

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:

**THE DICTATOR & THE CHARMER:
U.S. NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE OF CHINESE
PRESIDENT XI JINPING & IRANIAN
PRESIDENT HASSAN ROUHANI**

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“Islamic fanatic,” “atomic mullah,” “charmer,” “muscle-flexing dictator,” “corrupt manipulator,” “power-thirsty tyrant.”¹ This dissertation investigates how the American news media have framed the presidents of China and Iran in recent years. The dissertation first contextualizes American news coverage by examining bilateral relations between the United States and China and Iran, two countries often represented as hostile to American values and aspirations. Then, using content analysis and informed by framing theory, the dissertation investigates the discourse used to define Xi Jinping of China and Hassan Rouhani of Iran. Across both countries, this dissertation examined the

¹ All of these terms are from various news outlets that have described Iranian and Chinese leaders. For example, news outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Daily Beast*, and *The Wall Street Journal* used phrases such as “atomic mullahs” and “Islamic Fanatics” to address leaders from Iran. News outlets such as *The New York Times* have employed terms such as “power-thirsty tyrant”, “corrupt manipulators” and “muscle-flexing dictator” to describe Xi Jinping of China.

following news outlets: *Los Angeles Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, *Foreign Policy*, *Huffington Post*, and *Politico*.

To study the coverage of Xi Jinping and Hassan Rouhani, this dissertation investigates two headline-making periods in the careers of both men: Xi's early anti-corruption campaign (2013-14) and his crackdown on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement in 2014; and Rouhani's precedent-breaking phone call with President Obama in September 2013, and the Iran nuclear deal, signed between Iran and the P5+1 countries in July 2015.

This dissertation contributes to the relatively scant area of academic research evaluating U.S. media coverage of international leaders — a surprising omission in the literature, given the relationship between international reporting and the articulation and approval of foreign policy by foreign leaders.

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OF CHINESE PRESIDENT XI JINPING AND PRESIDENT HASSAN
ROUHANI**

By

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Dedication

For my father Ahmad,

for always trusting and believing in me and giving me courage to be proud of all that I am. This is for you, Baba. Thank you for your unconditional love and support.

To my mother, Soraya,

for her love, strength, and light that continues to guide me through my life. I love you Maman, and miss you every single day. The memory of your smile made this work possible.

To my partner, Hossein,

for his friendship, optimism, and endurance through these difficult times.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When Hassan Rouhani took the stage at the U.N. Security Council in September of 2013, Iranians were holding their breaths. Six years earlier, Iran's President Ahmadinejad had appeared behind the same podium, denied the Holocaust and blamed the horrific attacks of 9/11 on U.S. leaders. Following that appearance, President Ahmadinejad had traveled uptown to Columbia University where the president of the school, Lee Bollinger, introduced him as a “petty cruel dictator” with a “fanatical mindset.”¹

In his infamous Columbia speech, Ahmadinejad went on to repeat his denial of the Holocaust and refute the existence of homosexuals in Iran. By contrast, when Rouhani finished his U.N. speech in 2013, many Iranians breathed in relief. They had just heard their newly elected president talk of “wisdom,” of “hope” and of peace. Even though Rouhani later dodged questions about sensitive issues during his interviews with international news media, the headlines about the man who was leading the nation of Iran were drastically different than they had been about his predecessor.

Fast-forward four years to 2017. The differences in Rouhani’s demeanor and tone from Ahmadinejad had paid off. During the May 2017 elections in Iran, many Iranians took to social media to campaign for his re-election. Social media was rife with posts stating reasons why Rouhani was the best choice among the candidates. Some posts mentioned the nuclear agreement he brokered and the easing of sanctions. Others mentioned the advancement of social and cultural freedoms during his past term. But above all, people shared their belief that “Rouhani made us look better around the world.” Iranians posted past photographs of Rouhani and shared previous headlines from

global news outlets. Some users were creative enough to juxtapose foreign news media images of Rouhani with previous ones of Ahmadinejad in attempts to highlight the drastic differences in the way the two men — and hence the Islamic Republic — were viewed. What leaders do and how they are perceived around the world matters.

Global perceptions can change the course of a country — perhaps especially in societies where political parties have minimal power and most decisions are made by one supreme leader and a few advisors. Consider the Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Since he took office, journalists and observers have written fearfully of China's rise, and worried over Xi's "obsession with control." Journalists have wondered, given Xi's leadership, whether China is even committed to peace and stability. China's military maneuvers in the South China Sea, Xi's treatment of dissenters and his disregard for human rights have received much attention. While "Western" nations have not taken drastic actions against China, the media coverage about Xi has not been admirable nor friendly.

Journalists are fascinated by political leaders. Leading news outlets such as *The Economist* and *Time Magazine* annually select a most influential leader, and other news outlets regularly run lists of who is important, powerful and/or wealthy. Some political leaders are on the lists because they exert positive influences in the world, while others receive attention for being overtly controversial. In either case, how a leader is presented through international media affects his or her country's overall image, as well as its relations with the rest of the world.

U.S. citizens want their own presidents to be respected by the world, however, since the election of Donald Trump, U.S. citizens are experiencing what it feels like to have a leader who is often times rash, thoughtless — and on occasion simply

embarrassing and ignorant. Shortly after President Trump's first trip abroad, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that Europe could no longer count on the U.S., a singular comment by one of the United States' most important allies.² Americans too are learning that what a leader does and how a leader is portrayed around the world matters; a leader can break or make a country's image.

I was born in Tehran, and grew up in Iran and in England. In Iran, my childhood was shaped by the ever-present “enemy.” The Islamic government taught Iranians to look out for the “hands of enemy” that would grab our souls, seize our minds, and take our freedom. Personally, I remained unconvinced. I was a rare case. Because I had spent a significant portion of my childhood in the United Kingdom, I had often seen the images of Ayatollah Khomeini plastered on British television — and I had seen that the British media called the Ayatollah a “dangerous” fanatic, and charged him with slaughtering his own people to avoid a cease-fire with Iraq.

When my family returned to Iran in the 1990s, the country had just come out of the brutal nine-year Iran-Iraq War. The walls of Tehran were (and still are) plastered with “martyrs of truth,” images commemorating those who gave their lives in the war with Iraq. Other graffiti showed British and American flags painted on the missiles aiming at young men and Iranian cities. TV in Iran pictured Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan conspiring with Israel and Saudi Arabia to demolish Iran and its revolution. Political commentators on evening news referred to Thatcher and Reagan as the “enemies” who assisted Saddam Hussein in his gassing of Iranians. Thatcher, Reagan and Saddam were responsible, we were taught, for all that was wrong with Iran.

My bifurcated experience growing up awakened an interest in me in the subject of this dissertation. I believe that how nations, writ large, define their enemies is not just a linguistic exercise. Understanding how enemies are presented through the news media is vital. Who is “our enemy” influences how politicians, journalists, and the public think about those so-called enemies, and how they understand their own countries and the world at large. Usually, defining the enemy begins with a country's leaders. Time and time again, different countries have stated that their problems lie with the government of their enemies and not its people.

The “Red Menace,” the “Butcher of Baghdad,” the “Islamic fanatics,” the “Iranian thugs,” the “muscle flexing dictator,” the “corrupt manipulators,” the “mad dog of the Middle East,” the “blood thirsty tyrant.” These are just a few examples of how news media in recent years have characterized foreign leaders and foreign powers. Every society has some kind of foreign enemy in its past or present. However, “good” and “evil” and “friend” and “foe” are not always so easily differentiated in world politics and foreign policy — and there are consequences when enemies are represented with such pejorative terms.

In the United States, defining “the enemy” is especially complicated, as America is a nation of immigrants — some of whom actually have immigrated from so-called “enemy” states and practice religions or hold ideologies that are demonized. Consider the challenges that arose in the first days after the horrific attacks of 9/11. There was a careful attempt by the Bush administration not to label Muslims or Islam as the “enemy.” The administration left intentionally vague whom the “evil doers” were and who should be held responsible for the 9/11 attacks. That “gap” in definition allowed the Bush

administration to define opportunistically the “enemy” to be fought.³ Five months after the attacks, President Bush started officially identifying America’s enemies and their proxies in his famous “axis of evil” doctrine.⁴

This dissertation aims to examine the media coverage of leaders from two countries with complicated history with the United States. While there are a number of studies that look at foreign countries and their coverage in Western news media, there are still only a limited number of studies on how leaders from other countries — and their foreign policy decisions — are covered in U.S. and other Western news media. This dissertation contributes to the field of research in foreign policy news by trying to fill this void. Analyzing how professional U.S. journalists and opinion writers have framed leaders from Iran and China can provide insight into how these leaders and their actions are viewed in the United States.

1.1 Why China and Xi Jinping

In his famous essay, “The Clash of Civilizations” that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in 1993, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington raised caution about new enemies that would threaten the United States after the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁵ He asserted that “Islam” and China were unremitting threats to the United States, having emerged to fill the “enemy” vacuum.⁶ Following September 11, 2001, Islamic fundamentalism quickly surpassed China as U.S. Public Enemy Number One. But for those with an economic and trade focus, China has remained the United States’ most formidable adversary. Since 9/11, the overall framing of China in the American media has remained negative and mostly adversarial.⁷ Scholars such as Ono and Jiao argue that even though within the first month after the attacks of 9/11 Arabs and Muslims became

the primary enemy in American public discourse, the “timeless yellow [peril] motif” has remained persistent.⁸ Ono and Jiao argue that examples such as Jack Cafferty commenting on CNN that the Chinese are “basically the same bunch of goons and thugs they’ve been for the last 50 years” reaffirms the idea that China is still seen as an enemy in the public’s imagination.⁹ While one CNN commentator’s remarks do not constitute evidence for China being seen as an enemy country, the overall tone of American news media paints China and its leadership in a negative light.¹⁰ Although the U.S. State Department declares that the U.S. is interested in building a “positive,” “cooperative,” and “comprehensive relationship” with China, “positive” and “cooperative” is not always the reality of Chinese-American relations.¹¹ Since the establishment of relations with the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in 1974, American presidents have threatened to take a strong stance against China’s behavior in the region or towards its own people, but as China’s economic power grew, the condemnations of Beijing’s behavior were often limited to words rather than action. During the 2016 election campaign, for example, candidate Donald Trump repeatedly stated that he would “go after China” and label the country as a “currency manipulator.”¹² However, like most of his predecessors, since winning the election in November 2016, Donald Trump pulled back from his tough stance on China and even reiterated U.S commitment to the “One China” policy. Consequently, Xi became one of the first foreign leaders to visit President Trump at his Mar-a-Lago estate on April 16, 2017.¹³

The idea to study Xi Jinping emerged during his awkward December 2014 press conference with President Obama during one of Xi’s state visits to the U.S. During the press conference, *The New York Times* reporter Mark Lander asked a multi-part question,

including two to Xi, about the student movements in Hong Kong and about China's decision to block visa renewals for American journalists. Xi did what Xi does best: he calmly ignored Lander and after Obama was done answering his portion of the question, Xi simply called on a Chinese journalist.¹⁴ A few minutes later, Xi did respond to the original question by stating that the U.S. needed to stay out of the Hong Kong situation and that *The New York Times* created its own problems by not following Chinese law governing the renewal of visas. The "problems" were not with China, but with the Hong Kong protestors and *The New York Times*. Xi explained: "When a car breaks down on the road, we need to get under the car to see where the problem lies. And when a certain issue is raised as a problem there must be a reason. In Chinese we have a saying, 'the party which has created the problem should be the one to resolve it.' So perhaps we should look into the problem to see where the cause lies."¹⁵

Xi's blaming the public and the press for their own problems, sounded horrifically familiar to me. I became intrigued to see how a leader so powerful, yet so at odds with American values was portrayed in one of the world's freest media systems — and in an environment where he has no direct control. I then discovered, talking to my Chinese friends about how they think their leader and their country is represented in the United States, that most believed that China was getting a "bad rap" in U.S popular culture, especially in popular T.V. shows. Most echoed what many of my fellow Iranians usually say about may Iranian leaders: that Xi might not be the same as Obama, nor may he value freedoms that are revered in U.S., but he is working for China. Even though most of them were critical of the leader, they didn't think he deserved to be called a "tyrant" "or "coward" in the tweets and analysis that followed that press conference.

In this dissertation on “enemies,” China and Xi’s leadership have pertinence as a case study for three key reasons:

- China has been a powerful behind-the-scenes presence in United States’ dealings with enemy countries, such as Iran and North Korea.
- China and the United States have had serious cyber security confrontations, for example, in May 2014, a U.S. grand jury charged five Chinese military hackers with cyber espionage against U.S. corporations.
- U.S. politicians have often been “forced” into uncomfortable situations when questioned about U.S. economic relations with China despite its appalling human rights record. Successive US administrations have been charged with hypocrisy in dealing with China: critics have argued that for the U.S. to trade with China is to undermine American values.

1.1.1 The Coverage of Xi Jinping: Case Studies and Research Questions

Thus, to study the coverage of Xi Jinping, this dissertation investigated two case studies that had made headlines in U.S. news media: Xi’s highly publicized anti-corruption campaign and the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement in 2014. As explained in the method section of this dissertation, using content analysis and informed by framing theory, this study looks at the coverage of these two cases in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, *Foreign Policy*, *Huffington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, and *Politico*.

The dissertation considered the following questions when examining the coverage in the U.S. news media of Xi Jinping's anti-corruption efforts and of his crack down of the student protests in Hong Kong:

1.1.2 Research Questions for The Anti-Corruption Campaign

RQ1: How was Xi Jinping described in the coverage of the anti-corruption campaign in U.S. news media? What terms were used to describe his style of leadership? And what terms were used to describe his personality?

RQ2: What terms were used to describe Xi's policy of fighting corruption in China? What were the main motives seen by American journalists and analysis in comparison to those officially announced by China?

RQ3: What types of experts, official, or public sources were used by U.S. news media when reporting about Xi and the anti-corruption campaign?

RQ4: What other main issues about China or Xi were included in the coverage of Xi Jinping and the anti-corruption campaign?

1.1.3 Research Questions for The Umbrella Movement

RQ1: How did American news media cover Xi in news reports and op-ed pieces focusing on the Umbrella movement?

RQ2: What major frames/themes emerged in stories considering the Umbrella Revolution?

RQ3: What were the main expert, official, or public sources used in the coverage of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong?

RQ4: What other main issues about China or Xi were included in the coverage of Xi Jinping and the Umbrella Movement?

1.2 Why Iran and its Leadership?

The first reason to consider Iran and its leadership as a case study for my dissertation is personal. Since my first years in the U.S. coincided with the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the quest for positive news about Iran and its leadership was often unfruitful. However, after the election of Hassan Rouhani and the possibility of a nuclear deal with Iran, news stories began to seem more balanced. While the news did not become overwhelmingly positive, the new president and his team were certainly making an impact on the stories about Iran. Since the Rouhani administration came to power, there have been stories here and there that have a more “normalized” or at least “realistic” narrative about Iran. For example, the travel journalist Anthony Bourdain dedicated one of his CNN Parts Unknown episodes to Iran. The episode opens with him surrounded by smiling Iranians saying “Hi!” in English. He observes: “I’m so confused! [Iran] wasn’t supposed to be like this.”¹⁶

As an Iranian, it was comforting when after eight years of having a president who denied one of the most horrific events in history, the new leader and his foreign minister tweeted to the Jewish people on one of their holiest holidays. Thus, I was intrigued to see how Rouhani’s moderate approach is received by the U.S. news media; Iranians are also no longer reflexively evil on American prime time TV. For example, the CBS political drama, *Madame Secretary*, that depicts a fictional character, Elizabeth McCord, as the Secretary of State, often portrays McCord’s Iranian counterparts as likeable,

sophisticated, good-looking and even funny. I don't assume any of these changes in narrative towards Iran are accidental. Anecdotally, it appears as if the change in Iran's president has brought a change in media coverage of Iran. I am interested to see whether the political changes at the top have influenced how journalists cover news about Iran. I also am interested in including Iran in this dissertation because not only is often referred to as an "enemy" in the United States, it remains, by all estimations a threat to the United States' closest allies in the Mideast region: Israel and Saudi Arabia. Hence, even if Iran and the United States don't have direct conflicts, the kind of relationship Tehran, Tel Aviv and Riyadh have, make it difficult for Washington to make considerable changes in the course of U.S.-Iran relationships.¹⁷

Scholars such as David Altheide have argued that Americans never fully realized the seriousness of Iran's regime change following the Shah — or the role of the United States in Iran — until the hostage crisis of 1979.¹⁸ The hostage crisis changed how the U.S. and the world viewed Iran. During the Shah's regime, Iran was considered a moderate country in the Middle East and was known as one of America's close allies. Since the Islamic revolution of 1979, Iran has been a foreign policy challenge for the U.S. and its allies — a challenge ever more relevant to American interests since the end of the Iran-Iraq war and the efforts by Iranian officials to obtain nuclear capability. Iran is referred to as an U.S. foreign policy "disaster" by some scholars, and its deteriorated relations with the U.S. "tragic"¹⁹

After the 9/11 attacks, President Bush tarred Iran as one of his "Axis of Evil" countries, charging that the country was a sponsor of terrorism. Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, made clear in their turn, that

Iran had no interest in normalizing its relations with the U.S. or softening its image in the world.²⁰ However, following the election of Hassan Rouhani in June of 2011, Iran has made significant foreign policy overtures to the West, and has been willing to discuss nuclear issues.

1.2.1 The Coverage of Hassan Rouhani: Case Studies and Research Questions

Using content analysis and framing theory this dissertation looked at the coverage of Hassan Rouhani (and consequently the rest of Iran's leadership) through two case studies: the historical Obama-Rouhani phone call that occurred on September 28, 2013, and the Iran nuclear deal, which was signed between Iran and the P5+1 countries on July 14, 2015. This dissertation considered the following news outlets for its examination of Rouhani's coverage in U.S. news media: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, *Foreign Policy*, *Politico*, and *Los Angeles Times*.

1.2.2 Research Questions for Case Studies on Iran

In the case of Rouhani this dissertation considered the following questions:

RQ1: In the coverage of the Iran cases, how did the American news media present the Iranian government? Were clear distinctions drawn between the different actors in power? If so, according to the U.S. news media who had the upper hand in the power distribution in Iran?

RQ2: How were Ali Khamenei and Hassan Rouhani framed in these stories related to Iran? Was there a difference between their portrayals in the two cases?

RQ3: What were the main problematic issues identified by the journalists' sources: by the analysts they interviewed and by the political figures they quoted? Was there a distinction between what each group viewed as problematic?

RQ4: What kind of expert, official, or public source was used by U.S. journalists in each case?

RQ5: Were the news outlets in consensus — positive or negative — about the meaning of events (for Iran, for the U.S.) in each case? How did they differ (if they did) in their tone about Iran?

1.3 Organization of Chapters

In addition to this chapter the dissertation has five further chapters. Chapter 2 reviews that literature and those theories concerned with foreign news and foreign policies reporting, and considers a range of theoretical approaches to the data (media stories) along with framing analysis. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology employed to conduct this research.

Chapter 4 outlines a brief history of U.S.-China diplomatic relations, then summarizes the content analysis reports on Xi and the U.S. news media's coverage of Xi. Chapter 5 discusses the history of relations between Iran and the United States and the results of the content analysis regarding Rouhani and other Iranian leaders in the United States news coverage. Chapter 6 provides an overall description of findings for this research and provides some recommendations for future research.

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Chapter 2: Review of Theory & Literature

2.1 Introduction

In Bernard Cohen's classic book, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, originally published in 1963, Cohen bemoaned the fact that while the relationship between the news media and foreign policy was important for American political life, the literature on the field was quite scant.²¹ According to Cohen, during the time of his research (1950s-1960s) there had been little academic attention paid to the mechanisms that shape foreign news coverage — he noted, for instance, that there was limited research on the effect that foreign affairs reporting might have either on public opinion or on the foreign policy making process.²² However, since Cohen's observation much has been written about the press and international affairs — and much has changed about the nature of foreign policy reporting.

Scholars concerned with the relationship between the news media and political structure, developed theories about press functionality in various, mostly western, political systems. Studies of media effects such as those done by Iyengar and McGarty 2007;²³ Preiss et al. 2007, showed that the media can exert considerable influence over their audience.²⁴ A number of scholars namely McCombs 1972 ;²⁵ Wanta et al., 2004;²⁶ Iyengar and Simon, 1993;²⁷ Althaus and Tewksbury 2002;²⁸ Erdbring et al. 1980;²⁹ Wanta and Hu, 1993,³⁰ focused on foreign news from an agenda-setting point of view.³¹ Others, such as Entman, 1993, 2003;³² De Vreese , 2005;³³ D'angelo, 2002;³⁴ Weaver, 2007;³⁵ Iyengar and Simon, 1993;³⁶ Norris, 1995;³⁷ Dimitrova et. al, 2005,³⁸ and many others discuss the media's perspective and the attention that the media places on certain events, characters, or places. On foreign policy and the media, scholars such as Strömbäck,

2008;³⁹ Mazzoleni, 2008;⁴⁰ Hjarvard, 2004⁴¹ developed more nuanced arguments about the intensity of mediation in Western political communication.

With U.S. military involvement around the world, foreign reporters became the channel between citizens and the battlefield, issues of state involvement in war reporting, ethics of conflict reporting, and the advancement of new media technology have raised scholarly attention in the area of foreign affairs and conflict reporting. Researchers such as Allan and Zelizer, 2004;⁴² Thussu & Freedman, 2003;⁴³ Morrison & Tumber, 1988;⁴⁴ Matehoson & Allen, 2009;⁴⁵ have devoted considerable attention to the characteristics and challenges of war reporting. In the U.S., interest in war journalism heightened with U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq.⁴⁶

Yet, despite growing concern over U.S. foreign policy reporting, especially post-9/11 and the disastrous U.S. news coverage of the run-up to the 2003 Iraq war, the scholarship on foreign policy reporting is still scant. There has been limited scholarly work, for example, that specifically focuses on foreign leaders and their representation in U.S. or Western news media. This dissertation attempts to amend that — by analyzing U.S. media coverage of two key foreign leaders, namely, Xi Jinping of China and Hassan Rouhani of Iran.

This current chapter has four main objectives: First, since the focus of this dissertation is on U.S. news media coverage of two key foreign leaders and their countries, this chapter investigates arguments surrounding media system theories in the United States and addresses how investigations of journalistic professionalism enhance understanding of both the domestic and international media environment within which U.S. journalists operate. Second, this review examines how existing academic literatures

variously approach foreign news studies. The main theoretical approach used in this dissertation is framing analysis. This chapter emphasizes framing analysis literature — but there are other well-known theoretical perspectives, including the reach of ‘soft power’ and strategic narrative. While these theories were not applied to the findings of this research, they are discussed briefly in the following pages. Third, the current chapter will review the literature that uses framing analysis to analyze foreign policy and foreign news. Fourth, this chapter will present a brief overview of studies concerned with the coverage of Iran and China.

2.2 Media Systems & Journalistic Professionalism

Most theories concerned with media models focus on issues such as media ownership press and freedom. In their classic, *Four Theories of the Press*, Fredrick Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, explained the different kinds of press systems using philosophical and political rationales. *The Four Theories* are derived from the belief that the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates.⁴⁷ For Siebert et. al understanding the definition of truth within a society’s political system along with consideration of the social economical aspects, is basic to any systematic understanding of media systems.⁴⁸

The theories discussed in *Four Theories* are: the authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and Soviet models. These models are explained briefly in this section; however, this dissertation’s main concern is examining news outlets functioning under the libertarian model.

The authoritarian theory, according to Siebert et.al, set the tone for most of the worlds national press systems in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The theory

emerged from a climate where the concept of truth was seen as the product of few wise men and not the greater population. Thus, truth was to be positioned near to the center of power resulting in the top-down function of the press. In the authoritarian system, the elite determines what the people should know and how they should feel about certain policies. In other words, the elite set the agenda about political and social issues. In this system, citizens are rarely approved for private ownership of the press. If such a license is granted, the authorities reserve the right to withdraw the license.⁴⁹

The straw man type of definition provided by the authoritarian model does not address the differences in authoritarian rule. For example, the one size fit all model does not allow us to see the differences in how Stalin and Hitler would control the news media in their societies. Also, as stated by John Nerone and others, the theory does not guarantee that one can detect if a political system is moving away from libertarian to an authoritarian system. Simply put, using Siebert's model one cannot know when to call a restrictive act on the media an authoritative action and when a social preventive measure such as restrictions on pornography or regulations imposed by the FCC.⁵⁰ This question is important for foreign policy reporting. Since the 9/11 attacks, the concept of national security has often produced tension between the news media and the United States government.⁵¹

Also, in countries that function under the authoritarian system of the press, journalists and the public often find ways, regardless of the risks, to defy the suppression of expression. For example, Iran, has had an authoritarian press system for centuries and the state has controlled broadcast media since its emergence in the late 1930s. However, the state powers in Iran, whether a monarchy or a theological republic, have always

struggled to contain opposition media which emerged as soon as the early nineteenth century in various Iranian cities.⁵² In other words, the presence of an authoritative model does not always mean that a society would end up with an authoritative press system. Thus, even though when considering their official media systems it may seem that countries under authoritarian rule are stuck in time, in reality the advancement of technology and public literacy sways the masses to outgrow state-defined boundaries on the press.

The second media system identified by Siebert et. al, is known as the libertarian model.⁵³ The libertarian theory stemmed from the general philosophical environment of Enlightenment with the expansion of free trade and personal and religious freedoms. Based on libertarian theory, the truth is no longer seen as a property of power, citizens have the right to seek the truth. The press, as Siebert et al. write, is seen as “a partner in search for the truth. Press freedom is imperative in the libertarian model mainly because the press acts as a device for presenting evidence and arguments on the basis of which the people can check on the government and make up their minds on various policies”. Ideally, in the libertarian system minorities as well as majorities have the right to freely express the opinion about policies and social issues in the “free market place of ideas.”⁵⁴

The social responsibility theory raised from the uneasiness over the power of media conglomerates. The Commission on Freedom of the Press (Hutchins Commissions), first developed this model in 1947 in order to address concerns of media monopoly and its effects on information in Western societies. As newspapers and broadcast news grew in popularity and size, their ownership came to involve considerable amounts of money and influence. Thus, the theory suggests that the power and near

monopoly of the media's position in society obligates them to be socially responsible. The press, in this system, is in charge of informing the public and fairly reflecting positions on all sides of any given matter.⁵⁵

The Soviet Communist theory drives from the "Marxist truth." Based on the Soviet model the government controls the media and the "truth" is what the Party deems it to be.⁵⁶ The state-controlled media's main goal in this system is to create a strong socialized society as well as provide education, information, motivation and mobilization. Thus, the entire press system of the country is under the supervision of the Party.

The U.S. media system as stated by Siebert and his colleagues, is mostly considered libertarian with the aim to adhere to social responsibility theory. Siebert et al.'s categorization of the media has often been criticized as an artifact of the Cold War mentality.⁵⁷ *The Four Theories*, however, remain an important starting point for the discussion about the media and the public in a generalized way.

2.2.1 Criticism to the Four Theories of the Press:

Modern political communication scholars, such as Nerone et. al, 1995; Yin, 2008; Nordenstreng, 1997, contend that the work of Siebert et. al lacks the universality needed in mass communication theories.⁵⁸ For example, researchers such as Fourie, 2002 and Jifai Yin 2008, have attempted to use *The Four Theories* to explain media systems in countries such as South Africa (Fourie) and Philippines, India, China, Thailand, etc. (Yin), but they found that outside of the Cold War mentality and Western media systems, the models are hard to adapt in other societies.⁵⁹

For example, Yin asserts that when considering the diversity and complexity of the Asian continent's press system, *The Four Theories* are not useful. She writes:

It is hard to lump sum Asia together in any kind of description, and it is even harder to pigeonhole the vastly diverse Asia media systems into the four press categories developed by Western media scholars, who failed to include media experiences from the East in building their theories.⁶⁰

In her view, since the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of more open economic systems, the Internet has led theorists in the East and the West to re-evaluate the *Four Theories* as a paradigm through which to study the world media system.⁶¹

For Yin, the two criteria of press freedom and journalistic relations are not adequate parameters to assess the nature of the journalistic process in non-Western societies. Using the example of Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, Yin posits that Western scholars such as Siebert et.al often overlook issues of self-censorship or journalism corruption. Most of these countries are considered to have free media systems, yet, journalistic values and professional norms as revered by Western journalism are often compromised in such societies.⁶²

The watchdog role that is often expected from the press in the West is non-existent in countries such as Hong Kong or even Japan. Journalists in these countries are often in close relations with government and business owners, receiving hefty advertisement and access benefits. Such co-dependent relationships between the press and the power elite, undermine journalists' ability to take a critical stance on issues. Yin rightfully points out that Western scholarship in general and *The Four Theories* in particular, tend to disregard the cultures, philosophies, and traditions that distinguish Asian mass media.

What Yin asserts about Asian media is also true in the Middle East. The press system in many countries of the MENA region are by no means considered free in the Western sense of the word. But, what is often missed from the analysis about non-Western media system is the disregard of a country's political, traditional, and religious cultures which influence production and reception to a considerable degree.⁶³ For example, in Iran, news about sexual relations between movie stars is considered distasteful and unnecessary to report. If published, the news outlet responsible could get reprimanded not only by the government, but also by its audience.

Whether this attitude from the readers is right or wrong is neither here nor there in our discussion, but the point is that westernized media models such as *The Four Theories* do not consider the culture and norms that might result in self-censorship or restrictions of the press.

To repair the paradigm of press analysis set by *The Four Theories*, scholars have attempted to reassess media models with applicable criteria to various political systems. Lance Bennett, for example, argues that to assess the media in any given society one must consider the media's connection to political power. The media, Bennett argues, are important for "transmitting values, problem definition and image making." Hence, the media's autonomy from political and economic restraints is an important factor when considering their role in society.⁶⁴

For journalists that report on foreign countries and foreign affairs, libertarian model of Western media becomes even more problematic for two main reasons. First, the libertarian model holds that the press is free to disseminate information. As long as it is acting responsibly, there should be no imposed restrictions on the press. But when

reporting on issues such as war or national security, journalists are often limited in the information they receive by the government and military. In addition, journalists who have been trained and educated under the authoritarian model are forced to report on countries that do not have the same press system as their own, which means that the press-state relations are vastly different than what journalists are used to in the West. The shock value of these differences is often sensed in the news reports about countries with different approaches to press freedom.

Ideally libertarianism and social responsibility would ensure the press act professionally and in the best interest of their people at all times without the interference of the government. However, it is not clear that when journalists are tasked with covering war or contested foreign issues, libertarian media systems have the same autonomy as when reporting on less contested domestic issues. Historical events such as the Vietnam War, the Pentagon Papers, the case of NSA surveillance and Edward Snowden, the Iraq War, the Iran nuclear deal, etc. have demonstrated the limits and challenges for journalists covering such stories.

In the United States, Journalists covering sensitive national security issues have faced immense pressure from the U.S. government. For example, *The New York Times* reporter James Risen, who refused to reveal his source on his reporting related to the Iran nuclear program, faced the possibility of serious ramifications such as jail time. While there is room for legal media analysis, which is neither here or there for the sake of our argument, such examples show that even in a libertarian system with a socially responsible press, the government and the military can create hurdles for the media.

Also, since at its core, the libertarian system is driven by the needs of its

consumers, the role of foreign news becomes problematic and in some cases obsolete.⁶⁵

Hodge argued that consumer-focused news results in the following approach in foreign news reporting: if the audience is not interested in news from other countries, then what is the point of budgeting resources to cover them?⁶⁶ Hence, when a system focuses on consumer interests to determine what issues are newsworthy, there is the risk that the public would generally choose more entertainment-driven news rather than serious issues evolving around the globe.⁶⁷ The social responsibility model grants more authority to journalists.

Another important classical scholarship about media systems is the seminal work of Hallin and Mancini. In their 2004 book *Comparing Media Systems*, Hallin and Mancini stress that inquiries about any given country's media are impossible to understand unless the nature of the state and the patterns of relations between economic and political interests are fully analyzed.⁶⁸ According to the authors there are four key dimensions that characterize and influence media systems:

1. The shape and development of media markets (they mostly focus on newspapers and other mass circulation mainstream media);
2. The link between political parties and the media and the extent to which the media reflect political divisions (political parallelism);
3. The range of journalistic professionalism;
4. The degree of state intervention in the media.⁶⁹

Based on these dimensions, Hallin and Mancini identify three main media models in Europe and North America:

1. The North Atlantic liberal model — also known as the ‘Anglo-American’ model (established in countries such as the United States, Britain, Canada, and Ireland);
2. The Mediterranean or pluralized pluralistic model (prevalent in countries including Spain, Greece, Italy and France);
3. The North Central European Democratic corporatist model (most common in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Norway, and Sweden).

It is important to note that the countries in each of Hallin and Mancini’s models do not necessarily share identical media systems. For example, there are important differences between England’s regulatory rules on the press and those of the United States.⁷⁰

The news outlets examined in this dissertation are mainly from the Anglo-American model, a model characterized by a strong development of a newspaper-based press and by a high degree of journalistic professionalism.

U.S. outlets in particular have also benefited from limited political parallelism and government intervention. While Hallin and Mancini’s four dimensions offer valuable insights for all investigations of news media coverage, this dissertation mainly focuses on foreign news reporting. This dissertation does not directly consider the economic and market aspects of foreign policy reporting because its chief concern is with the framing of foreign leaders in the U.S. press, rather than with how U.S. journalists gather their information about Iran and China. As a result, scholarly work that examines the level of state intervention in the media, and/or that considers press-state relations are of significance to this dissertation.

2.2.2 Journalistic Professionalism

Objectivity and foreign reporting have been the topic of discussion for decades in both academia and the journalistic trade. For example, veteran foreign reporter and CNN's current chief international correspondent, Christian Amanpour's reporting during the Bosnian war in 1992 is an interesting example of challenges to journalistic objectivity in conflict and foreign reporting.

In May of 1994, Amanpour famously urged president Clinton to engage in the Bosnian conflict while speaking to him directly via satellite television on air. At one point she bluntly asked the President "Why as the leader of the free world, the leader of the only super power, has it taken you, United States, so long to articulate a policy in Bosnia...?"⁷¹

In her coverage of that war, Amanpour was one of the first journalists to label the travesties in Bosnia as "genocide." She summarized the killings by Serbian forces in a report on August 5, 1993 as follows, "What's happening right now are the first allegations of a sort of Nazi-styled World War II styled genocide going on, and this is obviously why it's created such an uproar."⁷² Because of her passionate reporting and often aggressive interviewing style during the war, Amanpour received a lot of criticism. Journalists accused her of abandoning the facts in favor of editorializing.⁷³ Amanpour has responded to those criticizing her reporting on Bosnia by challenging the definition of objectivity. Years after war she wrote:

For me, Bosnia was where I learned about the truth. Horrified when the do-

nothing crowd suggested I was taking sides, or losing my objectivity, I was forced to confront this charge, and examine our Golden Rule.

Here in Bosnia I determined that in the face of unspeakable crimes and the most serious violations of international humanitarian order, there is no moral equivalence, no blurring the line between victim and aggressor.

Objectivity means giving all sides a fair hearing. It does not mean drawing a false moral equivalence. In this case there is no one-hand-or-the other. And anyone who seeks to hide under that calumny is not just a liar, but an accessory, in this case to genocide.

I refused. It is the lesson of my lifetime.⁷⁴

There is a plethora of examples similar to what Amanpour experienced. Thus, similar to the logic of identifying media systems, understanding how journalism is defined as a profession and what norms and values shape journalism in different societies are valuable questions. When considering foreign reporting, the overarching question about professionalism is often asked to determine whether Western journalistic values, namely objectivity, are practical when reporting from rogue states (as defined by the journalists country of origin), battle fields, or interviewing fascists and dictators?

Paul Starr writes that from its early days the U.S. government created certain mechanisms that would allow the press to evolve as an independent institution from power. He states:

From the founding of the republic, the federal government had given the press constitutional guarantees, postal subsidies and other benefits that enabled

newspaper, book and magazine publishing to become economically as well as formally independent of the state and political parties.”⁷⁵

In defining journalism as a profession, two major strands of scholarship have emerged. The first trend holds that journalism’s importance is self-evident and is not dependent on the hierarchy of occupations. Scholarly work concerned with this approach often utilizes educational and occupational surveys.⁷⁶

The second trend focuses on sociology of news organization. This approach focuses on the character of journalistic knowledge (or claims to knowledge). Schudson and Anderson posit that the first approach is problematic because of its adoption of the purely trait perspective; the second approach is not useful because it mixes journalistic objectivity with journalistic professionalism. They state that in non-American media systems objectivity might not be a norm but professionalism still exists. Hence, Schudson and Anderson conclude that the most productive way to study objectivity, professionalism, and truth seeking is to look at the “day- to-day manners” in which journalists function. For Deuze, journalistic professionalism is heavily connected to the autonomy of the journalists, and their desire for public service are amongst the most important principles that define journalism.⁷⁷

Most journalism scholars such as Schudson,⁷⁸ Chalaby,⁷⁹ Rmaaprasad & Hamdy,⁸⁰ examine the links between journalism and professionalism. For these scholars, objectivity is not a universal value in journalism and it certainly cannot be considered as the only norm that rules the profession. Objectivity, write Donsbach and Patterson, are the key distinguishing factor between American and European newsrooms.⁸¹ For American journalists, their views have no relationship with their newsrooms. On the

other hand, European journalists reported that their political views were closely associated to their employers and their editorial positions. Dan Hallin has made vital contributions to the scholarly literature on professionalism through his exploration of the value of objectivity. He has been one of the most prominent scholars in arguing that while objectivity has lost much of its singular value in journalism that does not signal the death of journalistic professionalism.⁸² In his work with Mancini, the two men have argued that the notion of objectivity is an important and distinctive value for American journalists.⁸³ Not all journalists in Europe and North America share the same professional commitment to objectivity, they note — while it is an admired norm in American journalism, it is not a standard value for non-American media systems.⁸⁴ For Hallin and Mancini, journalistic professionalism has less to do with objectivity, educational barriers, and the conditions of state regulations, and more to do with the notion of journalistic autonomy or “greater control over [one’s] own work process.”⁸⁵

Scholars concerned with journalistic professionalism have ended up looking at news media as a political institution. For example, both Cook and Schudson agree that news media based on the field’s professional ideology can be viewed as a political institution which has its own values and goals and is consistent with the most revered principles in American journalism.⁸⁶ Scholars have asserted that in some circumstances organizational values may overshadow journalistic ones, arguing that journalists often find themselves under pressure to deliver a certain type of coverage.⁸⁷ Newsroom culture, therefore, is an important factor that analysis of foreign affairs reporting would benefit from considering.

