by the government's political and military actions instead of by relying on Reuters' reporters' evaluative attributes. Thus, UK Reuters presents the revolution as a religiously factional war, where the Sunni majority is suffering due to the Alawite minority's abuse of power, unequal treatment and acts of violence.

7.2 Polarization at the Macro-Level

This section answers RQ B (Section 1.2), which investigates the news coverage of the chemical attacks that took place in Syria between 2013 and 2015, determining the ideologies that underpinned the portrayal of its participants and their actions and which led to bias in their representation. This set of findings is structured to follow the sequence of RQs b.4, b.5 and b.6. To make the bias in these representations more explicit, the results are further discussed through the lens of van Dijk's (1998) ideological square.

This discussion will start by comparing the various representations of anti-government and pro-government SAs across the socio-semantic identification strategies, transitivity selections and participant roles that both news agencies applied. The comparative analysis of Iranian Fars will take place in Section 7.2.1, and the comparative analysis of UK Reuters will take place in Section 7.2.2. With that in mind, to improve cohesion and decrease repetition, the section on UK Reuters will highlight the salient differences between each agency.

7.2.1 Ideological Discourse in Coverage by Iranian Fars

The representational choices that Iranian Fars used to construct its story of the two warring sides adheres to the four moves of the ideological square (see Section 2.2.3 for more information). This is evident in the polarized representation of the actors it involved in the chemical crisis, its transitivity selections and the socio-semantic strategies it manipulated. Beginning with lexicalization, Iranian Fars referred to highly negative and notorious groups, such as ISIL, Jabhat Al-Nusra, Al-Qaeda and the Ba'ath party (see examples 1–5, Section 6.2.2), in its reports about the anti-government fighters. In contrast, it positively referenced the pro-government side by referring to their supreme social status and political positions, which included president, foreign minister, vice-chairman and so on. Pro-government actors were also individualized by their names (e.g., Assad, Putin and Meqdad).

Iranian Fars also referenced anti-government SAs to describe the participation of certain SAs in the chemical attacks, claiming that these individuals either provided the weapons or used them. This process of individualization was employed to create propositions that indirectly rationalized these accusations. For instance, Iranian Fars used the recurring reference to ousted Iraqi president Saddam Hussein and his followers, General Adnan al-Dulaimi and Izzat Ibrahim, to establish a mental relationship between the gas they used to bomb the Iraqi city Halabcheh (also spelled Halabja) 30 years ago and the gas missiles that hit the Sunni cities in Syria. The coverage also mentioned the Saudi Intelligence Chief Bandar provided the chemical weapons. This strategy was used to depict the anti-government SAs as unethical criminals.

In a similar vein, Iranian Fars made a number of lexical choices that were laden with politically- and culturally-negative values of judgement, such as fundamentalists, extremists, Takfiri, terrorists, mercenaries, insurgents and Salafists (see examples 1–3 and 7–9 in Section 6.2.2). The repeated use of these polarizing terms were highly ideological. They served to establish a negative mental model of the rebels that was inherently radical and inaccurate. While it is presumed that Iranian Fars reports facts and events objectively as they occur, and without its writers' personal sentiments or attitudes, this representation shows a clear authorial voice. It is important to note that Iranian Fars has claimed that it is independent in its policy statement (see Section 3.2.2). This means that the Iranian government, which is a major ally of the Syrian

government, is supposed to have no influence over the agency's coverage. However, the use of imbalanced, ideological-based lexical items to describe the anti-government SAs suggests a sectarian perspective.

The results also show that Iranian Fars used topicalization to describe the anti-government SAs, reinforcing the ideological representation of the rebels and their allies. For instance, as an anti-government ally, Turkey was portrayed as the instigator of the Sarin attack. In addition, the Iraqi plants were topicalized in headlines as the production facilities for the chemical arms that the rebels used. By comparison, the Syrian army's advancements in the battlefield and in pushing the terrorists back were foregrounded in the headlines. Topicalization is also evident in the activation of anti-government actors as participants in the chemical attacks. The frequency distribution of the activated and passivated roles that were allocated to the two warring sides shows how the coverage represented each party. Thus, based on the occurrences of activated roles that were previously displayed in Tables 6.5 and 6.6, the following chart gives a comparative sketch of their frequency distributions.
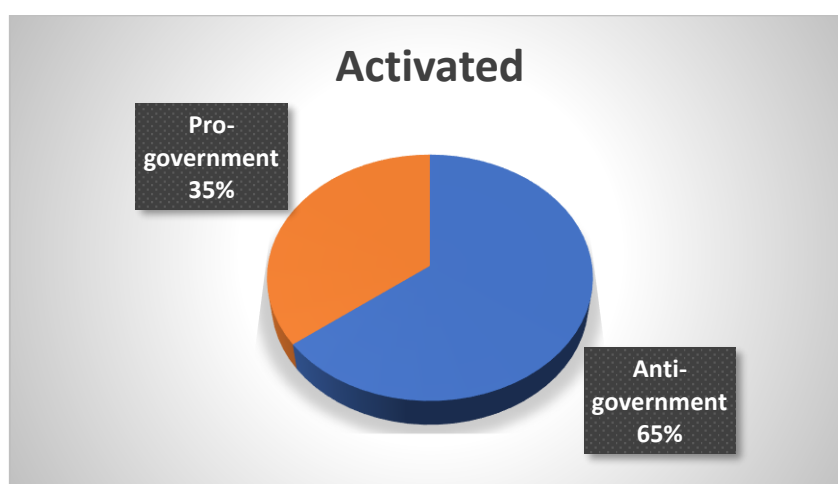

Figure 7.5 Comparative distribution of activated roles in Iranian Fars coverage.

This figure shows the frequency of the anti-government's and pro-government's activated roles. The anti-government's roles were activated almost twice as often as the pro-government's roles. The reasons behind the dominance of the anti-government activation are due to the following:

- The excessive use of pre-modifiers that conveyed ideological assumptions, such as Salafists, fundamentalists, Ba'ath or Takfiri, and references to their nationalities, like Iraqi engineers, Saudi militants or Australian suspects. The

use of pre-modifiers were also used to activate values of appraisal, such as well-known rebel leader.

- Post-modifier phrases and clauses that emphasized the actors' political affiliations or kinships, such as the father of a rebel or his son.

- Causative agents that recalled the actors who were involved in the referenced actions, such as 'which is led by Ahrar al-Sham'.

Moreover, the heavy reliance on the material processes to emphasize the involvement of the anti-government SAs in the chemical attacks had highly activated the roles of the fighters and their allies. The analysis shows that while the anti-government fighters were activated in relation to actions that denoted brutality, threats, attacks and violence, their allies, who were Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Saddam Hussein's affiliates, were activated in relation to arming and financing. In addition, Turkey was activated as the promotor of the international sanctions against Syria, and the US, UK, and France were topicalized in certain claims about the chemical allegations and in announcements of attacks against Syria by the US air force. By comparison, the Syrian Government was positively topicalized as Syria's primary defensive power, legal authority and protector of the lands. As a pro-government ally, Russia was also foregrounded as a powerful friend to Syria who offered vital political and military support.

Iranian Fars was also subjective in its account of the actors who were involved in the chemical attacks. This was evident in its recurrent use of quotations and reported speech that were attributed to allied sources, such as Russia or the Syrian News Agency, and other anonymous external sources that were not overtly credible or authentic. Moreover, the quoted sources were predominantly used to defend the pro-government fighters (see examples 6, 12–14, 19–20 and 56–58 in Sections 6.2.2 and 6.2.4). This shows that Iranian Fars did not use the information sources in a fair and balanced way.

With regard to the transitivity selections, the analysis shows that ideological square was highly reflected in the choices of processes and the roles of participants. The dichotomous representation of Self-positive and Other-negative were clearly evident in the negative representation of the anti-government fighters and the positive depiction of the government in both the headlines and the body of the reports. The following diagram shows the distributions of the processes that accompanied the pro-

government, anti-government and civilian SAs in Iranian Fars (based on the values given in Tables 6.5 and 6.7 in the previous chapter).
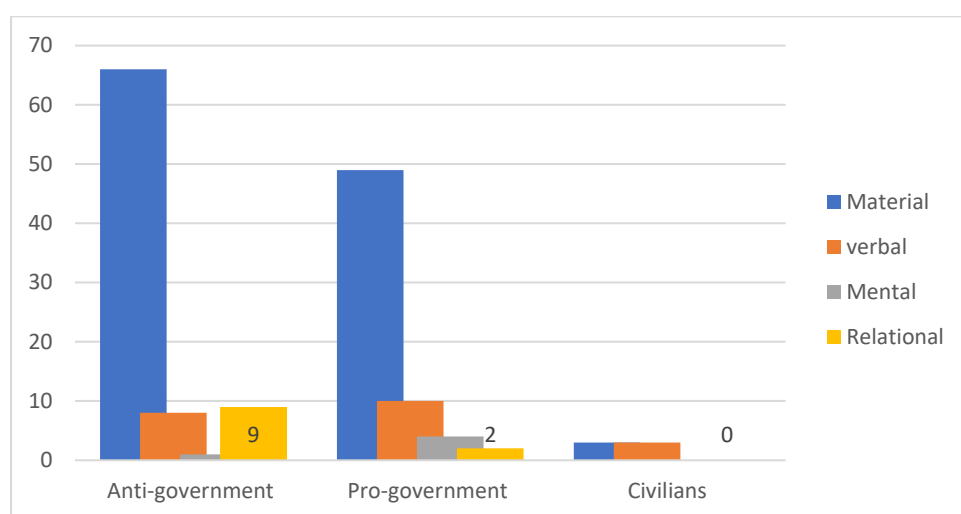

Figure 7.6 Comparative distribution of the transitivity processes in the coverage by Iranian Fars.

This comparative diagram shows that material processes were used only three times with civilian SAs and that they were used more frequently with the anti-government SAs than with the pro-government SAs (66 times and 49 times, respectively). The verbal processes are of comparable occurrences with the pro-government SAs counting 10 and anti-government SAs counts 8. However, it is relatively low with the civilians counts only 3. The mental processes of the pro-government occurred three times more than anti-government SAs while the relational processes occurred seven times less than the anti-government SAs. This leads to conclude that the civilians were marginalized in Fars coverage, while the anti-government fighters gained more focus by comparison with the pro-government fighters.

The results show that the material processes were dominant in the representation of the two warring sides. This prevalence can be attributed to the interactive nature of the investigated sample, a war incident which involved an actor, a process and an affected entity. A closer look at the results reveals that the material processes were used to depict the chemical crisis through the positive actions of pro-government SAs, presenting them as agents of defence, control and power (see examples 48–52 in Section 6.2.3), and the negative actions of anti-government SAs, portraying them as

agents of brutality and malignity against civilians and the Syrian Government (see examples 27, 29–30, 32 and 35 in Section 6.2.3)

In addition, a goal as a semantic role was used to assert the idea that Syria and the pro-government SAs had been victimized. The Syrian Government was represented as being targeted, gripped and attacked by western and regional allies who supported terrorist efforts inside Syria to unseat President Assad. As a semantic role of the anti-government armed groups, this goal role was implemented to show that these SAs had insufficient military power and skills, presenting them as individuals or groups who had been killed, arrested or destroyed, or to depict them as a hopeless party that was unable to finance themselves, arm themselves but always asking for support from other countries (see examples 36–44 in Section 6.3.2). As a consequence, a beneficiary role was developed to inform the implicit claim of terrorist and western conspiracy against Syria, and the anti-government fighters were said to have received weapons of mass destruction from Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Iranian Fars also used a collection of verbal processes to distance pro-government SAs from allegations about the chemical attacks. In addition, these verbal processes were employed to accuse the rebels and their allies of involvement in these attacks. To make these processes more credible, the anti-government fighters were reported to have made these claims. Using this strategy, Iranian Fars' coverage managed to accuse the Saudi Government of supplying weapons to the rebels, paying them salaries and of having a relationship with Al-Qaeda. On the other hand, the verbal processes that were associated with the pro-government SAs were reinforced by the authority of the speakers themselves and their commitment to their claims. A high degree of certainty was also reflected by the evaluative semantic reference to the verbs that were used (see examples 74–76 in Section 6.2.5). Thus, the balance between the frequency of verbal processes for the anti and pro-government SAs supported the views and interests of the pro-government SAs alone.

The choices that Iranian Fars made about the relational processes in its coverage are ideologically distinctive, as these processes aimed to stereotype anti-government fighters by employing ideologically-motivated attributes and values, like Salafists, extremists, ISIL, threats, terrorists and so on (see examples 7– 9 in Section 6.2.2). In summary, the anti-government fighters were depicted as criminals instead of as rebels who were seeking freedom and social reform. The attributes Iranian Fars used in its relational processes also directly accused anti-government SAs of chemical weapons

use, reinforcing their negative representation and depiction as terrorists. By comparison, the single relational process that was allocated to the pro-government SAs acted as a false accusation that the US was acting out against the Syrian Government. By explaining the differences between the two types of Sarin gases that were used in the chemical attacks, this process was used to justify the government's denial in the accusations of its involvement in the incident. The pattern of relational processes that Iranian Fars used in its reports was polarizing. It served to enhance the credibility of the pro-government party and to depict the anti-government groups in a negative light.

In addition, Iranian Fars employed two types of mental processes. The first process was emotive and showed a certain reticence to reveal the sensor's identity, or the anti-government fighters, due to fear. The second type was cognitive, used the Syrian Army as the sensor and showed higher mental operations and powerful phenomena, a result which echoed van Leeuwen's (2008) assertion that 'emotiveness' decreases as status and power increases. Accordingly, this pattern of mental processes contributed to building a positive representation of the government's power and hegemony.

In summary, the coverage by Iranian Fars was influenced by the overall ideology of Iran, its political loyalty towards the Syrian Government and their shared sectarian orientation. This is evident in the lexical choices that Iranian Fars used to reflect ideological prejudices and an alignment with government views and operations, providing a polarized representation of the two conflicting sides.

7.2.2   Ideology-Free Discourse in Coverage by UK Reuters

Unlike Iranian Fars, the coverage by UK Reuters did not show any prejudices that were informed by the UK's political stance on the Syrian Government. The lexical choices that UK Reuters used to represent the government and its allies showed a high degree of formality, and the references it made to the pro-government SAs were heavily reliant on the categories of nomination and functionalization. For instance, UK Reuters individualized Syrian officials by using their formal names (e.g., Assad, Ja'afari and Putin) and consistently highlighted their political status and military ranks (e.g., president, ambassador, generals, etc. (see examples 47–50 in Section 6.3.4). This is also consistent with UK Reuter's representation of the anti-government SAs, either referring to them collectively as rebels or Western powers or formally as the Opposition or by the names of their brigades' leaders. Rebel allies were similarly nominated and

functionalized (e.g., British Prime Minister David Cameron, U.S. President Barack Obama, etc.), showing that UK Reuters was neutral in its identifications for each side.

In addition, UK Reuters prioritized sectarian representation, which was marginalized by Iranian Fars, using the classification strategy to identify the SAs by their Islamic factions, i.e., Sunnis and Alawites. This sectarian representation was employed to highlight the division within the Syrian community that grew more after the chemical attacks hit a large scale of Sunnis-populated areas. It was also used to elucidate the cause behind the militarized confrontation between the Sunni rebels and government forces. By contrast, Iranian Fars suppressed this representational choice by placing the blame of the entire conflict on external forces, such as terrorism and western powers. Moreover, while the general lack of agency in UK Reuters' reports on those responsible for the chemical attacks show that the agency was impartial in its coverage. (see examples 14–16 in Section 6.3.2), Iranian Fars explicitly accused the rebels of committing the chemical attacks and relinquished the Syrian Government of any culpability in the matter.

Beyond that, UK Reuter's negative representation of the anti-government armed groups was selective rather than indiscriminate. For instance, the term insurgents was only used to refer to ISIS when they gassed a town during their fight with another rebel group. Otherwise, anti-government fighters were referred to as rebels or by the name of their particular unit or troop. Therefore, UK Reuters used nomination to separate the armed forces that fought against Assad into the two following groups: the rebels as an overarching name for the opposing fighters and ISIS as an armed terrorist group. Although UK Reuters also used both negative and positive references to the Syrian Government that included regime, perpetrators and sovereignty, these identifications were taken from quoted information and did not convey any input from their authors.

In regards to its informational sources, UK Reuters showed sensitivity in equally conveying the representative voices of the two conflicting sides. In addition, while it predominantly elected to use direct or indirect quotations from named sources, its unnamed sources were identified in relation to the affiliation to which they belonged (see examples 9–10, 22 and 26–27 in Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3). Thus, although UK Reuters completely avoided the representational strategy of utterance autonomization, which Iranian Fars used in both its quotes and reports of information, it also provided no conclusions to any of the propositions that were conveyed in its sources, leaving this

task to its readers. This balanced representation of informational sources served to make UK Reuters an objective and unprejudiced source of information.

Unlike the headlines in Iranian Fars, the headlines in UK Reuters did not take sides in the conflict. Rather, its headlines reflected the international impact of the chemical attacks. It is worth noticing that UK Reuters' headlines did not keep a fixed mental model to refer to either side of conflict. For instance, in headline 1, which was released in 2013, it made the rebels passive by stating that they were the target of the chemical offensive (see Section 6.3.1). However, in headline 5, which was released in 2015, it declared that the rebels had been involved in the use of the chemical weapons. This means that UK Reuters is highly sensitive to the value of truth even when the information it reports does not corroborate with the views of the UK or other western powers. As the chemical attacks grew as an international issue, UK Reuters focused on the UN's announcements about the reality of chemical weapons use in Syria while reflecting on the consequences of the attacks on the international community. As such, its headlines were non-ideological in their representation of the SAs who were involved.

Moreover, there were several differences between the anti- and pro-government SAs in UK Reuter's distributions of the activated roles (see Tables 6.9 and 6.11 in Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.4). The figure that follows visualizes these differences.
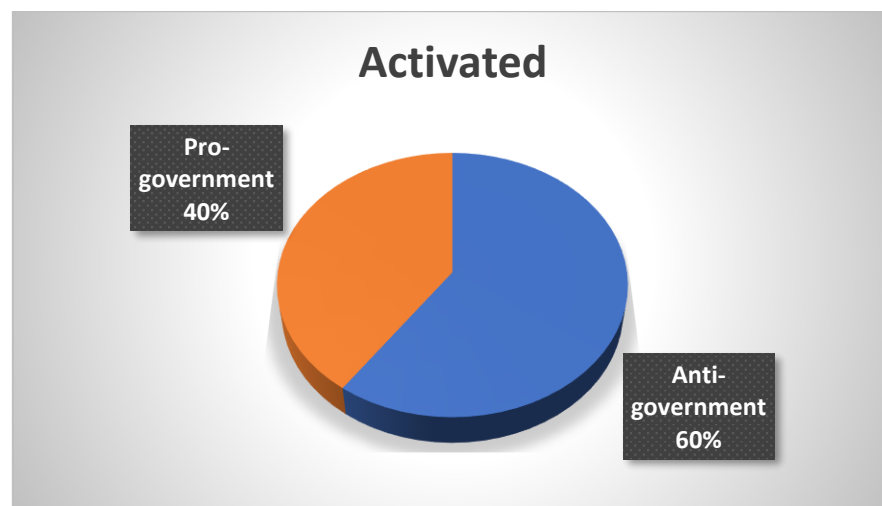

Figure 7.7 Comparative distribution of activated roles in UK Reuters coverage.

It is important to recall that the participants' activated roles help to reveal 'what interests are served' by the selection of their roles (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 33) and that this selection process can help to indicate the causal relationships between the actors

and their processes. Figure 7.7 shows a higher activation of the anti-government SAs than the pro-government SAs. This may have been caused by the multiple anti-government armed groups, such as the rebels, Kurds, ISIS and the Opposition, which functioned as a representative body during political negotiations, and the numerous allies who backed the rebels, like the US, UK, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey that required coverage during the accounts of the events. By comparison, the parties that opposed these groups included only Russia and the Syrian Government.

Thus, unlike Iranian Fars, UK Reuters activated several different roles for the anti-government SAs. To clarify, the rebels were activated not in terms of terrorism or betrayal but in their relationship to the opposition and defence against the power of the government forces. They were also activated in relation to the military brigades that they had and to the Sunni Islamic offshoot to which they belonged. Moreover, their western allies were predominantly activated as military threats to the Syrian Government, by the sanctions they forced and the political pressure they imposed against it and by the repercussions that were being enforced as a result of the chemical attacks (see examples 1–8 and 11–13 in Section 6.3.2). On the other hand, the Syrian officials were highly activated by their denial of any involvement in the chemical attacks, their demands toward the UN to limit its investigation to Aleppo and their decision to destroy their chemical weapons arsenal after sanctions were imposed upon them. Government forces were also activated by their clashes with the rebels and their abuse of power towards locals of Mouadamiya, where the military airport had been built. According to quotes from rebel allies, they were also activated as the perpetrators of the Sarin attack. With all that in mind, UK Reuters showed no polarization in its activation of either sides' roles. Its coverage of the events primarily used information that was collected from official sources on each side. Finally, according to the two sets of examples, Russia was activated as a primary supporter of Syrian politics, its military and its government.

With reference to the transitivity selections, Reuters showed no reflections to the binary ideological representation for the conflicting sides. The figure below summarizes the frequency distribution of the processes that were associated with the civilians and the warring sides (based on Tables 6.10 and 6.12 in Sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.5).
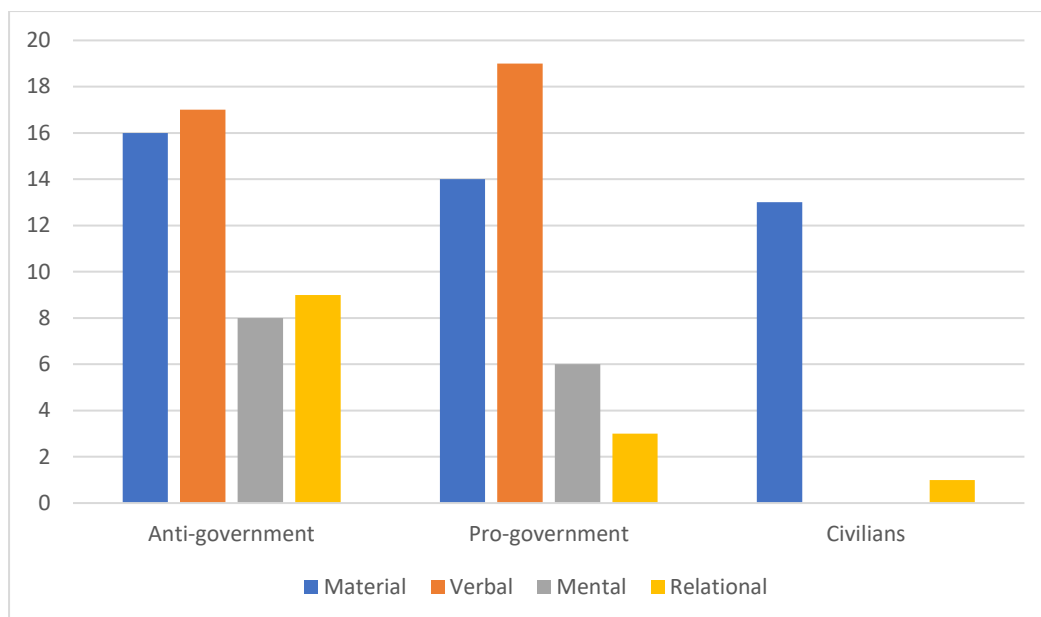
Figure 7.8 Comparative distribution of transitivity processes in coverage by UK Reuters.