Foreign news studies on objectivity tend to debate about how and why specific countries are covered or not covered by news media outlets. Willhoit and Weaver's study about foreign news correspondence interestingly found that professional norms and values are related to what journalists report about the United States.⁸⁸ Yet others such as Bennett, Gatlung and Ruge, Tumber , and Hallin have argued that the main problem with foreign news reporting is journalists' dependency on official sources.⁸⁹ That latter notion is an argument that most of the works presented here have articulated.⁹⁰

Finally, there are scholars who have identified other key factors, important in a consideration of journalistic professionalism — such as cultural issues and financial considerations — that deeply influence how journalists cover foreign news.⁹¹ Detailing all of these, however, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. On the issue of professionalism, this dissertation follows the line of thought stated by Weaver & Willhoit: journalism is self-evidently an important occupation that does not rely on occupational hierarchy to find its importance as a profession.⁹²

2.3 Professionalism and Objectivity in Foreign Reporting:

Media historians have traced the emergence of foreign news coverage to the early days of print and the regular production of newspapers or pamphlets in the early eighteenth century. In the United States, Howard Russell's accounts of the 1854 Crimean War for the *Times* is considered the earliest evidence of the emergence of foreign news. With the emergence of the Morse code and the telegraph (1830-1840) the ability to distribute information around Europe led to the creation of news agencies such as the *Associated Press* (May 22, 1846) and *Reuters* (October 1851).

Political influence soon motived media moguls such as William Randolph Hearst to invest in foreign news. In 1896, Hearst famously sent artist Fredrick Remington to Cuba to provide illustrations to accompany news about the Cuban Revolution. It was during this assignment that Remington cabled that there will be no war, to which Hearst apocryphally replied: “Please remain. You furnish the pictures, I’ll furnish the war.”⁹³ According to Wanta et al., the ideological battles of the early twentieth century, with the rise of Communism and Fascism, and two World Wars, revealed the necessity for Western news organizations to prioritize international reporting.⁹⁴ After the conclusion of the Second World War — and for a time alongside conflicts in Korea and Vietnam — the Cold War dominated international reporting in the United States well into the 1980s.⁹⁵

In late 1980s, the fall of the Berlin Wall, in addition to the corporatization of news media due to globalization and the emergence of 24-hour news channels such as CNN, revolutionized international news reporting in the West and particularly in the United States. With the emergence of the Internet, geographical borders were no longer a cause for concern in news access. Citizens from different countries had the ability to view news in each other’s societies. These changes transformed journalistic agendas to a large extent.⁹⁶

In foreign news studies, discussion about professionalism and even journalistic ethics, most of the focus is put on journalists who cover war and armed conflicts around the world. To understand foreign news coverage of war and conflicts, Piers Robinson argues that we must first consider the state of press-state relations during a conflict. He posits that war time relations between the media and government have traditionally been characterized by media’s dependency and deference to official viewpoints.

Most of the scholarly work looking at foreign news and war time journalistic professionalism contend that media cover war and to some extent foreign countries from the point of view of the country in which they, their major owners, and readers are based.⁹⁷ For example, on the coverage of the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2004) Barrett writes:

Western reporting of the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) were stories told by Western correspondents reporting from Western positions speaking to (mainly approved) Western political and military sources, mainly about Western military personnel, strategies, successes, and, less often, failures, and backed with comments from (often vetted) Western military “experts.”⁹⁸

To this end, media scholarship has often pointed out that the perspective of the news media in foreign reporting is often evident in the type of sources reporters use to cover foreign countries. Journalists use sources to add official and reliable voices to their ideas. Even though in most cases the accuracy in reporting depends mostly on whether a source is truthful, the blame Barrett attributes the Western “myopia” in war and conflict, and perhaps foreign policy, coverage to the media’s reluctance to rely on unverified or censored sources. He labels this justification as “hypocritical,” blind to media dependence on government or military sources of their own side. Hence objectivity and professional values are contested when considering conflict and war reporting. Thus, journalistic dependency on information subsidized by the government when covering war or foreign affairs issues is the most problematic and prevalent issue in discussions about foreign correspondence professionalism and journalistic values.⁹⁹ The same is visible for

journalists assigned to cover foreign affairs, especially that these journalists aim to report on the government's approach to specific events, thus, making them more dependent on official sources. for misreporting on an issue if often placed on journalists and their editors. Ibrahim et. al, argue that when reporting on war and peace journalists have to consider the demands of "army generals, the leaders of warring states, and leaders who send their troops to foreign wars."¹⁰⁰

In conclusion, the issue of professionalism and of objectivity in foreign news reporting often goes hand in hand with several key issues. First and foremost, scholars such as Bennett, Tumber, and Hallin who have questioned foreign reporters and their objectivity have mainly focused on what type of sources journalists use and how they verify sources when using them in the news reports.¹⁰¹ Second, a number of studies such as Willhoit and Weaver's study about foreign news correspondence interestingly found that foreign news studies on objectivity tend to debate how and why specific countries are covered or not covered by news media outlets.¹⁰² Finally, there are scholars who have identified other key factors, important in a consideration of journalistic professionalism when considering foreign reporting — such as cultural issues and financial considerations — that deeply influence how journalists cover foreign news.¹⁰³

As with many aspects in American journalism, changes in economic and technology resources played a major role the transformation of international reporting. The high expense of maintaining foreign news has lead U.S. news outlets to seek reliable and cheap ways to cover foreign affairs.

2.4 Scholarly Research on Foreign Affairs Reporting in the United States

Overall, scholarly research on foreign affairs reporting clusters around two major areas:

1. Press-state relations and how that relationship influences media coverage;
2. The influence of news media and public opinion on foreign policy decision making.

Scholars who research press-state relations are commonly concerned about the process in which foreign news is produced in the media and how journalists obtain foreign policy information.¹⁰⁴ Scholars chiefly concerned with media influence on policy decisions also address issues such as journalistic bias and overreliance on official sources. Many studies focusing on wartime reporting fit into this category of investigation.¹⁰⁵

In general, these two research interests have stemmed from the pluralist model and the elite model of scholarship, where each has its own set of significant scholarship. The elite model school of thought, in contrast to the pluralist school of thought, rejects the idea of power distribution and maintains that relatively small groups in the United States disproportionately wield political power and control the narrative on foreign policy in the news media.¹⁰⁶ While the scholars listed here have all articulated an elite model of influence, they do differ in the amount of power they believe the news media and/or the government exert.

2.4.1 Propaganda Model

Herman and Chomsky famously articulated the “propaganda model” of analysis of foreign news coverage, in which they see the news media as entirely dependent on the government’s narrative.¹⁰⁷ Their well-known 2002 study, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*, outlines their belief that U.S. media function as a tool to support the policy agendas of powerful elites. According to the authors, the same underlying power sources that own and fund the media play a key role in developing the dominant ideologies of the media narrative. Based on their definition, the propaganda model has five main filters, which focus on the inequality of wealth and power, and its effects on mass media:

1. Media’s size, concentrated ownership, and profit orientation of the dominant mass media firms;
2. Advertising as media’s primary income source;
3. Media’s reliance on government, business, and ‘experts’ as sources;
4. Flak as a means of disciplining the media, which means that powerful news sources tend to punish the media when they do not report in alignment with their political and economic preference;
5. Anti-communism as a national religion and a control mechanism. (This filter has now been replaced by the War on Terror argument)

The model shows that the media defend economic, social, and political agendas of privileged groups in various forms, such as: selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering of information, emphasis and tone, and by keeping debate

within the bounds of acceptable premises. The propaganda model has initiated a lot of debate in academia, some have accused the model of being too close to a conspiracy theory, while others have criticized it for lacking sufficient evidence in defense of its assertions.¹⁰⁸ Those scholars who have agreed with the model have generally praised its methodology and its theoretically pioneering concepts.¹⁰⁹

There are three major concerns with using the propaganda model to evaluate news reporting:

1. Even in countries where journalism is considered a dangerous profession, most journalists do not perform with the lack of agency depicted in the propaganda model. The model seems especially inappropriate when considering the U.S.
2. The model overlooks the relative freedom and autonomy that U.S. journalists enjoy.
3. While the usage of filters is useful, and some adjustments can perhaps explain media stereotyping and misrepresentations, the propaganda model lacks coherent definitions as to how this model can be applied when dealing with foreign affairs. More importantly, when there is dissent or at least a shift in the narrative of foreign policy decisions amongst the elites, the model does not clarify how to detect or analyze those disagreements.
4. Even when scholars agree with Herman and Chomsky in their assessment of foreign news reporting in the 1980s, the transformation of both the global media landscape and the U.S. position in world powers refute most of the filters presented in the model.

Despite all the academic commotion caused by the propaganda model, Herman and Chomsky's five-layered framework has initiated a lot of useful discussion about how exactly politicians manage the media. Hallin, for example, has taken a distinctive approach with his "different spheres" assessment of political power, as has Lance Bennett, in his articulation of his famous "indexing model."¹¹⁰ Both scholars have contributed heavily to the scholarly literature investigating press-state relations. Hallin's analysis of different spheres in reporting policy and Bennett's indexing theory have contributed to the theoretical framework of state-media relations and have become a basis for the development of further theoretical concepts in this field.

2.4.2 Indexing

As mentioned above, most scholars concerned with state-media relations consider how journalists gather their news. Bennett's indexing theory is one of the most well-known theories that focused on the notion of newsgathering.¹¹¹ To test his "indexing hypothesis," Bennett looked at stories from the *New York Times* on U.S. policy in Nicaragua from 1983-1986 and compared those stories with congressional abstracts that showed whether members of the congress agreed or disagreed with these policies. Bennett concluded that *The New York Times* indexed its editorial coverage of this issue to the same range of opinion in the government.¹¹² Bennett argued that when the *Times* covered critical aspects of U.S. policies in Nicaragua, it only reflected those divisions expressed amongst the political elite. Although Bennett's indexing model received empirical support, many scholars raised concerns.¹¹³ For example, Zaller and Chiu (1996), who themselves have used a more sophisticated version of the model for their

own work, argued that there was no way for Bennett's readers to know exactly how divided Congress was on Nicaragua, since Bennett only mentioned Congressional debates that correlated with issues raised in *The New York Times*.¹¹⁴

More troublingly, Zaller and Chiu also pointed out that members of Congress might have followed the editorial line of *The New York Times* rather than the other way around, raising the concern of who was indexing whom.¹¹⁵

2.4.3 The Spheres of Influence

Daniel Hallin's study on the Vietnam War that gave rise to his "Spheres of Influence" theory mainly focused on the popular myth that the news media were responsible for ending the Vietnam War due to their negative reports on Lyndon Johnson's failed foreign policies.¹¹⁶ Hallin concluded that the media were not acting as independently in criticizing the war as many would like to believe. On the contrary, he found that coverage of the war was very supportive up until 1968. Media criticism of the war only occurred after the U.S. political establishment became divided over the war, mainly after the disastrous Tet Offensive launched by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces on January 31, 1968. Hallin argued that the press reflected the divisions in the establishment rather than independently opposed Johnson's policies. Thus, the news media's role in ending Vietnam should be considered as an intervening variable rather than an independent variable solely responsible for changing the course of the war.¹¹⁷ Hallin's analysis of different spheres in reporting policy has contributed heavily to the theoretical framework of state-media relations and has become a basis for the development of further theoretical concepts in this field.¹¹⁸

Hallin defines three spheres in which the state-media relations can be detected. The first sphere is known as the sphere of consciousness. In this sphere, journalists do not have to deal with social objects perceived controversial by them and most of the public. The second sphere is one of legitimate controversy: as disagreements heighten amongst the political elite the U.S. media start to reflect these divisions. The third sphere is known as the controversy or deviance sphere; it is in this stage that journalists are more willing to balance official statements with reactions from the opposition or with independent investigations of controversial issues.

Hallin argues that the media are a political institution that reflect the prevailing patterns of political debate: when consensus is strong, journalists tend to stay within the limits of political discussion defined by the consensus; when it breaks down, coverage becomes increasingly critical and diverse. But neither Hallin nor scholars who support his view suggest that the media are passive. In fact, they assert that the media not only reflect but also strengthen political trends.¹¹⁹

The elite model of the media/foreign policy nexus varies in the amount of power held by the political elites. In Herman and Chomsky's model the political elite are the sole definers of the mediated agenda. While Bennett attributes some power to journalists and their gatekeeping behaviors, he still bestows most of the power to governmental elites. Hallin takes a more realistic approach and shows that when there is disagreement amongst the elite on an issue as important as war, media begin to narrate different aspects of the story. In comprehending the dynamics of foreign news reporting, these evaluations of state-media relations help scholars assess when and if journalists break from the dominant narrative about different issues.

An example of the legitimate controversy sphere was evident during the recent nuclear talks with Iran. Many major newspapers and television networks would recount various debates amongst political elites about whether the country should engage in a war with Iran or instead try to solve controversies diplomatically. While there is need for more research on the topic, the main reporting and commentary by the news media were based on political debates amongst powerful elites. In contrast to the discussions surrounding the Iraq War, a war with Iran was heavily contested by the media due to the disagreements between American political elites on the issue — especially disagreements between the White House and the U.S. Congress.¹²⁰

Scholars such as Robinson criticize the elite theories of state-media relations because of their overemphasis on the influence of political and economic structures in the news.¹²¹ Others criticize these theories for failing to clearly explain how the press decides which elite narrative to reflect when disagreement occurs amongst the elite.¹²²

As illustrated in the debates over these models, understanding how foreign affairs reporting takes place is an important inquiry for media researchers interested in foreign policy and foreign news. To reiterate Cohen's point, the power of the press in helping the public understand the world becomes especially important when considering foreign affairs reporting, because foreign affairs reporting is one of those areas in journalism that the public rely on the most to make sense of what is happening around the world.

2.5 Framing Analysis

Aside from the focus of media research on state-press relations and the influence of news on public opinion and foreign policy decision-making, media scholarship has

also focused on how different countries and specific issues are covered in U.S. news media. Thus, considering “framing” and “agenda setting” theories when theorizing about the news media behavior in the coverage of foreign affairs is essential. Also, since this dissertation mostly focuses on the representation of foreign leaders, framing analysis theory remains the major focus of this study.

Framing theory serves as an appropriate basis for understanding how foreign affairs reporters construct the narratives of foreign policy news. Even though long-held values of autonomy and objectivity are revered in journalism, scholars have long maintained that journalists use framing technique when writing stories. Thus, for scholars, especially those evaluating foreign and minority news reporting, journalists are seen as participants in creating the social standards that a country, policy, or group is referred to in a larger context of the society. This assertion is especially evident in studies concerned with foreign news and coverage of feminist and minorities in different societies.¹²³

The fact that journalists help create and/or reinforce certain narratives on issues is especially pertinent to the research of this dissertation. The way a foreign leader is labeled and framed often becomes the public’s perception of that leader. For example, the image of North Korean leader Kim Jung Un as a dangerous yet comedic figure is a common thread in most of the reporting about him. On the one hand, journalists mention his hair cut and love for Hollywood action movies, on the other, his dangerous nuclear ambitions and treatment of his closest advisors have created narratives of who he is. Understanding how media frame leaders from countries that are not aligned with U.S.

values is both interesting and valuable to an understanding of how U.S. journalists cover those countries.

In media studies, framing research can be categorized into two main groups. First, there are studies that look at frames as dependent variables. These studies look at the factors that influence the creation or modification of news frames. Second, there are studies that look at the effects of framing, considering audiences and their interpretation of frames. These studies look at frames as independent variables. This dissertation examines frames as dependent variables.

There is extensive literature that examines the framing of news events. Yet, as Dimitrova and Strömbäck assert there is no universally accepted definition on framing.¹²⁴ Robert Entman, who is highly regarded in the field of foreign news and media analysis, states that frames are ways in which media “selectively represent” issues and events.¹²⁵ Framing theory as further described by Entman, “consistently offers a way to describe the power of the communicated text.”¹²⁶ He defines framing as follows:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.¹²⁷

For scholars such as Goffman and Gitlin, “framing” is the act by which news stories are carefully selected, categorized and organized for the public to interpret.¹²⁸ For Gitlin, in particular, framing is the “persistent selection, emphasis and exclusion” of stories that “enable” journalists to develop a routine process for transmitting information.¹²⁹

Scholars such as Shoemaker and Reese and Tuchman who take a more sociological view of news assert that the framing process in news follows its own set of rules and characteristics.¹³⁰ For them, framing of an issue is often influenced by ideological, individual, organizational and social-structural variables. In studies following this line of thought, defining these variables and their prominence in the news-making process is of high value.

In addition, framing theory has provided deep theoretical insights into the political influence of news, including a number of other studies about foreign countries and specific foreign policy issues. For instance, framing theory has become tool to compare news products from different media systems and/or different approaches to significant issues. For example, Dimitrova and Strömbäck examined the framing of the 2003 Iraq War in two elite newspapers in Sweden and the United States. Their analysis revealed that based on the dominant political narrative in each country the framing of war was different in each paper. The Swedish paper, *Dagnes Nyherer*, had incorporated anti-war and responsibility frames. The U.S.' *The New York Times*, however, mostly used a military conflict frame. The study also showed that there were differences in tone and sourcing with U.S. media mostly relying on American government officials and military sources. Dimitrova and Strömbäck's study also showed that elite media in both countries framed the Iraq War by highlighting certain realities of the war and disregarding other aspects of the conflict.¹³¹

Newspaper frames can often be differentiated from television frames. In a study by Li and Izard on the coverage of the September 11 attacks in U.S. media, they found that political and human-interest frames were more evident in press coverage rather than

television coverage. Also, the disaster frame, which is mostly episodic, was present in 44 percent of the television coverage and 23 percent of the print coverage. There is a plethora of studies that focus on media frames during conflicts and war, mostly leading to the conclusion that in war reporting there is a high reliance on event-based frames that allow the investigation of specific issues in detail. Studies looking at the coverage of the Gulf and Vietnam wars have generally reached the same conclusion: that thematic frames about the war are more evident in print versions of Gulf war coverage.¹³²

Thus, framing shapes the public debate. Past studies generally agree that the fact that news frames are consistently used in the media makes some ideas “more salient than others.”¹³³ Therefore, no matter the subject of the story, whether it’s about an advertising campaign or a military conflict, frames are important “discursive cues” that impact the reader’s “cognition.”¹³⁴ Therefore, as Schudson points out, through such frames journalists channel information to citizens, assisting them in gaining an adequate understanding of politics.¹³⁵

Framing scholarship in foreign news, which is critical to this dissertation’s study, identifies news frames and studies how news frames shape the ruling news product. For those researchers who are concerned with audience perception of frames, constructionist and cognitive approaches are concerned with the effects of framing on the audience. Entman finds that the type of framing provided by U.S. news media, with an emphasis on opinion leaders such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, has significantly influenced the way the public and other media outlets engage in “problem definition,” “causal analysis,” “moral evaluation,” and “remedy suggestions” when confronted with stories about other countries.¹³⁶ All four functions serve each other and form a cultural

logic.¹³⁷ This logic is held together by culture and convention rather than by principles of valid reasoning. Entman uses anti-Islamic rhetoric as an example, he states that the idea that all Muslims are extremists is more easily accepted in communities where public convention holds anti-Islamic beliefs rather than presentable evidence on the issue.¹³⁸ To this end, many studies that have used framing in their assessments of U.S. news coverage about a specific policy or country have focused on what U.S. news outlets are selectively focusing on or selectively omitting.

According to Entman, communicators make conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say about any given subject. He asserts that in the framing of foreign countries the cultural logic formed by journalists often follows the dominant political narrative.¹³⁹ For example, in his 1993 study on the coverage of the KAL Air Lines and Iran Air incidents, Entman emphasized that the White House narrative of both incidents heavily impacted the frames used in U.S., news coverage:

The narrative [in the coverage of Iran Air and KAL Airlines stories] cohered with the Cold War understandings of U.S. elites and publics. Although it turned out to be factually inaccurate, it readily propagated throughout the American political communication system. Americans actively and emotionally embraced the familiar demonization of the Soviet Union and all aspects of the administration's framing (problem definition, causal analysis, moral evaluation, and remedy). Anyone who might have challenged the frame would have faced hostile reactions from the important players in their own networks and on the networks above and below them in the hierarchy.¹⁴⁰

Entman found that in the coverage of a specific U.S. policy, such as the war with Iraq, news media coverage follows more or less the same line. He stated that after the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the repetition of the word enemy in emotional and unambiguous frames by President Bush helped “unite” the country and the majority of the media narrative behind the administration’s agenda. However, Entman noted, the initial push back from the U.S. media and political elites on Bush’s idea to invade Iraq and blame Saddam for 9/11 prevented the administration from launching attacks against Baghdad in 2002:

Had the “war on terrorism” provided as unifying a framework as the Cold War mindset once did, particularly in its earliest years – had news organizations lapped up the White House line fervently as their predecessors during the Red Scare of the 1940s and 1950s – America might well have been waging unilateral war against Saddam Hussein by autumn 2002, and with massive public support. Instead, by that time, President Bush’s attempt to weave a seamless connection between Osama bin Laden, the new demon, and the familiar villainy of Saddam Hussein had run into objections and questions from leaders across the political spectrum; dissenters included prominent Republicans, Democrats, reporters, and editorial writers. The resistance in the summer of 2002 forced Bush to change course.¹⁴¹

Pippa Norris also pointed out the same notion in a study on pre- and post-Cold War periods in U.S. broadcast news. For Norris, the end of the Cold War generated a vacuum that made it hard for U.S. news media to identify the new role of the U.S. in

international affairs. The Cold War, Norris wrote, provided an easy way for U.S. news media to select, structure and prioritize complex news about U.S. foreign policy and international affairs, thus easily allowing U.S. journalists to “cue” countries as enemies and friends in their narration of international affairs.¹⁴² Therefore, characterizations such as the old stereotypes of “friends” and “enemies” had to change within the American news media narrative of international affairs. In such context, Norris defined “frames” as common stereotypes and categories used to facilitate both the understanding and writing of foreign policy news:

Reporters can ‘tell it like it is’ within 60 seconds, rapidly sorting key events from surrounding trivia, by drawing on reservoirs of familiar stories to cue readers.

New developments are understood within regular patterns. Frames represent stereotypes, which slot particular events into broader interpretive categories, which may, or may not, be appropriate. Since news frames can be expected to reflect broader social norms, political minorities challenging the dominant culture are most likely to prove critical of such treatment.¹⁴³

To this end, when a characterization of a country or policy is commonly used in the news media, the dominant news frames tend to eventually overtake the narrative of those issues as “natural and preexisting views.” Norris stated that two examples of these “journalism as usual” frames were the “North-South” frame (used in the coverage of famine) and the “dictatorship-democracy” frame — amongst other she detected within the 1945-1989 time period. While Norris accepted that American news media rapidly adapted to the new geopolitical situations after the Cold War, she did not see this rapid

adaptation translated into a higher quality of U.S. news coverage of international affairs.

In her view, the constant search by American news media for one crisis after another encouraged more episodic framing of international events, rather than careful hemmatic coverage that could provide more background and context to the crisis at hand.

For Entman and Norris, news media are significant in shaping the public agenda and are a force that presidents must reckon with — as demonstrated during the administrations of President Carter during the Iran Hostage Crisis (1979) and President Clinton during the Somali Crisis (1993).

2.5.1 The Cascading Activation Model

Entman developed a new model in framing analysis known as the cascading activation model. He used framing, indexing theories, and theories of human cognition such as the “spreading activation” mechanisms explained by Lodge and Stroh to theorize his model.¹⁴⁴ Bennett’s indexing theory focused on the notion of newsgathering. Entman stated that any given message could have a cultural context in the receiver’s mind. He used the example of Osama bin Laden, stating that if a picture of the Al Qaeda leader was shown to Americans, it is highly likely that they would attach the negative connotations of the burning towers, the doomed firefighters, etc. to the portrait of bin Laden. Thus, there would be a conscious or unconscious spreading of thoughts — or “nodes” as Entman called them. The cascading activation model explains that the movement of ideas from one “metaphorical cascade” to another is highly influenced by a number of variables such as: *motivations, cultural congruence, power, and strategy*. Entman

explains that the first two variables help “pull” mental association’s individual thinking and the power and strategy help push specific frames through the network.¹⁴⁵

Entman used his model to account for how the thoughts and feelings that support a frame often extend down from the White House through the rest of the system. In his analysis, words, images and ideas travel through interpersonal networks and across the different media, explaining the spread of frames from one location on the network to the others.¹⁴⁶ In most occasions, Entman has suggested the spread of ideas is often quick and uncontested, but on some occasions the spread of ideas can cause considerable conflict.

Each level that is predicted in the cascading activation model makes its own contribution to the mix and flow (of ideas), with the unfortunate result that the more an idea travels through the cascading levels, the less likely it is for those receiving the message at the end to be fully informed about to the “real” situation.

The flow of ideas is usually moving downward in Entman’s model. Thus, in a consideration of the American system: the president and his advisors possess the greatest power and the most autonomy. At the second level are other elite networks, such as Washington insiders who do not work in the executive branch. The third metaphoric cascade level is the network of journalists, columnists, producers and publishers who work for “important national media.” In Entman’s third stage, there is little clarity about who influences whom in the process of spreading activation of frames, but he sees the communication and exchange of information between the levels of journalists and the “higher” elites as the key transmission exchange.

For his study of media coverage after 9/11, Entman mostly treated elite national media as homogenous entities that offered a broad similarity in their coverage of the days

and months following the attacks. But others have noted that his cascade theory would benefit from a more thorough application of “agenda setting” theories — observing that within such a journalist network as sketched out in Entman’s third cascading activation level, elite media outlets such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are opinion leaders; their “cues” are followed by the rest of the news media.

As mentioned later in this chapter, David Altheide had reached the same conclusion in his study of the Iranian hostage crisis back in 1981.¹⁴⁷ Entman’s study on post-9/11 news coverage analyzed the coverage of major mainstream media outlets, such as ABC, NBC, and CBS news for broadcast outlets; *Time* and *Newsweek* for news magazines and, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* for newspapers. In his assessment of their coverage, Entman stated that the U.S. news media mostly employed the same tone and line of thought:

All parties to this process operate under uncertainty and pressure, with mixed motives and varying levels of competence and understanding. All are ‘cognitive misers’ who work in accordance with established mental maps and habits. They are ‘satisficers’ who rarely undertake a comprehensive review of all relevant facts and options before responding. Few political leaders or journalists have the time to do that, and even fewer members of the public have the inclination.¹⁴⁸

Entman tried to caution his readers that while most of the information about 9/11 provided by the U.S. media might sound or read the same, that singularity of news did not necessarily mean that the information was accurate or all-encompassing. That caveat is one considered in the analysis of the coverage of China and Iran in this dissertation.

Even though the majority of outlets studied in this dissertation's research might have framed Rouhani and Xi using the same tone and characteristics as the others, that similarity does not mean that American audiences are seeing these leaders or their countries clearly and thoroughly.

Entman's cascading activation model also tries to explain some of the gaps in each of the classical theories in foreign news coverage. Entman states that the model shows the emerging dissent among political elite, a critique that some scholars raise about Bennett's indexing model. The model also recognizes variation and hierarchy in the administration level, showing that there are many voices besides the president at the executive level — and thus, the model can show whether dissent is taking place within the political elite and, if so, why (for example, as this dissertation shows), the cascading activation can capture whether foreign leaders have influenced the White House and therefore impacted the news. Also, using framing theory, the cascading activation model demonstrates that frames travel through and within the cascade levels. Entman's model also shows what information is deemed most important and is therefore circulated widely amongst the different levels in the cascade (the president and his staff, policy makers, journalists and citizens).

This dissertation does not explicitly employ the cascading model in its analysis of Chinese and Iranian leaders. Yet, Entman's conceptualization of framing theory in the cascading model informed the data analysis of the coverage investigated for this dissertation.

2.5.2 Agenda Setting

Another approach that scholars have utilized to theorize foreign affairs and foreign news coverage moves from the discussion of news production to news consumption. This theory is known as agenda setting. Most scholars who employ the theory of agenda setting start from Cohen's well-known premise as cited in McCombs and Shaw : “media may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but what to think about.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, by emphasizing specific aspects of a story and omitting or glossing over others, the news media indirectly cue the public to think about those reported aspects (e.g.: human rights and China, terrorism and Iran). Agenda setting theory describes the hidden power relationship between the media and the public. The theory looks at media effects and explains how media’s coverage of a particular event or personality tracks the level of importance the audience attach to that event/person and to specific facets of that event/personality.

Scholars of foreign news have shown growing interest in agenda-setting theorizing and its application in media research. For example, in a well-known study by Wanta et al, the authors find that agenda setting theory explains why the more media coverage a country receives, the more likely an audience is to think that nation is important to U.S. interest. Wanta and others similarly found that the more media coverage of a country is negative, the more likely it is that audience members think negatively about that country.¹⁵⁰ Their observation has become known as the “second level” of agenda setting. McCombs and Shaw assert that agenda setting’s second level is mostly concerned with the “attribute of salience.” Simply put, if the first level agenda

setting is directing audiences on what to think about, the second level tells them “how to think about it.”¹⁵¹

Another study by Iyengar and Simon investigated the case study of the coverage of the Persian Gulf War, discovering three types of visible media effects.¹⁵² Through content analysis and polling studies, the authors found that the “level of network coverage about the Gulf War matched the Gallup Poll respondents naming the crisis as the nation’s most important problem.”¹⁵³ More recent studies have looked at whether online and “paper” readers of the news attribute different importance to a range of political issues. For example, a study by Althaus and Tewksbury found that readers who looked at the paper version of *The New York Times* and those who read the online version modified their agendas differently than one another. While the effects of foreign affairs reporting on audiences is not the subject of this dissertation, Althaus and Tewksbury’s study is interesting as it underlined the observation that media *do* tell the public what to think *about*.¹⁵⁴

In the next section, this dissertation will introduce some other key theories and concepts used in foreign news studies as well as present studies about foreign news, with a focus on studies about the coverage of China and Iran.

2.5.3 Soft Power

As mentioned earlier the concept of power is an underlying factor in the conceptualization of foreign news reporting by most theorists in the field. The invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan following the horrific attacks of 9/11 have brought new attention to the meaning and value of soft power in international diplomacy.¹⁵⁵ In foreign policy,

soft power is seen as the use of “attraction and persuasion rather than the use of coercion or force in foreign policy.”¹⁵⁶ In the 1990s, Joseph Nye coined the term soft power and questioned our understanding of the changing forms of influence in a changing international environment.¹⁵⁷ Nye defines soft power as follows:

Soft power is the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals. It differs from hard power, the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will. Both hard and soft power are important in the war on terrorism, but attraction is much cheaper than coercion, and an asset that needs to be nourished.”¹⁵⁸

Later on, Nye argues that the presidency of George W. Bush and the war on terror rhetoric placed the United States in an undesirable position in the international arena. He stated that the flow of anti-American sentiments in Europe, South America and more importantly amongst the Western world confirms the loss of the U.S’ global soft power. In the Cold War, political atmosphere had forced the U.S. to downplay the use of non-coercive instruments in its foreign policy decisions.¹⁵⁹ But according to Roselle et. al, soft power analysts often fall short of explaining the effects of non-coercive instruments and are mainly fixated on counting sophisticated tools or resources. Roselle et. al state that even with the end of the Cold War and the communication revolution, the “capabilities centric mindset has continued into U.S. foreign policy analysis.¹⁶⁰ For Miskimmom and his colleagues, the invention of the Internet replaced the counting of nuclear arsenals and weapons with “counting Twitter or Facebook followers and State Department language streams.”¹⁶¹ To overcome this gap Roselle et al introduce strategic narrative as a new approach to soft power and foreign policy analysis, they write:

Strategic narrative *is* soft power in the Twenty First Century. Strategic narrative sets off from a similar starting point Nye faced in 1990: Understanding fundamental change in the international system and asking: what are the best methods to influence international affairs? Strategic narrative brings us back to core questions in International Relations (IR), back to asking what means and methods of persuasion and influence are likely to work under what conditions, and to a focus on those conditions of communication and interaction, which have changed so fundamentally since Nye's seminal 1990 article.¹⁶²

As Miskimmon and others have started, while Nye pays some attention to the narratives of international relations, he generally ignored the importance of narrative in his work. Strategic narrative, according to its proponents, can easily fill in such gaps in IR and media scholarship about foreign news. Strategic narrative commonly addresses the formation, projection, diffusion, and reception of ideas in the international system. Also, strategic narrative helps detect how indifferent states try to use narratives strategically to influence audiences.¹⁶³ This ability allows scholars to identify how contestation works, especially when considering the complexities of today's media ecology. Using Kenneth Burke's concept of narratives, Roselle et. al, argue that strategic narrative has the following components in its analysis:

Character or Actor: Those who have agency and are depicted as important. State, non-state actors, rogue states, NGO's, MNCs and in general all actors associated with the international system today. Such designations inform us on who is considered important and what characteristics they hold.

Setting/ Space/Environment: Where the action in question is taking place. In foreign policy, setting is often referred to how international system is depicted and how it works. Is the world understood as one of growing interdependence and globalization with prospects for cooperation in pursuit of common goals, or is it depicted as a world of friends and enemies, those who believe as you do or those who do not?

Conflict or Action: Who did what to whom or what and what reactions and interactions emerged from that? This category often identifies perceived dangers, as well as how this danger should be confronted. Roselle et al. use the example of terrorism for this category. They state that when the world is set as a stage were terrorist challenge the security of all, more states identify groups as ‘terrorists’ and the implied response involves the use of the military and significant surveillances.

Resolution/or Suggested Resolution: This category focuses on the resolutions in a narrative – both in thought and action. For example, when the common solution narrative in the international system is to confront those who break norms about chemical weapons. This highlights ‘acceptable’ behavior in the international system, hence making it more difficult to justify the use of force and military as a method of engagement.¹⁶⁴

Roselle et al. also point to three levels of narratives in the study of international relations. First, international system narratives that describe how the world is structured and who the players are. For example, narratives such as the Cold War and the war on terror present the state as protecting individuals from non-state actors known as terrorist in a battle, for the sake of security.

The second level are national narratives that determine what the story of the state or nation is, what its values and goals are.¹⁶⁵ Common examples of national narratives

include the common narrative of the U.S. as a peace-loving country that is historically committed to freedom and democracy. In Iran for example, the national narratives are independence from imperialism and the protection of Iranian values. In China, the national narrative could be economical progress and the transformation of China as a superpower.

Finally, there are issue narratives that highlight why a policy is needed, why it is desirable and how it can be successfully implemented or accomplished. While Roselle et al argue that not all narratives in the international system are deployed by political actors, they assert that strategic narratives employed by one level may affect narratives of other levels.

Even though this dissertation focuses on framing analysis for its theoretical approach, the concept of strategic narrative, is a useful intellectual tool for the analysis of polices within the United State, China, and Iran. It seems that strategic narratives come in handy when considering countries who have had a problematic past with one another. The national narratives these countries have about each other and on the international stage often translates to the policy decisions their leaders employ. For example, during the presidency of Barack Obama, the narrative about Iran transformed from an unreasonable foe to a leadership that is reformist enough for the U.S. to engage with. In Iran, the narrative was that Iran is a peaceful nation and the American politicians are realizing that and are opening the doors for negotiations. With the presidency of Donald Trump in 2016, the narrative about Iran in the U.S. echoed the narrative of the early post Islamic revolutionary years. In Iran, after the Trump travel ban in 2017 and a new wave of rumors about possible sanctions and military conflict, the official narrative about the

United States seems much more negative than during Obama. While strategic narrative is useful in understanding the ideas in which a certain issue evolves within the national and international discourse, the theory does not distinguish between official narratives and popular narratives. To use the example of Iran and the U.S. again, what the hardliners elites in Iran or the Trump White House say about each other does not necessarily translate to what the publics of these countries may think of one another.

2.5.4 Analysis of the Coverage of Leaders

When it comes to leaders and their influence on society, Max Weber was one of the few scholars who attempted to theorize the influence of leaders using the concept of charisma. Weber transforms the religious meanings of charisma, dated back to the first century, and applies the concept to a secular meaning. Charisma, Weber states, along with traditional and rational-legal, is one of the three forms of ideal-typical of power. Since charismatic leaders have a powerful say the social formations of their society is shaped, they share an intense personal bond with their followers.