This diagram shows the prevalence of the verbal processes that UK Reuters used in its reports on pro- and anti- government SAs, which amounted to 17 and 19, respectively. The frequency of material processes was also high, with 16 used for anti-government SAs, 14 used for pro-government SAs and 13 used for civilian SAs. It is worth noting that UK Reuters' focus on the material processes of civilians indicates that the agency was interested in the reactions of civilians, the actions they undertook or the impacts of the chemical attacks they experienced. Nevertheless, Iranian Fars almost always marginalized civilians in its reports, only using them to support the Syrian government or as witnesses of the rebels' anti-Syrian activities. UK Reuters also associated more mental and relational processes with anti-government SAs, which amounted to 8 and 9, respectively, than with pro-government SAs, at 6 and 3, respectively. Finally, it associated no verbal or mental processes with civilians.

UK Reuters used material processes to describe the military actions that occurred on the battlefield. Both the anti- and the pro-government SAs were similarly given agency in the processes of defence and in regaining or retaking territory (see examples 17-20 and 61-63 in Sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.5). However, negative representation for each side was confined to reports of the confiscation of Mouadamiya by the Syrian Government and the use of chemical weapons by ISIS. This representation shows the difference between UK Reuters and Iranian Fars in their

selection of transitivity processes. Indeed, while UK Reuters always drew sharp lines between every participant's roles, providing the basis upon which it built its judgements by pointing out who undertook harmful actions and who did not, Iranian Fars tended to give indiscriminate agency to entire rebel factions by identifying them as the actors responsible for brutal or negative activities.

To enable every entity to express their points of view, UK Reuters also employed verbal processes as channels for the UN, the Syrian Government, the rebels and allies on each side. Unlike Iranian Fars, UK Reuters did not directly support the views of any conflicting side. In addition, it applied verbal processes to give a detailed representation of the chemical attacks from different perspectives, clarifying UN declarations about the reality of the chemical weapons use in the areas which were attacked. While the Syrian Government's views were made clear by its denial of involvement in the attacks, its accusations against the rebels and its anxiety towards the UN's mission in areas outside of Aleppo, the perspectives of the rebel allies were verbalized by their announcements to take military action against Syria and their firm accusations against the Syrian Government. These plural perspectives are absent in the verbal processes of coverage by Iranian Fars. Indeed, Iranian Fars only used official government sources to accuse anti-government allies of plotting against Assad and the rebels themselves to support the government's allegations against the US and Saudi Arabia.

Thus, the employment of the verbal processes by the two news agencies is quite different. Although UK Reuters used verbal processes to distance itself from the reported information and to cover every perspective from official sources, Iranian Fars used verbal processes to support the Syrian Government. This manipulation of verbal processes shows that with its ideological representation, Iranian Fars was more biased in its coverage than UK Reuters.

Similarly, UK Reuters' use of relational processes showed no alignment to either side. In addition, it allocated no negative or positive attributes or values to either the rebels or the Syrian Government. All the same, UK Reuters established the political context that legitimized interference from the international community, leading to UN investigations and sanctions against chemical production (see examples 31– 32 and 84– 85 in Sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.5). This is in direct contrast with Iranian Fars use of relational processes, which were highly stereotypical and ideological (see examples 49- 52 in Section 6.2.3). It is worth noting that UK Reuters stripped the relational processes

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of their agency when they reported who was responsible for the chemical attacks (see example 86 in Section 6.3.5).

By comparison, the mental processes projected the negative views that the rebels and their allies held towards the Syrian Government. The mental processes that were associated with Syrian officials were also informed by their reticence for additional investigation into the areas that were allegedly attacked. Thus, UK Reuters only employed mental processes that reflected each side's concerns.

In conclusion, this planned comparison revealed the dramatic differences between Iranian Fars' and UK Reuters' coverage of the Syrian chemical attacks. Iranian Fars coverage was highly ideological in its representation of the anti-government SAs, its manipulation of lexical choices and the patterns of transitivity in which fighters were framed. In addition, the Iranian Government's influence on Iranian Fars' reporting was evident in its polarized discourse, which supported and legitimized the actions of the Syrian government and its allies while blaming and criticizing the rebels and their allies.

By Comparison, UK Reuters' coverage showed no dichotomous representation. With exception to ISIS, which is globally recognized as a terrorist organization, neither of the conflicting sides were presented as purely negative or purely positive. In addition, UK Reuters' coverage of the Syrian Government showed no negative polarization. The Syrian officials were formally named, individualized and functionalized, but they were not labelled or negatively represented within a certain frame. Rather, they were allocated to the transitivity patterns that described their actions, which were in turn recanted by their own official sources. Moreover, UK Reuters showed no indications that it was aligned with the UK Government's political stance on the Syrian Government, which is made evident by the fact that UK Reuters gave no agency to those who were for the chemical attacks. While UK Reuters could have relied on allegations against Assad from the UK, US or France against Assad to give agency to the Syrian Government as the perpetrator of the chemical offensives or used Hollande's 'stack of evidence' to show its alignment with the UK, its reporters instead chose to follow the principles of trust, which emphasize the value of 'freedom from bias' and concentrate on the collection of facts alone ('About us', Reuters). As such, to exclude the SAs behind the chemical attacks, UK Reuters made reference to UN declarations over the UK's or Assad's allies. In summary, the coverage presented a factual record of information that surveyed the conflicting views without incorporating any personal assessments. Based on these findings, the analysis indicated that Reuters News Agency

is, to a great extant, non-ideological, which conflicts with the study's main assumption that all news language is ideological (Fowler, 1991). This non-ideological stance might be attributed to the nature of the Reuters agency as a commercial institution, which seeks to gain more outlets to supply with news and profit commercially. Thus, ideally, Reuters will avoid being ideological to encourage more news outlets to buy the agency's reports.

7.3 Summary

This chapter is dedicated to answering this research's primary question: based on this study's central assumption that media representation is influenced by the dominant ideology and political stance, was the Syrian revolution represented differently by UK Reuters than it was by Iranian Fars? To address this RQ, the chapter delivered a comparative analysis between the findings of the analyses of the two corpora across the micro and macro linguistic levels.

At the micro level, the comparative analysis answered RQ3, which was addressed from three angles. The first angle was to compare and contrast the keywords that each corpus used to refer to the two warring sides. The second was to investigate the differences between the semantic macrostructures that the news agencies used to introduce the conflicting powers. The third was to determine the collocational patterns that were prevalent in the three grammatical relationships that each agency implemented and to decipher their discourse prosodies. The findings at this level have reflected the influence of the Iranian ideology on Fars news manifested in the use of ideologically-loaded keywords, biased thematic frames, which obfuscates the sectarian war against Sunnis and the polarized discourse prosodies.

At the macro level, the comparative analysis addressed RQ6 by comparing the findings from multiple points of interest. It examined the differences between the socio-semantic strategies that the agencies used to identify the key SAs who were involved in the chemical attacks. It also investigated the similarities and differences between the transitivity patterns and participant roles that Iranian Fars and UK Reuters constructed in their samples. Finally, it linked all of these outcomes to the four moves of van Dijk's (1998) ideological square. The findings were then discussed in relation to the ideological and political background of Syria. The comparison revealed that Iranian Fars was highly influenced by Iran's leading ideology and economic interests in the Arab territory. This ideological impact shows that while Iranian Fars' coverage was

prejudiced in favour of the government, UK Reuters was more objective and balanced in its representation, and to some extent, more independent from the political views of its home country.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8. Introduction

This thesis has investigated the influence of the government's ideology and political stance on the media representation of the Syrian revolution by examining the discursive constructions of the two conflicting sides in Syria as reported by UK Reuters and Iran's Fars online news. The central aim of this comparative study was twofold: The first aim is to uncover any possible bias in the coverage of the two news agencies, whose countries hold opposing political positions on the Syrian government. The second aim is to provide a comparative analysis to reveal how the linguistic choices in news representations are influenced by underlying ideologies. As the previous chapter (Chapter 7) compared and discussed the findings of each linguistic level, this chapter begins by shedding light on the socio-political and historical contexts in relation to journalistic practices (Section 8.1). The chapter proceeds to discuss the results in light of the previous literature review (Section 8.2). The contribution of the study is identified in Section 8.3 followed by the research limitations and the scope for potential future studies (Section 8.4).

8.1 Socio-Political Reflections on the Media Representation of the Syrian Revolution

The overall framework of the analysis aimed to relate the discursive practices of the two news agencies to the social and political practices that motivated the resulting representations. Considering the fact that discourse is 'a circular process in which social practices influence texts, via shaping the context and mode in which they are produced' (Richardson, 2007, p, 37), the socio-political context of this incident can be drawn upon in revealing the ideological implications behind the biased discursive practices, i.e., stereotyping, exclusion, omission and so on.

Based on the findings obtained from the comparative corpus-based critical discourse analysis of Fars and Reuters corpora, Fars' portrayal of the Syrian revolution proved to be biased toward a negative representation of the revolution as demonstrated in the previous chapter. The overall picture of the Syrian conflict provided by Fars tends to depict an invasion instigated by the US and backed by the Arabian Gulf States, where the fighters are organised foreign-backed militias smuggled into Syria with the support of Turkey. Fars also depicted the civilians as being victimized, calling for Assad to defend them throughout the protest marches held against the militants. The fighters, in

addition, are framed as groups of terrorists trained by al-Qaeda in Iraq to launch chemical attacks against the government and the Syrian people. The whole context of the revolution is conveyed in favour of the Syrian government. This propagandistic framing of the conflict reflects to a great extent the most important facet of Iran's foreign policy, which is characterized by an anti-Western perspective that stands against any kind of Western or American interference in the region (Khosravinik, 2015). Therefore, the portrayal is conveyed as a Western conspiracy, where the role of the Syrian rebels is greatly marginalized. Accordingly, the scene is converted from a civil uprising conducted against the oppression of the government to an introduction of the legend of Islamic conflict against Western ambitions in the Middle East. This ideological depiction aims to win the support and sympathy of the Islamic countries and hence, cover up Iranian regional interests.