This dissertation does not aim to explore whether Xi Jinping or the Iranian leadership are charismatic leaders, but as Weber also contends, the formation of a leader as a strong, influential figure often shapes the narrative about the kind of power the leader holds over his people.¹⁶⁶ For him, charismatic authority is revolutionary in a way that traditional and rational-legal authority are not. Also, while traditional and rational-legal forms of power are often long-lived, charismatic leaderships are typically short-lived. The study of leaders and their charisma, influence, and power in societies has generated interested conversations amongst journalists, analysts and academic writers. In a

noteworthy study, Michael Bernhard, using Max Weber's theory of charisma, examines the impact of charismatic leadership in post-communist democratization by considering influential charismatic leaders such as Havel in the Czech Republic, Walesa in Poland, and Yeltsin in Russia.¹⁶⁷ Bernhard concludes that since both democracy and dictatorship legitimize themselves by using a combination of rational and charismatic elements, then the viability of dictatorship is not as vulnerable as some scholars predicted.¹⁶⁸ Each of these leaders are unique in their own way, Boris Yeltsin and Lech Walesa, both were recognized in their respective countries as national heroes in a time of deep struggle. Yeltsin managed to stop the hardliner coup d'état in 1991. Walesa led his people in the strike at the Lenin Shipyard in 1980. Havel, on the other hand, was more of a morally exemplary leader who accumulated the public's trust through years of resistance, especially in the aftermath of the Prague Spring. Neither one of these leaders, however, were successful in translating their visions into reality. Bernhard argues that generally there are limited intellectual discussions on the systematic understanding of leadership, especially in new and transitional democracies such as those forming during the 1980s and 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe. Bernhard examines the compatibility of charismatic leaders with democracy. He argues that power must adhere to the rule of law of power must predominate over charisma. Otherwise, the relationship between the leader and the led could become problematic. Bernhard's concern, brings the example of post-revolutionary leaders in China and Iran in mind. For example in China, Mao became the ultimate power in his country after the 1949 Revolution he had led and succeeded. The law in both lands started and ended with him

Bernhard, argues that when such status is received and the balance between power and law is lost, dictatorship becomes inevitable. According to him, dictatorship and democracy both legitimize themselves by a combination of charismatic and rational elements.

Overall, the study of a leader is viewed in biographical accounts written by journalists or biographers. Rarely have scholars in media studies or IR formed theories and methodologies on how to study the mediated portrayal of leaders in the news and popular media context.

In her book about contemporary Syrian leaders Lisa Wedeen argues that “political spectacles are key aspects of political life and play an important role in securing the consent of the public, reinforce obedience, anchor visually and audibly politically significant ideas as well as frame the ways people see themselves as citizens.”¹⁶⁹ The type of images used to mediate a leader’s image in society gives citizens an idea of what kind of personality is running their country. In the words of Dick Pels, “mediated politics can create a sense of false intimacy between the leader and the led and created a traditional divide between the formal and the informal.”¹⁷⁰ In Iran and China, the mediated images of the leaders were an important part of political systems in both countries. In Iran, the way the post-Shah era leadership presented itself to the public was in high contrast to what public were used to.

Elaborate dining halls where the Shah’s generals would line up to kiss the Shah’s (king’s) hand, gave a sense of loyalty, fear, and of course the idea that the King was wealthy and therefore the country was wealthy. Post-1979, politicians would sit on the floor in simplistic rooms without shoes, after the sermons by the Ayatollah Khomeini

known as the *Rahbar* (leader). Some would kiss his hand too, which in the political context of that era seemed more like a thank you for leading the country into a revolution and a sign of devotion to the *Rahabari* and his teachings. In China, the Maoist era saw the government emphasizing the images of China as a socialist country and supporter of the revolution. Then, during Deng Xiaoping rule and the reform era, the image of China transformed as an international cooperator and today the national image promoted by the government is a major global power.¹⁷¹ Not many scholars in media studies or IR have focused on how leaders from foreign countries have been covered in the news media and how these narratives have influenced the image of the leader in question. This dissertation hopes to fill that gap. Those studies that focused on the representation of leaders in the news media often focus on the methods, tools, and practices used to construct the leader's image.

In another example, Matar Dina studies the cultivation of the image and language of the charismatic Lebanese cleric Hassan Nasrallah through a sociopolitical lens.¹⁷² Dina argues that as the presence of Shia insurgency grew so did Nasrallah's image. Dina argues that the mediation of Hassan Nasrallah's image of presence and charismatic authority helped immensely in establishing the Shiite cleric as a national and Arab hero. Nasrallah's image, Dina writes, during the 2011 Arab uprisings challenged the image of Nasrallah. Hezbollah (the militant group led by Nasrallah) supported the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain, which has a large Shiite population. But with the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2013, Nasrallah's support for the Assad regime despite its repression of the popular uprising, angered many of his followers and clouded his image as a true leader of the marginalized masses. Most political science studies that focus on

charismatic leaders often analyzed the mediated narratives of the leaders through sociopolitical context.

For Chen and Meindi, portrayals of charismatic leaders, whether in business or politics, is highly affected by how they are presented through mass media.¹⁷³ As Calder, 1977;¹⁷⁴ Pfeffer, 1977;¹⁷⁵ Salancik, 1975;¹⁷⁶ Meindi and Ehrlich, 1985;¹⁷⁷ and others contended, leadership concepts appear as prominent features of the socially constructed relations that often determine the way we understand the world. Thus, as traditional definition of journalism posits, news is supposed to “mirror” or “reflect” the actual nature of the world. Journalists are meant to objectively inform the public. Gitlin writes, “In the mass mediated reality, organizations, bureaucracies and movements – in fact all larger and more enduring social formations – are reduced to personifications. Gans stated that aside from practical reasons to focus on the leaders, there is an implicit theory of society that the social process, above all, is shaped by leaders.¹⁷⁸ Other scholars such as Dyson and Preston have looked at the individual characteristics of political leaders and their usage of historical analogy during foreign policy decision making episodes.¹⁷⁹ They determined how the use of historical anecdotes and analogies by leaders could demonstrate their expertise and qualifications as a leader.

Most of the scholarly work devoted to the coverage of foreign leaders is focused on descriptions of their personality, ideas, and legacy. Rarely, have the mediated image of leaders become the topic of scholarly debate in media studies research. In her seminal 1984 book, *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership*, Ann Willner offers brief profiles of various leaders of the twentieth century (Khomeini, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Mahatma Gandhi, Hitler, Mussolini, Castro). In her work, Willner is less

concerned with mediated portrayals of these leaders and more with their methods of obtaining influence, prominence and legacy in their respected society and on the international stage.¹⁸⁰ In media studies, scholarship on leaders and their representation in news media is quite scarce. While the study of foreign leaders has not appeared as a major source of interest, growing number of scholars such as Hager, Hjarvard, Mazzoleni and Schultz; Schultz; Strömbäck have shown growing interest on subjects of mediatization and personalization in politics. However, those studies mostly focus on political decisions rather than political actors. This dissertation hopes to help fill the gap in debate about leaders and their mediated persona in news media.

2.5.5 Framing of China in the U.S. Press

Surprisingly, given China's rising prominence in the eyes of the United States, studies on the media's coverage of U.S. policy towards China are scant. The few studies cited here mostly employed the same theoretical approaches mentioned earlier in this chapter. For example, one study by Lin and Salwen examined the framing of different events leading to the normalization of relations between China and the US, by looking at the leading media outlets in the U.S., the PRC and ROC (Republic of China: Taiwan).¹⁸¹ The authors used "assertion analysis" theory, as conceptualized by Klaus Kippendorff, to see the relations between the White House and press narratives.¹⁸² Using assertion analysis, Lin and Salwen coded stories based on the positive or negative "assertion" about normalization. If the story had positive and negative assertions, it was coded as neutral. Therefore, their study also illustrated the different views about normalization in China, the U.S., and Taiwan. The researchers found that the differences in the coverage

of the normalization issue were mostly rooted in the different political systems in which each paper functioned.

An important early study in this respect was Stephen Mosher's 1990 book *China Misperceived*.¹⁸³ Mosher's work did not look at the coverage of just U.S. policy towards China but also discussed the coverage of China as a country as well. Mosher is not a media scholar and did not limit his analysis of the Chinese image to only journalistic accounts; he included writings of scholars and tourists. His book devotes numerous pages to U.S. news media coverage of China, criticizing the overtly positive packaging of China in U.S. media in the months leading to rapprochement and Nixon's historic trip. He points out that the horrific outcomes of the Cultural Revolution were highly ignored in U.S. press. Mosher accused well known U.S. journalists such as Theodore H. White and William F. Buckley who had accompanied Nixon on his historical trip to China for offering a "favorable but distorted depiction of Chinese reality".¹⁸⁴

Harold Isaac's classic *Scratches on Our Mind* is also an important book to consider for those interested in understanding the Chinese image in the United States. Isaacs interviewed close to 200 people on their views of India and China and tried correlate their responses to the Sino-Chinese relations during the early 1950s. While some of Isaac's ideas and conclusions are far-fetched for today's readers, his methodology and analysis on relations has inspired much foreign news research.¹⁸⁵

Tan Kuo Chang's *The Press and China Policy* is another important study looking at U.S. foreign policy reporting on China.¹⁸⁶ In his study, Chang focused on press coverage of different aspects of U.S. policies in China, studying 35 years of U.S.-Chinese relations (1954-1980). By examining government documents to understand policy makers, Chang

reviewed 35 years of presidential documents about U.S.-China relations. Also, the study performed a content analysis of the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*'s front page and editorials along with public opinion polls about China were presented. Chang's study found that with changes in the attitudes of political elites towards China, U.S. news outlets also changed their narration of the PRC. Eventually, with these changes in the press, public opinion polls also started to shift.¹⁸⁷

More recent studies in the field have focused on how U.S. media covered specific U.S.-China events. For example, David Shambaugh and his students at the Elliot School of International Affairs at George Washington University conducted a series of studies to consider the perceptions of U.S.-China relations in the United States by investigating concepts such as the "China Threat theory."¹⁸⁸ An important component of this series was a content analysis of four major newspapers in the United States and their China coverage between the years 2000-2002 (the outlets were: *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*). In the latter study, Liss found that quantitatively there were far more negative stories in all four papers about China than positive ones. Liss concluded that the U.S. media presented China as a threat by negatively emphasizing China's growing power and its abysmal human rights record. Liss argued that framing China as an enemy of U.S. values and power complicated Sino-Chinese relations. He labeled this framing as a "dangerous mistake."¹⁸⁹

A few studies have looked at the coverage of Chinese officials in U.S. news media. For example, one study by Yang-Chou Yu and Daniel Riffe examined U.S. news magazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*), from 1949-1976, to see how U.S. news attitudes had changed towards Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai Shek (leader of

the Republic of China) as the U.S. became increasingly pro-Mao during early 1970s. Using framing theory, the researchers found that during the 27 timeframes of the study, U.S. news frames towards Mao and Chiang had changed with the transformation of U.S.-China relations.¹⁹⁰ Thus, in each era of the relationship U.S. news magazines would frame Chiang and Mao differently.¹⁹¹

A more recent study by Leshuo and Chitty examined the U.S. and Chinese news media coverage of Xi Jinping's official U.S. tour during his vice presidency years back, in 2012.¹⁹² The highly publicized visit was important for both countries, especially since the tour gave China the chance to introduce Xi, who was known as China's president in waiting. Thus, using framing theory and content analysis, the authors showed the role of political culture and its influence on news frames by forming a comparative analysis between Chinese and U.S. news media.¹⁹³ The researchers found that based on a newspaper's country of origin and political alignment (mostly in U.S. media) the visit was characterized differently. The Chinese media had mainly seen the visit as successful, while U.S. media frames diverged between 'challenging visit' and 'successful visit.'

The idea of China as an enemy has also interested scholars. For example, Stone and Xiao studied U.S. news magazines before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Using framing and content analysis the authors concluded that U.S. new magazines covered China far more negatively after the demise of the U.S.S.R. The study showed that adversarial political relationships are often reflected in a nation's (here, the U.S.) domestic media.¹⁹⁴

Most scholars attempting to look at China through the prism of us vs. them often apply Edward Said's notion of orientalism. In his intriguing 1978 book *Orientalism*, Said

offers a thorough explanation of ethnocentric Western attitudes and depictions of the Orient. Said defines Orientalism as a strategy on a “flexible positional superiority” that places Westerners in a series of possible relationships with the Orient, without the West ever losing the upper hand.¹⁹⁵

Scholars such as Lams examined the otherness of China in elite Belgian and Dutch newspapers through a one-year timeframe.¹⁹⁶ Using framing analysis and Anthony Gramsci’s notion of ‘media hegemony’ along with theories of “otherness” from Said and other cultural studies scholars, Lams aims to form a multi-disciplinary assessment of China coverage Western Europe. The article concluded that while Belgium and Dutch media utilize some positive frames in their coverage of China, the news coverage is mostly negative and one-dimensional. Lams found that the European media, mainly focused on China’s rise in international economy and its human rights abuses:

The depiction of a powerful economic rival to the European business community and by extension a potential danger to the world economy due to a perceived overdependence on the Chinese economic magnet, nurtures and orients this collective thought toward a more irrational sentiment of a threat to the us-category by the outsiders. This produces intolerance and fear instead of true understanding.¹⁹⁷

Similarly, Collin Sparks, examined the coverage of China in UK national daily press during 2008, the year of the Olympic Games hosted by China. Sparks found that quantity of China coverage differed based on the status of the paper.¹⁹⁸ Sparks’ study also detected a high volume of episodic frames in British news coverage of China.

Interestingly, the study concludes that *The Financial Times* had far more detailed and well-rounded coverage of China, the author attributes this variation in the different audiences each paper has to consider. For him, *Financial Times* readers mostly had personal and professional relations with China; thus, they needed a better understanding of the country. With no doubt, there are more studies that examine the coverage of China in U.S. and other Western news media. However, the brief review presented here shows the importance of framing in the understanding of China in the coverage.

In the next section a brief review of Western news coverage of Iran are presented.

2.5.6 Framing of Iran in the U.S. Press

The U.S. news media coverage of the Middle East has been the focus of attention in American media scholarship for many years. Most studies examining this issue have analyzed the media coverage for its quality rather than its influence. However, based on the important available scholarly work it can be deduced that the United States media have covered each conflict and country in the region through the lens of their relations with the U.S, thereby following the elite narrative regarding these conflicts.

According to Fred Halliday, international concern with the region, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and following the adversities of World War II, focused on the economic struggles, religious disputes, and the regional conflicts, including the multiple Arab-Israeli conflicts, the 1958 Lebanese Civil War, the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the prolonged war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1989), and the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein which led to the wider Gulf War of 1993.¹⁹⁹

More recently, other events such as the 2003 Iraq War; the public uprisings known as the Arab Spring (2011); the Iran Nuclear Deal (2015); the civil war in Syria

(2011-present); and the rise of the so-called Islamic State, have dominated the coverage of the Middle East. In 2011, for example, 12 percent of U.S. news coverage was focused on the Arab Spring.²⁰⁰

Most countries in the Middle East have had a complex relationship with the U.S. The relations between Iran and the U.S. (as reviewed in the Iran Chapter of this dissertation) is amongst the most puzzling. As a consequence, U.S. news coverage of Iran has intrigued many media scholars. This section will briefly review some of the studies that have made significant contributions to an understanding of the coverage of Iran in Western media.²⁰¹ (*NB: see a brief description of the term “Western media” in the endnotes.*)

Specific events have sparked scholarly and news media interest in Iran-U.S. news coverage. As scholars such as Dorman and Farhang have noted, the patterns and themes of Iran coverage have tracked the estrangement of U.S.-Iran relations.²⁰² Similar to the academic studies that have focused on U.S. media coverage of China, scholars including Dorman and Farhang have concluded that the U.S. press shows a highly ethnocentric and ideological bias in their treatment of Iran.²⁰³

While Dorman and Farhang are vague about their methodology for assessing media coverage of Iran — their focus is on “everything published about Iran” in elite newspapers and news magazines — their study remains one of the most important works on U.S. news coverage of pre-revolutionary Iran. Their content analysis and close review of White House policies towards Iran across the 30-years of their inquiry concludes that U.S. news media have reliably followed the official Washington narrative about Iran. Thus, for example, they noted that in crucial moments — such as after the 1953 coup or

in the months leading to the 1979 Revolution — the U.S. news media largely ignored the Shah's increasing authoritative attitude.

Only a very limited number of academic studies have evaluated the coverage of a pre-revolutionary Iran; certainly, few current scholars have turned to analyze the pre-1979 era in Iran. Works considering how U.S. media covered the Shah or Mossadegh are noticeably missing in the literature, as are studies of the early depictions of Ayatollah Khomeini and other revolutionary figures. That is a pity. Such studies would illuminate not only how Iran has been portrayed both before and after the revolution, but suggest whether or not there are themes that remain, or patterns that still exist. Understanding how Iran was treated in U.S. news, would give scholars insights into the genesis of past, current and future U.S. policies regarding Iran.

Scholars such as Moeller have argued that Americans are traditionally interested in events occurring in their own backyard and show little interest in what occurs around the world.²⁰⁴ Yet even this explanation does not explain why American media paid so little attention to Iran considering that by 1978, Iran had become the most important client state in U.S. history.²⁰⁵ By 1979, Iran had the largest dollar amount in trade deals with the United States, Iranians were considered the main group of foreign students in the U.S., and U.S. technocrats were the largest national minorities in Iran.²⁰⁶ In the months before the revolution, Iran was politically — if not physically — at the center of America's backyard. Yet, important issues such as the state of human rights in Iran and the massive economic gaps in the country were severely underreported. The Shah was rarely depicted as a dictator, the U.S. media treated him as a progressive leader, there was little attention paid to his infamous Secret Service police (SAVAK), or to his crackdown

on journalists and students activists. There was no coverage about why Iranian youths were drawn to Khomeini and why anti-American sentiment was shaping in Iran. By ignoring these important changes, the U.S. news media seconded Washington's blinkered view of life in Iran under the Pahlavi regime. Scholars such as Detmer have observed that the American people not only lacked the sufficient information to *foresee* the revolution, they had no sufficient information to *understand* it either.²⁰⁷

Other than Dorman and Farhang's 1988 book, *U.S. Press and Iran*, a handful of studies have examined the issue of Iran coverage before the Islamic revolution. For instance, Deborah Kistasky examined how *Voice of America* radio covered Iran between 1949 and 1953. According to Kistasky, Harry Truman used VOA radio as an important propaganda tool to promote his doctrine of "liberal developmentalism" in Iran, a policy that promoted gradually bringing capitalism to Iranian society. However, the Eisenhower administration quickly changed course and supported a covert coup that overthrew Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh. By reviewing VOA archives and focusing on the "tone" and "language" of coverage the author traces how the VOA disseminated propaganda about Iran during those crucial years.²⁰⁸

While the scholarship in U.S. coverage of Iran pre-1979 is scant, a few key post-revolutionary events such as the Iran Hostage Crisis (1979) and the Iran-Contra scandal (1985-1987) have attracted tremendous scholarly attention. However, few media scholars have investigated Western media coverage of the Iran-Iraq war (1981-1989). This limitation in the scholarship is short-sighted: the Iran-Iraq War is the premise by which the Iranian government justifies to this day their need for a more advanced military and weapons systems and it has been a prime motivator for the Iranian government's efforts

at enhancing its regional power. These are precisely the two issues that have concerned American policy makers and news media.

Throughout the 1970s, the American public saw Iran portrayed as a progressive Middle Eastern society racing towards industrial advancements. Iran was distinguished in the U.S media from other Arab and Muslim-majority countries in the region. The men drank alcohol and spoke good English. The women wore miniskirts and used American products for makeup.²⁰⁹ Iranian youth danced to the Beetles and smoked American cigarettes. Stories depicted the Shah as a moderate leader, who spoke three languages, had a Western education and took ski trips to Switzerland. In sum, for the American public of 1978, there was nothing wrong with Iran. Therefore, when Ayatollah Khomeini rallied the people against the Shah, neither the American public nor the Carter administration could make sense of the events.²¹⁰

Within months after the revolution of 1979, a group of Iranian revolutionaries stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran and took 52 Americans hostages. The 444-day ordeal became known as the ‘Iran Hostage Crisis’ and it became the United States’ first encounter with militant Islam.²¹¹

With American lives at stake, the hostage crisis received extraordinary media coverage, and consequently media scholars grew interested in evaluating the news of it. David Altheide, mentioned above, studied the coverage of the crisis by the three major U.S. television networks ABC, CBS, and NBC.²¹² In part because of the TV networks day-by-day accounting of events, Altheide’s study found that the television networks were central to the U.S. public’s understanding of the nature, background and consequences of the crisis. All three, according to Altheide, were almost identical in their

coverage, using overgeneralized and simplistic frames to explain the situation of the Shah, of Islam in Iran, of Iranian student in the U.S., and of the families of the hostages. Altheide called this homogenous coverage “news consonance.” He wrote:

Homogenous messages by major news channels make it difficult for viewers who rely on these sources of information to discern the multiple realities underlying many issues and events, especially in terms of recognizing journalists' opinions, and then assessing them. When such opportunities are not available on the major media, the divergent perspectives surrounding the original event may be lost on the audience members, who depend on media portrayals for selection, definition and understanding of issues and problems.²¹³

Altheide also noted the importance of ideology and news formats in another study on the same topic. He found, for example, that the U.S. news network evaluated whether to cover a story about Iran by considering the “accessibility” of the story, whether the news was relevant to the audience for news, whether the story had strong visuals as well as drama and action, and whether there was “encapsulation and thematic unity” in the story. Altheide and other scholars have observed that U.S. news coverage of the hostage crisis only reported information permitted by the U.S. government; for example, the government’s description of hostages’ jobs were simply defined and perfunctorily repeated—“Farsi specialist” or “guard.” Understandably, such bland designations could be justified as part of the Carter administration’s protection strategy for the captives, and by no means were any job titles justifications for taking of hostages. However, to the best of this dissertation’s knowledge, there is a lack of reporting on what were the roles of

those hostages in the U.S. embassy — a question and an issue that is an important part of the Iranian political discourse about the event.²¹⁴

Another aspect of the hostage crisis that media researchers found poorly reported was the representation of Iran itself. The late-night newsmagazine, *Nightline*, for example, broadcast different aspects of the Iranian society and delivered simplified explanations for how Iranians behaved as fervent “Islamists” and a society obsessed with “martyrdom.” Palmerton found that the frames presented in the coverage were instrumental in generating the “rhetoric of terrorism” about Iran. Rarely, were there any stories of those Iranians not involved in the crisis, or any meaningful discussion on what had caused such an event.²¹⁵ Edward Said who devoted an entire chapter to the hostage Iran in his important study *Covering Islam*, attributed most of the misjudgments in U.S. news media’s Iran coverage to the Islamophobia in the West — an Islamophobia heightened by the Iranian Revolution, along with the ignorance of U.S. news media to Iran’s past.²¹⁶

Shanto Iyengar found the same pattern of episodic framing during the Iran-Contra affair. While that story was mostly a presidential scandal, the images presented about Iran were still highly event-based and lacked background and thematic explanation.²¹⁷ Complex stories — such as the Hostage Crisis or the Iran Contra affair — that involved various players, reasons, and possible outcomes were mostly reduced to one story in the American media: the freeing of the hostages or the responsibility of the president. While the use of such frames was justified, the events were more complicated than the simplified frames suggested. As a result, the stories did not provide the public with a meaningful comprehension of the event at hand.

Most generally, scholars' investigations of the news from Iran have underlined the role of media in shaping U.S. policy on Iran. As explained in previous pages, Entman's valuable 1993 study traced patterns of episodic framing in analyzing the coverage of the Iran Air flight 655 crash where the U.S. was responsible, in comparison to that of the KAL airlines crash which the Soviets were found responsible. Others, such as Malik also compared U.S. foreign policy towards Iran with editorials published in the *New York Times* during a similar period, 1968-1981. That study too found a high degree of correlation between the positions taken by the White House and U.S. news coverage about Iran.²¹⁸

As mentioned above, more and more scholars are turning to evaluate news media coverage of Iran. There have been recent studies on the media coverage Iran's nuclear program. For example, using theories of "otherness" and discourse analysis, Izadi and Biria looked at the discussion in newspaper editorials about Iran's nuclear program from 1984-2004. The authors detected six Orientalist themes in editorial comments about Iran's nuclear program: "inferiority," "backwardness," "irrationality," "submissiveness," "Islam as threat," Jews vs. Arabs," "untrustworthiness," and "strangeness."²¹⁹ Also, the rise of citizen journalism in the unrest following the contested election results in 2009, have prompted international scholars to consider how protesters used new media and new communication platforms.²²⁰ (Since most of those studies are concerned with citizen journalism in Iran, this dissertation will not detail that literature.) Yet despite recent flurries of attention, more academic research into media coverage of Iran is needed. This dissertation is an effort to address such concerns.

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¹⁵³ Aside from framing another effect mentioned in this study is known as Priming. According to Iyengar: Priming is an extension of agenda setting, the theory shows that impact of news coverage on the weight assigned to specific issues to make political judgement. The effect reflects, Iyengar and Kinder write, the ability of news programs to affect the criteria by which political leaders are judged. For more see:

Iyengar, Shanto, and Adam Simon. "News coverage of the Gulf crisis and public opinion: A study of agenda-setting, priming, and framing." *Communication Research* 20.3 (1993): 365-383. And Scheufele, Dietram A., and David Tewksbury. "Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models." *Journal of Communication* 57.1 (2007): 9-20.

¹⁵⁴ Althaus, Scott L., and David Tewksbury. "Agenda setting and the "new" news patterns of issue importance among readers of the paper and online versions of the New York Times." *Communication Research* 29.2 (2002): 180-207.

¹⁵⁵ Chong, Alan. "Soft Power in Foreign Policy." *Foreign Policy in Global Information Space*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007. 59-81.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Nye Jr, Joseph S. *Bound to lead: The changing nature of American power*. Basic Books, 2016.

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¹⁵⁹ Cull, Nicholas J. *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American propaganda and public diplomacy, 1945-1989*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

¹⁶⁰ Roselle, Laura, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loughlin. "Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power." *Media, War & Conflict* 7.1 (2014): 70-84.

¹⁶¹ Miskimmon, Alister, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle. *Strategic narratives: Communication power and the new world order*. Vol. 3. Routledge, 2014.Also see: Roselle, Laura, Alister Miskimmon, and

Ben O'Loughlin. "Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power." *Media, War & Conflict* 7.1 (2014). P: 75.

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¹⁶³ Ibid.

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¹⁶⁵ Holsti, Kalevi J. "National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy." *International Studies Quarterly* 14.3 (1970): 233-309. Also see: Walker SG (1987) Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis: An Evaluation. In SG Walker (ed) *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis*, 241–259. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

¹⁶⁶ Weber, Max. *On charisma and institution building*. University of Chicago Press, 1968.

¹⁶⁷ Bemhard, Michael. "Charismatic leadership and democratization: A Weberian perspective." (1998).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. Also see: Potts, John. *A history of charisma*. Springer, 2009.

¹⁶⁹ Wedeen, Lisa. *Ambiguities of domination: Politics, rhetoric, and symbols in contemporary Syria*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

¹⁷⁰ Corner, John, and Dick Pels, eds. *Media and the restyling of politics: Consumerism, celebrity and cynicism*. Sage, (2003): pp.41-67.

¹⁷¹ National Image Building and Chinese Foreign policy Hongying Wang

¹⁷² Matar, Dina. "Hassan Nasrallah: The cultivation of image and language in the making of a charismatic leader." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8.3 (2015): 433-447.

¹⁷³ Chen, Chao C., and James R. Meindl. "The construction of leadership images in the popular press: The case of Donald Burr and People Express." *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1991): 521-551..

¹⁷⁴ Calder, Bobby J. "An attribution theory of leadership." *New directions in organizational behavior* 179 (1977): 204.

¹⁷⁵ Pfeffer, Jeffrey. "The ambiguity of leadership." *Academy of management review* 2.1 (1977): 104-112.

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¹⁷⁷ Meindl, James R., Sanford B. Ehrlich, and Janet M. Dukerich. "The romance of leadership." *Administrative science quarterly* (1985): 78-102.

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¹⁸¹ Lin, Carolyn, and Michael B. Salwen. "Three press systems view Sino-US normalization." *Journalism Quarterly* 63.2 (1986): 360-362.

¹⁸² Krippendorff, Klaus. *Content Analysis: An introduction to its Methodology*. Sage, 2004

¹⁸³ Mosher, Steven W. *China misperceived: American illusions and Chinese Reality*. Basic Books, 1990.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Isaacs, Harold R. "Scratches on our minds." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 20.1 (1956): 197-211.

¹⁸⁶ Chang, Tsan-Kuo. *The press and China policy: The illusion of Sino-American Relations*, 1950-1984. Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1993.

¹⁸⁷ The reader must keep in mind that the description provided here about Chang's study is generalized and brief. Thus for a detailed account of the methodology and conclusions see pages 167-246.

¹⁸⁸ Chen, Rosalie. "China Perceives America: Perspectives of International Relations Experts." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 12, no. 35, 2003, pp. 285-297; Also see: Broomfield, Emma V. "Perceptions of Danger: The China Threat Theory." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 12, no. 35, 2003, pp. 265-284; Shambaugh, David. "Introduction: Imagining Demons: the rise of negative imagery in U.S.-China relations." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 12, no. 35, 2003.

¹⁸⁹ Liss, Alexander. "Images of China in the American Print Media: A Survey from 2000 to 2002." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 12, no. 35, 2003, pp. 299–318.

¹⁹⁰ Yu, Yang-Chou, and Daniel Riffe. "Chiang and Mao in US news magazines." *Journalism Quarterly* 66.4 (1989): 913-919.

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¹⁹² Leshuo, Dong and Naren Chitty. "Exploring News Frames of Diplomatic Visists : A Comparative Study of Chinese and American Media Treatment of Vice President Xi Jinping's Official Tour of the U.S.." *Communication, Politics&Culture*, vol.45, no.2, 2012, p.292.

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¹⁹³ Riggings, Stephen Harold. *The Language and Politics of Exclusion: Others in Discourse*. Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage Publications, 1997.

¹⁹⁴ Stone, Gerald C., and Zhiwen Xiao. "Anointing a new enemy: The rise of anti-China coverage after the U.S.SR's demise." *International Communication Gazette* 69.1 (2007): 91-108.

¹⁹⁵ Said, Edward. "Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient [1978]." Harmondsworth: Penguin (1985). Note: Since the 1960s different scholarly disciplines have defined “otherness” in political discourse. Models such as ‘representation of the other’ and the ‘rhetoric of othering’ by scholars such as Stephen Riggings, have offered definitions of the other and its presence in Western Societies. For example, Riggings defines the ‘other’ as the people who are not my people or one of us. For more see: Since the 1960s different scholarly disciplines such as communications and cultural studies, have drawn attention to

Western news media's coverage of the developing world. Models such as 'representation of the other' and the 'rhetoric of othering' by scholars such as Stephen Riggings, have offered definitions of the other and its presence in Western Societies. For example, Riggings defines the 'other' as the people who are not my people or one of us.

¹⁹⁶ Lams L. "China: Economic Magnet or Rival? Framing of China in the Dutch- and French-Language Elite Press in Belgium and the Netherlands." *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 78, no. 1-2, 2015, pp. 137–156. Also for Antoni Gramsci's "Hegemony" explanation see: Gramsci, Antonio. *The Gramsci reader: selected writings, 1916-1935*. NYU Press, 2000. Also see: Carragee, Kevin M. "A critical evaluation of debates examining the media hegemony thesis." *Western Journal of Communication* 57.3 (1993): 330-348.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 154

¹⁹⁸ Sparks, Colin. "Coverage of China in the UK national press." *Chinese Journal of Communication* 3.3 (2010): 347-365.

¹⁹⁹ Halliday, Fred. *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*. Vol. 4. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

²⁰⁰ According to the interactive version of this report, Afghanistan and Iran were other big numbers in the year of 2011: <http://www.journalism.org/2011/12/21/year-news/>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

²⁰¹ By Western media here I mean the media of the U.S. and Western Europe. According to Hallin and Mancini, media in Europe and the U.S. may be different in their systems but they overall enjoy the same kind of freedoms and more or less follow the same value. For more see: Hardy, Jonathan. *Western media systems*. Routledge, 2010.

²⁰² Dorman, William A., and Mansour Farhang. *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign policy and the journalism of deference*. Univ of California Press, 1988.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Moeller, Susan D. *Compassion fatigue: How the media sell disease, famine, war and death*. Routledge, 1999. For discussion on how victims are framed see: Moeller, Susan D. "A hierarchy of innocence: The media's use of children in the telling of international news." *Harvard International Journal of*

Press/Politics 7.1 (2002): 36-56. And for a detailed discussion on framing terrorism see: Moeller, Susan D. "The media's response to the war on terrorism." *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (2004): 59. Also: Moeller, Susan. *Packaging terrorism: Co-opting the news for politics and profit*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009.

²⁰⁵ Gasiorowski, Mark J. *US foreign policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran*. Cornell Univ Pr, 1991.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Detmer, David. "Covering up Iran: Why vital information is routinely excluded from U.S. mass media news accounts." *Contributions to the study of Mass Communications* 46 (1995): 91-102.

²⁰⁸ Kisatsky, Deborah. "Voice of America and Iran, 1949–1953: U.S. liberal developmentalism, propaganda and the Cold War." *Intelligence and National Security* 14.3 (1999): 160-185.

²⁰⁹ Bill, James A. "America, Iran, and the politics of intervention, 1951-1953." Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil ed. James A. Bill and William Roger Louis (London: IB Tauris, 1988) 287 (1988).

²¹⁰ Dorman, William A., and Mansour Farhang. *The U.S. press and Iran: Foreign policy and the Journalism of Deference*. Univ of California Press, 1988.

²¹¹ Said, Edward W. *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world* (Fully revised edition). Random House, 2008.

²¹² For example, ABC launched a news program first called The Iran Crisis—America Held Hostage and later changed to Nightline, which was designed to report on the crisis every night. On this program, Ted Koppel would report on recent events; conduct interviews with important players such as the Iranian foreign minister, Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, and families of the hostages. Though, Koppel's interviews with Iranian officials would often end in arguments between those participating, and rarely resulted in providing new information about the situation.

²¹³ Altheide, David L. "Three-in-one news: Network coverage of Iran." *Journalism Quarterly* 59.3 (1982): 482-486.

Note: German scholar Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann borrowed Altheide's "news consonance" convention, and built on it to suggest that that consonance across the news media made it difficult for "selective" perceptions to emerge. For more see: Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth, and Rainer Mathes. "The

event as event 'and the event as news': The significance media effects research." *European Journal of Communication* 2.4 (1987): 391-414.

²¹⁴ Altheide, David L. "Impact of format and ideology on TV news coverage of Iran." *Journalism Quarterly* 62.2 (1985): 346-351.

²¹⁵ Palmerton, Patricia R. "The rhetoric of terrorism and media response to the "Crisis in Iran"." *Western Journal of Communication* (includes Communication Reports) 52.2 (1988): 105-121.

²¹⁶ Said, Edward W. *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world* (Fully revised edition). Random House, 2008:(81-133).

²¹⁷ Iyengar's study is an interesting example of using foreign policy news and experiments, However, for the sake of brevity, I only mentioned the part that related to this research for more please see: Iyengar, Shanto. *Is anyone responsible?: How Television Frames Political Issues*. University of Chicago Press, 1994.

²¹⁸ Entman, Robert M. "Symposium framing U.S. coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran air incidents." *Journal of Communication* 41.4 (1991): 6-27

²¹⁹ Izadi, Foad, and Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria. "A discourse analysis of elite American newspaper editorials: The case of Iran's nuclear program." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 31.2 (2007): 140-165

²²⁰ Kamalipour, Yahya R. *Media, power, and politics in the digital age: The 2009 presidential election uprising in Iran*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. Burns, Alex, and Ben Eltham. "Twitter free Iran: An evaluation of Twitter's role in public diplomacy and information operations in Iran's 2009 election crisis." (2009): 322-334. And: Mortensen, Mette. "When citizen photojournalism sets the news agenda: Neda Agha Soltan as a Web 2.0 icon of post-election unrest in Iran." *Global Media and Communication* 7.1 (2011): 4-16; Morozov, Evgeny. "Iran: Downside to the" Twitter Revolution". " Dissent 56.4 (2009): 10-14; Hermida, Alfred. "Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism." *Journalism practice* 4.3 (2010): 297-308. Metzgar, Emily, and Albert Maruggi. "Social media and the 2008 U.S. presidential election." *Journal of New Communications Research* 4.1 (2009): 141-165.

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Introduction

In the ten years between, 2006-2016 annual Gallup polls have asked Americans this question : “What one country anywhere in the world do you consider to be the United States’ greatest enemy today?”²²¹ Every year, China and Iran have been in the top four on that list of greatest threats.²²²

Yet, while both countries appear on that list, most Americans recognize that China is a different kind of “enemy” to the United States than Iran is. China’s growing economic power, its relations with U.S. foes such as North Korea and Iran, and Beijing’s disregard for American values such as freedom of speech and expression, are the main reasons for Sino-American tensions in the twenty first century.²²³ Still, the deep differences between the Chinese and American governments — in ideology, politics, economics, diplomacy and human rights — have meant that relations between the two countries have ranged from productive to problematic. By contrast, U.S.-Iran relations have been substantially more difficult and reliably problematic; the U.S. State Department, for example, notes “The U.S. government does not have diplomatic or consular relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.”²²⁴ Since the 1979 Revolution in Iran and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the U.S. and Iran have been embroiled in what might be characterized as policies of “aggressive tolerance” towards one another.

In short, the United States has — and has had — extraordinarily complicated relations with the nations of China and Iran. This dissertation examines U.S. news media coverage of the leaders of China and Iran — President Xi Jinping of China²²⁵ and

President Hassan Rouhani of Iran — as a way of investigating how American media over the last few years have reported on those “complications.” Research conducted for this dissertation investigated the coverage of key events during those leaders’ time in office, using selected events as “case studies.”

3.2 First: A Note about “Knowing a Subject” and Objectivity in Research

When considering the parameters of this dissertation I decided to examine the U.S. media’s coverage of China, and specifically of Xi Jinping. As any interested journalist and scholar in foreign affairs, I had some knowledge about the countries that interested me. I had some knowledge of China’s political history, gained in part from the opportunity I had as an Iranian of visiting China twice, once in the spring of 1990, a year after Tiananmen, and later in 2008. Like many who were alive during the Tiananmen Square Massacre, I recall seeing the images of the protests, including of “Tank Man” and the discussions surrounding that photograph. My experience of seeing two Chinas — the stark contrasts in China, almost two decades apart — has kept me both intellectually and personally interested in the country.

China’s political history with the United States makes the U.S. media’s coverage of the country an interesting contrast for an examination of the U.S. media’s coverage of Iran. The People’s Republic of China was first an “enemy” of the United States, then in the early 1970s it gradually became a “friend.” Iran, however, was considered one of America’s closest “friends,” but by the end of the seventies, with the establishment of the Islamic republic, it turned into an “enemy.”

Conducting this study — of a country I had little direct knowledge about and of a country I grew up in — was both challenging and methodologically fascinating. When

researching and writing the Iran sections, I could recall many public debates, political propaganda messages and even personal conversations and other cultural elements relating to the events being investigated. My engagement with the events turned out to be relevant as I researched and wrote both the background and the analysis sections. It was easier for me to detect the media's overt generalizations and their omissions about the events — aspects that shaped their “framing” of Iran. In other words, for the case studies that addressed Hassan Rouhani of Iran, I was in the position of “knowing” the society having witnessed the impact of the events.

For China, I had to educate myself both about the political history between U.S.-China relations and to some extent about the cultural presence of United States in Chinese society. Some of this “learning” came from conversations with Chinese friends, but most of it I learned from English-language texts and social media posts by ordinary Chinese. However, none of these resources are presented as data in this research.

I have learned that there are advantages and disadvantages in both “knowing” and “learning” about research topics. For example, one advantage of having lived and experienced Iran as an Iranian citizen and a journalist was that I could detect some of the missing elements in the U.S. media's coverage of Iran. The examination of the coverage of Iran, however, also showed me how much I *didn't know* about the country I grew up in. Growing up in post-revolutionary Iran, many of the events that impacted U.S.-Iran relations are narrated differently than they are outside the country. For example, in Iranian school textbooks the hostage crisis is mostly framed as a heroic act. Thus, even though most of the people I have encountered during my life in Iran viewed the event as a “mistake,” Iran's official narrative about the crisis is different than the “Western” sources

that informed the Iranian history section of this dissertation. In Iran, for example, the American embassy is called the “House of Espionage” and hardliner Iranians and even many moderates and liberals truly believe that the Shah and his U.S.-backed regime extorted ordinary Iranians on many accounts. But reading and talking about Iran during the eight years that I have been in the U.S., I have realized that for Americans, the hostage crisis itself was the pivotal traumatizing event in the relationship.

Other events and issues are distinctly seen by the people in the two countries: the Islamic Republic’s support of Hamas or Hezbollah, these groups are commonly portrayed by the IRI as selfless heroes who are fighting for the rights of the Palestinian and other suppressed Muslims. Since 1997, the U.S. State Department has characterized both groups as terrorists.²²⁶ The distinctions can go on and on. Most prominently today, the Syrian Civil War that started in 2011 is viewed differently. According to the U.S. narrative, Iranian fighters are dying to defend the regime of Bashar Al-Assad, a man who has used chemical weapons against his own people. But the official Iranian narrative regards the fighters as heroes who are defending a highly revered holy site in the Shia religion (Sayyideh Ruqayya Mosque),²²⁷ stopping ISIS or Daesh from killing more innocent people, and halting the so-called Islamic States penetration into Iran’s borders.²²⁸

I believe acknowledging different narratives in history is essential when conducting research about countries with problematic histories. When writing the history sections for this dissertation, therefore, I deliberately decided to focus on books and articles that were written by Western authors or by Iranians who were not writing with the repercussions of the Islamic Republic in mind. In retrospect, however, perhaps my

including some of the “official IRI” narratives would have provided a more complete view of the misunderstandings between Iran and the U.S.

I have learned in researching and writing this dissertation that “knowing” a country does not mean that the researcher has complete knowledge about all aspects of society.²²⁹ As a liberal Iranian, I have mostly kept the company of likeminded people and have exposed myself to media messages that agree with my point of view. While it is true that curiosity and my job as a journalist have allowed me to see well beyond my inner circle (granted, as an observer and not a scholar), I can by no means make the claim that I fully and completely understand all aspects of Iranian society.

I have had to consider my personal biases when writing this dissertation. As a trained journalist, I was taught the value of objectivity, and I have tried to maintain that value in my news reports, however impossible a task. Similarly, researchers are also expected to be objective. But in their valuable book *Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckman point out that even when applying the most scientific methods in media research, scholars cannot produce totally objective results.²³⁰ Berger and Luckman assert that because media texts are open to interpretations, it is impossible for researchers to be completely objective in their assessments of those texts.

Researchers concerned with Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) and feminism research have addressed this issue in depth, noting both the advantages and blind spots of when researchers are close to a subject.²³¹ Scholars such as Donna Haraway have written extensively on objectivity in feminism research, observing that the “other” in terms of gender has notably different characteristics in comparison to the “other” as an immigrant, enemy or foreigner. Many of the concerns mentioned by feminists about objectivity in

feminism research resonate with my situation as a scholar working on Iran as one of my case studies. Most interestingly for me, feminist scholars such as Haraway, and others such as Shulamit Reinharz, refute the idea that being “outside” the research would add an impartial value to the research product. For Reinharz, objectivity of the researcher should not be defined as the “elimination of influence of the investigators’ personal features” but rather by acknowledging their “influence” in the research.²³² Thus, such scholars refute the idea that researchers who resonate closely with an “other” cannot be objective about their research — as long as the influence of that “otherness” is clear in the research.

As an immigrant, an Iranian, and a Muslim (born into the Shia branch of Islam) I regard myself as an “other” in American society. That said, as a liberal, non-religious women, I see myself as an “other” in the Iranian society as well. I believe that in any research I conduct on issues pertaining to Iran and the U.S. (both societies that I have lived in) these elements of otherness will have a presence in my work.

3.3 The Methods of this Dissertation

According to Zhou and Sloan, case studies provide a detailed description of any given topic and offer problem-solving perspectives and insights into a broad(er) situation. Consequently, by relying on inductive reasoning and observation of details, case studies help researchers gain insights about their topics.²³³

Case studies allow researchers to gain “deep insights” into specific issues in part because they permit the consideration of descriptive and explanatory data. However, researching/creating case studies is time consuming and can prevent researchers from generalizing the results of their research; thus the reliability of the results is an issue to

consider. As mentioned in the literature review section, there have been previous limited studies focused on how leaders from countries with unique relations to the U.S. have been covered. In the wake of various controversies such as the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989 or the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979, a flurry of studies appeared discussing how Iran and China as countries were covered in Western media.²³⁴ However, there have been few studies focusing on the media portrayal of the leaders of those countries and their policies. The leader of a nation is occasionally taken by media outside that nation to be a synecdoche for his or her country. Therefore, this method — analyzing the coverage of the leaders of China and Iran — can provide significant understanding of how these leaders and the countries they lead are portrayed in U.S. news media.

This dissertation selected case studies of events where the choice of events was governed by which events (issues, policies) first, generated the most stories about the leaders of China or Iran in the U.S. news media, and second, had great domestic and international impact and importance for the countries of interest (the U.S., China and Iran). For Xi Jinping, this dissertation evaluated the coverage of his anti-corruption campaign (2012-present) and the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement (September 2014). For Hassan Rouhani and the Iranian government, this dissertation evaluated the coverage of Rouhani's phone call with President Barack Obama at the time of his speech at the United Nations (September 2015) and the signing of the Iran nuclear deal in (April 2015).

This dissertation reviewed news reports written by professional journalists, editorials and opinion pieces. The news reports were the background of the analysis, but the editorials and opinion pieces were of special interest. Editorials have long been a subject of interest for media scholars. As Richardson and Lencendorfer state, editorial

writers are not restrained by journalistic norms and can write bluntly, stating exactly what they think. Thus they are valuable resources when considering a news medium's political tone or stance on any given issue:

The opinion page is just that—a place where editors can bluntly state exactly what they think. Smaller newspapers can produce editorials inexpensively, even when constrained to fill the news hole with wire content. Analyzing editorials can elucidate a less constrained media discourse that includes a broader segment of American society.²³⁵

Van Dijk has asserted that the idea in Western news ideology that opinion should not interfere with news reports provides a misguided assumption that the descriptions of news events are “value-free.”²³⁶ Van Dijk made that observation, even though he believed the selection of news or the focus on specific elements of a story “signal” the context of news production and the opinion and beliefs of journalist. However, Van Dijk argued it was still important to differentiate between news stories and opinion pieces. News stories, he pointed out, usually contain no explicit opinions of the journalists. Background features, which have also been analyzed in this dissertation’s research, provide historical and background information of a specific news event. In editorials, opinions are explicit and formulated from the authors’ points of view. It has been often noted by media scholars that editorials are designed to assist the opinion formation of the reader about news events.²³⁷

However, Van Dijk’s assessment is that editorials reflect the point of view of the news mediums and their editors, but in the case studies examined in this research that has not always been the case. In some instances, the papers studied here have chosen to

publish editorials from policy makers or analysts that do not necessarily agree with the paper's general line of thought on a specific issue. To this end, looking at opinion pieces written by the Editorial Board of a paper helps shed some light on an outlet's approach on a policy or country. Thus, their presence in this research becomes exceptionally important.²³⁸

In the case of foreign affairs reporting, the opinion pieces that are included in the news media often reflect contrary views to the paper's editorial board and to other opinion pieces. It provides a form of balance in the papers Op-ed page to include various standpoints. In the cases studied here, in the coverage of the Iran nuclear deal outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* all included opinion pieces from contributors with different viewpoints from the paper's stance on the issue as well as from one another.

Qualitative approach seems well-suited for exploring the U.S. news media treatment of foreign leaders. A qualitative approach allows the analysis of complex language and terms used in the coverage. The dissertation employs content analysis to analyze the frames used in the coverage of Iranian and Chinese leaders.

3.3.1 Content Analysis

In the field of media studies research, content analysis has been the fastest growing technique in the past 20 years. Reese and Shoemaker have cited Laswell's well known statement — “Who says what, through which channel, to whom, with what effect” — as an effective definition of what content analysis is all about.²³⁹ Weber has defined content analysis “as a research method that uses a set of procedures to make a valid inference from text.”²⁴⁰ Scholars such as Riffe and Freitag have noted that

content analysis has been used to study a broad range of media “texts,” including TV programs, narrative and other forms of films, the editorial as well as the advertising content in newspapers and magazines, and even interview transcripts.²⁴¹

Initially, Harold Laswell introduced this technique as a systematic method to study propaganda in the late 1920s.²⁴² Then, with the advent of television in 1950s, content analysis grew rapidly as a methodology in media research, as academics and others turned to examine violence, racism and gender in television programming. Today, content analysis as a methodology can be categorized into two main traditions: the behaviorist and the humanist tradition. The behaviorist tradition is most popular amongst social scientists, who are concerned with the effects of media messages. The humanist approach, by contrast, looks at “the media’s symbolic environment,” using psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology techniques to analyze how media content (television, radio, film, news) reveal truth about a society.²⁴³ In simpler terms, the behaviorist approach studies media effects and the humanist approach demonstrates the existing attitudes, perceptions and culture. This dissertation is mostly concerned with the latter; it aims to reflect existing attitudes and perception in U.S. news media about Chinese and Iranian leaders.

A.1.1 **Objects of Analysis**

The objects of analysis for all the case studies were news reports, feature stories; editorials and op-eds published within the selected timeframes, both collected/published through the LexisNexis database or discovered through the news outlets’ online search engines. The analysis did not analyze Letters to the Editor from readers or the more informal online comments from readers.

Note: Specific details about this dissertation's content analysis are included in the appendices section of this research:

- Detailed explanation on the selected news outlets, keywords and data collection, and the utilization of content analysis software (MAXQDA) can be found in Appendix A.
- Details of the content analysis structure, definitions, and typologies, including frequency of coverage and code sheets for the study of the coverage of Xi Jinping can be found in Appendix B.
- Charts representing the findings of the content analysis on the coverage of Xi Jinping case studies can be found in Appendix C.
- Details of the content analysis structure, definitions, and typologies, including frequency of coverage and code sheets for the coverage of Hassan Rouhani and the Iranian leadership can be found in Appendix D.
- Charts representing the findings on Iran can be found in Appendix E.

A.1.2 **Codebook**

A separate coding sheet was designed for the study of Iranian and Chinese leaders (See table 3 Appendix B for China and Table 6 in Appendix D for Iran). To create each coding sheet, I performed an initial analysis with the research questions in mind: I first analyzed roughly fifty articles from each outlet to get an anecdotal impression of what words, frames, sources, etc. emerged from the coverage and to understand the general tone of the coverage. The more stories that were examined, the more evident it became that specific words and themes were being repeated in the coverage, an observation that

led to conclusions about the “framing” of the leaders.

As mentioned in the literature review, researchers must consider in their assessments of the credibility and bias of foreign affairs reporting, which sources journalists quote.²⁴⁴ In my analysis I paid attention to the professional affiliation, the job title and the reputation of sources cited in stories on Iran or China. While such an assessment is time consuming, researchers of foreign news reporting need to familiarize themselves with the sources cited in news reports about different countries. For example, in the case of Iran, U.S. journalists often quoted expert sources from think tanks, many of which are considered to have liberal or conservative perspectives on international affairs (e.g: Ray Takeyh, who is CFR’s senior Iran analyst, Trita Parsi, founder of NIAC etc.). In the case of stories on China, by contrast, U.S. reporters most often quoted human rights activists, who bring their own interests into their commentary, and China scholars, such as Minxin Pei. It is fair to say that a key part of my research entailed investigating the background and reputation of sources who appeared frequently in the coverage.

3.4 The Coverage of Xi Jinping in U.S. News Media

To examine media coverage of Xi Jinping, the dissertation uses two case studies: the anti-corruption campaign initiated by Xi to fight graft in China; and Xi’s response to the 2014 pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong, known as the Umbrella Movement or Umbrella Revolution. What follows is a description of the timeframes and research questions for each case

3.4.1 Case Study 1: Anti-Corruption Campaign

The first China case study focuses on President Xi's anti-corruption campaign launched in 2012, when Xi Jinping introduced his plan to fight graft in China. (Note: A detailed description of the campaign is provided in the results section of this dissertation.) The study looked at two separate timeframes in relation to Xi and the anti-corruption campaign. The first timeframe focused on Xi's initial months as the president of China: from March 2013 to May 2013.²⁴⁵ Examining this period allowed me to see how American journalists and analysts interpreted Xi and his initial policies.

The second timeframe focused on the fourth quarter of 2014 (from October to December). China watchers and journalists know this phase as a significant period of President Xi's fight against graft. According to the website *The China File*, 1239 officials were arrested during this period (the numbers are a bit tentative), and more than 3 billion Yuan were embezzled or misused by the accused officials.²⁴⁶

Articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were downloaded using the LexisNexis data base. *The Wall Street Journal* was downloaded using the ProQuest database. For *The New Yorker*, *Politico*, *Foreign Policy*, *Huffington Post* and the *Daily Beast*, the desired stories were collected using their websites. For those articles collected via LexisNexis and ProQuest (*The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*), keywords such as: (Xi and corrupt! or graft or bribe!) and (China or Chinese and corrupt! or graft or bribe!) were used. For the outlets *The New Yorker* and *Foreign Policy* that have an archival database (upon subscription), I used keywords such as (Xi and corruption) and (Xi and graft).

Unfortunately, online native outlets such as *Huffington Post* and *Daily Beast* do not have archival search engines that can search via keywords or date ranges. Thus, for these outlets, I used words such as Xi, corruption, and the names of the high-level Chinese officials accused of corruption (see table 1 in Appendix B). Using the MaxQDA software, which is designed for qualitative and quantitative analysis I coded a total of 392 articles for both timeframes (210 stories for 2013 and 182 articles for 2014).

When terms were counted to determine how many times a specific word is used, they were only counted once per paragraph. For example, if Xi was labeled an “authoritative leader” twice in a paragraph, it was only counted once. But if that description was used more than once in an entire news report or op-ed, I counted it more than once. I avoided counting an adjective about a leader twice in a paragraph because often journalists were explaining their use – or their source’s use of the term and not necessarily using the adjective multiple times in one paragraph.

A.1.1 **Research Questions for Anti-Corruption Campaign Case Study**

RQ1: How was Xi Jinping described in the coverage of the anti-corruption campaign in U.S. news media? What terms were used to describe his style of leadership? Personality?

RQ2: What terms were used to describe Xi’s policy of fighting corruption in China? What were the main motives seen by American journalists and analysis in comparison to those officially announced by China?

RQ3: What types of sources were used by American news media when reporting about Xi and the anti-corruption campaign?

RQ4: What other main issues about China or Xi were included in the coverage of Xi Jinping and the anti-corruption campaign?

3.4.2 Case Study 2: The Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong

The second case study chosen to examine the coverage of Xi Jinping was the pro-democracy movement's protests in Hong Kong. The dissertation examined the entire period of the unrest: September 28 to December 30, 2014. The same process of data collection for the anti-corruption campaign was used for the Umbrella movement case study. Stories from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were collected from the LexisNexis database.

Keywords such as (Xi and Hong Kong!) or (Xi and protest! and Hong Kong and Umbrella) were used to retrieve articles for these outlets. Again, for the online native outlets I only used Umbrella Movement. Roughly 200 stories across all outlets were analyzed for this portion of the research. For other news outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Politico*, *The New Yorker*, *Huffington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, keywords such as (Xi and Hong Kong) or (Xi) and (protest/Hong Kong protesters), (Hong Kong and Umbrella) and (Umbrella) were used. For example, if I searched for Protest or Protesters, I would also re-check my results using the keyword: Umbrella/Umbrella Movement. One hundred and eighty-two stories (across all outlets) were analyzed for this portion of the research (Appendix B table 2).

A.1.1 Research Questions for the Umbrella Movement

RQ1: How have the American news media covered Xi in news reports and op-ed pieces focusing on the Umbrella Movement?

RQ2: What major frames/themes emerged in stories considering the Umbrella Movement?

RQ3: What were the main sources used in the coverage of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong?

RQ4: What other main issues about China or Xi were included in the coverage of Xi Jinping and the Umbrella Movement?

3.4.3 Coding Schema

Most of the categories defined below as codes were used in both case studies studying China. Those categories that were unique to each case are specified below.

A.1.1 Description of Xi Jinping

To assess the first research question in both case studies, any reference to Xi and his personality, character, style of rule was noted under this category. This category also included the description of Xi's inner circle as a subcode.

A.1.2 Description of the Anti-Corruption campaign

To address RQ2 for the anti-corruption campaign, I identified specific adjectives and themes describing the campaign; and collected them, for example, under such subcategories as "description of" or "motives behind the campaign." For "description of arrested politicians," the dissertation looked at what kind of words and adjectives were used to describe those who were arrested because of Xi's anti-corruption campaign.

The "motive behind the campaign" subcategory identified what kinds of reasons were given by the U.S. news media to explain Xi's the anti-corruption campaign.

A.1.3 Issues with Xi and China

To address RQ 4, within the content analysis for both case studies I identified the

major issues journalists, analysts, and politicians raised about China and noted whether there were any differences in these views. Thus this dissertation coded the media coverage of such issues as “human rights,” “press freedom,” “China’s regional power,” “China’s relations with other adversaries,” “currency manipulation.” On human rights, this dissertation coded coverage of such topics as the treatment of dissidents, religious freedom, historical references to the Tiananmen Square Massacre, etc.

For China’s regional-power category I identified mentions of China’s growing regional power under Xi Jinping. In the “China’s relations with other adversaries” category, Xi and the Chinese government’s relations with countries such as Russia, Iran and North Korea were identified.

A.1.4 Sourcing Specific to the Coverage of Xi Jinping

To assess the sources used in the coverage of Xi and the third research question mentioned in both cases, sourcing quotes and other attributions were coded for each article. Again, attributions were important here because, in the instances where Xi was noted as a source, he was actually quoted from a speech he might have given. Neither Xi nor anyone from his inner circle grants interviews to foreign news media. Thus, some Chinese officials were quoted through their speeches or interviews they had given on Chinese state media, but were identified as sources here. Based on previous studies mentioned in the literature review section, sourcing is an important tool to understand foreign news and foreign policy reporting. Issues such as reliance on official sources and diversity of sources were examined.

Some of the sources used in the coding are as follows:

- Xi Jinping

- Named Chinese officials
- Unnamed officials (Chinese)
- Unnamed officials (American)
- Named U.S. officials
- Unnamed officials
- Pro-Xi sources (such as analysts, officials, people who support Xi and his policies)
- Dissident voices (quotes and comments from those opposing Xi and the Chinese government)
- Chinese people (more neutral sources)
- World leaders (former and current)
- Protesters (Umbrella Movement)
- Chinese state media
- Chinese social media
- Accused Chinese officials (anti-corruption campaign)

Note: As explained earlier, I made a point to distinguish between credible and non-credible sources in the research. For instances where sources were deemed as non-credible, which I determined by doing initial research on the sources, I made a note of the number of problematic sources used in the coverage. But since the number turned out out to be low, I ultimately did not include that data in the summary of the research.

3.5 The Coverage of Iranian Leaders in U.S. News Media

To analyze the U.S. news media's coverage of Iranian leaders, this dissertation investigated the coverage of two recent events — both considered to be pivotal shifts in the relations between the two countries:

- The President Barack Obama and President Hassan Rouhani phone call that occurred on September 28, 2013.
- The Iran nuclear deal signed between Iran and P5+1 countries on July 14, 2015.

This dissertation evaluated the coverage of these events through an investigation of the reporting carried out by multiple U.S. news newspapers; *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*; and several news magazines, including *Foreign Policy*, *The New Yorker* and *Politico*. *The Los Angeles Times* was included among the outlets investigated in order to evaluate whether the large Iranian expat community in California might have played a role in the overall coverage.

The dissertation excludes an in-depth analysis of coverage of these events by the *Daily Beast* and the *Huffington Post*. An initial review of the coverage of these outlets (about 50 articles) revealed that their coverage of Iran depended heavily on news agencies such as *Reuters* and the *Associated Press*. Thus, the dissertation could not detect any framing patterns authentic to *The Daily Beast* or the *Huffington Post*. As in the chapter on U.S. media coverage of China, this dissertation's content analysis of these U.S.-Iran events was informed by the literature on framing analysis — especially in

regards to framing studies of foreign news coverage — and the literature on agenda setting theory.²⁴⁷ (See the literature review section in this dissertation.)²⁴⁸

3.5.1 Case Study 1: Barack Obama-Hassan Rouhani Historic Phone Call

This dissertation investigated the media coverage of the Obama-Rouhani phone call across a two-month timeframe, from September 1 to October 30, 2013. This timeframe allowed both for the inclusion of the actual day of the phone call (Sept 28, 2013), as well as for the weeks following it. The time frame also included coverage of the resumption of nuclear talks (October 15-16, 2013) between Iran and the P5 +1 countries. For this case study, keywords such as (Rouhani and Phone Call) or (Rouhani and Obama and relations!) were retrieved from LexisNexis. For those outlets that were not archived by LexisNexis, I used their own search engines searching for terms such as (Obama – Rouhani phone call).

3.5.2 Case Study 2: The Iran Nuclear Deal

This dissertation investigated media coverage of the Iran nuclear talks across three months of the summer 2015, from June 1 to August 31, 2015. Iran and the P5+1 countries reached a nuclear agreement on July 14, 2015. Hence, this timeframe encapsulates the actual date of the agreement as well as the media coverage of the talks in the month and a half before and after the signing of the deal. Keywords such as (Rouhani and Deal!) or (Iran Nuclear Deal and Hassan Rouhani) or (Hassan Rouhani) were used.

A total of 241 news reports, editorials, opinion pieces were analyzed over the two months of the “phone call” coverage, and 329 news stories, editorials, and opinion pieces were examined during the span of the “nuclear talks” (see tables 5&6 in Appendix D).

3.5.3 Research Questions for Case Studies on Iran

For both cases on the coverage of Iranian leaders the same set of research questions were used. To address the issue of research transparency, it is important to note that the author of this dissertation is Iranian and lived in the U.S. during the timespan of the events under investigation.

This circumstance introduced acute research sensitivity to the data collection and analysis of the Iran coverage that has no parallel in the data collection and analysis of the media coverage of events in China.²⁴⁹ Having witnessed the reactions of the Obama-Rouhani phone call and reactions to the finalization of the nuclear deal, while considering the topic of this research, helped the author articulate the research questions presented below:

RQ1: In the coverage of the Iran cases, how did the American news media present the Iranian government? Were clear distinctions drawn between the different actors in power? If so, according to the U.S. news media who had the upper hand in the power distribution in Iran?

RQ2: How were Ali Khamenei and Hassan Rouhani framed in these stories related to Iran? Was there a difference between their portrayals in the two cases?

RQ3: What were the key problematic issues identified by the journalists' sources: by the analysts they interviewed and by the political figures they quoted? Was there a distinction between what each group viewed as problematic?

RQ4: What were the main sources used by journalists in each case?

RQ5: Were the news outlets in consensus — positive or negative — about the meaning of events (for Iran, for the U.S.) in each case? How did they differ (if they did) in their tone about Iran?

3.5.4 Description of the Iranian Government

To assess RQ1, the description of the Iranian government in U.S. media, the content analysis identified instances where news reports “defined” the Iranian government. Any adjective used to describe the Iranian government was listed under this category. But, there was a problem, as anyone familiar with Iranian politics would understand: this is a very broad category. Thus, to be more specific, this category had two subcategories: (a): description of the hardliner branch and (b): description of the moderate branch. Generally, U.S. media and U.S. politicians have different ways of talking about the Iranian government. The hardliner sector was (and is) particularly defined in negative terms; words such as “regime” are usually used when the news media were discussing the more conservative sector of Iranian politics. But for moderates, less harsh words and in some cases even positive adjectives were used.

A.1.1 Description of Ali Khamenei and Hassan Rouhani

To examine the second research question, the content analysis noted the adjectives and themes used to define the two Iranian leaders, Rouhani and Khamenei.

Interestingly, general definitions about Iranian politics used two simple categories, “hardliner” and “moderate,” to describe individuals or groups within the Iranian government. An initial analysis of the data also revealed that U.S. news outlets understood that to fully describe Rouhani and the extent of his authority in the government, they had to describe his boss, Iran’s supreme leader: Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Thus, articles coded “description of Rouhani” or “description of Khamenei” described these men using specific adjectives and themes discussed in the results section.

3.5.5 Issues with Iran

To assess RQ3, the content analysis identified any topics that U.S. journalists found notable about the Iranian government or society. This category was important because the issues gave some insight into how Iranian leaders position themselves on various topics. Articles coded “issues with Iran” contained a variety of subjects such as: “trustworthiness,” “human rights,” “regional influence,” “military capabilities,” “freedom of the press,” “anti-Americanism,” “religious freedoms,” etc. The aim here was to investigate which of these issues with Iran was most concerning to U.S. journalists, analysts, and their sources and also to see whether there were any discrepancies between what the various news outlets found problematic about Iran. A second-stage observation was also recording when certain language would appear. When examining the language employed, I would also note who was making the statement. For example, if “human rights” came up in the coding I would further code the words “J: for journalist” or “A: for analyst” depending on whether a journalist or op-ed writer had written the piece. In terms

of sources, I would use “SPo: Source/ Politician,” “SA: Source Analyst,” “SP: Source /People,” and so on.

In some cases the position of the Iranian people towards some of these topics (words used) was also a part of the coverage. For example, a story talking about Khamenei’s stance on human rights would almost inevitably mention the views of his opponents (or proponents) as well, therefore such articles typically gave insights into the relative popularity of the leader or spoke about the leader’s loss of touch with the people. In rare cases when the American public would be part of the story, I would make a note about whether “the public” was Iranian or American. However, the American public didn’t appear often enough in the data for the dissertation to view that public as a separate category.

For the “trustworthiness” category, issues such as “mutual trust” and the trustworthiness of Iran’s leaders were identified. This category of “trust” was especially relevant in the nuclear case study because Iran was entering into a negotiated agreement with world powers, and, as in any “deal,” trust is a critical concomitant to being able to “close the deal.” For the “human rights” category, any article that mentioned the word “human rights” and adjectives describing Iran’s record in human rights were noted.

The “regional influence” category specifically looked at articles that discussed Iran’s regional policies and how Rouhani or Khamenei were positioned on those issues. For the “freedom of the press” category any article pertaining to the issue of press freedom in Iran was noted. On “religious freedom” any article looking at religious minorities and Rouhani and Khamenei’s position on the issue was noted. For example, the coverage mentioned Rouhani’s 2015 tweet on Rosh Hashanah, where he wrote about

“shared Abrahamic roots, “peace,” and “mutual understanding.”²⁵⁰

3.5.6 Tone of Coverage

To address the fifth research question the overall tone of the articles were assessed to see whether their tone was positive or negative when discussing Rouhani, Iranian leaders, and the future of relations. Thus, adjectives and words with positive connotations were coded as positive. For example, if an article stated that the signing of the nuclear deal was “a promising sign” that article would be coded as positive. If an article took a doubtful or negative tone about any of the mentioned subjects, that article would be coded as negative/skeptical.

The next chapter discusses the results found by the dissertation when using these categories and content analysis to examine the coverage of Xi Jinping and Iranian leaders in U.S. news media.

3.5.7 Sourcing Specific to the Coverage of the Iranian Leadership

RQ4 inquires about sources used by journalists in each of the case studies about the Iranian leadership. Under this category the sourcing quotes and other attributions were coded for each article. Attributions are important here because, in the instances where Khamenei was noted as a source he was actually quoted; the supreme leader does not grant interviews. Thus some Iranian officials were quoted through their speeches or sermons, but were identified as sources here. Based on previous studies mentioned in the literature review section, sourcing is an important tool to understand foreign news and foreign policy reporting. Issues such as reliance on official sources and diversity of sources were examined. Some of the sources used in the coding were as follows:

- Rouhani
- Khamenei
- Rouhani government (except for Javad Zarif — meaning his ministers, advisors, etc.)
- Mohammad Javad Zarif
- John Kerry
- Iranian state media
- Iranian opposition/diaspora source
- Iranian public
- Hardliner officials
- Unnamed Iranian officials
- President Obama
- Obama administration officials
- U.S. Congress member (D: Democrat and R: Republican)
- U.S. public
- U.S. news media
- European officials (leader of European countries and parliament or similar members were both coded under this category)
- Expert as analyst
- Netanyahu and Israeli officials: Israeli prime minister was often mentioned and quoted in the coverage, thus he was noted under this sourcing category. Israeli officials were also noted; they were mostly unnamed and mentioned as “Israeli officials.”

Notes

²²¹ Gallup, Inc. "US Position in the World." *Gallup.com.*, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116350/position-world.aspx>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

²²² Gallup, Inc. "Four Nations Top U.S's Greatest Enemy List." *Gallup.com*, 22 Feb. 2016, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/189503/four-nations-top-greatest-enemy-list.aspx>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

²²³ Xinbo, Wu. "Forging Sino-US Partnership in the Twenty-First Century: opportunities and challenges." *Journal of Contemporary China* 21.75 (2012): 391-407.

²²⁴ "Iran Travel Warning." U.S. Department of State. *U.S. Department of State*, 22 Aug. 2016. <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings/iran-travel-warning.html>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

²²⁵ Note that Xi JinPing is currently (May 2017) General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, President of the People's Republic of China and Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

²²⁶ "Foreign Terrorist Organizations." *U.S. Department of State*. n.d. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

²²⁷ While I recognize that protecting the mosque, might be a cover for Iran to gain more influence in the region. The government calls the fighters as "protectors of the Mosque." But its important to note that the mosque has a special importance for religious Iranians. It's the resting place for the Prophet Mohammad's grandchild, who was accompanying her brother, the highly revered Imam Hossein, during the Battle Karbala (680 , AD) that lead to the death of her brothers and many others . Sukayaneh dies in Yazid's prison at the age of four, and has become the symbol of injustice against the Shia faith. Before the civil war in Syria, flocks of Iranians would visit the site every year.

²²⁸ Pinto, Paulo G. "'Oh Syria, God Protects You': Islam as Cultural Idiom under Bashar al-Asad." *Middle East Critique* 20.2 (2011): 189-205.

²²⁹ Feminism literature helped me greatly in articulating this issue. For more on the researcher see Harding, Sandra G., ed. *Feminism and methodology: Social science issues*. Indiana University Press, 1987. Also: Agozino, Biko. "Methodological issues in feminist research." *Quality & quantity* 29.3 (1995): 287-

298. Acker, Joan, Kate Barry, and Joke Esseveld. "Objectivity and truth: Problems in doing feminist research." *Women's Studies International Forum*. Vol. 6. No. 4. Pergamon, 1983.

²³⁰ Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. No. 10. Penguin UK, 1991

²³¹ Altheide, David L. "Reflections: Ethnographic content analysis." *Qualitative Sociology* 10.1 (1987): 65-77.

²³² Reinhartz, Shulamit, et al. "Methodological Issues in Feminist Research: A Bibliography of Literature in Women's Studies, Sociology and Psychology." *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1983, pp. 437-454.

²³³ Zhou, Shushua, and William David Sloan, editors. *Research Methods in Communication*. 2nd ed., Northport, Al, Vision Press, 2015.

²³⁴ For more on studies about the coverage of the Iran Hostage Crisis see : Said, Edward W. *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world (Fully revised edition)*. Random House, 2008. Also see: Nacos, Brigitte Lebens. *Terrorism and the media: From the Iran hostage crisis to the World Trade Center bombing*. Columbia University Press, 1996. Kamalipour, Yahya R., ed. *The US media and the Middle East: Image and perception*. No. 46. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997. For more on television coverage of foreign affairs see: Larson, James F. "Television and US foreign policy: The case of the Iran hostage crisis." *Journal of Communication* 36.4 (1986): 108-130. Also see : Meeske, Milan D., and Mohamad Hamid Javaheri. "Network television coverage of the Iranian hostage crisis." (1982): 641-645. For the impact of ideology on news see :Altheide, David L. "Impact of format and ideology on TV news coverage of Iran." *Journalism Quarterly* 62.2 (1985): 346-351.

²³⁵ Richardson, John D., and Karen M. Lancendorfer. "Framing affirmative action: The influence of race on newspaper editorial responses to the University of Michigan cases." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 9.4 (2004): 74-94.

²³⁶ Van Dijk, Teun A. "Handbook of discourse analysis." *Discourse and dialogue*. 1985. Also see: ---. "Discourse, opinions and ideologies." *Current Issues in Language & Society* 2.2 (1995): 115-145.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Van Dijk, Teun A. *News analysis: Case Studies of International and National News in the Press*. Routledge, 2013.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Weber, Robert Philip. *Basic Content Analysis*. No. 49. Sage, 1990.

²⁴¹ Riffe, Daniel, and Alan Freitag. "A content analysis of content analyses: Twenty-five years of Journalism Quarterly." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 74.3 (1997): 515-524.

²⁴² Lasswell, Harold Dwight. *Politics: Who gets what, When, How*. New York: P. Smith, 1950.

Also see: Lasswell, Harold D. "The structure and function of communication in society." *New York* (1948).

²⁴³ Tankard, James W. "The empirical approach to the study of media framing." *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world* (2001): 95-106.

²⁴⁴ Van Dijk, Teun A. *News analysis: Case studies of international and national news in the press*. Routledge, 2013. Entman, Robert M. "Symposium framing US coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran air incidents." *Journal of communication* 41.4 (1991): 6-27.

²⁴⁵ March /01/2013- May/31/2013, Xi was formally sworn in on March 12. But I conducted my research from the first day of March to collect any possible background articles that might have been published in anticipation of his inauguration.

²⁴⁶ "Visualizing China's Anti-Corruption Campaign." *ChinaFile*. N.p., 21 Feb. 2017
<http://www.chinafile.com/infographics/visualizing-chinas-anti-corruption-campaign>

²⁴⁷ Iyengar, Shanto. *Is Anyone Responsible? : How Television Frames Political Issues*. American Politics and Political Economy Series. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

²⁴⁸ Entman, Robert M. *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.s. Foreign Policy. Studies in Communication, Media, and Public Opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

²⁴⁹ While it is beyond the purview of this dissertation, the author noted, as mentioned above, that a long-standing familiarity with Iran aided the author articulate the research questions; she did also note, however, that having less familiarity with China brought its own advantages: "fresh" eyes.

²⁵⁰ Rouhani, Hassan. "May Our Shared Abrahamic Roots Deepen Respect & Bring Peace & Mutual Understanding. L'Shanah Tovah. #RoshHashanah Pic.twitter.com/UheJPrjuVx." *Twitter*. N.p., 13 Sept. 2015. Hassan Rouhani <https://twitter.com/hassanrouhani/status/643067027389837312?lang=en>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

Chapter 4: China: History and Results

4.1 History of U.S. –China Relations

The history of U.S.-China relations is an enormous subject to tackle. The first encounters date back to the late 1700s, when the first American cargo ship landed in Gaungzahou carrying silver and American ginseng to trade for tea. According to historian John Pomfret, American and Chinese people have been “enchanting and disappointing” each other since the day they met in 1784.²⁵¹

Official U.S.-China relations date back to the mid-1800s, with the signing of the Wanghia treaty between the United States and the Qing-dynasty; the Treaty was mostly designed to curb British involvement in China. Through the agreement the United States was granted most favored nation status in trade.

After a few decades of sound economic relations, internal turmoil in China led to the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. Resentment towards the U.S. as a foreign exploiter had already built up in China after the U.S. had assisted Britain and other European nations during the Boxer Rebellion, from 1899 to 1901. Most observers date the current Sino-American tensions to the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, by Mao Zedong. For 23 years relations between Communist China and the United States were non-existent, until 1972 when after a series of clandestine meetings President Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong reestablished relations with the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué.

The story of the early 1970s rapprochement between Beijing and Washington is nothing less than a Cold War thriller, replete with secret trips, foreign leaders providing cover for American dignitaries, internal fighting in Nixon’s White House and backroom dealings. Yet the decades following the reestablishment of relations between China and the U.S. have also been

eventful. Since the Carter Doctrine years, which highlighted human rights as a key component of American foreign policy — a shift in U.S.’ priorities that coincided with growth of China as an economic superpower — U.S. presidents have struggled with how to balance trade and political relations with China.