On the other hand, Iran's and Syria's governments are religiously monolithic. They share the same Islamic faction of Shi'ite, which forms the antagonistic counterpart of the Sunni faction as mentioned previously. Considering that the Sunni population constitutes the majority among all the ethnic and religious sects making up the Syrian community (see section 1.1.1), the radical suppression of Sunnis despite their role as vital social actors in the conflict is substantially ideological because the identification of the Sunni sect in the conflict would be interpreted as a process of ethnic cleansing against Sunnis and this would destabilize Assad's government. Considering Assad's fall signifies the collapse of the Iranian political dreams in the region, such as imposing dominance over the Arabian Gulf and controlling Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon. Consequently, this would risk the position of Iran and shift the power balance in the whole region in favour of the Arabian States. Therefore, Fars conveyed the events in a way that does not jeopardise this political ambition.

Moreover, looking at the military crush of Assad forces employed against the protestors and the strongholds of the rebels recalled the Hama massacre undertaken by Hafez Al-Assad, the father, against his rivals in the Muslim Brotherhood party in 1982 (see Section 1.1.1 and 1.1.2). Thus, hiding the identity of the rebels and representing them as non-Syrian terrorists backed by the US aligned with Assad's policy of quelling any insurgency against his government. However, this time the crackdown did not help, and the uprising swept all over the country despite the series of massacres that occurred in Daraa, Hama and Aleppo, and the use of chemical weapons. Therefore, speculating

on the misrepresentation of these massacres in relation to the Syrian-Iranian alliance and their shared ideological background revealed the religious bigotry of the Iranian government, which is evident in its prolonged brutal oppression against its local minorities, especially Ahwazi Arabs (see Ghanea and Hass, 2011).

It is also worth noting that Iran adopted a double-standard stance toward the Arab revolutions from the very beginning. According to Goodarzi (2013), Iran has supported the revolutions enacted in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Yemen, describing them as the new age of pan-Islamism. The Iranian authorities, he added, were encouraging the opposition wave to oust the government which they described as a Western protectorate. However, when Syria's turn came and the revolution was sparked in 2011, Iran held an opposite stance and supported the Assad government to crush the protestors, providing him with massive military and logistic aid (Hilal, 2011). Therefore, based on the political interests of Iran upon which the Syrian-Iranian axis was established (see Section 1.1.3), this reverse reaction from the Iranian government was not questioned. All of the Arab revolutions were in some way serving the broad Iranian project in the region; however, the overthrow of Assad would ruin this dream, as Syria is the only channel that connects Iran to the Levant (Barzegar, 2011). So, contrasting this political context to Fars' coverage uncovers the motivation behind the biased representation of the revolt, wherein the whole uprising is depicted as a Western plot to topple the government and protect Israel (see Section 4.2.2.4).

8.2 Discussion of the Findings

The aim of this section is to provide a discussion of the results in light of the theoretical background and in relation to the previous studies of ideology, media and CDA. This thesis showed that the political perspective of Iran was very influential in the case of Fars coverage. The analysis across the micro- and macro-linguistic levels revealed the news agency's alignment toward the Syrian government that the Iran Republic established an alliance with in 1979. This finding conforms with van Dijk's (1996) view that 'there is evidence that in many situations the news media have been persuaded, manipulated or even coerced to follow political (or military) views on international affairs' (p.28).

However, with respect to the findings of the Reuters analysis, this was not the case. Reuters proved its full adherence to the principles of trust and independence (for

more information about Reuter's policy, see Section 3.2.1). The rival political stance of the UK and its alliances against the Syrian government did not impact the reporters' ability to convey the facts as they existed. An indicative example that showed a sort of challenge to the UK political position toward the recrimination of Assad's use of chemical weapons is the headline 'Exclusive: Chemical weapons used by fighters in Syria – sources'. In this article, Reuters reported the involvement of the rebels in the chemical attack, news which reinforces Assad's government and contradicts absolute Western accusations. This discursive practice has informed Reuters' monological perspective, which conforms to Bakhtin's insight on independent reality (Soffer, 2009). This perspective is characterised by 'an outsider position and avoiding entrance into dialogical relationships' in narrating events (Soffer, 2009, p. 473). The finding challenged the postmodern perception of objectivity in American press, where journalists adhere to a dialogue perspective, which leaves some room for subjective evaluation (Durham, 1998; Schudson, 1990; Creech 2014).

Contrary to the findings of Ali and Omar's (2016) study on CNN and RT coverage of the Russian military support provided to Syria, Reuters proved its strict ideology-free perspective compared to the biased representations in the two previous sources. This finding, in addition, cast a light on the full independence of UK Reuters in contrast with the US and Russia's politically influenced coverage. In addition, Reuters' representation of the Syrian government officials is at odds with their representation in *Arab News* and *The News International* of Pakistan in Afzal and Harun's (2015) study. The study indicated that Syrian and Libyan authorities are negatively identified by the overuse of value-laden expressions, such as 'death machine' and 'deluded', to describe Assad and Qaddafi, respectively (p. 250). However, Reuters adhered to formal nomination, individualization and functionalisation processes to represent the government social actors neutrally, leaving the perception of the government to be inferred from their own actions (see Section 7.2.2). Moreover, although *The Guardian, The Independent*, and *BBC* are UK news outlets, Reuters did not echo their government-affiliated perspectives, which tend to criminalize the Syrian government and support the US and UK air strikes (see Shojaei et al, 2013; Akkerhuis, 2013).

Moreover, Reuters news is characterised by projecting a wide spectrum of voices, which represents the social structure of the Syrian community, such as the

majority and minority sects of Sunnis, Shi'ites, Alawites, Druze and Christians, and on the other hand, it conveyed the different ideological perceptions of the armed groups in the arena, such as radical Islamists, moderate Islamists, secular opposition and moderate rebels. However, Fars' coverage is characterised by suppressing the main representative voices of the rebels, who hold a moderate secular ideology, such as the Opposition and the Free Syrian Army (FSA), while foregrounding, instead, the two radical ideologies of Salafi Jihadism and Islamism (see Section 1.1.2). At the same time, the pro-government militias (i.e., the Shabiha) are radically suppressed and excluded, while the government and its officials are introduced positively. This finding of polarised discourse, which follows van Dijk's (1998) ideological dichotomy of the positive-Self and negative-Other representation, meshes with the results of a number of significant studies (Baker et al. 2012; Abeed, 2017; Amer, 2015; Ghachem, 2014; Maalij, 2012 and Alhumaidi, 2013). It is worth noting that the polarized representation of Iranian Fars is literally the opposite of the Arab news coverage, such as *Al-Arabia, Al-Jazeera* and *Arab news*, which express the Sunni perspective (see Akkerhuis, 2013; Amin & Jalilifar, 2013). They all polarized the coverage in favour of the opposition front and the anti-government fighters, while Fars, representing the Shia mouthpiece, foregrounded the negativity of the opposition and enhanced the positive aspects of the Syrian government defence.

Drawing upon the polarised representation of Fars at the micro-linguistic level, which revealed the exclusion of moderate rebels and the opposition as well as the overuse of value-laden and ideologically based lexical items to describe the anti-government fighters, such as ISIL, terrorists, Takfiri and Al-Nusra, aligns with Wurth-Hough's (1983) results, who found that biased news is always selective, works to marginalise events and foreground others according to the preference of power holders. Moreover, the backgrounding of the chemical attack crisis and the blurring of the sectarian conflict reality echoes Huckin's (2002) concept of manipulative silences, where a reporter deliberately omits 'some pieces of information that is pertinent to the topic at hand' (p. 348). In the case of the chemical attacks, the silence was enacted by reducing the news reports on this topic, which manifested in the absence of chemical-attack-related lexis in the keyword list.

In addition, Fars News Agency showed a great focus on the riots caused by the fighters without revealing the causes behind this civil disturbance, which erupted due

to the government ignoring the demands of the protestors and crushing the marches of demonstration at the onset of the uprising in 2011. This thematic suppression of the social unrest's causes in the coverage conforms to the racial representation of Vietnamese bandages in Australian newspapers, cited in a study performed by Teo (2000), which revealed that the skewed representation of Vietnamese immigrants' needs in the Australian newspapers had legitimised the police violence against them. This result gives credence to the finding that the over-focus on ISIL and the radical exclusion of Sunnis as well as the backgrounding of rebels are ideologically motivated. The biased representation of Fars established the legitimate basis for the Assad forces' atrocities against their fighters.

Along the same line, Fars' reference to the mental disorders of the rebels caused by hallucinatory drugs (see Section 4.2.2.4) is congruent with Milburn's et al (1987) study on US news coverage of the war on terrorism, where he pointed out that 'the attribution of mental instability to terrorists and their leaders' served to legitimise the dictator's military actions against them as the given implication of this attribution is "you can't negotiate with crazy people"' (as cited in Gerbner, 1990, p. 3).This also shows Fars' compliance with the political preference, which intends to overlook the real stimuli that influenced the marginalised Sunni majority to lead the revolt.

On the other hand, the CDA findings showed how the manipulation of the material processes in Fars coverage disguised the reality. Fars activated the anti-government fighters as the agent of the crisis and the beneficiary of the chemical substances that were provided by Saudi Arabia and manufactured by Iraqi plants (see Section 6.3.3). The civilians are backgrounded and highly passivated as victims of chemical attack; however, they were agentialised as supporters of Assad's government. The government, on the other hand, is depicted as a passive patient in the crisis whose soldiers were targeted by the chemical weapons, while it is highly activated as a defender who pushed the terrorists back. This misrepresentation of the reality is encoded by the manipulation of the transitivity selections (see Section 6.3.5). However, the reader is not a passive receiver who would accept propagandistic narration, especially with the rise of digital devices and social network sites, which broadcast the incidents live. This unrealistic depiction of the chemical attack echoes findings (Iwamoto, 1995; Amer, 2016) that reality is represented in favour of the power holders. Moreover, the finding of a heavy reliance on the official sources of the government

authorities, in Fars coverage, to substantiate its war propaganda while at the same time backgrounding other rival sources, which hold opposing views, is also evident in other studies (Amer, 2017; Knightly, 2000; Osisanwo, 2016).

8.3 Contributions of the study

The present study aims to contribute to the current knowledge of language and media discourse. The originality of this thesis, if I may say, can be summarised as follows. First, to the best of my knowledge, among the current studies examining media bias, this is the first study that has investigated media bias in independent news agencies as opposed to in newspapers and social media. The significance of this choice is that bias is not expected to exist in news agencies as they are considered a wire for gathering news and distributing it as raw information, which reflects no attitudinal perspective. In addition, the two news agencies were selected based on their online statements about being independent from the government and holding no ideological stance, which made tracing their partiality more challenging.