This chapter aims to briefly explain the history of U.S.-China relations from the Nixon’s rapprochement era in 1972 to the end of Barack Obama’s presidency in 2017. Across this 45-year period, the two countries signed treaties, brokered deals, and stumbled through times of tense disagreements. This dissertation, however, only addresses those events and issues needed to provide background context to the relations between the two nations following the rise to power of Xi Jinping.

4.1.1 Nixon’s Opening of China

There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation.

- Richard Nixon

The year 1972 was an election year in America. Even though President Richard Nixon was bogged down with international crises, including the end of the Vietnam War, and domestic issues such as the Watergate scandal and a shaky economy, he managed to win the election by a landslide against George McGovern’s, the weak Democratic rival. Many analysts attribute Nixon’s win to his achievements in foreign policy.²⁵² As observed by scholars such as James Mann, Nixon’s foreign policies — especially vis-à-vis the Communist bloc countries —

challenged traditional Republican orthodoxy. By so doing, Nixon managed to draw votes from independent and moderate voters.²⁵³

While a member of Congress, again as vice president, and yet again as first a presidential candidate and then as president, Nixon had reliably taken a tough stance against Communism. That being said, Nixon became the first U.S. president to visit Moscow and China. In May of 1972 he visited Moscow and addressed the Russian people via television. In his speech he talked about the similarities of the two nations and the necessity of peace between the world's most dominant powers.

But however ground-breaking that trip was, the more pivotal overseas trip was earlier that year, when Nixon made a one-week visit to China. By his own characterization, that trip became known as the “week that changed world.”²⁵⁴

As William Bundy, former *Foreign Affairs* editor, observed, the Nixon presidency was the first administration voted into office by the post-war generation.²⁵⁵ His administration had to conduct foreign and domestic policy without the national consensus that had sustained past administrations since 1947.²⁵⁶ Thus, for the president and his team, aside from the significant foreign policy challenges, such as finding a solution to end the Vietnam War, the administration had to devote considerable attention to building public consensus behind its policies. Additionally, Nixon had assumed presidency at a time where nuclear capabilities were becoming a standard of supremacy in the international world order.

By the early 1970s, the threat of a country’s abilities to destroy an adversary and at the same time lose the ability to protect its own people became a possible reality. As former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger later noted, the world order at the time of Nixon’s reelection was shaped by the concept that super powers could “devastate one another.” Power had become

more “abstract,” “intangible,” and “elusive.”²⁵⁷ With these changes, Nixon was eager to adopt a more engaging approach to foreign policy. The first time he *publicly* advocated for change in U.S. relations with China was in his 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article titled “Asia after Vietnam.” In that piece, while acknowledging China’s role in the wars in Asia, Nixon wrote that the “world must come to grips with the reality of China.” He continued by arguing that China could become a “partner for stability,” if the world would “engage” China, and pull Beijing into the international world order. Nixon echoed this conciliatory tone even in his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention:

We believe this should be an era of peaceful competition, not only in the productivity of our factories but in the quality of our ideas. We extend the hand of friendship to all people, to the Russian people, to the Chinese people, to all the people in the world.²⁵⁸

For some of Nixon’s close advisors such as Kissinger, who ultimately became the mastermind behind the rapprochement to China, the idea to pursue the PRC seemed impossible at first. In fact, after Kissinger first heard of the President’s idea to establish relations with China, he told his top aide Alexander Haig that the President had “lost his mind” and had “taken a leave of reality.”²⁵⁹ Eventually, after a series of events involving the Vietnam War and the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations that drove the China and Russia close to a full-fledged war in 1969, the political environment became more suitable for Nixon and his team to approach the possibility of new relations with the PRC.²⁶⁰

In China, Mao Zedong, the Chinese leader, and Zhou Enlai, the premier, had their own reasons for considering the establishment of relations with the United States. The brutality of the Cultural Revolution had devastated the country’s economy and public morale. By 1969, the rift

in Sino-Soviet relations had moved from theoretical and ideological disagreements to a dangerously military sphere. These domestic and international realities prompted Mao to gradually warm up to the idea of better relations with Washington — especially after Moscow emerged as the greater threat to the existence of the PRC.²⁶¹ Also, aside from the possible threats from the Soviet Union another important motive to establish relations with the Nixon administration was Taiwan. For 20 years, the United States had protected Chiang Kai-Shek's government; Mao wanted Taiwan back; he hoped closer relations with Nixon could weaken the power structure on the island.²⁶²

A.1.1 Ping-Pong Diplomacy

Before rapprochement, both Mao and Nixon knew that the idea of normalized relations between China and the United States could result in heavy backlash from their opponents at home. Thus, both needed to ease their nations into accepting the idea of rapprochement. In April 1971, the World Table Tennis Championships provided Mao with the excuse he was looking for. In Japan, the Chinese ping pong team extended an invitation to their American counterparts, for an all-expense paid visit to the PRC. This was, as *The Washington Post* remembers: “the biggest story of 1971.”²⁶³

Zhou Enlai stunned the world when he announced that along with the American ping pong team, China would grant visas to foreign journalists to cover the historic event. *Time* magazine later called the ping pong match between the two nations as “the Ping Heard Round the World” and labeled the visit as “Ping pong diplomacy.”

Nixon and Kissinger saw Mao and Zhou’s clever move as a green light. One main reason for the U.S. side to take the friendly match as a sign was that the President’s eagerness to end the

war in Vietnam, especially with the 1972 presidential elections fast approaching. The Russians were showing no sign of wanting to help accelerate peace process and Nixon had stated to Kissinger, “China was the only other player with influence in Hanoi.”²⁶⁴

Changes in American and Chinese political attitudes towards each other emerged after months of secret exchanges facilitated by Pakistan. Eventually, in April 1971, Premier Zhou Enlai sent a handwritten message to the White House announcing China’s readiness to start negotiations on the possibility of re-establishing relations with the United States. However, the tone of Zhou’s letter was not as welcoming as Nixon and Kissinger had hoped. Even in those initial communications, Zhao made it clear that the most significant issue for China was the U.S.’s support of Taiwan. Zhao mentioned in his handwritten note that the PRC demanded the withdrawal of American armed forces from Taiwan as a condition for the talks.²⁶⁵ After months of meetings and strategizing, Kissinger left for China in July of 1971.²⁶⁶

Unsurprisingly, when Zhou and Kissinger sat down, Taiwan topped Zhou’s list of agenda items. He insisted that the United States must recognize the mainland’s historical claim to Taiwan and recognize the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China. Zhou also demanded that the U.S. must withdraw all its forces from Taiwan, and the PRC considered all past agreements between U.S. and Taiwan such as the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty “illegal.”²⁶⁷ At first, Kissinger stuck to the President’s orders about not going into too much detail about Taiwan, however, when pressed by Zhou, he said that once the Vietnam War ended, those forces in Taiwan would quickly depart. He also reiterated that the administration did not support “two Chinas” and noted that on this issue, the U.S. political evolution was in China’s favor. Zhou found Kissinger’s responses to be “hopeful.”²⁶⁸

Hearing the Premier's concerns about Taiwan, Kissinger quickly concluded that the only way he was going to get the Chinese to formally invite the U.S. President was to state the Nixon administration's support for a One China policy. Thus, according to internal memos recently unearthed and written about by various scholars and think tanks, without the go-ahead from Washington, Kissinger had firmly mentioned that "the United States is not advocating a two China solution or a One China one Taiwan solution." Despite the importance of this exchange, in his memorandums to the White House Kissinger had only mentioned the Taiwan issue briefly, and had mostly focused on Zhou's promising response that "the prospect for a solution and the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries is hopeful."²⁶⁹

On the issue of Indochina, Kissinger emphasized that if an agreement for ceasefire was not reached, the war could continue, even with changes in U.S.-China relations. Despite some pushbacks by Zhou, Kissinger insisted that the PRC join the U.S. in "reaching a settlement." Other issues such as U.S.-Japanese relations, Chinese distrust of the U.S. intentions, and of course the U.S.SR were also discussed. Most importantly, the logistics of Nixon's visit and the drafting of Kissinger's communiqué were negotiated. The Chinese wanted to make the communiqué sound as China was graciously inviting the American president and Kissinger wanted it to sound that the Chinese wanted the President to visit. Also, the Chinese wanted the communiqué to say the purpose of Kissinger's visit was the normalization of relations but Kissinger insisted that it be labeled in broader terms such as "beneficial to Asian and world peace."

After intense negotiations Kissinger finally sent a cable reading "Eureka" to the White House. Kissinger had spent close to seventeen hours in the negotiations and by the end of the talks Zhou had finally issued an invitation for a formal summit.

On July 15, 1972, the president appeared before the nation from the NBC studios in Burbank California. He explained that he was about to announce a “major development in our efforts to build lasting peace.” He said he had sent Dr. Kissinger to Peking for the purpose of having talks with Premier Zhou Enlai. He reminded the audience that over the past three years he (Nixon) had repeatedly said that there could be no lasting peace in the world without the participation of the PRC and its 750 million people. Nixon continued by reading the following statement that was being simultaneously read in Beijing:

Premier Zhou Enlai and Dr. Henry Kissinger, President Nixon’s Assistant for National Security affairs, held talks in Beijing from July 9 to 11, 1971. Knowing of President Nixon’s expressed desire to visit the Peoples Republic of China, Premier Zhou Enlai, on behalf of the government of Peoples Republic of China, has extended an invitation to President Nixon to visit China at an appropriate date before May 1972. President Nixon has accepted the invitation with pleasure. The meeting between China and the United States is to seek the normalization of relations.²⁷⁰

After the official statement, the president tried to indirectly assure other Asian allies such as Japan and Taiwan that the visit and these talks “will not be at the expense of our old friends” and the normalization of relations with China “is not directed at any other nation.” The president concluded by saying that “all nations can be our friend without being any other nation’s enemy.” He also stated his “profound belief” that “all nations would benefit from the reduction of tension between the United States and the Peoples Republic of China.” After this statement both Nixon and Kissinger had the daunting task of reining in pro-Taiwan conservatives such as then-governor Ronald Reagan and journalist William F. Buckley. The President knew that if he were to get backlash from anti-Communist U.S. conservatives, who until now had aligned themselves

with Nixon, handling the reactions to his China initiative would be a difficult task. In general, most conservatives and even Democrats supported Nixon's decision. Unsurprisingly, Taiwan and Japan were infuriated by Nixon's announcement and the secrecy of U.S.-China talks. Prime Minister Jiang Jieshi of Taiwan publicly denounced Nixon's decision and called it an "unfriendly act" that could have "serious consequences."²⁷¹

The Nixon administration started the year 1972 preparing for the President's historic visit to China. Now that Kissinger's visit was public, the press was fascinated by the prospective visit and about 250-300 journalists had signed up to join the President on his trip to China. Based on various studies on the Nixon White House tapes, the administration had advised all staff members to give few details about Nixon's trip to the press. Even the critics within the administration were steadfast on keeping the President's plans secret. Secretary of State Rogers, who was mostly kept in the dark about China, had warned that if any leaks were to occur about China's policy, perpetrators would be in "big trouble."

Thus, most of the talking about China and the President's upcoming visit came from Nixon himself. Often in interviews he was asked about the trip and what possible relations with China could mean for the Vietnam War, and what it would mean for future relations with Taiwan, and what the President's political motivations for launching the China initiative were. For example, in a New Year's Eve special interview with CBS' Dan Rather, Nixon assured Rather that Kissinger had made no deals with the Chinese about Taiwan, and that the recognition of the PRC would not mean that the U.S. did not recognize Taiwan and that the administration planned to uphold the 1954 treaty.²⁷²

In his State of the Union address that year, Nixon famously observed that he would travel to China and Russia "without any illusions." Nixon argued that he was keeping his inaugural

address promise of “opening the lines of communication with America’s top adversaries: Moscow and Beijing.”²⁷³

A.1.2 Nixon goes to China

Your handshake came over the vastest ocean in the world.

- Zhou Enlai

Nixon landed in Beijing on February 21, 1972. The Americans had helped schedule the plane arrival for 11:30 a.m. Beijing time, or 10:30 a.m. Eastern time in America, believing that time would be best for a maximum television audience, better lighting for TV cameras and more crowds able to be present to welcome the Americans. However, the Chinese had prevented any crowd gatherings in the airport or on the President’s path to his residence.

During the visit Kissinger sat down with Mao twice and had numerous meetings with Zhou Enlai. In his meeting with Mao the two leaders shook hands and posed for photos, Mao insisted that the discussion on the joint communiqué be discussed by Kissinger and Zhou Enlai; Mao himself mostly wanted to talk about philosophy, Taiwan, and the Soviet Union.

In his initial meetings with Zhou Enlai, Nixon conveyed the following agreements to Zhou:

1. The United States accepted the fact that “there is one China, and Taiwan is a part of China.”
2. The Nixon administration would not recognize Taiwan’s independence.
3. The United States would “discourage” Japan from recognizing Taiwan.

4. The United States wanted a peaceful solution to Taiwan and would not support any attempts by any Taiwanese attempt to take back the mainland.
5. The United States wanted normalization and pledged to remove its troops from Taiwan as soon as the Vietnam War was over.

Nixon was hopeful that the Chinese would commit to act as “peacemakers” in the Vietnam War, however, Zhou Enlai had made it clear that China would not facilitate any peace negotiations unless the United States would fully withdraw its troops from Vietnam. All in all, Nixon decided that establishing relations with China would ultimately benefit America’s stance in the war and would make the Soviets “spin on their heads.” After days of negotiations that were often steeped in deep disagreements between Nixon’s own administration, especially those between Secretary Rogers and Kissinger, finally on February 27, 1972 the United States and the PRC issued the Shanghai communique in which both countries pledged to work for “normalization” of relations and to expand “people to people contacts” and “trade opportunities.” With the Soviet Union in mind, both countries vowed that neither nation would seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region — and the communique pledged that both countries were “opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony.”²⁷⁴

Thus began relations between China and the United States. Many scholars and politicians have written and commented about Nixon’s China policy. Some have praised his vision and some have criticized him for betraying Taiwan, an American ally, and argued that the U.S. was overtly accommodating towards Beijing and the Communist party. Many saw U.S. concessions on Taiwan as a grave setback for American values. The idea that the U.S. would turn its back on a close ally, for the sake of a Communist country, seemed disappointing. *The Detroit Free Press*

famously headlined its breaking news story of the Shanghai Communiqué as “They Got Taiwan; We Got Egg Rolls.”²⁷⁵

After Nixon’s resignation in 1974, Gerald Ford’s administration didn’t tinker much with U.S.-China ties; the relationship seemed to be working for both nations. However, the years to come were strained by the emergence of Chinese leaders in opposition with American values of human rights and free speech, as well as by China’s own internal issues.

4.1.2 Carter’s Move towards Normalization of Relations with China

Our decision to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China will help to preserve peace and stability in Asia and in the Western Pacific.

- Jimmy Carter, State of the Union Address, 1980

In contrast to Nixon who had spent most of his adult life in public service, Jimmy Carter had limited experience in policy making. A one-term governor of Georgia, he had had no experience in international affairs. Despite his limited experience, Carter had developed his own foreign policy ideology. He believed in the rule of law in international affairs and wanted the United States to take the lead in promoting universal human rights. He often preached the idea that the U.S. should minimize its exercise of power around the world and avoid military interventions as much as possible.²⁷⁶

The insertion of human rights into American foreign policy allowed the Carter administration to take a tough stance on Russian oppression in Eastern Europe. However, it also meant that the President would have to take a tough stance on old allies, such as the Shah of Iran, and new friends such as the newly established Deng Xiaoping administration in China.

The situation in China had also been altering. With the end of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's death, a new Central Committee pushed through a constitution in 1977-1978 that allowed freedom of speech, press, and demonstrations. Deng Xiaoping, who had moved to the top of the Communist Party by 1978, declared that no one — not even Mao — should be copied unquestionably. Prompted by these changes, Chinese citizens began putting up posters on the famous Democracy Wall in Beijing and in other cities to publically express their suffering during the Cultural Revolution. Wei Jingsheng, the leader of the Democracy Wall movement, called for China to adopt democracy. He argued that democracy should become part of the “fifth modernization” in Deng’s four-item plan.²⁷⁷ Thus, when Carter gave a speech in Washington on world human rights, a poster went up on the wall asking Carter to pay attention to the “state of human rights in China.” Within a few months, Deng grew impatient about the protests and the criticisms emerging from within the Party. Eventually, the wall posters came down and leaders of the movement including Wei and many other ordinary citizens were jailed.

As tensions grew in the streets of Beijing, Carter, who had vowed to defend democracy, was pressured to take a stance on the issue. However, relations with China were important and the Carter administration hoped to maintain good relations with the new leaders. Thus, the administration came up with a rationalization that Jim Mann called “the Cultural Revolution baseline:”

The Cultural Revolution base line can be used to excuse virtually any sort of repression in China, since none of it can match the horrors of the Cultural Revolution. (Applying the same logic, of course, we might say that East German security apparatus was an improvement over the Nazis).²⁷⁸

With the soft stance taken by Carter in response to the crackdown on the Democracy Wall activists, Deng and the Central Committee realized that the Carter's administration — like those of his predecessors Nixon and Ford — was willing to look the other way when necessary. Deng did not publicly reply to Carter's comment and after a few weeks of silence both leaders were happy to move on.²⁷⁹

Relations grew stronger between Washington and Beijing after intense negotiations between the two countries took place during visits by Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Eventually, on January 1, 1979 the United States and China issued a joint communiqué that announced the commencement of normal diplomatic relations between the two nations. Based on this agreement, the U.S. officially recognized that the government of the PRC was the sole legal government in China. In addition, the United States government declared that it would end formal political relations with Taiwan, Republic of China (ROC), while preserving economic and cultural ties.

A few weeks after the normalization, Deng came to Washington, the first PRC leader to officially visit the United States. The issue of Taiwan remained a source of contention, however, not only between Washington and Beijing, but especially between Republicans and Democrats in Congress.²⁸⁰ To this end, in April 1979, Congress approved the Taiwan Relations Act, in an attempt to undermine President Carter's China breakthrough. The act requires the United States to continue cultural relations with Taiwan and requires Washington to provide Taipei with defensive arms, but does not officially violate the "One-China" policy.²⁸¹

The normalization of relations led to two other important outcomes. First, Carter ordered his State department to facilitate a massive student exchange between the two countries. Based on Carter's own writings, he believed that allowing Chinese scholars and students in the U.S.

would expose young Chinese, and perhaps future leaders, to the American way of life — he hoped to arouse their interest in a more global way of life. Second, Carter granted China Most Favored Nations (MFN) status, which helped expand trade and economic deals with the PRC.²⁸²

Despite Carter's rhetoric on human rights, many analysts argue that the president's direct criticism of human rights violations around the world were often selective. His low standards for the Chinese government and their visible human rights violations and his initial non-reactions to the Shah of Iran's brutal crackdown on demonstrators which ultimately led to the collapse of the Pahlavi dynasty caused confusion amongst analysts in regards to the President's standards on the issue he had used to redefine American foreign policy.

4.1.3 Reagan's Pragmatic Approach to China

Personally, I think the Red Chinese are a bunch of murdering bums.

- Ronald Reagan, 1971

During his political career, Ronald Reagan was known as a pro-Taiwan politician who had famously called the Chinese “a bunch of murdering bums.” In fact, due to his close relations with the Taiwanese government, Nixon sent him to Taiwan in 1972 to smooth relations after signing the Shanghai communiqué.

Eight years later, Reagan was sworn into office as president. Despite constant criticism of Carter's dealings with China during the campaign, especially in regards to Taiwan, Reagan's China policy was not that different from his predecessor. He had come to office committed to take a tougher stance on human rights in Communist nations and vowed to restore anti-

Communism as the bedrock of American foreign policy. However, during his two terms in office, Reagan's main focus was on the Soviet Union, not China.

Reagan's actions in contrast to his promises on taking a hard stance on human rights, once again showed the selective nature of America's value-based foreign policy. For example, on a trip to Moscow in 1988, the president held a meeting to talk face to face with Russian dissidents. He did not do the same in his visit to China four years earlier. In fact, since Nixon, American leaders had dealt with China only through the country's leadership and had avoided public meetings with its dissidents and students. Reagan was not interested in disturbing the status quo.²⁸³

The most important reason for Reagan's reluctance with taking a hardline approach to China was the economy. In the early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping instituted a series of reform and openness policies known as *gaige kaifang*. The reforms led to the establishment of "Special Economic Zones," designed to encourage foreign investment, liberalize markets and facilitate trade between China and its economic partners. American businesses were carefully monitoring these promising signs in China and were instrumental in pushing the Reagan administration to strengthen economic ties with the Chinese.²⁸⁴

Hence, with economic opportunities looming in China, the Reagan administration was pushed into strengthening ties with the PRC. In December of 1981, the administration sent a delegation to China to represent the U.S.-Chinese Joint Economic Committee. The Committee led by Secretary of State Alexander Haig, started a new round of negotiations with Beijing. Again, Taiwan proved to be the problematic issue between the two countries. The Chinese were insisting on a permanent halt on U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. The American delegation — wary of reaction back in Washington — were pushing for the possibility of selling some arms to Taipei.

Eight months of negotiations eventually culminated in what became known as the 1982 communiqué.²⁸⁵ Both parties had to make significant concessions; China agreed to tolerate periodic arms sales to Taiwan and the U.S. agreed to reduce the quantity and sophistication of what it sold to Taipei.²⁸⁶

For scholars such as Henry Liu, the 1982 communiqué generated a “new breed” of policy advisors who believed past U.S. concessions to China were unnecessary. They argued that for China to realize its economic ambitions it had no choice but to accept U.S. terms. This line of thinking, Liu explained, narrowed the gap between the anti-Soviet hawks and the pro-Taiwan right group in U.S. policy on China.²⁸⁷ Back home, President Reagan, content from his lucrative foreign policy victory with China, insisted that the 1982 communiqué did not tarnish relations with his old friends in Taipei. He stated:

My longstanding personal friendship and deep concern for them [Taiwanese] is steadfast and unchanged. I am committed to maintaining full range of contacts between the people of the United States and the People of Taiwan — cultural, commercial, and people-to-people contacts — which are compatible with our unofficial relationship. Such contacts will continue to grow and prosper and will be conducted with the dignity and honor befitting old friends.²⁸⁸

Two years after the signing of the communiqué, Reagan visited China. Two main objectives were at the top of his agenda: he wanted to show the international community that America and China were cooperating and he also wanted to bolster his own foreign policy credentials for his 1984 reelection campaign. Reagan’s only condition was that Premier Zhou Ziang, visit Washington first. Thus, after Zhao Ziang visited Washington in January of 1984,

Ronald and Nancy Reagan flew to Beijing four months later on April 26. Close to 600 journalists accompanied the President and the First Lady.

The trip was a unique photo-op for both Reagan and the Chinese leaders; during the six-day visit Reagan and President Li Xiannian (Deng was the supreme leader now and did not take part in negotiations), discussed economy, development of nuclear commercial power in China. In addition Li, also announced his displeasure with continuing U.S. support for Taiwan.²⁸⁹ Nowhere in the six-day visit, did Reagan mention political prisoners and other human rights violations in China. Even in his visit to the prestigious Beijing University, he talked about the future and the value of ideas. He did not mention freedom of the press and freedom of thought, nor did he speak about the democratic value of holding governments accountable.

In his return from China, Reagan justified his friendly stance with China by shrewdly questioning the Communism of the Chinese, calling them “so-called Communists.” On his way back to the U.S. he had talked to the reporters accompanying him, saying that he was heartened that the injection that his talks with the Chinese leadership had taken U.S.-China relations to a “new level” and that he was impressed by how curious ordinary Chinese were about America. He also added that his talks with Deng Xiaoping had given him “an opportunity to correct some misapprehensions they had about us and what we were doing here and there in the world.”²⁹⁰

Simply put, after the China visit, President Reagan’s views on China seem a bit contradictory. For example, when reporters aboard Air Force One asked the President whether his views had changed on China, he replied “not particularly.” But did the President mean he still saw the Chinese as a “bunch of murdering bums?” Or was he a true believer in what he had told reporters and others that the United States could “get along with China.” After the trip, it seemed unavoidable for Reagan, to constantly modify his narrative of China — he was after all known as

the anti-Communist crusader, who for decades had defined “Red China” as an implacable enemy of the U.S.

Overall Reagan’s policies towards China in particular and Asia in general were successful. A 1984 *Foreign Policy* article described U.S.-China relations in the Reagan era as the President’s single foreign policy success and defined the policies as “the triumph of pragmatism over ideology.” American businesses were finding stronghold in the Chinese market contributing to effective, and rewarding, U.S. presence in Asia. Also the student program, initiated by Carter, had motivated 40,000 students from the PRC to seek higher education in the U.S. by the late 1980s.

4.1.4 George H.W. Bush’s China Policy Overtaken by Tiananmen Square

I don't want to see a total break in this relationship. And I will not encourage a total break in the relationship.

- President George H.W Bush, response to Tiananmen, 1989

Amongst Washington insiders, George H.W Bush was known as a politician comfortable with the status quo—especially in foreign policy. After the Gulf War and the “liberation” of Kuwait from Saddam Hussein, to the surprise of many, President Bush did not support the idea of regime change in Iraq. During his campaign, he avoided highlighting human rights or anti-Communism, just as his predecessors had done. Generally, Bush’s goal on American foreign policy was to direct it towards the “nonjudgmental” realism of Nixon.²⁹¹

However, Bush inherited the presidency during a turbulent era in the twentieth century. Changes in Eastern Europe — the fall of the Berlin Wall, for instance — were amongst the many

global upheavals that occurred during Bush's presidency. But above all, within months of taking the Oval Office, President Bush was faced with a politically-initiated massacre of civilians in Beijing.

Since the rapprochement era, American journalists had covered China under the "modernizing authoritarian regime" paradigm. News coverage towards the PRC was favorable enough that for scholars such as Steve Mosher, the reportage on China often complimented Nixon's efforts to "refurbish" China's images in the United States. Almost two decades later, on June 4, 1989 Americans witnessed a spectacular "defiance against the Chinese Communist regime and its leaders." In one stroke, the paradigm of China coverage suddenly changed with the massacre on the streets in Beijing. Journalists could no longer ignore the realities about the PRC that had unfolded in their living rooms.²⁹²

The events in Tiananmen Square had started in April 1989 and within two months the protests had spread across China. The demonstrators were at first students but eventually constituted people of all walks of life. They protested governmental corruption, repression and dictatorship. Most of the protesters openly asked for an American-style democracy and were openly interviewing with the foreign press, stating that they were avid fans of Voice of America and holding banners with quotes from Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson or famous lines such as "Give me Liberty or Give Me Death." As the protests progressed in early June of 1989, Deng Xiaoping ordered the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA), to open fire on the protesters.

Interestingly, there was an upsurge of foreign reporters allowed in Beijing during the summer of 1989 to cover the historic visit of Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. The visit was highly important for the Chinese leadership; Gorbachev would become the first Soviet leader to visit China in thirty years.²⁹³ Also, the visit marked the official reconciliation between Moscow

and Beijing. Some had speculated that the visit might be rescheduled for another time, but Deng and President Yang Shangkun along with other senior leaders of the Communist party insisted that to show strength the visit must go on as planned. Thus, on May 16, 1989, almost a month after the first student demonstrations, Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping shook hands symbolizing the formal end to the Sino-Soviet rift.

Despite attempts by the PRC leaders to show that the protests had not disrupted the historic visit, the demonstrations, as *The New York Times*, noted on May 1989, and forced Beijing officials to alter key plans for the visit.

In a major loss of face for the Chinese leadership, Monday's itinerary had to be repeatedly adjusted to avoid 150,000 students and spectators who took over Tiananmen Square. While Mr. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, did not directly refer to the student demonstrations in his meeting on Monday with President Yang Shangkun, the entire day seemed to be an exotic dance in which the Chinese side tried to shield Mr. Gorbachev from the protesters.²⁹⁴

One other event had also drawn journalists to China: the Asia Development Bank (ADB) Summit in Beijing. The meeting was important because for the first time representatives from the Republic of China (Taiwan) would set foot in Beijing.²⁹⁵ With the surge of American journalists in China, the pro-democracy movements became a fixture on American news media. Broadcast channels devoted entire programs to the events in the streets and stories about the 1989 riots in newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* ran to full pages. By June 5 1989, Americans had seen a side of China that could not be unseen. Given the immediacy and vividness of the scenes carried out in front of their eyes, there was little room for another

narrative about China that would convince the American public that China was still a country moving towards reform.²⁹⁶

A.1.1 George H.W. Bush's Pseudo-Response to Tiananmen

During the initial use of force against the protesters by the Chinese government, the Bush administration tiptoed around the subject in press conferences and public statements. But when images of the dead surfaced and the symbolic “tank-man” photo was plastered on American newscasts and newspapers over and over again, the President had no choice but to respond to the events in Beijing. On June 6, two days after the massacres, President Bush made the following statement:

During the past few days elements of the Chinese Army have been brutally suppressing popular and peaceful demonstrations in China. There have been widespread and continuous violence and many causalities and we deplore the decision to use force and I now call on the Chinese leadership publicly as I have in previous channels to avoid violence and to return to their previous policy of restraints [...] The United States cannot condone the violent attacks and cannot avoid the consequences for our relations with China [...] This is not the time for an emotional response but for a reasoned careful action that takes into account both our long-term interest and recognition of a complex internal situation in China.”

As a direct reaction, Bush suspended all military relations with China. The Bush administration tried three distinct diplomatic tactics towards China post-Tiananmen. First, to ease public and congressional outcry, the White House imposed immediate sanctions on the

PRC, which included the suspension of military-to-military relations and high-level leadership exchanges. Second, Bush attempted to establish back channels to connect with the Chinese government. In July of 1989, despite putting a public freeze on high-level contacts with China — he secretly sent his national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, to Beijing for talks with Deng only one month after the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Third, the President made an effort to look decisive and not influenced by Congressional pressure when it came to foreign policy — therefore he often replied harshly when asked about tougher actions against China. For example, at one press conference when asked about further sanctions suggested by Congress, Bush stated, “I’ve told you what I’m going to do. I’m president. I set the foreign policy objectives and actions taken by the executive branch.”

Eventually, Bush conceptualized his approach to post-Tiananmen China as the “policy of engagement.” This choice of words, as David Lampton wrote, was surprising since the Reagan administration had used the same terms, a few years earlier, to describe relations with South Africa’s apartheid government. Thus the politics of engagement became the justification for gradual return to business as usual with China. Many scholars believe that Tiananmen was the only time since the rapprochement era that the U.S. had economic leverage over China, but Bush failed to use it.²⁹⁷

4.1.5 Bill Clinton’s Business-First Policies with China

We need to place our relationship into a larger and more productive framework

- President Bill Clinton, 1994

Much like Reagan, Bill Clinton's pre-presidential politics on China had been heavily pro-Taiwan. As governor of Arkansas he had visited Taiwan four times and was considered a close friend of Taiwan's political elite. As a candidate, Clinton incessantly criticized President Bush for his reaction to Tiananmen; he had famously pledged that he would lead "an America that will not coddle dictators, from Baghdad to Beijing." During the campaign, he also met with a number of Chinese activists speaking out against the Chinese government and demanding Congressional action against Beijing's human rights violations.

Due to Clinton's scant foreign policy experience and knowledge of China, during his first term in office most of his decisions on dealings with Beijing depended heavily on his Congressional colleagues. Throughout the Bush presidency, the Democratic Congress, led by senate majority leader George Mitchell and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, had twice proposed bills that would tie the renewal of China's trade benefits with the U.S. to tangible improvements in their human rights record. In both cases, Bush had vetoed the bills.²⁹⁸

During his first months in office, Clinton decided to take a punitive approach with China; which held that if China did not improve its human rights records, the U.S. would scale down on economic dealings with China. Thus, the President issued an Executive Order on May 1993, with similar tone to the Mitchell-Pelosi bill. Based on the order, Beijing would have one year to improve its human rights records or there would be limitations on the trade benefits, such as MFN (Most Friendly Nation) status that China enjoyed with the United States.

However, in the early 1990s China's economy was booming and U.S. and European companies were in fierce competition with each other for the Chinese market. American businesses worried that Clinton's tough stance on human rights would make them less competitive to the Europeans. The President received backlash from Republicans as well as

Democrats; his own economic advisors and campaign donors criticized his approach, warning that his idealistic world view was harming the economy. Thus, as the May 1994 deadline approached, Clinton was under mounting pressure to rescind his executive order. Eventually he admitted that the Chinese had made no improvements on human rights, however, with mounting pressure Clinton had no choice but to revoke his own executive order and re-establish China's MFN status.

With Clinton's first approach failing, the administration came up with a new approach known as the Soothing Scenario. The argument of this approach was that if the U.S. continued to do trade with China, the economic connections would prompt their political system to open up. That scenario would mean that various freedoms would perforce come to China, just as they had come to Eastern Europe — a scenario, it was argued, that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall.²⁹⁹ In addition the Clinton administration argued that security and economic issues should not be held hostage to human rights differences. By the time Clinton was sworn in for a second term, his China policy was well in motion. The president's national security advisor, Anthony Lake, who had once declared China to be one of the "backlash states," flew to China in July 1996 to engage in what the administration called a "strategic dialogue."³⁰⁰ A year later, Premier Jiang Zemin made a state visit to the U.S. During that visit, the two leaders held an astonishing joint press conference: the two men got into a debate-like back and forth on the question of human rights and the events in Tiananmen Square eight years earlier. Jiang Zemin addressed the events as "political disturbance" that became necessary for the government to deal with to keep China "secure" and its opening up to continue "smoothly." President Clinton responded and said:

I think it should be obvious to everyone that we have a very different meaning of the event in Tiananmen Square, I believed that what happened and the aftermath and the

continuing reluctance to tolerate political dissent has kept China from politically developing the level of support in the rest of the world that otherwise would have been developed. I also believe, as I said in my opening statement, that over the long run the societies of the twenty-first century that will do best would be those that draw their stability from their differences.³⁰¹

To the surprise of journalists, President Jiang was not ready to leave the discussion so he said in English “I would like to also answer this question.” He then continued in Chinese and said:

Our two countries have different geographic locations. We also different historic and cultural traditions and different level; economic developments and values; therefore, I believe it is just natural for our two countries to hold different views on some issues. Now, people in the world are standing at the turn of the century where we are going to bring in the twenty-first century and science and technology have developed significantly as compared with for instance the period when Newton lived in [...]³⁰²

The Chinese leader also added that terms such as “democracy, human rights, and freedom are relative terms that are determined by specific national situations in different countries.” He also stated that such discussions must be based on “non-interference.”

Again, Clinton felt the need to respond:

The U.S. recognized that on so many issues China is on the right side of history but in this issue we believe that the [Chinese] government is on the wrong side of history. There is after all now a universal declaration of human rights.³⁰³

The President went on to talk about his own personal experience with the press and the things written “about him and his family,” hinting that bad stories about leaders of a country should not result in the suppression of the press. The remarkable exchange between Jiang and Clinton uniquely captured the different views on human rights between the two nations.

Within the final year of the Clinton presidency, China received another important benefit from the United States. For almost a year the Clinton administration was trying to win congressional approval for legislation that would pave the way for China to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Secretary of State Madeline Albright argued that “China’s membership would give the United States more access to China’s market, boost our exports, reduce our deficit, and create new, well-paying jobs.” Clinton added that the membership of China in WTO would have a “profound impact on human rights.”³⁰⁴

However, the predictions made by Albright, about the trade deficit, and by Clinton, on human rights, did not work out as the administration had hoped. In 2016, the American trade deficit with China was about \$347 billion. The year congress accepted China’s enrolment in the WTO the trade deficit was around \$70 billion. In terms of human rights, the situation in China did not improve either. In 2017, Freedom House and Amnesty International, two credible NGOs focused on tracking human rights violations around the world declared raised concerns about human rights abuses in the Chinese society. Freedom House gives China’s human rights practices a score of 15 out of 100 (with 0 being the worst).³⁰⁵

4.1.6 George W. Bush and the Value of Trade with China

“If we make China make an enemy, they’ll end up being an enemy. If we trade with

*China, and trade with the entrepreneurial class, and give people a taste of freedom, I think you'll be amazed at how soon democracy will come.*³⁰⁶

- George W. Bush, 1999

During his presidential campaign George W. Bush decried Clinton's "strategic partnership" approach with China. He repeatedly referred to China as a "strategic competitor." In most of his campaign speeches, Bush talked about democracy and freedom, insisting that his administration would take a tougher line on promoting American values once in office.³⁰⁷ But with emotions still raw from the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, following the defection of a high-level Chinese colonel and China's imprisonment of American scholars, there were serious concerns amongst the foreign policy community over the state of U.S.-China relations within the first few months of the Bush presidency.³⁰⁸

Amid these periodic tensions, and within months after his inauguration, President Bush experienced his first sensitive military incident with the Chinese. On April 1, 2001, a United States Navy reconnaissance plane collided on with a Chinese fighter jet that was tailing the plane. The American plane managed to make an emergency landing, but the Chinese plane crashed into the waters below. With Washington in panic mode, the Chinese determined that the U.S. side had "total responsibility" for this event. The Americans, however, blamed the incident on the Chinese planes that had become "increasingly aggressive in tailing American aircrafts." Meanwhile, the 24 American crewmembers were arrested and their intelligence material was confiscated. Despite pressure from his neoconservative advisors, President Bush decided to apologize to China. Following his apology, the crewmembers and the aircraft were let go after 11

days in Chinese custody.³⁰⁹ The incident, while concerning for the administration, demonstrated that Bush wanted to make his own decisions on China. As Jim Mann wrote:

On China, the Bush administration wanted America’s foreign policy to take on a harder yet cautious stance towards the PRC. “On Iraq and the Middle East, Bush settled his disputes by siding with the hawks; on China, however, the president weight in on the side of the doves.”³¹⁰

A few months later, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 shook America to its core. With close to three thousand casualties and more than 6,000 injured, the administration quickly evaluated its priorities on who to call enemies and who to see as friends. As the *Financial Times* later wrote:

[...] the attacks of September 11, 2001 changed all the calculations. The U.S. had enough enemies. In East Asia, at least, Mr. Bush’s foreign policy would embrace the hardheaded realism of his father, George H.W. Bush.³¹¹

In the U.S.–China summits between leaders of Washington and Beijing, terrorism was the common theme in most meetings. In February 2002, exactly thirty years after Nixon’s visit, Bush visited China and praised the PRC leaders for their “strong support” for the war on terrorism. Beyond 9/11, the President wanted to negotiate with China; the U.S. hoped to halt Chinese arms sales to North Korea and U.S. foes in the Middle East, but no major consensus was reached on the touchy issues of Taiwan and Chinese arms sales and negotiators in the American delegation rarely mentioned human rights. Bush soon realized that despite the initial negotiating success with China over the Hainan Island incidents; there were sensitive issues that would be better left unchallenged for the time being. Thus, Bush’s one-week visit led to what Jian Zemin

called a “common understanding” and “important results” in relations between the two countries: U.S. and China vowed to have more intelligence cooperation.

Later that year Jiang announced that Hu Jintao, the Chinese vice president, and the potential next leader, would visit the U.S. More progress was made, including on the arms sales issues with the Chinese. In November 2000, China and U.S. signed an agreement whereby China pledged to stop its export of missiles and related technologies and establish a plan to stop further exports. In return, the U.S. committed to begin processing licenses for commercial space cooperation such as including the launching of U.S. satellites by China. However, the 2,000-arms agreement was never implemented by China. Washington worried that Beijing’s reluctance to fulfill their promises meant that it had major arms deals with “rogue states.” Ultimately, there was no consensus met on the arms deals issue. Both administrations decided to make terrorism their common enemy, and their important mutual benefit, trade, as the main issues of the summit with Hu.

But some human rights organizations and experts, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, raised concerns about China’s actual intentions vis-à-vis their cooperation on the war on terror. For China, its biggest problem with Islamic extremism was with East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a Muslim separatist group founded by militant Uyghurs, a Turkic-speaking ethnic group living in Xinjiang province in northeast China. The Bush administration agreed to blacklist ETIM as a terrorist group. But groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch argued that China was simply using the “war on terror” as an excuse to marginalize Muslims in China.³¹²

In fits and starts, the Bush administration managed to engineer positive relations with China. Three reasons were behind the Bush administration’s success with China: First, Bush

advocated free trade from the beginning of his presidency, believing that supporting free trade would promote freedom, security, and economics. He had softened his tone with China. Instead of calling it a “strategic competitor,” he stated, “while China is not our strategic partner, neither is it our enemy.” Third, from the early days of his administration, Bush championed that China be granted NTR (Normal Trade Relations) status; making Chinese trade easier with the States.³¹³

4.1.7 Barack Obama and the Pivot to Asia

I've been very explicit in saying that we have more to fear from a weakened, threatened China than a successful, rising China.

- Barack Obama, 2016

In 2009, China was not a country trying to free itself from isolation, nor was it in dire need for U.S. trade contracts. By 2009 China was a country that had transformed its economic capability and international position into the world’s largest manufacturing economy; it ranked as one of the world’s top three economies. On the other hand, since Tiananmen, Chinese leaders had carried out severe crackdowns on political dissent and free speech.³¹⁴ Thus, the newly elected Barack Obama was faced with a China that was economically in a unique and unprecedented position, and at the same time was one of the world’s most repressive political systems.

Once sworn in, President Obama and his team managed to establish a working relationship with the Chinese government. For Obama, the challenge was that he needed China’s help on tough and urgent issues facing the U.S. and the globe. Issues such as stabilizing the global financial system, curbing global warming, preventing North Korea from using the nuclear

weapons it claimed it had and ensuring that rogue states, including Iran, not build weapons of mass destruction.

Within months of his inauguration, Obama visited China in November 2009. The visit was off to a complicated start. After a few meetings and a formal dinner, Obama and President Hu Jintao held a joint press conference, but during the 30-minute news conference President Hu did not allow questions. Many journalists observed the noticeable frustration in the body language of both Obama and Hu Jintao. The frustration, news reports wrote, was mostly because of the rising frictions between the two nations over human rights and economy policies. Activists criticized Obama for being “too muted” on China’s abysmal human rights record, especially since President Obama postponed a meeting with the Dalai Lama until after this summit meeting.

Thus, Obama returned from his short visit with little achievement. On important topics such as Iran, China’s currency, and human rights, Hu held firm on China’s position. On Iran, the Chinese would not speak publically about enforcing new sanctions. On the currency issue, Hu made no indications that China was going to change its financial practices to stop currency manipulation. On human rights, Hu bluntly stated that the two countries had differences and the discussion should end there. Thus, to quote *The New York Times*, on his first visit Obama was faced with a “fast-rising” China that “was more willing to say no to the U.S.”³¹⁵

In a similar tone *The Wall Street Journal* wrote the following:

Barack Obama's first trip here [China] signaled a turning point in relations between a weakened U.S. power and a China that senses its time has come, as the president was hectored about economic policy, largely ignored on human rights and restricted in his efforts to reach out to ordinary Chinese.³¹⁶

The unsuccessful visit was followed by another unhappy episode in U.S.-China relations — the failure to secure a deal at the December 2009 UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen. The 10-day summit boiled down to Obama and Wen Jiabao, the Chinese premier, attempting to broker a deal on providing aid to poor countries to adopt climate change policies by the year 2020. Negotiations were deadlocked mostly by divisions between rich and poor countries. By the end of the summit, China rejected any recommendations on greenhouse gas emissions, on the grounds that the goals set by industrialized countries, especially the United States were “unrealistic.”

Finally, in a January 2011 visit by Hu Jintao to the White House, Obama firmly discussed the need to recognize human rights and stated the need for freedom of speech, religion and assembly. He called on China to engage in talks on Tibet with the Dalai Lama, and consider its policies on Internet freedom. These statements indicated a toughening approach by Obama after China’s refusal to make concessions on its currency regulations and assist the U.S. on its struggles with North Korea and Iran. At a joint press conference, the two leaders were asked about human rights. Obama delivered a lengthy and philosophical answer, but Hu refused to answer. Later, he said that China was only willing to engage in a dialogue on human rights on terms of “non-interference” in China’s internal affairs.

Within his first two years in office, Obama and Hu met eight times, trying to tackle trade, environment, and human rights issues. However, during Hu’s tenure the two leaders did not reach any major milestones in their relations. The Obama administration quickly realized it had to develop a new strategy in dealing with this new fast-rising China.

In 2011, President Obama announced the “Pivot to Asia” doctrine as a major shift in his foreign policy goals in the East Asian region. The “Pivot” doctrine was a major change in the

U.S. foreign policy-thinking, outlining a shift in U.S. political attention from the Middle East and the Euro-Atlantic region, to a focus on East Asian States in order to contain China's rapid rise.³¹⁷ Several factors were considered in the articulation of the "Pivot" idea. First, Obama and his team realized that China's increasing regional influence meant that Washington needed to play a more substantial role in the Asia-Pacific region. Second, Obama was coming up for reelection and his GOP rival, Mitt Romney, seemed to have a tougher rhetoric on China, thus Obama wanted to demonstrate his leadership role within the Asia-Pacific region. The "Pivot to Asia" idea encapsulated a wide range of issues from further cooperation with multinational organizations to policies on economy trade, security, and promotion of democracy.

The tone of the ideas and strategies were both stern and straightforward. For example, on security issues Obama made it clear that U.S. military and boarder security forces were now shifting from Iraq and Afghanistan to Asia. On democracy and human rights, the President announced that his administration would take more substantive measures to promote such values in the region.³¹⁸ Naturally, the "Pivot" idea didn't please the Chinese; they worried that this new approach meant that the U.S. was looking to impede China's rise and ensure its own dominance in the region.

Ultimately, the "Pivot to Asia" idea did not turn out as Obama had hoped. Some of the plan's objectives such as "economic engagement" were realized to some extent. However, the "Pivot" main goal, the shift in U.S. attention from the Middle East to Asia, was the major setback of Obama's Asia policy. Numerous challenges in the Middle East such as the instabilities in Iraq and Afghanistan, nuclear challenges with Iran, and the Syrian Civil War that resulted in the rise of new terrorist groups that were beheading American journalists and killing

Muslim civilians by the hundreds, made it impossible to divert too much attention from the Middle East.

In part because the “Pivot” doctrine proved to be easier said than done, Obama and his administration realized a productive and peaceful relationship with China was vital for U.S. to have an effective presence in the Pacific region.

For the next year, Obama and his administration tried to maintain the “Pivot” doctrine and keep positive relations with China at the same time. By 2012, Obama had been reelected and China’s former Prime Minister, Xi Jinping was selected as the next Chinese president. Both men had long and complex issues ranging from domestic, regional, and international to deal with. In their relations, both leaders knew that their actions towards one another could either instigate international conflict or create an ongoing productive relationship. In the course of the next four years, Obama and Xi managed to avoid any major crises and had achieved some agreements: in 2014, a major climate change deal was reached— after months of negotiations China agreed to significantly reduce its greenhouse remissions. The two leaders also managed to reach some minor, but effective solutions for trade disputes and China supported the Obama administrations in sanctions against North Korea and a nuclear deal with Iran. However, there were still important disagreements and points of hostility between the two countries: China’s cyberattacks on U.S. companies and intelligence agencies, human rights conditions in China, the expulsion of U.S. journalists and activists from China, and Beijing’s aggressive behavior in the South China Sea.

During the two Obama administrations Sino-U.S. relations followed a different trajectory. In the past, following the inauguration of a new president, U.S.-China relations would start off with major conflicts and eventually find a stable path. With Obama, the relationship was

smooth within the first few weeks, experienced some setbacks and ultimately found some stability.

By the end of his presidency Obama had met with Chinese leaders seventeen times and aside from cyber security issues discussed earlier, the Obama administration managed to avoid major conflicts with the Chinese government. While at first Obama's encounter with the Chinese was challenging and awkward, throughout his presidency he managed to develop an effective relationship.

4.1.8 Discussion and Conclusion

U.S.-China relations have been both a complicated and important. Some analysts have gone so far as to call Sino-American relations the most important bilateral relations of the century.³¹⁹ However, as discussed above, the issues of trade, security and human rights have raised tensions between the two countries. But China's growing economic power has increasingly given the PRC the upper hand. For the U.S., China's relations with American adversaries such as Iran and Russia have also been problematic. China's non-judgmental foreign policy has made Beijing a darling amongst dictatorships around the world. It's unclear what the future hold for Sino-American relations.

During the 2016 presidential campaign then-candidate Donald Trump called the Chinese "the grand masters of currency manipulation." Trump also accused the Chinese of inventing "global warming" to "make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive," and threatened to impose a 45 percent tariff on Chinese goods. After taking office in January 2017 and after receiving the customary cold shoulder from China — in response to Trump's questioning the "One China" policy — Trump, as had his predecessors, toned down his critical narrative. Early in the Trump

administration, Xi Jinping and his wife made a state visit to Donald Trump's Florida estate. Trump expressed hope for China's help in dealing with North Korea; however, the often-changing tone of the Trump White House seems worrying for many foreign policy experts. Many analysts hope that the president will come to realistic terms about the importance of relations with China — and that he will take a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy, especially with China. In the words of Lee Hamilton:

The relationship is fragile as well as of paramount importance. The future of the world, in no small measure, depends on the stability of U.S.-China relations. Trump's vague tweets, with few details, sow confusion and escalate risks, such as when China flew what was described as a nuclear-capable bomber across Taiwan and disputed areas of the South China Sea.

The next section discusses the results from the dissertation's content analysis on the coverage of Xi Jinping in U.S. news media.

4.2 Results: U.S. News Coverage of Xi Jinping

How has Xi been covered in U.S. news media? Have his efforts to be seen as a kind yet tough leader paid off globally? What kind of a leader is Xi — according to U.S. news media, which has no control over? The research conducted for this dissertation answers such questions through two case studies: the media's coverage of Xi's anti-corruption campaign and their coverage of Hong Kong's "Umbrella Movement."

After addressing those case studies, the results of the content analysis of news reports and opinion articles are presented. The news reports were written by professional journalists,

published in print or online outlets. The editorials and op-eds included in the analysis were written by journalists, experts, analysts, and current and former politicians. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the data collected did not include commentary from the public (e.g. comments appended to online posted articles or letters to the editor).

Each case study is explained separately. The research considered the terms and frames that emerged while examining the data. Some of these terms or frames might not have a direct connection with the cases used in this study, but still form a good portion of the news reports and thus contribute to the overall portrayal of Xi Jinping. The research also looked at the overall tone of sentences and paragraphs to determine the negative or positive nature of the press narrative towards Xi and his policies. As discussed in previous chapters, examining sources used in news reports is a major component of foreign news analysis. Therefore, the content analysis also studied the type of sources used by U.S. news media in the coverage of the two case studies introduced for this research.

In the next section I will present a brief review of how Xi Jinping is portrayed in China. Gaining insight into his image inside China is useful for this research. It will show the differences of how Xi is portrayed in his own country, where he has control over the media and the United States, where journalists, opinion writers, and editorial boards of newspapers are free to write what they want about him.

4.2.1 The Portrayal of Xi Jinping in Chinese Media: The Lovable Mr. Xi

Since President Richard Nixon's meeting with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1972, Chinese leaders have been a source of fascination for the American news media. Seven years after Nixon's trip —the first trip by a U.S. president to the People's Republic of China since it

was established in 1949 — Deng Xiaoping became the first Chinese leader to officially visit the United States. Television footage of a smiling Deng waving a cowboy hat and joking at the February 1979 White House state dinner startled the American public. Americans had expected to see a mysterious and untrustworthy head of state, but instead saw a surprisingly engaging — and softer — Chinese leader.³²⁰ Then, 11 years later, in the spring of 2000, the late Mike Wallace famously interviewed Jiang Zemin, Deng's successor. On that occasion, too, the public was stunned — by Jiang Zemin's reciting of Lincoln's Gettysburg address and by his frankness about Communist China's political system and its difference.³²¹

Xi Jinping is different from his predecessors. Unlike Deng, his first state visit to the United States in 2015 was mostly uneventful. He posed for a few photo-ops with American business executives, and there were a few awkward moments in a joint press conference with President Obama, but no iconic images or surprising incidents came out of his visit. Also, in contrast to Jiang Zemin, who sat for hour-long interviews with the American media, Xi has only granted a few written interviews to international media, such as *The Wall Street Journal*³²² and *Reuters*, and to several think tanks in the years since his coming to power.

Despite Xi's chilly attitude towards foreign news media, in China he frequently appears on television and is quoted in front page stories of Chinese newspapers. In fact, one of the unique traits of Xi Jinping's presidential persona is his high awareness of his public appearances at home. Historically, Chinese leaders have not been concerned about the optics of their public appearances within their country. Unlike European and American leaders, Chinese leaders do not typically pose for "candid" photo-ops, for example, holding hands with their wives or playing affectionately with their children. It has also not been part of the Chinese leadership style to show up in public places to mingle with ordinary Chinese. This general aloofness has made

sense: the public does not elect Chinese presidents, after all. In China, the National People's Congress (NPC) elects the president and has the power to appoint and remove him. Thus, Chinese leaders angling for approval usually focus their campaigning within the party.

Xi has been a surprising exception to this norm. In early 2013, for example, a few months after he was sworn in as president, Xi paid a surprise visit to a well-known restaurant in Beijing. He stood in line with the other restaurant patrons, ordered his food, and then sat down next to the other customers to eat. Following his meal, in an unprecedented move, he posed for selfies and photos. The pork-bun restaurant visit inspired a viral song, the music video performed by famous musicians generated millions of hits within hours of being uploaded.³²³

China watchers have also pointed to changes in Xi's behavior with his wife, Peng Liyuan, a former revolutionary soprano. During his first months in office, Xi rarely paid attention to her in public. Old footage shows him striding out of airplanes on his own, leaving Peng to catch up and shake hands with world leaders on her own. More recently he deplanes and holds Peng's hand and the two of them walk hand in hand to greet other leaders. China watchers have also noticed that during other public appearances Xi and Peng look at each other, hold hands, and even have been seen whispering in each other's ears.³²⁴

Some analysts argue that Xi's omnipresence in Chinese political and cultural spheres signals his taking up of the personality principles established by Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. In the early Cultural Revolution era, Mao stated, "there was a need for more of a personality cult that would help stimulate the masses and dismantle enemies."³²⁵

Mao came to power after an era known as the "century of humiliation." The hundred-plus years between 1839 and 1949 encapsulates a series of events that had weakened the Chinese state: two opium wars with Britain, the Taiping Rebellion, a civil war that left more than 20

million dead, and constant conflicts with Japan. Thus, when Mao took power in 1949, the country had a century of defeat and resentment in its public memory. To generate national pride, Mao developed a leadership style that connected Chinese patriotic values to the legitimacy of the newly established Communist Party.³²⁶

After Mao's death in 1976, Chinese leaders rejected Mao's centralized style of rule and obsession with his own cult of personality, mostly due to the Mao era legacy of countless executions and excruciating social and economic hardships. Thus, after the Chairman's departure, China's leaders restructured the Chinese political system, to have a type of "collective-presidency" in order to prevent the Mao-style rule from happening again.³²⁷

However, after the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989, the reformists who had advocated for the shared power in China lost their influence and pro-Maoist hardliners regained popularity.

Analysts such as Li Cheng argue that a simple review of Xi's executive actions in the three years following his assent to the presidency demonstrate his affinity to both to Mao and to Mao's style of governance.³²⁸ For example, in 2016 Xi urged the members of the Communist Party to study Mao's 1949 guidelines on party discipline. In January of 2016, Li Zhanshu, the director of the General Office of the Communist Party and Xi's right-hand man, proclaimed that all Communist party agencies from the ministerial level and above must have "absolute loyalty" to the party. Journalists in China have reported that in early 2013, only a few months after taking power, Xi had ordered Chinese news outlets to urge their employees to pledge loyalty to the Party on a daily or weekly basis.³²⁹

In the two years following Xi's rise to power in 2013, Xi's influence in China has grown immensely. One indication of the range of his control is the fact that he has taken over the

chairmanship of seven policy-making committees in areas ranging from military reform, finance and economics to cyber security. Observers note that Xi's influence is now equal to that of Mao's during his rule over China; some news outlets such as *The Economist* refer to him as "the Chairman of everything."³³⁰

Following Mao's example with his *Little Red Book*, Xi has also published a compilation of his speeches and writings titled *The Governance of China*. The book has sold more than three million copies in China and has been translated into seventeen different languages.³³¹

Xi is a constant presence in Chinese media. According to a study by researchers at the University of Hong Kong, during Xi's first year in office, his name appeared "4,186 times" on the first pages of the *People's Daily*, the premier state-run newspaper³³² — more than double the mentions of his predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin.³³³ Also, CCTV's top evening news show "Xinwen Lianbo" devoted more time to Xi in one year (2013-2014) than any other five Politburo standing committee members, an uncommon trend in Chinese politics.³³⁴

Xi's sophisticated propaganda apparatus has shaped his public persona in China. He is depicted as a tough, but progressive and lovable president. Such a bifurcated characterization is actually a common way that Communist and authoritarian regimes portray their leaders. The Ayatollah Khomeini, for example, was long depicted within Iran as both a loving grandfather and unforgiving towards traitors — affable scenes showing him kissing his grandchildren and walking in his garden tending to the flowers were juxtaposed with serious scenes of him leveling a hard stare and speaking tough words towards Iran's potential enemies.

4.2.2 The Anti-Corruption Campaign

(March-May 2013 and October-December 2014)

President Xi Jinping started his term as China's seventh president with the promise to fight corruption and restore integrity within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He pledged to "put power in a cage" of laws and regulations and to go after corrupt officials no matter their rank, status or family background. In Xi's own terms, he vowed to pursue suspects whether they were "tigers" or "flies" — in other words, whether they were high-level or ordinary cadres.³³⁵

According to official Chinese reports and China watchers in the U.S., by 2017, the campaign had prosecuted close to a million officials.³³⁶ The accused ranged from ministerial and provincial leaders to thousands of lower ranked administrators and city officials. Well-known figures such as Bo Xilai, China's former minister of commerce, Zhou Yongkang, the former head of China's security apparatus, and Su Rong, former vice chairman of China's top political advisory body, were amongst the long list of those targeted by the campaign.³³⁷ The high-profile status of those arrested has led some analysts to believe that Xi was using the anti-corruption campaign to marginalize his potential political rivals.

Official corruption has contributed not only to the public's dissatisfaction with Party leaders but more generally to alarming rates of social and financial inequality. In 2014, the IMF placed China among the world's worst countries in terms of income inequality. Despite the positive outcomes of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms during the 1990s, the limited oversight of public officials and their income in the new century created a culture of corruption amongst China's ruling elite.³³⁸

Within Xi's first weeks in office, he created the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), a powerful ideological watchdog organization in charge of investigating and punishing corrupt officials. Wang Qishan, known as the commander-in-chief of Xi's anti-corruption campaign is famous for his hawkish investigation techniques. Outlets such as *The*

Economist call Qishan the “devil.”³³⁹ Under his leadership, all senior members of the Communist Party were presented with files of their sins, signaling to the idea that he (Wang) knows everything about everyone.

The CCDI operates under a harsh disciplinary system known as Shuanggui. Based on the Shuanggui system, CCDI investigators function beyond the reach of China’s criminal justice system. Thus, they have the authority to investigate and summon any of the 85 million members of the Communist Party to account for allegedly ill-gotten gains.³⁴⁰ The CCDI also uses other surveillance methods, including wiretaps, unannounced house searches, and spying on suspected officials. As none of the CCDI procedural methods are publically disclosed, Western journalists have often criticized the secrecy of the anti-graft campaign procedures.³⁴¹ According to recent reports by Human Rights Watch, the CCDI have used harsh methods on detainees to force confessions from the suspects, including sleep deprivation and other physical tortures.³⁴²

4.2.3 The Umbrella Movement

(28 September-30 December 2014)

On September 28, 2014, peaceful protests broke out in Hong Kong in opposition to the election rules reinstated by Beijing to the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPCSC). The Standing Committee’s decision maintained that any candidate for Hong Kong’s chief administrator had to be vetted and approved by Beijing, meaning that Hong Kong residents would only have the ability to choose the city’s chief executive from a list of names provided by Beijing. Protesters believed the decision overturned the “one country, two systems” doctrine proposed when the United Kingdom handed over Hong Kong to China in 1997. Back then, Hong

Kong had become a “special administrative region” within China, entitled to a high degree of autonomy and eventually its own leader. A group called Occupy Central with Love & Peace led the September protests. The umbrella became a symbol of the demonstration when protesters used them as shields against police tear gas.

The pro-democratic movement in Hong Kong occurred two years into the Xi presidency, in a city long known for its progressive social atmosphere. It is an interesting case study for two reasons. First, because of Xi’s promises of reform and more stability, American journalists closely followed his response to the protests. The protests gave journalists a chance to see Xi “in action” — both in regards to native social movements and in regards to political dissent in a region of China where his control was considered to be less absolute. Second, Hong Kong’s unique history and progressive social atmosphere and the fact that journalists are not under the same visa restraints in Hong Kong as they are on the mainland provided a unique opportunity for international journalists to report on the protests.

4.2.4 Reporting on Corruption and other Sensitive Issues in China

Xi’s anti-corruption campaign has been well reported in the American news media and followed closely by the U.S. think tanks and research institute that focus on China and its internal issues. The Bo Xilai scandal especially received extensive coverage in all the leading U.S. news outlets. In addition, the arrest of Zhou Yongkang, on December 15, 2013, was even featured on the front page of *The New York Times*. Arguably one of the most senior leaders arrested in Xi’s corruption campaign, Zhou Yongkang, was a senior leader of the CCP and the former head of China’s security apparatus and law enforcement institutions. In his capacity as security chief, Zhou oversaw China’s law enforcement institutions, intelligence agencies, courts,

and parliamentary institutions. During this period, many of Zhou's high-level allies and other provincial secretaries close to him were investigated and arrested.³⁴³

Based on the bylines in the news reports investigated for this research, most journalists who covered Xi's anti-corruption campaign and the Umbrella Movement were located in Hong Kong or Beijing.³⁴⁴ Reporting on controversial issues in China is a complicated task for foreign journalists. Unfavorable reports about Chinese leaders and their policies have serious ramifications for foreign journalists and their news organizations.³⁴⁵ The blockage of Western media websites and the harassment of journalists and translators has now become a common response to negative stories. In 2012, when David Barboza of *The New York Times* and his team ran a Pulitzer-winning exposé about the accumulated wealth of former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's family, for example, the reporters and researchers were constantly harassed and intimidated by the Chinese government and eventually had to leave China due to security concerns and visa issues.³⁴⁶

4.3 Analysis of Cases and Framing of Xi Jinping in U.S. News Media

In the analysis across all news outlets and across the two events — the anti-corruption campaign and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong — this dissertation considered the following when performing the content analysis:

1. Adjectives describing the Xi and his anti-corruption campaign policy/adjectives describing Xi's in stories about the Umbrella Movement
2. Description behind motives of the campaigns/reasons for the Umbrella Movement
3. Description of those accused (victims vs. criminals)/description of protesters

4. Description of procedures used in the campaign /Xi administration's treatment of protesters

Through these inquiries, the content analysis detected the following frames in coverage of Xi Jinping across all news outlets:

Frames that uniquely discussed Xi and his personality, political ideology, and leadership styles:

- Xi, Power & Personality Frame
- Xi, Military Policies Frame
- Xi, Policies & Ideologies Frame

Frames shared between the two case studies:

- Free Speech & Human Rights Frame
- China, Rising Power Frame
- Mao, Xi's Idol Frame
- China, Regional Influence Frame
- China's Past, Tiananmen & Cultural Revolution Frame

Frames specific to the anti-corruption campaign:

- Anti-Corruption Campaign, Rivalry Frame
- Anti-Corruption, Positive Action Frame

Frames specific to the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong:

- Hong Kong Politics & History
- Protests, Demands & Tactics

The “Xi, Power & Personality Frame” frame was shared between both case studies; the other two frames were unique to the anti-corruption case study. However, this does not mean that the Umbrella Movement was under covered in the news media. This dissertation only looked at

the coverage of Xi during the Umbrella Movement; it was not in the scope of this dissertation to study the full coverage of the protests in Hong Kong.

4.3.1 Xi, Power and Personality Frame

In general, the coverage of Xi during the anti-corruption campaign saw two main phases: the definition phase and the skepticism phase.

The Definition Phase:

While Xi's anti-corruption campaign had officially started in 2012 when he was vice president and had already gained much attention in U.S. news media with the Bo Xilai scandal, the U.S. news media tended to neutrally define the anti-corruption campaign in the days leading up to Xi's inauguration and for the initial days of his presidency.

According to a rough estimate by MAXQDA software, about 27 percent of the stories coded explained the anti-corruption campaign in terms of Xi's power.³⁴⁷ For example, on March 28, 2013, *The New York Times* wrote the following:

In the four months since he was anointed China's paramount leader and tastemaker-in-chief, President Xi Jinping has imposed a form of austerity on the nation's famously free-spending civil servants, military brass and provincial party bosses. Warning that graft and gluttony threaten to bring down the ruling Communists, Mr. Xi has ordered an end to boozy, taxpayer-financed banquets and the bribery that often takes the form of a gift-wrapped Louis Vuitton bag.³⁴⁸

The news media framing of the days leading to the Xi presidency and his early days in office were mostly of a thematic nature. Journalists wrote articles that provided background information about China, its economy, social situation, and other challenges for Xi as China's new president. For example, on March 14, 2013 *The Wall Street Journal* wrote:

China on Friday is expected to name its new premier, a move widely expected to result in the elevation of Vice Premier Li Keqiang. Mr. Xi comes into office as China grapples with problems that include economic imbalances, a wide wealth gap, pervasive official corruption and food and environmental issues.³⁴⁹

The Skepticism Phase:

However, even within those first weeks, the news media were already questioning different aspects of the campaign with a highly skeptical tone. This is especially evident in quotes and sources used in the coverage, which mostly contained highly critical analysts and human rights activists. As the Xi presidency and his fight against corruption progressed, the tone of criticism became more ubiquitous across all outlets. One major criticism, was about the procedures and the lack of due process in the fight against corruption, since the administration's methods of targeting the suspects seemed vague for most journalists and China watchers. The coverage used words such as ‘self-described,’ “politically selective,” “secrective” and “cosmetic.” To this end, the U.S. news media quickly reached the speculated conclusion that Xi Jinping had ulterior motives in fighting corruption, with the most important of all being power consolidation.

Although Xi himself had stated that corruption was threatening the morality and existence of the Communist Party and that he wanted to govern China “under the rule of law,” within months after his election reasons such as “power consolidation,” and “purging political

rivals,” were often noted by the U.S. news media.³⁵⁰ The ongoing discussion and speculations by the U.S. news media about Xi’s “real” motives behind the campaign led to the emergence of what this dissertation calls the “Xi the power grabber frame.” A stunning 85 percent of stories and editorials examined for the anti-corruption campaign, mentioned Xi’s power consolidation through the campaign, in one way or another. Thus, articles from both time periods, such as the examples mentioned here, show that ‘power consolidation’ by Xi was the most cited reason offered by U.S. news media. For example, in a story on March 14, 2013, the day Xi was sworn in, *The Washington Post* writes the following about China’s newly elected president:

Xi’s clearest moves since November have been geared toward consolidating his power. He has firmed up ties with the military, come out strong for protecting China’s sovereignty in territorial disputes and proposed a vague revitalization of the country, mentioning in speeches a still-undefined concept of the “China dream.”

In another example, an opinion piece published on October 18, 2014, author and well-known China analyst MinXin Pei, writes the following in *The New York Times*:

When Xi Jinping launched his anti-corruption campaign shortly after becoming the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in late 2012, most observers thought he would merely go through the motions, jailing a few senior officials and then carrying on business as usual. His predecessors, after all, had used anti-corruption investigations largely to eliminate their political opponents and consolidate power. Disciplinary actions would spike during the year following a new leader's appointment and fall the year after that.

Similarly, when Zhao Yongkang was up for trial in 2014, analyst Matt Sheehan wrote the following for the *Huffington Post*:

Experts are quick to point out those investigations against Zhou Yongkang and others are deeply rooted in Xi’s personal consolidation of power — power that he has used to crackdown on dissidents, human rights lawyers and even micro-bloggers. Paving the way for emissions reductions may not have been Xi’s original motive for going after Zhou and Shanxi coal tycoons, but experts said those moves have in the end strengthened him and handicapped likely opponents in battles over energy policy.³⁵¹

Aside from clearly stating that the campaign was designed to help Xi gain more power and prominence in China, U.S. news media also implied such narratives in the word choices that journalists and analysts used to define those accused of wrongdoings in the campaigns. Words such as “rivals,” “victims,” and “fallen officials” were commonly utilized in the news coverage. Rarely, were the accused referred to as “criminals” or “crooks.” *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* devoted special coverage to the accused officials and their treatment by Xi, for instance, when in early December of 2014, a group of six police officers attempted to take their lives after being fired from their jobs due to alleged corruption charges. The six men were from a group of 300 who called themselves “China’s Wronged Officers.” *The Washington Post* extensively covered their story and reported that the officers were forced into confessions and naming their colleagues after hours of beating and days of starvation.

The U.S. news media were rightfully adamant in their reporting to not convict the accused before their trials, even though the trial and sentencing of these officials were often

termed as “cosmetic” by U.S. journalists. Therefore, terms such as “alleged” or “rumored” were used to refer to those officials investigated by the campaign. For example, on September 15, 2013 *Foreign Policy* magazine writes:

It is quite possible that President Xi is encouraging the investigations and arrests of high-level officials in order to consolidate his own power and purge the Communist Party of potential rivals. Jiang Jiemen’s career has long been closely associated with the mounting power that Zhou Yongkang enjoyed, so the news about both of them led, for example, to BBC News analyst Celia Hatton in Beijing to report that “rumors indicate that Mr. Zhou continues to act as a rival to Xi Jinping.”³⁵²

In the anti-corruption coverage, Xi ‘hidden motives’ became a central part of the coverage. Therefore, even the stories that were focused on the arrested officials, the issue quickly turned into “why this specific person.” For example, *The Daily Beast*, wrote the following:

Zhou’s trial is necessary for Xi Jinping to consolidate power and more importantly build his credibility as a tough fighter against corruption,” said Chen Xiaoping, a New York-based legal scholar. “Therefore, the court will most likely focus on Zhou’s corruption and murder charges to hide the political nature of Zhou’s crimes.”³⁵³

In other instances, the accused officials were portrayed as trophies for Xi’s anti-graft campaign. For example, Bill Bishop wrote the following for *The New York Times* after the arrest of Liu Tienan, a senior economic policymaker. In another *Times* story, revealingly headlined: *Presumed Guilty in China’s War on Corruption*, the reporters used the terms “fallen officials” to describe those arrested for corruption, citing the ambiguity of campaign procedures:

[...] but admirers of Mr. Xi's anti-graft blitz largely overlook a key paradox of the campaign, critics say: Waged in the name of law and accountability, the war on corruption often operates beyond the law in a secretive realm of party-run agencies, like the one that snared Mr. Wang, plagued by their own abuses and hazards [...]

In more than a dozen interviews, legal scholars and lawyers who have represented fallen officials said defending them was especially difficult, even by the standards of a judicial system tightly controlled by the party.³⁵⁴

Amongst the most notable criticisms made by U.S. journalists about the anti-corruption campaign were issues about the procedural methods used by the Xi administration to arrest and question those suspected of corruption. While analysts also touched on procedural problems with the campaign, news reports written by journalists were more concerned about the procedures behind the arrests and investigations. Words such as “selective” and “unjust” were often used to describe both the methods used to single out certain politicians and their punishments

As for the “positive outlook” category, only a handful of stories quoted analysts or the Chinese public in favor of Xi’s campaign. For such stories the content analysis identified analysts that had commented in favor of Xi’s policies. Interestingly, often the sources used in these stories were often contradicted by journalists or other analysts that were not in favor of Xi’s policies in regards to the anti-corruption campaign.

Overall, the majority of the news reports criticized Xi and his government for their lack of due process in the arrest, questioning, and conviction of those accused of corruption in China. The majority of speculative analysis emerged during the coverage of the arrest of high ranking officials or “tigers.” In such stories, U.S. journalists repeatedly pointed out Xi’s political

motivations that resulted in the arrest and imprisonment of officials such as the former head of China's national security Zhou Yong Kang. While news reports have hinted at the popularity of the campaign, there is limited in depth coverage on the public stance about the campaign. The dissertation is not advocating that U.S. journalists are obligated to reflect positive outlooks in their coverage, but the lack of positive or even neutral analysis about the campaign raises concerns on whether U.S. journalists are covering one-sided perspectives about the campaign.

Thus, the coverage of the anti-graft campaign in the United States contributes heavily to the impression that Xi initiated the campaign because he was on a quest expand his power in China. Another important factor that alarmed the U.S. news media was Xi's focus on the military. When in late March 2013, Xi announced that his anti-graft campaign would also address corruption in the PLA and that even high-ranking generals would be held accountable, the speculation about the president's vision for the future of the military became a common theme across most outlets. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* wrote:

The new system [controlling spending in the military] is part of an anti-corruption drive President Xi Jinping has spearheaded since coming into power as the Communist Party's top official in November, amid warnings from leaders in the Communist Party that pervasive graft threatens its hold on power. In addition, say analysts and diplomats, the move will help secure Mr. Xi's control over the military and bolster popular support for the Communist Party after a string of scandals last year, including the fall of former party stalwart Bo Xilai.³⁵⁵

Across all outlets the crackdown on military corruption was seen as a telling sign that China's seventh president was attempting to gain more power within China. Interestingly, within

the anti-corruption case study, the Chinese military were often a source of fascination for U.S. news reporters and analysts. Therefore, Xi's anti-graft crusade also frequently led into discussions of Xi's ambitions. This dissertation labeled those recurring discussions as "The Ambitious Mr. Xi" frame.

4.3.2 Xi, Military Policies Frame

U.S. journalists viewed Xi's ideas and visions for the future of China as central components of his personality and identity as an influential leader. Even though the main search terms of this research focused explicitly on Xi's anti-corruption campaign and on Xi himself, Xi's political visions and strategies surfaced in many of the stories and editorials covered in this research.

A.1.1 Xi's Military Policies

An unexpected theme that came up during the research on the coverage of Xi's anti-corruption campaign was a military one. Because of the specific keywords, there was no expectation that the stories in the data would address China's military power, except perhaps for stories that might highlight a military corruption case. Yet a considerable number of the anti-corruption stories analyzed referenced one way or another to Xi's military ambitions in their narrative of Xi and his power in China. For example, *The New York Times'* news reports mentioned Xi's military policies 58.8 percent of their stories. In addition, outlets mentioned Xi's military policies in 57.1 percent of op-eds and editorials they ran during the timespan studied on this research (see Chart 2). A detailed account of the findings are presented in charts are in Appendix C.

Journalists used words such as “muscling up” and “muscular” to demonstrate the kind of military Xi aspired to build for China. Other words such as “obsession” and “unstoppable,” “ambitious” and “alarming,” were used to describe Xi’s aspirations of military expansion. The military angle in the articles also served to portray Xi as an authoritative figure.