The second significant contribution concerns the fact that the Syrian revolution is a complex conflict, which does not reflect the normal straight trajectory of an uprising that can be described in terms of rebels revolting against their corrupt government. It is, rather, an intricate multi-layered civil war where multiple sets of ideologies are playing out in the background. Thus, examining the bias in the news reports under investigation could not be accomplished only by tracing the straightforward depiction of positive-Self representation and negative-Other representation, which most of the Arab spring studies follow[24]. Identifying the bias in this study required investigating the social structure of the Syrian community (Sunni, Shi'ite, Alawite, Christians and Kurds; see Section 1.1.1); explicating the ideological movements motivating the fighters opposing the government (Salafi Jihadism, Secularism and Islamism, Section 1.1.2); searching for the political agenda of Iran, ISIL and Saudi Arabia (Section 1.1.3, 1.1.3.1 and I.I.2) and elucidating the demographic distribution of the Syrian revolution (Section 1.1.1). To give an example, the intensive military actions of the government forces in al-Qalamoun and Hasaka would not be signified as racist if the demographic distribution had not been identified, which revealed that these cities are all Sunni-

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[24] See the studies of (Ali and Omar, 2016; Afzal and Harun, 2015; Amin and Jalilifar, 2013) on the Syrian revolution and (Alhumaidi, 2013; El-Nashar, 2014) on the Arab Spring.

inhabited areas (see Figure 4.10). For another example, the prejudices against Sunnis are not observed through lexical choices or negative representations of Sunnis, but through the radical textual exclusion of the whole sect in Fars; had the social mosaic of the Syrian community not been investigated, the bias would not be witnessed. Moreover, the socio-political context of this issue has revealed that the antagonistic representation of Saudi Arabia in Fars news is not only religiously motivated, though one might be deceived by the frequent use of Takfiri Saudi, but is also political, as Takfiri ideology targets the West as well and threatens its stability (See Section 1.1.2 and 1.1.3).

Thus, considering these intermingled political and ideological factors, this study examined the representative social actors for all these ideologies and factions that characterise the two conflicting sides. Thus, the study bridged the gap of the previous studies, which have focused on a selective set of social actors, such as the *President* as a representative of the government side and the *opposition* as one whole block to represent the other side. Accordingly, this study is more analytical; each side is broken down into the spectrum of armed groups and each armed group is identified in relation to its ideology and in light of the discursive practices that construct its image (Sections 5.2.1.4 and 4.2.1.3 are indicative). Thus, the analysis extends beyond classifying the social actors into positively or negatively represented groups. The goal is to shed more light on the different realities of the infighting fronts to obtain a better understanding of the Syrian revolution, such as the ideological discourses underpinning Fars' exclusion of Sunnis, Reuters' emphasis on Alwites, the identification of the rebels as foreign-backed, the categorisation of Saudis as Takfiri, the causes behind the splits among the anti-government fighters and the US support for YPG while YPG being shelled by Turkey.

In addition, this study contributed to the current literature of Arab Spring as it went beyond the typical comparative frameworks of Arab/Arab and Arab/West by providing an important third perspective, a Persian/West perspective. Moreover, within the Persian perspective, the study unraveled another facet of Islamic ideology, Shia ideological perspective, which carries completely opposing views, interests and political stance in relation to the Islamic Arab Sunni Perspective. The study, also, tackled Iranian news outlets for two reasons, first because Arab and Western powers hold the same stance against the Syrian government, thus their representation will be

similar to some extent, besides having been thoroughly investigated. Second, considering that Iran is the major ally of the Syrian government in the Middle East and an anti-West conservative country, the study endeavors to clarify this area and contribute to the existing body of literature.

Another contribution of this study concerns methodological innovation. The integrated method of corpus-based approach to CDA was employed not only to enhance the objectivity of the qualitative analysis, but also as a technique to guide the sample selection of the critical discourse analysis. The range of aboutness resulted from the keywords and the lexical cluster analysis was multi-faceted and interesting. A set of different topics has been raised, such as the political activities of the opposition, moderate Islamists versus radical Islamists, ISIL and their agenda, Alawite and Sunni tension, and the chemical attacks. Each one of these topics can be addressed as a subject of close critical discourse analysis. However, the selection of the chemical attack was based on the absence of this keyword in the Fars corpus and its significant presence in the Reuters corpus, where it received a high keyness score (719.997), ranking ninth. This led me to base my argument on solid statistical evidence that the incidents of chemical attack had been significantly marginalised and backgrounded in the Fars corpus.

8.4 Study Limitations and Suggestions

This research has a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. Starting with data limitation, this study was restricted to the period extending from 2013 to 2015. This limitation was due to the inability of the news archives to keep reports for more than three years (Section 3.2.2). So, as my research started in late 2014, the study missed the first two years of the revolution 2011 and 2012, which witnessed the beginning of the uprising. That period, I think, was crucial in studying media bias as it did not witness the interference of the ISIL or any other non-Syrian smuggled armed groups, thus an examination of the representation would not be influenced by the ideologies of different armed groups. Another limitation of the data was the corpus size. This limitation was due to the lack of a systematic news dataset, such as LexisNexis, which allows users to download the reports easily. Reuters does not provide access to

the reports that have not been saved as a corpus, such as RCV1, RCV2 and TRC2[25]. Instead, the corpus was collected manually through the process of copy and paste, which was time-consuming and required a lot of attention to avoid copying irrelevant details, such as the page subtitles and icons. On this basis, the present research encourages a future corpus-based linguistic study of media bias on the Syrian revolution in the first two years on a larger data scale.

It is worth mentioning that the historical background of the Syrian revolution was one of the main challenges in this study. The lack of literature that inclusively addressed the political, religious and social aspects of the Syrian revolution constituted a substantial obstacle in the study because retrieving bias was not only a linguistic-based manifestation because the Syrian revolution differed from the rest of the Arab Spring uprisings. The revolutions against the governments of Qaddafi, Bin Ali and Mubarak, for instance, did not involve the sectarian oppression that Assad's government conducted against the Sunni sect. Therefore, it would be interesting to carry out a more focused study to investigate the discursive representation of the sectarian-based massacres in the Syrian revolutions. The study does not claim that it covered the whole political history underpinning this revolution. However, my study has provided a solid background that could be of great help for future research to encompass the other aspects that I might have missed.

Thus, in light of the data limitations, it would be interesting to build up a specialised corpus on the revolutions of the Arab Spring, which includes all the reports released by the international news agencies to facilitate a more thorough investigation of the different perspectives on the Arab Spring. Another vital area for future research on media bias is the representation of Kurdish fighters in Turkish news agencies, such as Anadolu, and UK Reuters or elsewhere.

On the whole, this study is fully dedicated to investigating the discursive practices conducted by news outlets to blur and reshape reality. This study, with the above limitations in mind, is meant to reveal how the two conflicting sides in the Syrian

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[25] Upon emailed requests, which I sent to Reuters asking for reports corpus that included 2011 to 2013, Reuters referred me to the three available corpora, which were last updated in 2008. See the link for more information about the three sets of corpora: https://trec.nist.gov/data/reuters/reuters.html.

revolution are discursively constructed to help clarify the ideological implications that underpinned the news discourses.

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APPENDICES

Mon Aug 03, 2015 7:20
Sources: Terrorists in Syria Receive Cargo of Chemical Substances

"The Takfiri terrorist groups have received dangerous chemicals in trucks which crossed Jordan into Syria through Nasib border crossing," the Syrian sources said.The local sources also revealed that the hazardous chemical substances included chlorine agent.In April 2014, the foreign-backed militants fired mortar shells, containing poisonous chemical substances, on several residential areas in the city of Homs.

The terrorists attacked the cities of Al-Sabil and Al-Zahra districts in Homs with mortar rounds containing poisonous chlorine agent. Chlorine gas, which was widely used during World War I, can be deadly.In late August 2013, rebels and local residents in Ghouta in Damascus countryside accused the then Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, of providing chemical weapons to an al-Qaeda linked rebel group. Interviews with people in Damascus and Ghouta, a suburb of the Syrian capital, where the humanitarian agency Doctors Without Borders said at least 355 people had died in late August from what it believed to be a neurotoxic agent, appear to indicate as much, Infowars.com said in a report written by Dale Gavlak and Yahya Ababneh.

From numerous interviews with doctors, Ghouta residents, rebel fighters and their families, a different picture emerged. Many believed that certain rebels received chemical weapons via the Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, and were responsible for carrying out the dealing gas attack.

"My son came to me two weeks ago asking what I thought the weapons were that he had been asked to carry," said Abu Abdel-Moneim, the father of a rebel fighting to unseat President Assad, who lives in Ghouta.

Abdel-Moneim said his son and 12 other rebels were killed inside of a tunnel used to store weapons provided by a Saudi militant, known as Abu Ayesha, who was leading a fighting battalion. The father described the weapons as having a "tube-like structure" while others were like a "huge gas bottle."

Ghouta townspeople said the rebels were using mosques and private houses to sleep while storing their weapons in tunnels. Abdel-Moneim said his son and the others died during the chemical weapons attack. That same day, the militant group Jabhat al-Nusra

(Al-Nusra Front), which is the al-Qaeda's arm in Syria, announced that it would similarly attack civilians in the Assad regime's heartland of Latakia on Syria's western coast, in purported retaliation. "They didn't tell us what these arms were or how to use them," complained a female fighter named 'K.' "We didn't know they were chemical weapons. We never imagined they were chemical weapons."

"When Saudi Prince Bandar gives such weapons to people, he must give them to those who know how to handle and use them," she warned. She, like other Syrians, do not want to use their full names for fear of retribution.

A well-known rebel leader in Ghouta named 'J' agreed. "Jabhat al-Nusra militants do not cooperate with other rebels, except with fighting on the ground. They do not share secret information. They merely used some ordinary rebels to carry and operate this material," he said. "We were very curious about these arms. And unfortunately, some of the fighters handled the weapons improperly and set off the explosions," 'J' said.

Doctors who treated the chemical weapons attack victims cautioned interviewers to be careful about asking questions regarding who, exactly, was responsible for the deadly assault. The humanitarian group Doctors Without Borders added that health workers aiding 3,600 patients also reported experiencing similar symptoms, including frothing at the mouth, respiratory distress, convulsions and blurry vision. The group has not been able to independently verify the information. More than a dozen rebels interviewed reported that their salaries came from the Saudi government.

Mon Apr 21, 2014 9:26
Hersh: Turkey Behind Sarin Attacks in Syria

TEHRAN (FNA)- Last December Seymour Hersh wrote that the CIA knew that Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda affiliated fundamentalists in Syria, were capable of producing Sarin and were likely the ones who used it last August in Ghouta near Damascus. The U.S. then claimed that the Syrian government had used the lethal gas and Obama threatened an all out air attack against it. Obama stopped the operation and went to Congress which denied to sanction any attack. A deal proposed by the Russian Federation for Syria to give up all its chemical weapons allowed Obama to publicly back down from his red-line.

Hersh now has a new piece out that goes much deeper into the issue. According to his sources: In 2012 the CIA build a rat-line to provide weapons from Libya via Turkey to the Syrian insurgents.

That rat-line was stopped by the CIA after the attack on the U.S. "consulate" in Benghazi but the Turks continued to run it on their own.

The Turkish prime minister had bet all his cards one the Syrian insurgency. His intelligence service MIT was supporting not only the Free Syrian Army but also Al-Nusra. When the war turned against the insurgents and the Syrian government was on the verge of winning Turkey needed to change the game.

Turkey trained al-Nusra on the production of Sarin and provided the precursor chemicals.

After several Sarin incidents, one of which killed some Syrian soldiers, Erdogan pushed the White House to react to the supposed breach of Obama's red-line against the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government. Obama at first declined.

In August 2013 chemical weapon inspectors arrived in Damascus. The Turks used the visit to instigate a spectacular chemical warfare incident in Ghouta. This incident pushed Obama to declare that the red-line had been crossed and that he would use air attacks against the Syrian government.

Provided with physical probes from the incident via the Russians and the British U.S. government laboratories found that the Sarin used in Ghouta did not match the Sarin the Syrian government was supposed to have.

Knowing that the case was weak and the proposed action would likely escalate throughout the Middle East the U.S. military urged to call the attack off. Obama then threw the ball over to Congress and, after Congress declined to pick it up, took the Russian deal.