For example, Xi made headlines when he rejected military reform — namely, transferring official control of the military from the Party to the Chinese government (a council of advisors). Journalists understood his rejection as not only another form of power consolidation by Xi, but also as a sign of his ambitions for an even more powerful China. As stated in the history section above, China’s military power has been a constant concern for U.S. foreign policy and military establishment, thus any signs of military expansion by China is considered newsworthy. Frames discussing the Chinese military and its capabilities were mostly of a thematic nature. The importance of the growth of Chinese military in U.S.-China relations was often discussed in the opinion pages. For example, an op-ed by a group of contributors published in *The New York Times* stated:

As China’s economic and military strength continues to grow, and its weight in the Asia-Pacific region increases, Beijing and Washington will have to not only negotiate and renegotiate the boundaries of their power and influence, but also develop a shared understanding of their global roles and responsibilities.³⁵⁶

The news media’s focus on Xi’s interest in stronger military intensified after Obama announced his “Pivot to Asia” doctrine in 2013. *Politico*, for example, noted that Xi was on the quest for a more “robust” military to curb growing U.S. influence in the region.³⁵⁷

Similarly, John Garnaut of *Foreign Policy* wrote the following about Xi's speech to sailors on board a guided-missile destroyer back in December 2013:

For Xi, this [China's military capabilities] is no idle question. The 59-year-old new President is himself a veteran who launched his career in 1979 as personal assistant to Geng Biao, then secretary-general in charge of daily affairs at the Central Military Commission, the 11-member panel that runs the Chinese armed forces. And Xi has stated clearly that the military is central to his vision for China. "We must ensure there is unison between a prosperous country and strong military."³⁵⁸

Therefore, even though most stories were collected using keywords related to anti-graft campaign, the issue of Chinese military power came up regularly in the coverage. The stories discussing Xi's military ambitions not only further enhanced the "power grabber" frame but they also shed light on Xi Jinping's military ambitions for China.

A.1.2 Xi's Military Policies: Regional Influence

Another recurring theme that enhanced the "Xi, Political & Military Policies Frame" in the reporting of the anti-corruption campaign was Xi's foreign policy goals and ideas. In his speeches Xi often linked all his policies to one another. For example, he made numerous speeches observing that a less corrupt China would allow its citizens to pursue the Chinese Dream and ultimately lead to a stronger China internationally. Thus, it is not surprising that Xi's foreign policy was another recurring theme in the coverage of the anti-corruption campaign. China's ambitions in foreign affairs were viewed by the U.S. news media as President Xi's ultimate goal to become the most powerful world leader. Hence, another frame (roughly 41

percent of stories) in the coverage about Xi's domestic anti-graft campaign was his ambitions, as tracked through his approach to foreign affairs.

U.S. news media often reported on Washington's "unease" about China's growing power in the international scene, a notion often echoed by op-ed writers and reporters alike. China's relations with various countries and areas of the world often portrayed Xi as a leader seeking power over markets and resources around the world. His influence over the Chinese military and growing influence in the region, as well as his relations with American foes such as Iran, North Korea, and Russia, were amongst the most recurrent in the collected research. Journalists used words such as "aggressive," "assertive," and "intrusive," to describe China's security policy, particularly in reference to its prolonged war of words with Japan over disputes on the Senkaku Islands. For example, Jeremy Page of *The Wall Street Journal* wrote the following about Xi's growing ambitions:

Now those U.S. and Asian officials' concern is that Mr. Xi, while establishing clear authority over China's generals, has endorsed the more muscular approach to international relations, and a more prominent role for the military in China's development. Since his speech aboard the destroyer, China's military newspapers have been peppered with references to the "dream of a strong military" and the need for "combat readiness."³⁵⁹

According to U.S. news media speculations, the more military rivals Xi purged in his anti-corruption campaign, the more influence Xi would gain in the military and across the government. The result? A stronger military ultimately would translate into an even stronger presence for Xi and China in international affairs.

The frames discussed so far were unique to the anti-corruption case study. The second case study, the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, did not generate as many diverse frames as the anti-corruption campaign when considering Xi Jinping. As far as the U.S. news media was concerned, the Chinese government's approach to the unrest in Hong Kong further enhanced their skepticism about his ideas of reform that he had been preaching. Thus, in both case studies, issues of human rights, social freedoms, censorship, and treatment of dissidents were repeated in the coverage.

4.3.3 Xi, Policies and Ideology Frame

In the U.S. news media's coverage of the Umbrella Movement, the issue of human rights was the most prevalent frame. While this was not a surprising finding, the ways in which American news outlets handled the frame in their reporting on Xi and the dissent movements was interesting. Since the dissertation's research questions were focused on the portrayal of Xi Jinping in the U.S. news media, the content analysis of the Hong Kong protests coverage focused on those stories that mentioned Xi Jinping. Above all, American journalists and analysts observed that Xi's "macho-like" and "iron-willed" attitude and his hatred of weakness would eventually crush the Hong Kong movements — and in this they were correct. Journalists cited their belief that President Xi would not negotiate with the protesters, and explained the situation by referencing Xi as the "paramount leader" or "supreme leader" — in this they were also correct.

For example, in October 2014, *The Wall Street Journal* wrote:

China's new Supreme Leader, Xi Jinping, has taken a hard line with Hong Kong because

he fears its democratizing influence on the mainland. However, Mr. Lai believes that unrest and open defiance represent an even greater threat to Mr. Xi's power. As internal battles continue, he needs to resolve the Hong Kong situation quickly. That gives Mr. Lai hope that Mr. Xi will try to find a compromise without bloodshed. That would boost his credentials as an enlightened leader willing to accommodate pragmatic change.³⁶⁰

Many reporters understood Xi's general attitude towards dissent as a sign of his tyrannical tendencies. For example, *The New York Times* wrote:

Mr. Xi's record so far — unyielding opposition to political liberalization and public protests has been a hallmark of his rule — has suggested a politician who abhors making concessions. He has fashioned himself into a strongman unseen in China since the days of Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong, and few if any party insiders and political analysts expect him to give serious consideration to the demands for full democratic elections in Hong Kong.³⁶¹

The “Xi the Tyrant” frame became more visible when the Hong Kong protests were seen as an impediment to Xi's policy ambitions. Most journalists pointed out that Xi would handle the movement with his signature policies in mind. For example, *Politico* wrote the following about the protesters and the impact of the movement:

And so this could be a make-or-break moment for Xi. His plans for major economic and financial reforms have threatened powerful vested interests and alienated critics who're likely to be biding their time and hoping for Xi to slip up. Xi needs to get Hong Kong right not only because a misstep would repel the international community and sabotage

Hong Kong's success as a financial capital; he needs to respond very carefully because failure will severely weaken his authority—and his trademark “Chinese Dream”—in the eyes of his mainland constituency.³⁶²

Similarly, an op-ed on October 15, 2014 in *The Washington Post*'s weblog wrote the following about the Xi's possible handling of the situation:

Most dangerously, the regime risks cornering itself into carrying out a violent crackdown on the protesters. That would inspire global protests, risk a backlash in mainland China and besmirch the “Chinese Dream” leader Xi Jinping has promised before he has even defined it.³⁶³

U.S. news media mostly credited Xi's avoidance of full-scale violence to his ambitions. Many news outlets speculated on what would happen — what Xi would do— by referencing what had happened in China's past. Much of the coverage of the Umbrella Movement framed the current events with background information about Hong Kong's society, its politics, and history. Amongst the background information provided for the Hong Kong coverage, reference to the Tiananmen Square Massacre was amongst the most visible. Every news outlet reviewed in this for this research, mentioned Tiananmen at least once in their coverage (roughly, 92 percent of the stories).

The U.S. news media expected events in Hong Kong to turn into a Tiananmen 2.0. For example, in an opinion piece on October 4, 2014 on *The Wall Street Journal*'s blog, scholar, activist and author Orville Schell wrote:

Such movements sometimes do indeed change history for the better. But also,

sometimes for the worse: They can engender horrific periods of restoration and reaction, during which all impulses of political reform are crushed. That is precisely what happened after the violent suppression of the mass demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989. And it could happen again in Hong Kong now [...]

I recall with perfect vividness watching those dramatic events unfold in Beijing. What started as a simple memorial to the life and death of the former liberal Communist Party chief Hu Yaobang soon evolved into an almost two-month-long mass movement with a full menu of demands. Just as in Hong Kong, it was an inchoate, ever-changing movement made up of many factions, which deprived it of an effective central nervous system. As it spontaneously, and peacefully, gathered momentum, the 1989 protest came to include as many as a million people in the capital alone and to occupy not only all of Tiananmen Square's vastness but much of downtown Beijing as well.³⁶⁴

Similarly, *Politico* referenced Tiananmen in its coverage of the PRC's 65th birthday: In stark contrast, top Chinese leader Xi Jinping led the Communist Party old guard at a National Day gathering in Beijing. It was a show of solidarity at the top. Party elders included ex-President Jiang Zemin, former Premier Li Peng (nicknamed the "Butcher of Beijing" for his role in the 1989 Tiananmen Square bloodshed) and other senior luminaries from an earlier era. Xi was photographed prominently with Jiang, who remains influential despite his poor health. Xi's speech, full of soaring rhetoric, sent good wishes to the people of Hong Kong—but failed to mention the protests. "Today we can be completely proud to say a China full of vitality and [...] hope is already towering over the East," he was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.³⁶⁵

The New Yorker also speculated that there would be far worse repercussions if Xi were to respond to the Hong Kong movements in the same way as his predecessors did in 1989:

But the costs of a crackdown — diplomatic isolation, recession, another alienated generation — would be incalculably higher than they were in 1989. China's economy today is 24 times the size it was then, and Beijing aspires to leadership in the world. The question is not whether Xi Jinping can summon the authority to resolve the crisis but whether he can begin to address the problem that awaits him when it's over: an emerging generation that is ever less willing to be ruled without a voice.³⁶⁶

For both cases studied about the coverage of Xi Jinping in this dissertation, the majority of the coverage had stories relating to human rights (see Appendix C). In the anti-corruption case study, discussion of human rights was mostly thematic. In the Umbrella Movement case study, the discussion of human rights followed both episodic and thematic frames. In news reports the episodic frames were used to report day-to-day incidents such as the use of tear gas by Hong Kong police, or new tactics used by protesters to prolong their sit-ins on the streets of Hong Kong.

In 2013, the Chinese government started a series of crackdowns on activists who had taken it upon themselves to expose official corruption. American outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Daily Beast*, and *Huffington Post* labeled the crackdown as “surprising” and “contradictory to the campaign’s main objective.” Terms such as “tragic,” “appalling,” “hawkish,” and “disappointing” were the most common phrases used to describe Xi’s policies and attitudes towards freedom of speech and human rights — human rights lawyers and activists were amongst the highest number of sources journalists used across their coverage of the anti-corruption campaign and the Umbrella movement (Appendix C).

A.1.1 Xi's Political Policies: Xi's Chinese Dream S

Another recurring theme that frequently emerged in coverage about Xi's signature anti-graft campaign was his vision for what he called the Chinese Dream — a doctrine expressed in terms close to that of the American Dream. Many American journalists and China watchers saw Xi's Chinese Dream vision as code for his desire to make China into the “global superpower.” The idea that a Chinese leader with views antithetical to Western democratic values could present a doctrine that appeared to mimic the idealism expressed in American dream raised many eyebrows in the United States.

Well-known politicians such as Senator Marco Rubio (R-Florida) wrote an extensive piece for *Foreign Policy* on this issue:

Although Xi's dream has echoes of the American Dream, these two visions are different and ultimately incompatible if China desires to become a “responsible stakeholder” in the international system. Which dream succeeds in the coming decades will have profound implications, not just for the United States and China, but for the world. That's because for almost seven decades, the United States has served as the primary guarantor of peace and stability in the world. It has built alliances, helped establish international institutions, and protected the international sea lanes on which commerce flows and helped spread freedom and prosperity. In times of crisis, America has provided leadership and, when necessary, the lives of its citizens to advance its ideals and defend its security.³⁶⁷

Journalists often described Xi's dream skeptically, using terms such as “unrealistic” and “vague.” Opinion pages were even more critical of the Chinese Dream than news reports. For

example, an opinion piece by long-time freelance China correspondent, Clarissa Sebag-Montefiore, in *The New York Times* spoke sarcastically of the dream:

If Xi's Chinese Dream is a deliberately vague notion, designed to mean anything anyone wants, the limits of its ambiguity must nonetheless be determined from the top down.

Some of my Chinese friends call it an ineffectual magic wand (wield it but nothing happens), and on Sina Weibo, China's Twitter — over which the state holds less control than it would like — many mock it as Communist Party propaganda nonsense. But even a concept that is largely empty is worthy of censorship.³⁶⁸

While the U.S. news media typically were not enthusiastic about Xi's doctrine of the Chinese Dream, the recurring mentioning of the idea often linked with Xi's anti-graft, military and foreign affairs polices, enhanced the portrayal of the Xi as an "ambitious" politician. Xi had often stated that to achieve the Chinese Dream, China needed to free itself of corruption and greed, a message that, as noted by *The New Yorker*'s Evan Osnos, highly resonated with the Chinese public. For many Chinese, the "dream" is a testament to their leaders' forward-thinking.³⁶⁹

4.3.4 Personal Components of Xi Jinping's Coverage

Aside from the characterization of Xi Jinping through the case studies, the content analysis also revealed how U.S. news media characterized Xi's personal characteristics. The news outlet's descriptions of Xi enhanced their assessment of Xi's policies and strategies. However, it was interesting to note that the media made more personal observations of Xi during

their reporting on Xi's anti-corruption initiative than the Hong Kong protests. It appeared that was the case because the anti-corruption campaign had a closer connection to Xi and his policies than the Umbrella Movement.

Journalists covering Xi's anti-corruption campaign in its early phase (March-May 2013) were also just coming to understand who Xi was as a leader even though he had been sworn in as the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (CCCP) in November of 2012 and had announced his key policy programs shortly thereafter. By the second phase of his corruption initiative (October-December 2014) — a timeframe which overlapped with the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong — journalists had developed a better understanding of Xi's personality and his style of leadership. Most often, stories focusing on Xi's personality in the anti-corruption campaign used thematic frames to explain who he was, his family background, his marriage, and his world views.

At the beginning of 2013, journalists and analysts were mostly focused on introducing Xi to their readers. Thus, there were a lot of stories about Xi's attitudes, family background, education and ideological views. Articles also described Xi, noting that he was "China's tallest president," or observing that he was "seldom smiling," "stoic," "serious looking," and a "princeling." Within a few weeks of his presidency, as the anti-corruption campaign gained ground in China, terms used to describe Xi focused more on his style of leadership and decision-making. He was called a "strongman," "neo-authoritarian," "blunt," and "ruthlessly ambitious."

The American news media also wrote about how Xi was being described in Chinese state media. Journalists observed that in China he was being called "Xi Dada," "Uncle Xi" or "Papa Xi," and noted that he was being characterized as "down-to-earth" and a "man of the people."

For example, when a new song praised Xi and his “loving relationship” with his wife, *The Washington Post’s* China bureau chief Simon Denyer wrote the following in November 2014:

Since taking power, Xi has simultaneously sought to portray himself both as a tough leader and as a man of the people, with a visit to a steamed bun shop and a trip to mingle with ordinary people on the streets of Beijing on a smoggy day last year designed to show him as more approachable than some of his predecessors.³⁷⁰

One aspect that especially stood out was the discussions by U.S. news media about the formation of Xi’s ideology. In almost 56 percent of the stories examined for the anti-corruption campaign that focused on Xi’s personality, journalists made direct or indirect comparisons to Mao Zedong and his style of leadership, noting, for example, that Mao was an “idol” and “inspiration” to Xi, and observing similarities between Xi’s book, *The Governance of China* and Mao’s *Little Red Book*.

Journalists compared President Xi’s methods in fighting dissent to Mao and his ambitions to consolidate power in the late 1960s. Scholar Sergey Radchenko wrote in *Foreign Policy*: “Xi’s policies in fighting corruption come directly from Mao’s arsenal: divide and rule.”³⁷¹ Journalists also observed that Xi’s military ambitions appeared to take inspiration from Mao’s famous quote that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” U.S. news media noted that Xi’s urging of artists to create “morally inspiring art” that “embod[y] socialist values” was reminiscent of Mao’s views that art should serve the Party.

Based on past studies, Americans and American journalists consider Mao not only to be a revolutionary strongman, but to be one of the most criminal leaders of the twentieth century. Mao is remembered as the dictator responsible for the deaths of 30 million Chinese during the

Cultural Revolution. Thus, journalists' comparison of Xi to Mao is a telling indicator of the tone of coverage of Xi Jinping.

Interestingly, to further illuminate Xi's personality, the U.S. news media paid some attention to his wife — Peng Liyuan. For many journalists and analysts, Peng modernized the image of China's first lady. In 2014, Peng made headlines when Vladimir Putin jumped from his seat at an APEC event to place a shawl on her shoulder. She accepted the shawl for a second and then handed it off to someone nearby. The awkward moment went viral and was shown once on Chinese state media. The incident caused so much attention that *Foreign Policy* ran an article headlined "Putin Hits on China's First Lady, Censors Go Wild."³⁷² That article pointed out that Xi wanted to portray a "squeaky clean image" when abroad. Within hours all Chinese news media had pulled down the video and censors had scrubbed it off social media sites.³⁷³ But aside from that incident, Western news media paid attention to Peng's clothing, public demeanor and even her past; she became an integral part of how Xi was portrayed in the American news media. During the coverage of the anti-corruption campaign, for instance, it was often noted that Peng only wore clothes by Chinese designers. On foreign trips her demeanor and behavior were closely observed. Bill Bishop of *The New York Times* wrote the following about her during the couple's first state visit to Russia in March 2013:

Peng Liyuan, the president's wife, has been an unexpected star of the trip. Mrs. Peng, a singer who holds the rank of major general in the People's Liberation Army and is known for her patriotic songs, is China's glamorous and public first lady in a long time. Pictures of her on the trip lit up Chinese social media and her fashion choices, all Chinese brands, should be both a boon to the designers and a message to other Chinese officials and their spouses that homegrown brands are more appropriate than foreign, luxury ones.³⁷⁴ By

focusing on the first lady, the U.S. news media demonstrate the differences Xi and his predecessors. Also, U.S. news media interpreted the differences in Peng Yuan's behavior as a testament to Xi's consciousness to public appearances.

4.3.5 Sources Used in The Coverage of China

Since most of the literature reviewed in second chapter pointed to the importance of sources in news media coverage of foreign policy this dissertation also paid attention to the sourcing habits of U.S. news media. A description of sources and the findings related to the sources for each outlets and type of article related to China are in (Appendix B and Appendix C)

A.1.1 Sources Used in the Coverage of the Anti-Corruption Campaign

- China watchers and analysts had the highest presence in the sourcing by U.S. journalists in the anti-corruption campaign case study. These analysts were mostly critical of Xi's policies. The analysts and China watchers were either Western or Chinese expats. Pro-Xi analysts were not as present in the coverage. Those in favor of Xi's policies were usually university professors or government policy analysts in China. Surprisingly, there were not many economic or criminal experts used in the sourcing. In a few instances, the social and economic ramifications of high corruption in China were mentioned, but generally the coverage focused on the political aspects of the policy (For percentages see Appendix C).
- Since Xi Jinping does not usually grant interviews, his speeches are often quoted to reflect his views in the coverage. Thus, "Xi as Source" was used as an indirect source.

- In the anti-corruption campaign case study, U.S. journalists often sourced the Chinese state media. Opinion writers and newspaper editorials referred to state-controlled news media as a source that reflected the views of the government. Even in editorials which generally use limited sources, the Chinese state media were often used in both case studies to reflect the position of China's political elite. Thirteen percent of editorials used the Chinese State media in their sourcing.
- Another highly used source in the anti-corruption campaign were human rights/climate change and other pro-democracy and freedom of speech activists. The “activist” sources were used to provide perspective on how the Xi administration had forced confessions and the treatment of those arrested. A number of stories also used activist’s sources to point out Xi’s issues with journalists and human rights activists.
- Chinese bloggers and social media posts were often used to show the Chinese public reactions and opinions. However, there were very limited interviews with the public and most of the public opinion basement were based on blog entries on social media sites.
- Unnamed Chinese officials were also often quoted in the coverage, presumably the reason why most of these sources were “unnamed” was due to the high scrutiny of individuals in China, especially in the Xi administration.

In conclusion, the pattern of sources used in U.S. news coverage of Xi in the anti- corruption campaign, more or less follows what previous scholars, such as Van Dijik and Berkowitz, had found in their studies about China’s coverage in the United States.³⁷⁵ Also, since U.S. journalist face the issue of access to Xi and his inner circle, journalists relied on state-controlled Chinese media and Xi’s speeches that were published or broadcasted in China. Similar to the unnamed sources category, U.S. journalists had no choice but to use the Chinese state media as their

primary source for instances of public announcements. However, U.S. journalists and analysts often stated that the reports from the Chinese state media were what the Chinese leaders had approved. In other words, U.S. journalists often warned their audiences of the pro-government bias in state-run media, commonly labeling the Chinese news media as “government mouthpieces.” As noted above, most analysts and China watchers cited were from Western research centers. Many Chinese expats were also used as analysts in the coverage. Interestingly, there were limited number of financial or economic analysts in the coverage. Opinion articles and editorials followed more or less the same pattern. In these articles, unnamed sources and the Chinese state media were the most used sources in the coverage.

A.1.2 Sources Used in the Coverage of the Umbrella Movement

- The majority of sources used in the Umbrella Movement were the pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong. All news outlets had conducted interviews with people on the ground in Hong Kong. Other activists (mostly those in opposition to Xi) were often used as sources of the time (Appendix C).
- Again, Chinese state media appeared frequently as sources in U.S. news coverage of the movement. Similar to the anti-corruption case study, reporting from the state media was used to detect the Xi government’s narrative of events.
- Xi Jinping’s public statements were also noticeable sources in the coverage. “Unnamed Chinese Officials” were common sources used by U.S. journalists, as were “Hong Kong officials.” Quotations from Hong Kong sources were often complemented by Beijing-aligned sources.
- U.S. news media also interviewed and quoted China scholars and historians.

4.3.6 Discussion and Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, content analysis of the two China case studies showed that U.S. journalists often use a negative and/or skeptical tone in their coverage of Xi Jinping. Using framing analysis, the research conducted for this dissertation showed the existence of three main frames in the coverage: “Xi the Power Grabber,” “Xi the Tyrant” and “The Ambitious Mr. Xi.” “Xi the Tyrant” frame was evident in both case studies, and across both mainstream and online-native publications. Through this frame, Xi was depicted as a dictatorial figure with an unforgiving attitude towards dissent.

Most stories in the overall coverage emphasized the political ramifications of events depicted, and reflected on the implications for Xi. Thus “Xi, Power and Personality Frame” was one of the most relevant frames in this study, with most stories on the corruption campaign, for example, speculating that the reason Xi wanted to “lock power in a cage” was to remove his key rivals. Xi was often portrayed as an ambitious politician who seeks great personal power and who desires China’s supremacy in the world.

Unsurprisingly, the U.S. news media were critical of Xi, taking perspectives on the events being reported that were not aligned with Xi Jinping’s policies and ideas. To arrive at those evaluations, the sources used in the story were most often highly critical of Xi.

Notes

²⁵¹ Faiola, Anthony, and Robin Wright. "Ahmadinejad's Day One in New York: A Hostile Reception, a Rambling Talk." *The Washington Post*, 25 Sept. 2007, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/24/AR2007092400168.html. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

²⁵² One of Nixon's campaign ads from 1972 starts with a close up of the president's diplomatic, passport, showing various country stamps and a narration of his achievements in each of the countries and continents in the background. The ad shows stamps from India, Yugoslavia, Canada, and most importantly Russia and China:
<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1972>

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ MacMillan, Margaret. *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World*. Random House Incorporated, 2008.

²⁵⁵ Nixon, Richard M., and Rick Perlstein. *Richard Nixon: Speeches, Writings, Documents.*, Princeton University Press, 2008.

²⁵⁶ Bundy, William P. *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

²⁵⁷ Kissinger, Henry. *On China*. New York, Penguin Press, 2011.

²⁵⁸ "Nixon's 1968 RNC Acceptance Speech." *YouTube*, 3 Feb. 2012,
www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aD5rgDpQqc. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

²⁵⁹ Kissinger, Henry. *On China*. New York, Penguin Press, (2011).P: 29.

²⁶⁰ Kissinger, Henry. *White House Years*. Simon and Schuster, 2011.

²⁶¹ Tudda, Chris. *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012. Internet resource.

²⁶² Chiang Kai –Shieh's name is Romanized to Jiang Jieshi, he was the ruler of Taiwan from 1928-1975

²⁶³ Roberts, Steven V. "Ping-Pong Diplomacy: The Secret History Behind the Game That Changed the World' by Nicholas Griffin." *The Washington Post*, 24 Jan. 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ping-pong-diplomacy-the-secret-history-behind-the-game-that-changed-the-world-by-nicholas-griffin/2014/01/24/03e10536-794f-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6_story.html?utm_term=.0d3fedcd83e5. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

²⁶⁴ For more on diplomatic reasons of the rapprochement see: Goh, Evelyn. "Nixon, Kissinger, and the "Soviet Card" in the US Opening to China, 1971– 1974." *Diplomatic History* 29.3 (2005): 475-502.

²⁶⁵ Zhou Enlai had stated that he wanted high ranking American diplomats naming Secretary of State William Rogers or the President himself, later Nixon decided that Kissinger would be best suited since he could travel to China secretly and without the press knowing (Kissinger, 2011).

²⁶⁶ Yahya Khan had named the mission to connect China and the U.S., "Marco Polo", the Americans and Chinese were able to establish Communication. After several months of secret diplomacy, Zhou Enlai sent a message to president Nixon via Yahya Khan, inviting President Nixon's special envoy to Peking. Kissinger was tasked to visit China and start the groundwork for a possible visit by the President himself and the normalization of relations. On July 1 1971, Kissinger set off for what the administration announced a "tour of Asia." Based on Kissinger's own statements, the plan between Yahya Khan and the U.S. was that during a dinner in Pakistan Kissinger would allegedly fall ill and Yahya Khan would urge him to recuperate in his exclusive Vila on the mountain tops of Pakistan. A Kissinger stand-in would go to the establishment and Pakistan's foreign minister, Mohammad Khan, to an aircraft destined for Beijing where the Chinese accompanied him, would drive Kissinger himself. No one, not the worlds press, or the U.S. embassy staff—not even Nixon's own cabinet knew of Kissinger's trip to China (PBS Documentary).

²⁶⁷ In addition to the issue of Taiwan, only weeks before Kissinger's secret trip to China, the Pentagon Paper scandal shook the administration to its core. The Pentagon Papers was a scandal involving a secret study by secretary of state Robert McNamara, the study was highly critical of U.S. conduct of the war in Vietnam. The study was publicized by a former DOD and RAND corporation employee, Daniel Ellsberg, leaked the report to the Times, Washington post and a number of other papers. The White House now had to deal with the fallout of the exposé just as Kissinger and his team were finalizing his trip to China. After The Pentagon Papers leak, while instigating an

initial panic in the administration's plans to quietly approach China, validated Nixon and Kissinger's decision to keep Kissinger's trip hidden from the media

²⁶⁸ Kissinger, Henry, and Clare Boothe Luce. *White House Years*. 1st ed. ed., Boston, Little, Brown, 1979.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. 60.

²⁷⁰ This was an important part of Kissinger's Negotiations, when word of Nixon's possible visits to the U.S.S.R was mentioned, Kissinger played it as if Nixon already had an invitation from the Soviets. He didn't. Kissinger wanted Nixon to visit Beijing before China, so that they (the Nixon administration), would have the upper hand with the Russians.

²⁷¹ Bush, Richard C. *At Cross Purposes: U.S.-Taiwan Relations Since 1942*. Routledge, 2015.

²⁷² In reality, however, Kissinger had visited China for the second time in October 1971, he had tentatively promised Zhou that as soon as Taiwan returns under the control of the mainland the 1954 treaty can be set aside. Also in January 1971 the Nixon administration was in crisis mode over new offensives by the North Vietnamese, and China's reluctance to intervene, that generated discussion about possible cancellation of the President's trip, in public Nixon and his team avidly defended stronger ties between China and the United States.

²⁷³ "Richard Nixon: State of the Union Message to the Congress: Overview and Goals - February 2, 1973." *The American Presidency Project*, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3996.

²⁷⁴ "China and the United States." *China and the United States: From Hostility to Engagement*, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nsa/publications/china-us/>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

²⁷⁵ Lattanzi, Bill, et al. Nixon's China Game. *PBS Home Video Distributor*, 2000. Also see "Horne, A. (2009). *Kissinger: 1973, the crucial year* (1st Simon & Schuster hardcover ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster.

²⁷⁶ Brinkley, Douglas. *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's journey beyond the White House*. Penguin Mass Market, 1998.

²⁷⁷ Mann, James. *The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression*. New York: Viking, 2007. Print.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ The partisanship on the issue was to shift over the next three decades: when a Democratic president has been in the White House, Republicans became fierce supporters of Taiwan, and then the reverse occurred during Republican presidencies.

²⁸¹ Albert, Eleanor. "China-Taiwan Relations." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 7 Dec. 2016, www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-taiwan-relations. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

²⁸² Foot, Rosemary. *The Practice of Power: Us Relations with China Since 1949*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995.P: 73

²⁸³ Shirk, Susan L. *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China*. Vol. 24. Univ of California Press, 1993.

²⁸⁴ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Public Affairs. U.s.-China Joint Communiqué: August 1982. Washington, D.C., U.S. Dept. of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, 1982

²⁸⁵ Bush III, Richard C. "The role of the United States in Taiwan-PRC relations." *Taiwan: Beyond the Economic Miracle* (1992): 345-68.

²⁸⁶ Henry Liu, U.S., *China: The Politics of Ambiguity*. *Asia Times Online*. 24 April 2002.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Smith, Hedrick. "REAGAN, IN U.S., SAYS CHINA TRIP ADVANCED TIES." *The New York Times*, 1 May 1984, www.nytimes.com/1984/05/02/world/reagan-in-us-says-china-trip-advanced-ties.html. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

²⁸⁹ Mann, James. *The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression*. New York: Viking, 2007. Print.

²⁹⁰ Mosher, Steven W. *China Misperceived: American Illusions and Chinese Reality*. New York, Basic Books, 1990.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Deans, Phil. "Bush's China policy: Understanding the First Hundred Days." *The RUSI Journal* 146.3 (2001): 78-81.

²⁹³ The previous Soviet leader to visit China was Nikita Khrushchev in 1959.

²⁹⁴ KRISTOF, NICHOLAS D. "PROTEST GOES ON." *The New York Times*, 15 May 1989, www.nytimes.com/1989/05/16/world/gorbachev-meets-deng-in-beijing-protest-goes-on.html. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

²⁹⁵ Suettinger, Robert L. *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations 1989-2000*. Brookings Institution Press, 2004.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Garrison, Jean A. *Making China Policy: From Nixon to GW Bush*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005.

²⁹⁸ Tudda, Chris. *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2012.

²⁹⁹ Ibid

³⁰⁰ According to Lake other backlash states were : Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Libya

³⁰¹ Pres. Clinton & Pres. Zemin at Joint Press Conference (1997)." *YouTube*, 19 Apr. 2013,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=HupI1TKN-aM. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Foot, Rosemary. *The Practice of Power: Us Relations with China Since 1949*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995.

³⁰⁵ China." *China | Country Report | Freedom in the World | 2017*, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/china>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁰⁶ "More Headlines: George W. Bush on Free Trade." *More George W. Bush on Free Trade*, www.ontheissues.org/Celeb/More_George_W_Bush_Free_Trade.htm. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁰⁷ It's important to keep in mind that the Bush family had significant ties in China. Bush the elder served as a liaison in the U.S. embassy in Beijing after the rapprochement era (CHECK). Prescott Bush, W's uncle, had a number of lucrative businesses contracts with China.

³⁰⁸ Rumors about the Bush family ties in China, raised much speculation on whether Bush would be more confrontational in dealing with China.

³⁰⁹ Deans, Phil. "Bush's China policy: Understanding the First Hundred Days." *The RUSI Journal* 146.3 (2001): 78-81.

³¹⁰ Mann, Jim, and Rogers D. Spotswood Collection. *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China from Nixon to Clinton*. 1st ed. ed., New York, Alfred Knopf, 1999.

³¹¹ Stephens, Philip. "Financial Times." *The Financial Times*, 26 June 2008, www.ft.com/content/5f6d5306-4399-11dd-842e-0000779fd2ac

³¹² In fact, according to these organizations, long after the Bush presidency and the declining immediacy of the war on terror, China still continues to harass its Muslim citizens. For example, in 2014, Chinese police had conducted daily house-to-house searches, looking for books or clothing that revealed any connection to "conservative" Islam; the police had also detained dozens of women wearing the Islamic hijab. The Washington Post reported that those Muslims working in government organizations and students were forced to eat during the fasting month.³¹² Thus, with such reports and stories on China's crackdown on its Muslims, many scholars worry that Beijing is taking advantage of the ambiguity of the "war on terror" and using the elusiveness of the concept to its advantage. For more see :

Small, A; Zhu,W ; Hundman, E. (2015). Is China a Credible Partner in Fighting Terror? *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/24/china-islamic-state-terrorism-war-beijing-paris-us/>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³¹³ Some scholars argue that his initial hostile attitude towards Beijing was a following his ABC stance on foreign policy: Wang, C. (2009). George W. Bush and China : Policies, problems, and partnership. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

³¹⁴ On political rights China ranked 7 and on Civil liberties it ranked 6. "China." *Country Report | Freedom in the World* | 2009, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2009/china>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³¹⁵ Cooper, Helene. "China Holds Firm on Major Issues in Obama's Visit." *The New York Times*, 17 Nov. 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/11/18/world/asia/18prexy.html. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³¹⁶ Weisman, Jonathan, et al. "Obama Hits a Wall on His Visit to China." *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 Nov. 2009, www.wsj.com/articles/SB125857743503654225. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³¹⁷ Lieberthal, Kenneth. "The American Pivot to Asia." *Foreign Policy*, 21 Dec. 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/12/21/the-american-pivot-to-asia/>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³¹⁸ On democracy, the Obama administration did follow on some promises. For example, in December of 2011, Secretary Clinton became the first U.S. diplomat to make an official visit to Myanmar in fifty years.

³¹⁹ Li, Cheng. "Assessing U.S.-China Relations under the Obama Administration | Brookings Institution." *Brookings*, 5 Sept. 2016, www.brookings.edu/opinions/assessing-u-s-china-relations-under-the-obama-administration/. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³²⁰ Taylor, Adam. "How a 10-Gallon Hat Helped Heal Relations between China and America." *The Washington Post*, 25 Sept. 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/25/how-a-10-gallon-hat-helped-heal-relations-between-china-and-america/. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³²¹ Fish, Isaac Stone. "Is Mike Wallace the Reason Chinese Leaders Don't Give Interviews?" *Foreign Policy*, 22 July 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/12/21/the-american-pivot-to-asia/>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³²² "Full Transcript: Interview with Chinese President Xi Jinping." *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 Sept. 2015, www.wsj.com/articles/full-transcript-interview-with-chinese-president-xi-jinping-1442894700. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³²³ Schiavenza, Matt. "Xi Jinping Eats Some Dumplings at a Restaurant." *The Atlantic*, 30 Dec. 2013, www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/12/xi-jinping-eats-some-dumplings-at-a-restaurant/282719/. Also:

The restaurant song is not the only Xi inspired melody. In 2013, he visited the Shibadong village in Hunan province. There he met an old lady who said to the president "I don't know what to call you?" Xi used a term that goes back to the Mao era; he simply said: "I am the steward of the people." Later in 2016, the Hunan Satellite Television aired a song and dance that re-enacted the visit. Parts of the song: We are in your hearts | You are in our hearts | You love us The People | We The People deeply love you | We don't know what to call you | You take our hands in yours | We don't know what to call you | You take our concerns to heart.

³²⁴ This change of behavior by the China's first couple has also inspired another hit song called Papa Xi Loves Mama Peng, Parts of the song advise young Chinese to learn how to love from Papa Xi and Mama Peng.

³²⁵ Beech, Hannah. "Xi Jinping, China's New Chairman Mao." *Time*, 31 Mar. 2016

<http://time.com/4277504/chinas-chairman/>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³²⁶ Sullivan, Lawrence R. *China since Tiananmen: Political, Economic and Social Conflicts*. Armonk, NY, M.E. Sharpe, 1995.

³²⁷ Zhao, Dingxin. "China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed." *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 45.5 (2016): 664-665.

³²⁸ Li, Cheng. Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership. *Brookings Institution Press*, 2016.

³²⁹ A friend who used to be a journalist in China gave me this information.

³³⁰ "Chairman of Everything." *The Economist*, 2 Apr. 2016, www.economist.com/news/china/21695923-his-exercise-power-home-xi-jinping-often-ruthless-there-are-limits-his. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³³¹ Beech, Hannah. "China: Is President Xi Jinping's Book Really a Best Seller?" *Time*, <http://time.com/3827869/china-president-xi-jinping-book-bestseller/>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³³² Hall, Casey. "Is Xi Jinping Cultivating a Personality Cult? Or Just a Personality?" , 26 Apr. 2016, www.forbes.com/sites/caseyhall/2016/04/26/is-xi-jinping-cultivating-a-personality-cult-or-just-a-personality/#60f503525a13. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³³³ "Xi Jinping's Tightening Grip." *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 Oct. 2016, www.wsj.com/articles/xi-jinping-tightening-grip-1477392964. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Branigan, Tania. "Xi Jinping Vows to Fight 'Tigers' and 'Flies' in Anti-Corruption Drive." *The Guardian*, 22 Jan. 2013, www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/22/xi-jinping-tigers-flies-corruption. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017. Also see: "Xi Jinping Vows 'Power within Cage of Regulations.'" Xi Jinping Vows "Power within Cage of Regulations" - *Xinhua* | English.news.cn, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-01/22/c_132120363.htm. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³³⁶ "One Million' Chinese Officials Punished for Corruption." BBC News, BBC, 24 Oct. 2016, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-37748241. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³³⁷ *Financial Times*, www.ft.com/content/3c521faa-baa6-11e5-a7cc-280dfe875e28. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³³⁸ Daly, Robert. "China's Xi Dishes the Dirt on Corrupt Officials to Drive Them from Office." *Newsweek*, 13 June 2016, www.newsweek.com/xi-dishes-dirt-stamp-out-corruption-460924. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³³⁹ "The Devil, or Mr Wang." *The Economist*, 26 Mar. 2015, www.economist.com/news/china/21647295-chinas-second-most-powerful-leader-admired-and-feared-devil-or-mr-wang. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁴⁰ Haas, Benjamin. "China Torturing Suspects in 'War on Corruption' Says Human Rights Watch." *The Guardian*, 6 Dec. 2016, www.theguardian.com/law/2016/dec/06/china-torturing-suspects-in-war-on-corruption-says-human-rights-watch. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁴¹ "The Devil, or Mr Wang." *The Economist*, 26 Mar. 2015, www.economist.com/news/china/21647295-chinas-second-most-powerful-leader-admired-and-feared-devil-or-mr-wang. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁴² "Special Measures." *Human Rights Watch*, 1 Mar. 2017, www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/06/special-measures/detention-and-torture-chinese-communist-partys-shuanggui-system. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁴³ Tmg. "500." *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 22 July 2016, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/11276723/China-arrests-former-security-chief-Zhou-Yongkang.html. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁴⁴ There were no indications of where the op-ed writers were located.