The Turks are furious that they did not get the attack they had demanded. Erdogan still needs a victory over the Syrian government and his support for al-Nusra and other radicals continues. As Hersh tells it the U.S. is unable or unwilling to stop him:
Barring a major change in policy by Obama, Turkey's meddling in the Syrian civil war is likely to go on. 'I asked my colleagues if there was any way to stop Erdoğan's continued support for the rebels, especially now that it's going so wrong,' the former intelligence official told me. 'The answer was: "We're screwed." We could go public if it was somebody other than Erdoğan, but Turkey is a special case. They're a Nato ally. The Turks don't trust the West. They can't live with us if we take any active role against Turkish interests. If we went public with what we know about Erdoğan's role with the gas, it'd be disastrous. The Turks would say: "We hate you for telling us what we can and can't do."'

The story, as Hersh tells it, makes sense and fits the known circumstances. Erdogan has bet his house on the fall of the Syrian government and continues his best to achieve that. Turkey obviously supports the current onslaught on Lattakia and the Armenian town of Kessab in north-west Syria which is led by Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra. Recently over 1,000 mercenaries were flown from north Jordan to Turkey to join the fight. In the last week anti-tank missiles from U.S. production, of which the Saudi government recently bought 15,000, have been used in these attacks.

As the U.S. is unable or, more likely in my view, unwilling to stop Turkey on its way to become another Pakistan something else has to happen to change Erdogan's calculations. What could that be and who could provide it?

Sun Apr 20, 2014 1:39
Syria in Last 24 Hours: Army Regains Control of Strategic Town in Ghouta

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army won back control over the town of Zobdin in Damascus countryside after pushing back the terrorists from their positions.

The army units regained control of Zobdin in Eastern Ghouta and are now continuing their advance towards other insecure areas in the same region. Also in the past 24 hours, the foreign-backed militants fired mortar shells, containing poisonous chemical substances, on several residential areas in the city of Homs. The terrorists attacked the cities of Al-Sabil and Al-Zahra districts in Homs with mortar rounds containing poisonous chlorine agent. Chlorine gas, which was widely used during World War I, can be deadly.

Meantime, informed sources disclosed that the Syrian army is planning a massive, phased offensive to take back control over two-thirds of the areas currently controlled by the foreign-backed militants by end of 2014. "The Syrian army intends to restore full security to Aleppo and Daraa in order to endorse its control over 70 percent of the militant-ruled areas in the country," the sources told FNA.

The army units have so far restored security to Al-Qalamoun region in Damascus countryside in the Southern parts of the country. The army liberated the towns and villages in Al-Qalamoun, and even regained control over the mountainous regions in the region. After its successful operations in Al-Qalamoun, the Syrian army has started its operations in Homs where it has made major advances so far, the sources added. The sources reiterated that Homs and Al-Qalamoun will be declared as secured regions as soon as Eastern and Western Ghouta are purged of terrorists completely. Elsewhere, Syrian army targeted armed groups in many provinces and destroyed their weapons, hideouts and equipment.

Army units confronted a militant group tried to infiltrate from Bilal al-Habashi Mosque to al-Manshiyeh neighborhood in Daraa al-Balad, killing and injuring its members. A military source told the Syrian news agency that the army units also killed a number of militants and destroyed their cars which were equipped with heavy machineguns on Rosoum al-Modawarah al-Rbaisyeh road in Daraa countryside. Citizens of Ras al-Ma'ara, al-Jibeh and Assal al-Ward towns in al-Qalamoon took to streets Saturday affirming support to Army against terrorism.

The citizens of the three towns hailed the army's efforts to restore security and safety to Homeland. Meantime, the Syrian army made major advances in a strategic region in Idlib countryside in the Northwestern parts of the country. The army pushed back foreign-backed militants from Khan Sheikhoun city and prevented them from wining control over Al-Salam army post in the Western parts of the city. Meantime, the Syrian army started a series of military operations in Eastern Tal Ahmar in Qonaytareh region of Daraa province. Also, the Syrian air force pounded the militants' positions in Naimeh and Daraa Al-Balad towns in Daraa. The clashes erupted between the army forces and the militants in Daraa days ago. Elsewhere, the Syrian army regained control over the Eastern parts of a strategic town in Hama countryside in the Central parts of the country.

The army units seized back the Eastern side of the town of Mourek in Hama province that was used by the Takfiri groups as a center for carrying out their military operations in Central Syria. According to FNA dispatches, tens of militants were killed and dozens more injured in heavy clashes in Hama. Last week, the Syrian army began large-scale operations in Mourek. Military sources believe that Mourek is no less important than the town of Yabroud, in Damascus countryside, which was liberated last month. The Syrian armed forces say that seizing control over Mourek is crucially important for reopening Hama-Khan Sheikhoun-Maareh Al-Naman International Highway and breaking the siege of Khan Sheikhoun region in Idlib countryside in Northwestern Syria.

Meantime, Syria rebels will soon receive the first batch of hi-tech TOW anti–tank missiles, several sources said. Earlier this month Russian media said that America has started supplying Syrian militants with such heavy weaponry via Saudi Arabia and its allies in the region. The aim is to shift the balance of power in favor of Syria's rebel groups and topple Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, Islam Times reported. Even though experts have strongly warned against such move, stressing that groups such as Al-Qaeda will undoubtedly seek to acquire such technology of war, Saudi Arabia has nevertheless pushed Washington to up its war game in the Levant. On pictures posted online, the missile reads, "BGM-71E" also known as "TOW-2A". It is important to note that it was Saudi Arabia which in the 1980s bought such weapons from the US.

Sat Jun 22, 2013 4:43
Deputy Leader of Syrian Journalists' Union: Iraqi Plants Producing Chemical Arms for Rebels

TEHRAN (FNA)- Vice-Chairman of the Syrian Journalists' Union Mostafa Meqdad said that chemical plants in Iraq are producing chemical weapons for the terrorists in Syria, confirming the remarks by Russian President Vladimir Putin who had revealed the involvement of certain groups in Iraq in the production of such weapons.

"Russia is also aware that a plant which produces chemical weapons exists in Iraq and belongs to the terrorist groups," Meqdad told FNA in Damascus on Saturday. "Russia has announced that the Syrian government has not used such (chemical) weapons and stressed that the terrorists have used them in Syria, specially in Aleppo and Idlib," he added. His remarks alluded to Putin's comments earlier this week that laboratories in Iraq are producing chemical weapons for the terrorists in Syria.

"We know that Opposition Fighters were detained on Turkish territory with chemical weapons," Mr. Putin told a press conference in Lough Erne, Northern Ireland after meeting the leaders of the industrialized nations in a G8 Summit. "We have information out of Iraq that a laboratory was discovered there for the production of chemical weapons by the opposition. All this evidence needs to be studied most seriously," he continued.

Putin questioned the credibility of allegations by the US, UK and France that Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's forces had used chemical weapons, and attributed equivalent horrors to the forces supported by the West. Putin's remarks confirmed a detailed report by the FNA in May which said former Ba'ath regime officials are involved in the production and procurement of such weapons to the Syrian terrorists.

Early last month, informed sources told FNA that the innocent people killed in the Khan al-Assal area of rural Aleppo in Northwestern Syria were the victims of the chemical weapons supplied to the terrorists by a Saddam-era General working under head of the now outlawed Ba'ath party Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri. "The chemical weapons used in the attack on Khan al-Assal area had been prepared by former Iraqi Military Industries Brigadier General Adnan al-Dulaimi and supplied to Ba'ath-affiliated terrorists of the Nusra Front in Aleppo through Turkey's cooperation and via the Turkish town of Antakya in Hatay Province," an informed source, who asked to remain anonymous for fear of his life, told FNA on May 6.

The source who has been an aide to Izzat Ibrahim - the most senior member of Saddam Hussein's inner circle who is still on the run and heads the outlawed Ba'ath party after

the apprehension and execution of Iraq's former Dictator Saddam Hussein - defected from the group a few months ago, but holds substantiating documents on Izzat Ibrahim's plans.

Gen. Adnan al-Dulaimi was a key man in Saddam's chemical weapons production projects. After the fall of the dictator and when the Ba'ath party was divided into the two branches of Yunes al-Ahmad and Izzat Ibrahim, he joined the latter group and was deployed in Northwestern Iraq, which is a bastion of Ba'ath terrorists, to produce chemical substances. "The 80mm mortar shells which landed in Khan al-Assal and killed dozens of people were armed with the latest product of Dulaimi's hidden laboratories sent to the Nusra members for testing," the source added.

"Also at his order, several former Iraqi military industries engineers trained the Syrian terrorists on how to use these chemical weapons," the source said, adding that all plans in this connection were prepared by Adnan al-Dulaimi and staged after the approval of Izzat Ibrahim. The chemical mortar shells, which the source said were fired at Khan al-Assal from the Nusra-ruled Kafr Dael in Northwestern Aleppo, contained a chemical substance very familiar to the Iraqi Ba'ath party leaders, Sarin nerve gas. Adnan Dulaimi and his Ba'athist colleagues in Iraq's military industries mass-produced the same lethal gas and used it in vast areas against the Iranian troops in the 1980-1988 war and eventually killed thousands of people in the Kurdish town of Halabcheh with the same chemical agent.

UN human rights investigators announced just a few hours ago that they have testimony indicating Syrian rebels have used Sarin gas. Interviews with victims and doctors have provided "strong, concrete suspicions" that rebels used the deadly nerve agent, according to a lead investigator, who also stressed that there's no evidence yet that the Syrian military used Sarin.

"Our investigators have been in neighboring countries interviewing victims, doctors and field hospitals and, according to their report of last week which I have seen, there are strong, concrete suspicions but not yet incontrovertible proof of the use of Sarin gas, from the way the victims were treated," member of the UN independent commission of inquiry on Syria Carla Del Ponte said in an interview with Swiss-Italian television. "This was use on the part of the opposition, the rebels, not by the government authorities," she added, speaking in Italian.

The United Nations independent commission of inquiry on Syria has not yet seen evidence of government forces having used chemical weapons, which are banned under international law, Del Ponte said. The chemical attack on Khan al-Assal came after a video footage posted on the internet late in January showed that the armed militants in Syria possessed canisters containing chemical substances. The foreign-sponsored militants had earlier released footage in which rabbits were killed by inhaling poisonous gas.

Tue Dec 02, 2014 3:2

Syria in Last 24 Hours: Army Makes Major Advances in Eastern Ghouta

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army continued its military operations in Damascus countryside and made major advances in Eastern Ghouta.

The Syrian soldiers backed by artillery units advanced towards the strategic town of Khan Al-Sheikh in Eastern Ghouta and FNA reports from the battlefield said that they are likely to regain control over the town in the next few days. The army soldiers also inflicted major losses on the rebels in Eastern Ghouta, al-Qalamoun, Misraba, Harasta, al-Nashabyyeh and Arbeen, leaving a large number of Takfiri militants dead and wounded.

Also in the past 24 hours, the Syrian army made fresh advances in its operations against ISIL Takfiri group in areas near Hama, leaving scores of the militants dead and injured. The Syrian forces targeted the positions of the terrorists in Hama province, killing a large number of them in the areas of al-Bela'as, Jana al-Elbawi, al-Hanoutiyeh, Edneh, al-Heddaj and Kafer Zaita. Meantime, the militants sustained toll in the areas of Doureen, Kfar Dalbeh, and Tertyah, as the army made gains in Lattakia. The army troops also managed to destroy three vehicles of the terrorist group during the operations.

Elsewhere, the Syrian army stormed the hideouts of Takfiri groups in the surrounding areas of Homs province, killing and injuring a large number of the militants.The army claimed the lives of too many militants in the area of al-Shaer, Homs province, after heavy clashes with the militant groups. Meantime, Spokesman of Kyrgyzstan's National Security Committee announced that a large number of Kyrgyz citizens are now fighting for the ISIL terrorist group against the Damascus government in Syria.

"A sum of 175 Kyrgyz nationals, who have been attracted to ISIL through the group's Internet advertisements, are now fighting alongside the terrorists group in Syria," Suleymanov said. He underlined that ISIL is a serious threat to Kyrgyzstan, and said, "We have arrested 36 terrorists over the past two years and tried them on charges of radicalism."

A recent UN report revealed that terrorists from 29 countries have infiltrated into Syria to fight against the Damascus government, most of whom are extremist Salafists. Elsewhere, the Lebanese army raided Tariq Al-Jdideh neighborhood and arrested four Syrians on suspicion of belonging to a terrorist organization.

The Syrians are suspected of belonging to a terrorist group and of entering the country without proper identification papers, the army communiqué said. The army also arrested six Lebanese and one Australian suspect in Koura, said the communiqué, without giving further details. The detainees were referred to the concerned authorities, it added.

Meantime, an Egyptian young man fighting for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist group in Syria reportedly committed a suicide attack at the Kurdish-Syrian city of Kobani. Islam Yakan, aka Abu Salama al-Masry, joined the militant group, which controls swathes of Syria and Iraq, few months ago, Egypt Independent reported.

Meantime, Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad said foreign-backed terrorist groups are using chemical weapons such as chlorine gas in their fight against the government forces. Addressing a meeting of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on Monday, Mekdad said the Syrian government had never used such weapons during the war against the militants.

He emphasized that terrorist groups "have used chlorine gas in several of the regions of Syria and Iraq". The Syrian official's comments underscored what appeared to be the OPCW's next major challenge as it fully eliminated Syria's chemical stockpile. UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on October 1 that the international mission to eliminate Syria's chemical stockpile has wrapped up its operations in the war-torn country after almost a year.

The UN Security Council adopted a resolution in September last year to rid the war-torn country of its chemical arms. Under the resolution, the OPCW was mandated to

oversee the elimination of Syria's stockpile. US war rhetoric against Syria intensified last year after foreign-backed opposition forces accused the government of President Bashar al-Assad of launching a chemical attack on militant strongholds in the suburbs of the capital, Damascus, on August 21, 2013.

Damascus has vehemently denied the accusations, saying the attack was carried out by the militants themselves as a false-flag operation. Syria has been gripped by deadly violence since 2011. The western powers and their regional allies - especially Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey - are reportedly supporting the militants operating inside Syria.

Reuters' Reports on Chemical Attacks

Mon Aug 26, 2013 9:50pm BST

Related: WORLD, SYRIA, MIDDLE EAST

Dogged Rebels the Target of Syria Gas Attacks -Activists

AMMAN | BY KHALED YACOUB OWEIS

AMMAN A diplomat and activists said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had been trying for some time, in vain, to dislodge rebels from the areas not far from central Damascus that were hit by suspected chemical weapons last week.

Assad has strongly denied carrying out chemical attacks, telling Russian newspaper Izvestia on Monday that the allegation "insults common sense" and that the rebels were responsible for what could be the world's worst poison gas strike in 25 years.

Even some locals in rebel-held areas hit by the strike have questioned the rationale for such an attack so close to Assad's own forces and just a few days after UN weapons inspectors arrived in the city to investigate previous allegations of chemical weapon use.

The hundreds of deaths caused by the August 21 attacks have also drawn threats of military retaliation from Western powers, which could turn the tide against Assad's efforts to defeat a 2-1/2-year revolt against his rule.

But diplomats and rebels interviewed by Reuters said to the southern ring road that separates Damascus from its more rural environs and neutralise the immediate threat to the heart of the capital.

The suburbs of Zamalka, Jobar and Ain Tarma sit in an expanse of farming country known as the Eastern Ghouta. Along with the town of Mouadmiya in the west, these areas had been pummelled for months by battlefield artillery, warplanes and surface-to-surface missiles before they were hit on the morning of August 21.

In the 72 hours that followed, Assad's mechanised forces from the Fourth Division and the Republican Guards, the praetorian units entrusted with defending his seat of power, mounted a major push to retake the four areas, but well dug-in rebels held out, sources said.

"The regime has been throwing everything he has at the Ghouta, but it remained a thorn in its side. When you have a large number of well-organised rebel fighters in an urban area with lots of cover, using chemical weapons becomes very tempting," a Middle East based diplomat said.

THREAT TO CAPITAL

When the revolt became militarised almost two year ago, the rebels of Ghouta, mostly from the Sunni majority that opposes Assad and his minority Alawite sect elite, were among the first areas in the country to take up arms.

The rebel groups there include the Saudi-backed Liwa al-Islam Brigade, Saladin Brigade, Jobar Martyrs Brigade, and Tahrir al-Sham, a unit headed by Firas al-Bitar, an officer who defected from Assad's army and has a reputation as a good military planner.

"If the rebel units were not so well organised, Assad would have captured Ghouta long time ago," said Moaz al-Shami, a prominent activist who witnessed fighting in Ghouta.

"The regime needed to kill 1,000 people in one go in Ghouta, or whatever the final tally of the chemical attack proves to be, because it was in need of a morale boost," he added.

In the last few weeks, rebel brigades based in Jobar, which is only three kilometres from the central Abbassiyeen Square, managed to open a supply corridor to the besieged Damascus neighbourhoods of Barzeh and Qaboun in the northern sector of the capital, opposition sources said.

The link brought the military threat from Ghouta closer to the heart of Damascus and helped the two districts withstand intensifying loyalist attacks, the sources said.

"Rebel operations in the countryside have been merging with Damascus, and the regime could not take that. Assad would have loved to gas Barzeh and Qaboun as well, but they are too interconnected with loyalist areas," said Khaled Omar, a member of the opposition Local Council of Ain Tarma.

"By hitting Ghouta, Assad thinks he is preserving Damascus and destroying a popular incubator of the revolution," he added.

To the West, in Mouadamiya, activists said at least 80 people were killed when the district was hit with nerve gas an hour after the attack on Irbin, Ain Tarma and Jobar.

Over the past four decades, Syrian authorities have confiscated much of Mouadamiya to expand the Mezze military airport and compounds for the Republican Guards and Fourth Division, which now surround the town.

Most of Mouadamiya's residents had already fled after Assad's forces had overrun the suburb several times in the last year. About 9,000 civilians have remained in the district, according to opposition activist Wassim al-Ahmad.

"The regime attacked Mouadamiya with chemical weapons because it is strategic, and because after nine months of siege, it found no other way," he said.

(Editing by Will Waterman)

U.N.'s Ban Says all Claims of Chemical Arms Use in Syria Need Investigating

THE HAGUE | BY ANTHONY DEUTSCH - April 08, 2013|

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon speaks at a news conference at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in the Hague April 8, 2013.

Reuters/Michael Kooren

THE HAGUE An advance team of U.N.-mandated experts has gone to Cyprus and is awaiting permission from the Syrian government to investigate allegations of chemical weapons attacks, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on Monday.

Syria has asked the United Nations only to investigate what it says was a rebel chemical attack near Aleppo. The opposition has blamed President Bashar al-Assad's forces for that strike and also wants the U.N. team to probe other alleged chemical attacks by the government.

There have been three alleged chemical weapons attacks - the one near Aleppo and another near Damascus, both in March, and one in Homs in December. The rebels and Assad's government blame each other for all of them.

Russia, an ally of Syria, has supported Damascus against demands from Western powers that the investigation be widened.

Ban has made clear he wants an all-encompassing inquiry, saying it was the "firm principle" of the United Nations that investigators be granted access to all areas where chemical weapons were allegedly used.

After meeting in The Hague with the head of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is providing scientists and equipment, Ban said an advance team was in Cyprus, ready to go to Syria within 24 hours.

"All we are waiting for is the go-ahead from the Syrian government to determine whether any chemical weapons were used, in any location," Ban said.

"I urge the Syrian government to be more flexible, so that this mission can be deployed as fast as possible."

An exchange of letters between Syria's U.N. Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari and U.N. disarmament chief Angela Kane showed that the two sides are far from agreement, U.N. diplomats said on condition of anonymity.

Ja'afari has insisted that the inspectors only investigate the Aleppo incident. He wants the Syrian government to approve members of the mission, insists on appointing an observer to accompany the inspection team and wants duplicates of any of samples taken, the diplomats told Reuters.

Kane wrote back to Ja'afari on April 5 explicitly pointing out that the Aleppo and Homs attacks should be investigated, as well as "any other location that the head of mission may determine is necessary," one of the diplomats said.

SPECTRE OF IRAQ

Syria's Foreign Ministry compared efforts to broaden the probe to the U.N.'s role in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq by the United States.

It is "at odds with the Syrian request. It shows there are hidden intentions ... which violate Syrian sovereignty," said a statement on state television. "Syria cannot accept these manoeuvres."

Ahmet Uzumcu, head of the OPCW, said the full mission would comprise 15 experts, including inspectors, medical experts and chemists. Officials from the Geneva-based World Health Organisation will also be on the team.

It will be headed by Swedish scientist Ake Sellstrom, a former U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq, whom Ban also met in The Hague. Sellstrom was to join the advance team on Monday.

An offer of assistance came from opposition campaigner Basma Kodmani, who told Sellstrom in an undated letter that tissue samples had been gathered from six alleged victims of chemical attacks on March 24 in the villages of Adra and Ateybeh.

"There are 32 persons showing symptoms of illness and are currently being treated following exposure to the weapons who are willing to be examined by the inquiry," the letter said.

Ban said all serious claims of chemical weapons use in Syria should be examined quickly so that evidence was preserved.

"The use of chemical weapons by any side, under any circumstances, would constitute an outrageous crime with dire consequences," he said.

Britain and France want to broaden the U.N. investigation to include Homs and Damascus, where rebels say Assad's forces used chemical munitions. They also blame the Syrian government for the incident near Aleppo.

Russia, which has used its veto on the Security Council to counter Western pressure on Syria, has suggested that Western powers are using the spectre of weapons of mass destruction to justify intervention in Syria, as they did in Iraq.

The OPCW, established to oversee the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention, has helped to destroy roughly 80 percent of chemical weapons stockpiles declared by 188 members.

Syria is one of just eight countries that have not joined, the convention. The others are Angola, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea, Somalia and South Sudan.

According to Western intelligence agencies, Syria is believed to have one of the largest remaining stockpiles of undeclared chemical weapons in the world, making it a security issue for Washington and its European allies, as well as for neighbouring Israel.

Syria has not confirmed or denied that it has chemical weapons, but has said that if it did, it would never use them against its own people, only to repel foreign invaders.

(Additional reporting by Oliver Holmes and Mariam Karouny in Beirut and Louis Charbonneau at the United Nations.; Editing by Michael Roddy and Christopher Wilson)

Fri Aug 30, 2013 5:48pm BST

Related: WORLD, SYRIA, MIDDLE EAST

France Says Ready to Act Over Syria, Despite British Refusal

PARIS | BY CATHERINE BREMER AND JOHN IRISH

PARIS President Francois Hollande said a British parliamentary vote against taking military action in Syria would not affect France's will to act to punish Bashar al-Assad's government, which it blamed for a chemical attack on civilians.

Hollande told the daily Le Monde he still supported taking firm punitive action over an attack he said had caused irreparable harm to the Syrian people, and said he would work closely with France's allies.

Diplomatic sources said that while the British decision could add to the French public's reservations about strikes, Hollande may now feel an even stronger duty to carry through on a promise to punish the perpetrators of the poison gas attack.

"The chemical massacre in Damascus cannot and must not go unpunished. Otherwise we'd run the risk of an escalation that would trivialise the use of these arms and put other countries at risk," Hollande told Le Monde.

Asked if France could take action without Britain, he replied: "Yes. Each country is sovereign to participate or not in an operation. That is valid for Britain as it is for France."

France, the former colonial power in Syria, has backed the opposition rebels since the start of the conflict yet is worried spiralling violence could spill over into Lebanon, where it has its strongest political and economic links in the region.

France has some 20,000 nationals living in Lebanon, myriad companies operating there and a peacekeeping force of around 800 soldiers. Diplomatic sources say Paris fears Assad's forces could attack its interests there in retaliation for strikes.

Unlike British Prime Minister David Cameron - who lost a parliamentary vote sanctioning military intervention on Thursday - Hollande could, if he chose, act before a French parliamentary debate set for Wednesday.

Hollande, who was due to talk on Friday to U.S. President Barack Obama, told Le Monde France had "a stack of evidence" that Assad's forces were behind last week's gas attacks. "I believe punitive action must be carried out against a regime that is doing irreparable harm to its people," he said.

France would act if the conditions justified it, he said, and any response would be firm and proportionate.

"There are few countries that have the capacity to inflict a sanction by the appropriate means. France is one of them. We are ready. We will decide our position in close liaison with our allies," Hollande said.

France most likely would deploy Rafale and Mirage fighter jets fitted with Scalp air-to-surface missile with a range of up to 250 km (155 miles), from Corsica in the Mediterranean.

PUBLIC LUKEWARM

France and Britain have become close diplomatic allies in the years since their disagreement over joining the 2003 U.S.-led war in Iraq and coordinate closely in defence operations.

Cameron stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Hollande's predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy two years ago when the EU members launched air strikes against the forces of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi to stop his crushing of a rebel uprising.

French diplomatic sources said Paris had been braced for a refusal by British lawmakers to countenance British military action over Syria. While disappointing, it would likely make France more determined to join any U.S. action, they said.

"It wasn't a surprise that Cameron lost the vote but it has made Hollande's decision more complicated and more political. There are a lot of parameters to take into account," one senior source told Reuters. "It's not an easy decision."

He said France had not yet decided on its course of action but believed that not acting would create a dangerous precedent.

Francois Heisbourg, a special adviser at the Foundation for Strategic Research and former defence ministry adviser, said France was now waiting for the U.S. government to make public its own intelligence assessment about the chemical attack.

"The Americans will make their proof public this afternoon. It will prejudge what Obama will say and he will, either privately or publicly, let loose the dogs of war," he said.

Two opinion polls published this week, and carried out after the gas attack in Damascus, indicated lukewarm support among French voters for military intervention in Syria.

A survey by pollster CSA found 45 percent of respondents would support a U.N. military intervention and 40 percent would be opposed. Separately, 59 percent of people in an IFOP poll did not want France to take part in any intervention.

Hollande, whose popularity has been hurt by economic gloom, showed unexpected military mettle when he dispatched troops to help Mali's government fend off Islamist rebels earlier this year, an intervention backed by two-thirds of the public.

(Additional reporting by Julien Ponthus, Patrick Vignal and Nicholas Vinocur; Writing by Catherine Bremer; Editing by Jon Boyle).

U.N. Confirms Chemical Arms were Used Repeatedly in Syria

[Louis Charbonneau](), [Michelle Nichols]()

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - Chemical weapons were likely used in five out of seven attacks investigated by U.N. experts in Syria, where a 2 1/2-year civil war has killed more than 100,000 people, according to the final report of a U.N. inquiry published on Thursday.

U.N. investigators said the deadly nerve agent sarin was likely used in four incidents, in one case on a large scale. The report noted that in several cases the victims included government soldiers and civilians, though it was not always possible to establish with certainty any direct links between the attacks, the victims and the alleged sites of the incidents.

"The United Nations Mission concludes that chemical weapons have been used in the ongoing conflict between the parties in the Syrian Arab Republic," the final report by chief U.N. investigator Ake Sellstrom said.

Syria's U.N. Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari and the opposition Syrian National Coalition did immediately comment on the 82-page report.

The investigation found likely use of chemical weapons in Khan al-Assal, near the northern city of Aleppo, in March; in Saraqeb, near the northern city of Idlib, in April; and in Jobar and Ashrafiat Sahnaya, near Damascus, in August.

As initially reported by Sellstrom in September, there was "clear and convincing" evidence that sarin was used on a large-scale against civilians in the rebel-held Damascus suburb of Ghouta on August 21, killing hundreds of people.

A man, affected by what activists say is nerve gas, breathes through an oxygen mask in the Damascus suburbs of Jesreen August 21, 2013. REUTERS/Ammar Dar

In the final report on Thursday, the experts said sarin had likely also been used on a small-scale in Jobar, Saraqeb and Ashrafiat Sahnaya.

The inquiry was only looking at whether chemical weapons were used, not who used them. The Syrian government and the opposition have accused each other of using chemical weapons, and both have denied it.

TOTAL 16 ALLEGATIONS

Rebels have seized all kinds of weapons from military depots across Syria, according to the United Nations. Western powers say the rebels do not have access to chemical arms.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon established the Sellstrom investigation after the Syrian government wrote to Ban accusing the rebels of carrying out the chemical weapons attack in Khan al-Assal.

Sellstrom delivered the final report to Ban on Thursday. Ban will brief the U.N. General Assembly on the report on Friday and the U.N. Security Council on Monday. Ake Sellstrom (L), Head of the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, hands his report over to Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon at the United Nations headquarters in New York December 12, 2013. REUTERS/Lucas Jackson

"The use of chemical weapons is a grave violation of international law and an affront to our shared humanity," Ban said. "We need to remain vigilant to ensure that these awful weapons are eliminated, not only in Syria, but everywhere." The United Nations has now received 16 reports of possible chemical weapons use in Syria, mainly from the Syrian government, Britain, France and the United States. The experts looked closely at seven of those cases.

The U.N. experts were from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the World Health Organization.

Kremlin critics oppose Russian for Interpol head. France, Britain and the United States said the technical details of Sellstrom's initial September report on the August 21 attack pointed to government culpability, while Syria and Russia blamed the rebels. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government agreed to destroy its chemical weapons arsenal after the August 21 Ghouta attack, which had led to threats of U.S. air strikes. Syria also acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The U.N. Security Council adopted a resolution in September to enforce the deal, brokered by the United States and Russia, which requires Syria to account fully for its chemical weapons and for the arsenal to be removed and destroyed by mid-2014.

The Hague-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has been charged with supervising the elimination of Syria's chemical arsenal.

Editing by Sandra Maler, Jim Loney and Mohammad Zargham

November 6, 2015 / 7:26 AM / 3 years ago

Exclusive: Chemical Weapons Used by Fighters in Syria - Sources

Anthony Deutsch

THE HAGUE (Reuters) - Chemical weapons experts have determined that mustard gas was used in a Syrian town where Islamic State insurgents were battling another group, according to a report by an international watchdog seen by Reuters.

A confidential Oct. 29 report by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), a summary of which was shown to Reuters, concluded "with the

utmost confidence that at least two people were exposed to sulphur mustard" in the town of Marea, north of Aleppo, on Aug. 21.

"It is very likely that the effects of sulphur mustard resulted in the death of a baby," it said.

The findings provide the first official confirmation of use of sulphur mustard, commonly known as mustard gas, in Syria since it agreed to destroy its chemical weapons stockpile, which included sulphur mustard.

The report did not mention Islamic State, as the fact-finding mission was not mandated to assign blame, but diplomatic sources said the chemical had been used in the clashes between Islamic State and another rebel group taking place in the town at the time.

"It raises the major question of where the sulphur mustard came from," one source said. "Either they (IS) gained the ability to make it themselves, or it may have come from an undeclared stockpile overtaken by IS. Both are worrying options."

Syria is supposed to have completely surrendered the toxic chemicals 18 months ago. Their use violates U.N. Security Council resolutions and the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention.

The findings were part of three reports released to members of the OPCW last week. They add to a growing body of evidence that the Islamic State group has obtained, and is using, chemical weapons in both Iraq and Syria.

Kurdish authorities said earlier this month that Islamic State fighters fired mortar rounds containing mustard agent at Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in northern Iraq during clashes in August. They said blood samples taken from around 35 fighters who were exposed in the attack southwest of the regional capital of Erbil showed "signatures" of mustard gas.

A team of OPCW experts has been sent to Iraq to confirm the findings and is expected to obtain its own samples later this month, one diplomat said.

ASSAD'S FORCES ALSO UNDER SUSPICION

In the Idlib Province south of Aleppo, another report said, there were several incidents between March and May of 2015 which "likely involved the use of one or more toxic chemicals," including chlorine.

Those attacks, which resulted in the deaths of six people in the opposition-controlled region, have been blamed on government forces.

"Witnesses reported hearing helicopters overhead at the time the chemical munitions exploded. Only the Assad regime has helicopters," U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby said, referring to President Bashar al-Assad's government.

The White House said on Friday it was very concerned about the initial findings of the OPCW.

"We are continuing to investigate these allegations very closely and to be proactive about the threat from chemical weapons, or other similar threats," a National Security Council spokesperson said in an email.

A special session has been called by the OPCW's 41-member Executive Council to discuss the Syrian findings and it will be held in The Hague on Nov. 23, sources at the OPCW told Reuters.

Sulphur mustard - which causes severe delayed burns to the eyes, skin and lungs - is a so-called Schedule 1 chemical agent, meaning it has few uses outside warfare.

Kremlin critics oppose Russian for Interpol head

The third report by the OPCW fact-finding mission to Syria said the team had so far been unable to substantiate claims from the Syrian government that its forces had been targeted by insurgents using chemical weapons.

The mission "cannot confidently determine whether or not a chemical was used as a weapon" by militants in the Jober area on Aug. 29, 2014, it said.

Syria agreed in September 2013 to destroy its entire chemical weapons programme under a deal negotiated with the United States and Russia after hundreds of people were killed in a sarin gas attack in the outskirts of the capital, Damascus.

The last of 1,300 tonnes of chemical weapons declared to the OPCW was handed over in June, 2014, but several Western governments have expressed doubt that the government of President Bashar al-Assad declared its entire arsenal.

With Syria's civil war in its fifth year, chlorine has also been used illegally in systematic attacks against civilians, the OPCW found. A U.N.-OPCW joint investigative mission has been assigned to determine who was behind those attacks. The three reports will be formally presented to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon later this month.

Additional reporting by Idrees Ali and Roberta Rampton in Washington; editing by Pravin Char, Janet McBride and Alan Crosby

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