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Chapter 5: Iran: History and Results

5.1 History of Relations and Background

For almost a century the United States and Iran have had some level of interaction with one another. For the first 60 years, relations between Tehran and Washington were friendly and productive. Since the late 1970s and the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, however, cordiality has devolved into animosity, threats and sanctions. The United States and Iran have gone from a relationship of allies to a state of what might be called aggressive tolerance towards one another.

In this section of the dissertation chapter, the history of U.S.-Iran relations is reviewed. During this dissertation's examination of news stories about Iran, the notion of "historical mistrust" between the two nations frequently appeared in U.S. journalism about Iran. Most journalists offered background insights on the historical examples they cited. Thus, this section aims to offer both an explication of pivotal past events and proffer some explanations as to why the United States and Iran moved to a state of aggressive tolerance. In the next section, the results of the content analysis on the two case studies regarding the U.S. coverage of Rouhani and the Iranian leadership are discussed.

The history provided below is not a detailed geopolitical analysis of U.S.-Iran relations. Its primary aim is to outline the events in a relationship that was once perceived to have "unshakable links" — events that led to the current hostile and complicated relations between the two countries.

5.1.1 Mr. Millspaugh Goes to Tehran

Back in the 1920s, the Iranian government had requested a financial advisor to help reorganize the Royal Finance Ministry of Iran. In 1922, Arthur Millspaugh was sent to Tehran to regulate the country's financial system; he spent eight years in total in Iran, which he wrote about in two books. Millspaugh's mission was to regulate Iran's financial system; he is credited with important achievements, including the establishment of Iran's first tax codes. Millspaugh's writings offer one of the first American narratives about Iran and Iranians. His first book, *The American Task in Persia*, provides interesting insight into Iranian culture, customs and day-to-day life. In one entry, he describes the similarities he finds between Iranians as '[o]rientals' and his fellow 'occidental' Americans:

Judged by their original stock, the Persians are our first cousins. Persia has an admixture of various racial elements, but the core of the population is Aryan [...] The Persians are, as a race dark but there are many blonds among them. In physical appearance they are generally fine-looking, congenial specimens.³⁷⁶

The presence of Millspaugh and his American team provided a check in the power struggles between Britain and Russia in Iran. However, Millspaugh's tenure in Tehran was often influenced by the political rivalries and power games of the Shah's close allies and the British, as well as by the Russian lobbies in the Iranian government. By 1928, internal politics in Iran led to the dismissal of Millspaugh from the country.³⁷⁷ The United States government expressed its regrets over his dismissal, but sought other paths to gain influence in Iran.

Before World War II, Britain and Russia were the two major foreign powers actively pursuing their own political and economic interests in Iran (or Persia as they called it back then).³⁷⁸ From 1940-1950s, Iran loomed large for the United States, both for geopolitical reasons during the world war and for its oil.³⁷⁹ With the end of the war, however, the U.S. began to re-evaluate the level of its influence in Iran — mostly by considering its rivals: Britain and Russia.³⁸⁰ In the later 1940s, the British held considerable control over the oil fields in Iraq and Iran, while the United States only controlled oil fields in Saudi Arabia. The Russians also had close ties to Iran and were considered an influential voice in Tehran's political decisions. Rivalry between U.S. and these countries, combined with Iran's oil reserves, and its unique geopolitical situation in the region, motivated the U.S. to seek a more substantial role in Iran.³⁸¹

As the Second World War came to an end, the United States made deals with both Moscow and London to withdraw their troops from their occupied territories in Iran. The British honored the agreement and pulled their troops out within weeks, but the Soviets didn't clear out for several weeks longer. The Russian refusal turned into what became known as the Iran Crisis, making Iran one of the first areas of contention between the U.S. and the Soviets post-war. The crisis prompted the U.S. to censure the U.S.S.R. at the United Nations; the two countries even resorted to subtle nuclear threats against each other. Eventually, after Iran's Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam promised the Soviets access to Iran's northern oil fields, the U.S.S.R. pulled out of Iran.³⁸² For scholars such as Donette Murray, the issue of Soviet withdrawal from Iran was an indication of America's growing prominence in international affairs:

The Soviet Union may have chosen, for its own reasons, to depart from Iranian

Azerbaijan in 1946 and Iranian politicians may have played a more substantial role, but Truman's tough stance and the retreating Red Army convinced many, then and later, that the U.S. was the most powerful player, who could dictate and dominate the affairs of those with whom it came into contact.³⁸³

During the first few years of the 1950s, U.S. involvement in Iran was mostly in an advisory and assistance form. The U.S. provided significant financial aid to Iran and often advised the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. For example, the U.S. government advised the Shah to focus on economic and political reforms, while promising that it would take care of Iran's national security. With the substantial aid monies provided by the U.S. and with the presence of American advisors within the Shah's inner circle, soon Iran's relations with the U.S. became a substantial part of the Shah's rule, and therefore a highly valued relationship.³⁸⁴

With the escalation of the Cold War, Iran's strategic importance grew for both the United States and Soviet Union. For President Harry Truman, U.S. involvement in Iran proved essential for U.S. interests in the Middle East. According to the Truman doctrine the U.S. had two main ideological bases for enhancing its military-political involvement in Iran:

- To contain the revolutionary or potentially revolutionary movements in the underdeveloped world;
- To maintain order and stability within the establishment framework.³⁸⁵

In terms of Iran, U.S. policy was to keep the pro-American Shah in power and maintain the status quo. Thus, any of those who thought to challenge the power

establishment in Iran, in effect were challenging the interests of the United States. What evolved in Iran during the fateful years of 1949-1953 forever changed the political scene in Iran and left a mark on Iranian attitudes towards the U.S.

5.1.2 Mossadegh and the 1953 Coup d'état

Many in Iran, regard the fateful days of August 1953 as the most important turning point in Iranian politics — some see it as even more significant than the 1979 Revolution. For them, the CIA-led coup d'état was the beginning of the end for any hopes of Iran as an oil-rich democratic society. What has become known, as the “Mossadegh Tragedy” is now part of Iranian political memory and discourse.³⁸⁶ Parents, who worry about their children entering politics, journalism or humanitarian law, often retell the story of Mossadegh and his unfortunate political fate.³⁸⁷

Mohammad Mossadegh became a household name in the early 1920s. As a young Western-educated intellectual he was one of the first members of Parliament to voice concern over the extensive powers held by Reza Khan, who was the secretary of war and one of the most powerful men in Iran during the 1920s. After Reza Khan became king and established the Pahlavi dynasty, Mossadegh left the political scene for a few years. Mossadegh returned to politics in 1941 after the forced abdication of Reza Khan.³⁸⁸

In the 1950s parliamentary elections, Mossadegh and his National Front party won the majority of seats in Iran's *Majlis* (parliament). The main priority for the National Front Party was to end British control over Iran's oil sales. After months of negotiations, the British failed to convince Mossadegh on a deal that would prevent the nationalization of Iranian oil.

With Mossadegh's popularity rising, the Shah decided to appoint him as prime minister especially since the Majlis had nominated him for the position. In his new role, Prime Minister Mossadegh focused on nationalizing Iran's oil revenues as his main policy agenda. Despite American and British opposition, the Majlis approved the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company on May 1, 1951. At first, there was considerable sympathy for Mossadegh amongst the U.S. government; American intelligence assumed that Mossadegh's government desired to keep the U.S. as a counterweight to the U.S.S.R. in Iran. Also, Mossadegh's belief in free speech had helped improve social and political freedoms in Iran preventing a public uprising against the pro-American Shah. However, Mossadegh's radical approach to foreign meddlers, his demands for the enhancement of governmental power, and his incorruptible sense of service, facilitated the formation of foreign and domestic enemies against him.

In August 2013, sixty years after the 1953 coup d'état in Iran, the CIA publicly admitted that it was behind the coup against Mossadegh. The detailed documents published on the National Security Archives website, reveal the United States' role in the "controversial operation."³⁸⁹ According to these reports, the Churchill administration, and in particular Sir Anthony Eden, the foreign secretary viewed Mossadegh as a "serious threat" to Britain's strategic and economic interests. However, the British needed American support to carry out any operation against Mossadegh in Tehran. By late 1952 and the election of Dwight Eisenhower, the U.S. position aligned with the British, who suggested that Mossadegh should be ousted, for fear of his involvement with the Soviets.³⁹⁰ Thus, in early 1953 the MI6 and the CIA engineered the operation to overthrow the popular Iranian prime minister.³⁹¹

Meanwhile in Tehran, some of Mossadegh's major supporters were feeling isolated by the Prime Minister. As a politician Mossadegh knew well enough that endorsements from influential clerics would go a long way to stabilizing his power, thus during his fight for the nationalization of oil, he had established ties with Tehran's influential cleric, Mohammad Kashani. But, due to their differences or perhaps Kashani's insincerity in his support and Mossadegh 's uncompromising attitude, within weeks before the 1953 coup d'état, the relationship soured. By severing ties with Kashani, Mossadegh lost major support amongst Tehran 's religious and economic elites, making his government even more vulnerable to surrounding challenges.³⁹²

In August of 1953, the Shah finally agreed to overthrow Mossadegh. He signed two decrees — dictated by CIA operative Donald Wilber. The first decree stripped the Prime Minister of his powers. The second, appointed Fazlollah Zahedi, a CIA-approved candidate as the country's next prime minister.³⁹³ Shortly after signing the orders, the Shah left Iran for vacation in Europe, and the CIA-led coup d'état known as Operation Ajax, was put into motion.³⁹⁴

On 19 August 1953, pro-Shah protests broke out in the streets of Tehran and the military bombarded Mossadegh's residency. Dozens of hired infiltrators took over southern Tehran's business district and vandalized many shops and banks in area. The next day, Mossadegh surrendered to prevent further bloodshed. The Shah returned from his pretend vacation in Rome and Zahedi was became prime minister. Eventually, Mossadegh was sentenced to three years of solidarity confinement in military prison. Later, he was put under house arrest at his residence in the rural town of Ahmadabad until his death on March 5, 1967. The 1953 Coup also led to the arrest, torture and

executions of many of Mossadegh's supporters and colleagues, such as the late Hossein Fatemi, the mastermind behind the nationalization of Iranian oil.

The overthrowing of Mossadegh was the first major clandestine operation undertaken by the CIA in Iran. The 1953 coup d'état left many marks on the Iranian society and its politics. In terms of U.S.-Iran relations, the event led to further involvement of the U.S. in Iran, and as Susan Maloney writes, the coup situated the U.S. as an important stakeholder in Iran's future:

The coup was a turning point for Iran, both with respect to its internal political dynamics and in its relationship with the rest of the world. Washington's involvement in the ouster of Mossadegh meant that the Eisenhower Administration had a real stake in the fate of his successor. The generous American [financial aid] program technical and financial assistance enabled the Shah to impose a higher degree of central control and reassemble the mechanisms of the state under his personal authority.³⁹⁵

Another important outcome was the Shah's growing authoritarian style of governance. As Mark Gasiorowski put it: the formation of an authoritarian monarch with the help of the U.S. put an "indelible stain" on U.S.-Iranian relations.³⁹⁶ U.S. and Britain might have temporarily achieved their goal in Iran, but in the long-term the outcome proved disastrous for both countries. While the coup occurred 65 years ago, it remains, in the words of *The New York Times*, an "open wound in Iran's relations with the United States."³⁹⁷

5.1.3 From the Shah’s Reforms to the Islamic Revolution

After the coup, the 30-something-year-old Shah became both paranoid and delusional about his power in Iran. He crushed dissent and spent considerable amounts of money on defense. Between the years 1972 and 1976, for example, he purchased \$10 billion worth of weaponry from the U.S. alone.

Four years after the coup — with the help of the CIA — the Shah established a secret police force. Over the years, SAVAK became notorious for its brutal handling of dissidents and for harassing citizens, students and journalists for merely carrying censored books or attending “problematic” political meetings. The Shah’s methods backfired; by the late 1970s the Shah’s brutalities left him no room for negotiation with the millions of Iranians who were impatient and eventually removed the Shah from power.

For almost a decade after the coup the Shah’s power grew without any major issues in Iran. However, in the early sixties the Shah and his advisors realized that the country’s poverty and the growing dissatisfaction amongst the masses were damaging the monarch’s global image and his relations with the United States.

In 1961, the newly elected President John F. Kennedy raised concerns over the Shah’s behavior, and Iran’s social and political situations. When Kennedy took office Iran’s internal issues had worsened. The financial gap between the rich and poor had widened, and those living in rural areas still lived in abysmal conditions.³⁹⁸ The most important U.S. objective during the early 1960s in the Middle East was to minimize Soviet influence in the region. Thus, during the Cold War, U.S. presidents were eager to keep the pro-American Shah in power. Alarmed by CIA reports of growing public

resentment and the possibility of a coup against the Shah, President Kennedy persuaded the Shah to consider social reforms. Kennedy also reduced U.S. military aid to Iran and increased the number of economic grants and loans for agricultural and development purposes. Due to public hatred of the Shah's secret police the SAVAK, who were trained by the CIA, the president ordered the CIA to halt its training programs in Iran.³⁹⁹

By 1963, the Shah fearing both an internal uprising and/or a severing of ties with the United States, presented a series of economic reforms known as the White Revolution. The suggested reforms mostly consisted of land distribution from wealthy landlords to the landless peasants, a vague anti-corruption campaign, and hefty promises such as the decentralization of government functions, privatization of government-owned factories, and profit-sharing plans for workers. However, as historians have pointed out, the suggested reforms were focused on economic and some limited social reforms and had, conveniently, omitted any political reforms. The White Revolution was not received the way the Shah and the Americans had hoped and opposition to the Shah coalesced from the religious sectors of the society.⁴⁰⁰

Various clerics, led by a 61-year-old rising oppositional cleric named Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, started preaching against the Shah's reforms and Western meddling in Iran. Within weeks criticism against the proposed reforms intensified and the Shah unleashed his forces to silence the opposition. In cities such as Qom, one of Iran's holiest cities, security forces stormed a famous religious school known as the Faiziyih Theological School, which led to the death of one student and the wounding of many others. The Faiziyih incident caused public outcry over the Shah's treatment of religious centers.⁴⁰¹

To protest the attack, Khomeini delivered one of his most famous and important sermons on June 3, 1963. For the first time, Khomeini declared the Shah to be the enemy of the Iranian people. After the Shah had Khomeini arrested, massive protests broke out across the country. By the Shah's admission, the days of protest in early June led to the deaths of over 125 people in Tehran alone at the hands of the Shah's forces — most observers believe that the number of casualties was in the thousands.⁴⁰²

Back in Washington, the Kennedy administration did not comment on the unrest or the killings, and by the end of the summer of 1963, the Kennedy-Shah relationship was on a positive track.⁴⁰³ While the Shah succeeded in quieting down the riots, many analysts believed that the June riots in 1963 laid the foundations for the 1979 Revolution.⁴⁰⁴

Khomeini continued to fiercely criticize the Shah. In 1964 another round of harsh criticism and unrest unfolded. Khomeini scorned the Shah for the Status of Force Bill that granted U.S. military personnel diplomatic immunity for crimes committed on Iranian soil. The bill was passed by the Majlis and caused public outrage. Khomeini fiercely condemned the Majlis for passing the bill. The Ayatollah famously stated in a speech delivered on November 4, 1964:

They [the parliament] passed it [the agreement] without any shame, and the government shamelessly defended this scandalous measure. They have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog. If someone runs over a dog belonging to an American, he will be prosecuted. Even if the Shah himself were to run over a dog belonging to an American, he would be prosecuted. But if an American cook runs over the Shah, or the marja' [source of

emulation] of Iran, or the highest officials, no one will have the right to object.⁴⁰⁵

The most well-known passage of the speech called out the Shah and the Americans for their transgressions against the faithful. This portion of his speech is still quoted by Iranian leaders, plastered on the walls of major cities and written in text books:

[...] By God, whoever does not cry out in protest is a sinner! By God, whoever does not express his outrage commits a major sin! Leaders of Islam, come to the aid of Islam! ‘Ulama of Najaf, come to the aid of Islam! ‘Ulama of Qum, come to the aid of Islam! Islam is destroyed! Muslim peoples! Leaders of the Muslim peoples! Presidents and kings of the Muslim peoples! Come to our aid! Shah of Iran, save yourself!... Let the American President know that in the eyes of the Iranian people, he is the most repulsive member of the human race today because of the injustice he has imposed on our Muslim nation. Today the Qur'an has become his enemy; the Iranian nation has become his enemy. Let the American government know that its name has been ruined and disgraced in Iran.⁴⁰⁶

Khomeini's November 1964 speech set the ideological tone for the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Thus, the Shah's White Revolution was one of the first major political events that induced public criticism of the Shah, followed by crackdowns. The 16-year time gap between the White Revolution and the Islamic Revolution provided ample time for the anti-Shah camp in Iran to gain strength and prominence within Iranian society. The Shah, the CIA, and the American news media all failed to recognize the importance of the growing insurgency against the power establishment in Iran.⁴⁰⁷

The White House too ignored what was happening in Iran. Even though there were National Intelligence Estimates (NIE) and other forms of official reports that indicated concern over the Shah's growing power and the rise of oil revenue in Iran, Washington was content as long as the Shah remained an ally and the U.S. profited from Iranian oil. President Lyndon Johnson had his hands full, following the assassination of President Kennedy in late 1963, civil rights unrest at home, and a growing war in South East Asia.⁴⁰⁸

During the early 1970s, the Nixon administration followed the same policies as the previous administration. Nixon established what became known as the "Twin Pillars" in the Middle East. The strategy was to rely on Iran and Saudi Arabia as American proxies in the region. The administration assessed that by allying with both Saudi Arabia and Iran there would be a balance of power between the Arabs and Persians in the region. But Nixon ultimately tilted in the Shah's favor. In 1972, Nixon personally asked Shah to protect American interests in the Mideast. With Nixon's full support, Iran's military expenditure and U.S. military sales to Iran reached an all-time high. A consequence of relying on the Shah, was that U.S. intelligence gathering in Iran decreased, and the information that did make it to the CIA offices was from the SAVAK and the Shah's inner circle.⁴⁰⁹

While U.S. relations with Iran reached its peak during the Nixon and Ford years, there were many signs of unrest in Iran that could have been observed. But Nixon's devotion to *Realpolitik* prevented much criticism against the Shah, and the American media did not stray too far from the White House's narrative about Iran. For Americans, Iran was a valuable proxy power in the region: to oppose the Soviets, provide secure

supplies of oil, and protect American economic interests. And the Shah proved his loyalty and usefulness to the U.S. time and time again. The Shah dutifully positioned Iran as a buffer against the U.S.S.R and a pro-Soviet Iraq, provided counter-insurgency assistance in Oman and supported U.S. goals in the Horn of Africa.⁴¹⁰ By the mid-1970s American dependency on Iran had grown to such an extent that *The New York Times* noted that the U.S. was essentially hostage to the Shah, no matter who was president.⁴¹¹

Washington mostly ignored reports of growing dissent against the Shah through the later 1960s and early 1970s, and tended to rely on the positive assessments about the Shah and his future as Iran's ruler.⁴¹² The U.S. failed to make any significant contact with opposition leaders in Iran for fear of angering the Shah. Thus, for almost a decade U.S. intelligence did not develop decent information about the changes in Iran.

Thus, as Jimmy Carter took office in 1977, there appeared to be little reason for Washington to seek a new strategy in Tehran. With the Shah dutifully performing his duties as the protector of American interests in the region, Carter saw fit to enhance the U.S.-Iran military exchange, ordered the CIA-SAVAK links to continue, and expressed support for Iran acquiring nuclear power plants. Even though that Shah would periodically take a tough stance against the West (especially on the issue of nuclear power), in Washington, many justified the Shah's attitude as his way of appeasing his critics. For example, in February 1974, following a Franco-Iranian agreement on uranium enrichment, the Shah told *Le Monde* that one day "sooner than is believed," Iran would be "in possession of a nuclear bomb."⁴¹³ Another important reason for Washington to shrug off Shah's episodic tough talk was the fear that angering the Shah could motivate

him to close off U.S. listening posts in northern Iran that supplied much of U.S.'s Soviet and other regional intelligence capacity.

When questioned about human rights, the Shah firmly asserted to Carter in his November 1977 visit to the U.S. that his repressive measures on political freedoms were necessary to combat Communism. Thus, even Carter, who had campaigned on morality and on a U.S. foreign policy that valued human rights — Carter's idea for *MoralPolitikers* — was willing to overlook the Shah's brutal crackdowns. In general, the Carter administration's policy towards Iran was that the Shah was to be supported, not criticized.⁴¹⁴ For Iranians and their opposition leaders, the U.S. support of the Shah's behavior made America an accomplice to the atrocities of SAVAK and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

There have been numerous analyses of what went wrong within the American intelligence infrastructure that it missed the 1979 Revolution. Almost all reach the same conclusion: the Islamic revolution was largely missed due to intelligence failures. From the mid-1970s information about the coming revolution was available but U.S. intelligence agencies and the White House failed to see the severity of the opposition against the Shah, and the majority of U.S. news media reports were equally oblivious. The blinds were so firmly in place that U.S. intelligence failed to take reports of Shah's diagnosis of terminal cancer seriously. One would think that the Shah's cancer and possible death would have galvanized interest in the U.S. in acting to secure its interests in Iran — especially given the Americans' dependency on their personal relationship with the Shah.⁴¹⁵ But as pointed out by Gary Sick, in early 1978, the CIA insisted that Iran was not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary state and suggested that violent

and non-violent groups that were known to oppose the Shah did not have the capacity to cause any real harm.⁴¹⁶

The next year, in early 1979, the agency correctly assessed that the religious leadership did have the strength to bring out the masses — that opposition to the Shah’s forces came from the clerics, not the National Front nor Iran’s communist party known as the “Tudeh” party. However, the CIA and the White House failed to act. Other agencies such as Pentagon’s Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), also made errors in their analysis. DIA, for example, mistakenly concluded that the Shah would be in power for at least the next ten years — but the Shah was ousted within months of that report. Some reports were circulated that were critical of the Shah and his style of rule, but those critical narratives were often lost in the pro-Shah atmosphere of the intelligence community.⁴¹⁷

Another problem in foreseeing the future, was the U.S. intelligence community’s overreliance on the information provided by the SAVAK. Analysts had warned in the past that SAVAK’s intelligence reports tended to underestimate the opposition and overestimate their control on resistance in Iran. But the Shah had made clear that American intelligence was not permitted to act independently in Iran. Thus, all information coming out of Iran was more or less following the Shah’s narrative. There was intelligence from other allies, such as Israel and France, who had concluded that the Shah would not survive possible uprisings, but the Americans ignored those warnings. Therefore, even though Khomeini had been vocally critical of the Shah since early 1960s, former analysts such as Henry Percht recalled that in May 1978, when the U.S. embassy

in Tehran reported on Khomeini, the staff had to identify him to Washington because the “cleric was still, at this point, an unknown quantity.”⁴¹⁸

Finally, there were many other international distractions for the Carter administration. The White House had started out its tenure by taking on hefty foreign policy goals such as the normalization of relations with China, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) with the Russians, and attempts to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁴¹⁹

5.1.4 The Triumph of the Revolution and Decades of Aggressive Tolerance

Consequently, when the revolution prevailed in February 1979, the U.S. was stunned and confused on how to deal with the new Iran. At first, Khomeini appointed highly regarded opposition leaders from the National Front, Mossadegh’s Party.⁴²⁰ To lead the transition, Dr. Mehdi Bazargan, an university professor and a longtime critic of the Shah, was appointed as prime minister. A team of French-educated Iranian lawyers all known for their intellectual and moderate approach to Islam were tasked with writing Iran’s new constitution.⁴²¹

Khomeini, who had pledged he would not seek a major political role after the revolution, settled into his estate in northern Tehran. The moderate nature of Bazargan’s government within the first few months of the revolution appeared promising to the U.S. and the rest of the world. It was hoped that the new Iranian political system could peacefully engage with the international community. Official announcements by the newly appointment Iranian government enhanced these hopes. For example, Bazargan

and his foreign minister Ibrahim Yazdi promised that U.S. technicians, including military advisors would be re-invited to do their jobs.⁴²²

The newly established administration had signaled, with Khomeini's blessing, the possibility of normalizing relations with the U.S. In his memoirs, President Carter stated that the Ayatollah had sent his own representative to see Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to pledge increased friendship and cooperation and to seek U.S. support for the new prime minister.⁴²³ However, Khomeini's close followers did not favor the Bazargan administration, despite their pragmatic and moderate approach. When Bazargan, Yazdi, and Iran's defense minister Mustafa Chamran attended a meeting with Brzezinski in Algiers in October 1979 (a month before the hostage crisis) it was seen by conservatives as a sign of pro-Americanism. They vehemently criticized the government and started to lobby against Bazargan and his team. Eventually, conservatives surrounding Khomeini came to dominate post-revolutionary politics. For this group of highly conservative men, resuming ties with the U.S. was "ideologically inconvincible."⁴²⁴ These voices and the growing impatience of fervent revolutionaries for the return of the Shah to Iran to stand trial, attributed to rising tensions in November 1979.⁴²⁵

5.1.5 The Hostage Crisis

The main reasons taught to us as Iranian students about the embassy takeover was that the U.S. would not return the Shah to stand trial for his inhumane treatment of the Iranian people and that Iranians were fed up with American interference in Iran. While we all knew that there was much more to the story, the takeover of the U.S. embassy has become a topic of debate between Iranians. Some of the participants in the embassy

takeover, such as the former mayor of Tehran Morteza Alviri, have expressed regret for the events and have stated that the embassy takeover was a “fatal mistake.” But still, every year hardline factions in the government hold ceremonies and rallies commemorating the event.

A few weeks after the revolution, the Shah who had fled Iran was in dire need for cancer treatments. Carter was hesitant to grant the Shah entry to the States in fear of retaliation by the new government. Eventually, after pressure from people such as Henry Kissinger and other key figures in Washington, the Shah was admitted to a hospital in New York in late October 1979.⁴²⁶ There were large demonstrations in Tehran and outside the U.S. embassy on November 1, 1979 but they were peacefully concluded, and the Bazargan government thought the crisis had passed. However, three days later, on November 4, 1979, the embassy was invaded by a group of students who called themselves “Students following the Imam Line.” The group seized 66 diplomats, who were held as hostages for 444 days. After months of negotiations and a failed rescue attempt, the hostages were freed on January 20, 1981 — the day of the inauguration of President Ronald Reagan. Just as the 1953 coup d'état had forever changed Iranian perceptions of American's, the hostage crisis also left a permanent mark on American views of Iranians. Unfortunately, since most of the culprits of the hostage crisis later assumed high ranking government positions, Americans' mistrust of Iranian officials carried on for decades to come.

5.1.6 From the Iran—Iraq War to the Iran-Contra affair

Ronald Reagan had campaigned on the hostage crisis issue. He had sent the message to the American public that he was the solution to the crisis and that if elected president he would increase defense spending and show uncompromised toughness that would restore American prestige around the world. With the Iran-Iraq War breaking out in September 1980, the administration decided to strengthen ties with Iraq. That alliance was appealing: Iraq was openly anti-Soviet and an alliance with them would ensure the flow of oil to the U.S. While publically the administration maintained a position of neutrality in the war, the U.S. and other Western countries heavily favored a victory by Saddam. Reagan even authorized two missions, Operation Staunch and Operation Praying Mantis, to undermine Iranian victory during the war.⁴²⁷ The President approved sales of arms to Iraq and removed the country from its blacklist despite the Iraqi army's use of chemical weapons against its own people and Iranian troops in 1988. Other unfortunate events such as the downing of Iran Air flight 655 by U.S.S Vincennes that same year, contributed to decades of hostility and resentment between U.S. and Iran.

Many early assessments held that the Iran-Iraq War would go on for a few months and conclude with Iran giving up some of its oil-rich regions.⁴²⁸ However, Iran proved to be a tougher-than-expected opponent for Iraq. Iran managed to keep its territories but at the significant cost of its infrastructure and over a million casualties. Another consequence of the war was Iran's growing popularity amongst Shia populations in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon and Syria. Iran's regional influence grew, as did its ties to the Soviet Union. This outcome was a major blow to American efforts, as

Congress and the White House had, ever since Harry Truman, spent billions of dollars to keep Tehran and Moscow at odds.⁴²⁹

While gaining closeness to Iraq was in some way encouraging to the United States, the loss of Iran soon proved more problematic than the U.S. had initially anticipated. The U.S. government quickly realized that Iran's power in the region was a force to be reckoned with, whether in an unstable Lebanon in the mid-1980s or more recently in Syria, Iraq, and Palestine.

Several years into the Iran-Iraq War, U.S. foreign policy problems forced the White House to seek solutions through Tehran. The bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut in 1983 (which Iran was blamed for) and the capturing of American embassy workers — especially CIA station chief William Francis Buckley by Hezbollah forces in Lebanon — put the U.S. in a desperate situation. After a series of events and clandestine meetings in the summer of 1985, Reagan approved a series of arms sales to Iran; however, this was against the arms sales embargo with Iran, making the trade illegal. The scandal became known as the Iran-Contra affair or “Irangate.”

Oliver North, a staff member of Reagan's National Security Council, claimed partial responsibility for the arms sales and justified his role as having diverted funds from the arms to the Contras fighting Communism in Nicaragua. The scandal initially appeared in the Lebanese magazine *Ash-Shirra*. The story dragged on for months within the Reagan administration. In the end, 14 people were charged with either operational or “cover-up” crimes.⁴³⁰ North's conviction was overturned on a technicality, and President Bush issued six pardons to the alleged culprits of the scandal. As the Reagan era ended, Iran and Iraq had concluded the war and Iran was in a stronger position as far as regional

influence was concerned. But the U.S. had still no conclusive plan on how to deal with Iran. President George H.W. Bush entered the White House after constant attempts to downplay his involvement in the Iran-Contra affair.⁴³¹ Eventually, Iran helped by releasing U.S. hostages — the last hostages were freed in 1992 — but the U.S. viewed Iran's assistance as a “too little, too late” gesture, which infuriated Iranian leaders and gave more prominence to the hardliners' narrative that America could not be trusted.

President Bush took office during a period of major global change — most dramatically the conclusion of the Cold War. The demise of the Soviet Union allowed the President to speak of a “new world order,” and made U.S. supremacy a reality. However, relations in the Middle East were still fraught, including with Iran, especially since the Lebanese militia, backed by Iran, still held a number of U.S. hostages. Also, Iran had formed a new alliance with Hamas, a group that challenged both Israel and the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization); that shift in alliances added more complexity to the conflict and the general security of the region.

During the Bush years, several additional factors contributed to the stalemate in relations between the U.S. and Iran. Iran's aggressive tone against the U.S. and its often-problematic regional influence made it hard for any U.S. president to suggest friendlier relations with Iran.

Other events such as the horrific assassination of Iran's former Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar in Paris by people linked to the Iranian regime, as well as Ayatollah Khomeini's Fatwa against Salman Rushdie for his book *The Satanic Verses*, made it even more difficult for the Bush administration to approach Tehran. However, the Bush administration made some efforts to open negotiations with Iran's leaders, namely

prominent and somewhat moderate figure Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. But due to poor intelligence and planning those efforts fell through.

Throughout the Bush presidency, the U.S.-Iran relationship was mostly stagnant and the administration made little to no progress in its policies towards Iran. Thus, many of the same issues — Israel, Iran’s growing regional power, and the failure of better relations with Iraq —were still present by the time President Bill Clinton took office.

5.1.7 An Apology, a Terrorist Attack, and a Handful of Missed Opportunities

In 2009, *Foreign Policy* magazine noted that the Clinton presidency marked an important era for American foreign policy, an era that overlapped with “historic convergence of technological and political trends.” Clinton inherited the presidency at the beginning of a new era of globalization, forcing him to generate a new American foreign policy agenda. As *Foreign Policy* wrote:

Bill Clinton understood sooner, better, and more profoundly than many other leaders that globalization was not simply a trendy buzzword, noting that: “Everything from the strength of our economy, to the safety of our cities, to the health of our people depends on events not only within our border but half a world away.”⁴³²

With the conclusion of the Cold War and the decreasing level of global security threats, Clinton had hoped to shift U.S. foreign policy from “geopolitics to geopolitics.” However, the end of the Cold War also brought a debate amongst Washington’s decision-makers about the risks to the U.S. in the “new world order”

conceptualized by Clinton's predecessor.⁴³³ As a candidate, Clinton had criticized Bush's foreign affairs focus and vowed to focus his attention on domestic issues. But the Clinton presidency soon became consumed with complicated foreign policy issues, including the crisis in Somalia. In the concluding months of his presidency, Bush had sent American forces on a humanitarian mission to Somalia, but the mission quickly expanded to restoring the government and order in the country.

On October 3, 1993, a U.S. Black Hawk helicopter was hit by a grenade and crashed. A rescue team was sent to secure the Somali crash site and get the American soldiers out, but the rescue team ended up in a 15-hour battle that ended with hundreds of Somalis and nearly 20 Americans dead and U.S. pilot Michael Durant held as hostage. Durant was held for 18 days. Since the Iranian Hostage crisis, the American public had grown sensitive to their government's reaction to the mistreatment of U.S. citizens by foreign nationals. Therefore, when images of a bruised and terrified-looking Durant along with videos of a dead American soldier being dragged and degraded in the streets of Mogadishu were plastered across American media, the public was both horrified and outraged. As a result, within months of taking office, Clinton had to swiftly reevaluate America's presence in Somalia. Clinton eventually ordered a full withdrawal of American forces in March 1994.⁴³⁴

A month later, genocide in Rwanda (April-July 1994) broke out, ultimately leaving more than 800,000 people dead. The Balkans erupted, with ethnic wars in Bosnia (1992-1995) and Kosovo (1998-1999), demanding urgent attention from the president.⁴³⁵ Even though Clinton had campaigned and hoped to focus on domestic affairs during his presidency, conflicts and violence overturned the President's intentions.

As far as Iran was concerned, the Clinton administration had no clear plan.⁴³⁶ Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a close ally of Khomeini, and one of Iran's most influential political figures became Iran's fourth president in summer of 1989.⁴³⁷ His presidency was important for Iran's economic revival post-Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), as he advocated for the Islamic Republic to re-evaluate its relations with the U.S. Even though the majority of Rafsanjani's supporters were conservatives, he had made several public speeches on the benefits of free markets and normalization of relations with the U.S. arguing that better relations with the West "would not contradict revolutionary values as long as the U.S.'s behavior was corrected." However, despite signals by Iran's leaders and Clinton's own economic approach to foreign policy — an approach that argued that authoritarian nations would have an incentive to change their behavior when they became more economically engaged with the West — ultimately the White House was hesitant to change its stance on Iran.

5.1.8 Dual Containment Policy

During his first term, Clinton's Iran policy was heavily affected by Secretary of State Warren Christopher who viewed Iran as a "living menace." Christopher was reluctant to engage in any type of negotiations with the Islamic Republic.⁴³⁸ The first inclination of his influence was outlined in what became known as the "Dual Containment" policy announced at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in May 1993. Mark Indyk, the mastermind behind the idea, conceptualized the policy as an effort to contain Iran and Iraq, the two nations considered to be the most significant threats to the U.S. and Israel in the Mideast region. Dual Containment policy argued that

cutting off and isolating both countries from the international economic and trading system would help alleviate their threat.⁴³⁹ The policy also indicated that there would be benefits of regime change in Iraq. However, Iran was labeled as the most terroristic state by the State Department; Secretary Christopher labeled Iran as a “grave threat” to the world and an “international outlaw.”⁴⁴⁰ Indeed, in the following months, there were numerous reports about Iran hampering the Mideast peace process, purchasing missiles from North Korea, and breaching UN sanctions.⁴⁴¹

However, there were many critics of the Dual Containment policy that saw the lumping of Iran and Iraq together as a “logical flaw” in the suggested policy. Analysts such as Gregory Gause believed the containment of Iran required a “strong and unified” Iraq, otherwise Iran would gain a unique advantage and break out of its international isolation.⁴⁴² Further pushback came from U.S. allies in Europe which had already employed a “critical dialogue” policy with Iran and were not in favor of losing the prospect of doing business with Iran.

Thus, the Dual Containment policy not only didn’t reach the hoped-for outcomes, it came up against hardliners in Iran who were also taking a tougher stance on Iran’s national security. Having concluded the brutal eight-year conflict with Iraq, the conservatives were pushing for the revival of Iran’s nuclear program, earning them the nickname “Atomic Ayatollahs” in the U.S. news media.⁴⁴³ Tehran had established close ties with Beijing and Moscow, to the extent that the UN raised concern over Iran’s growing interest in using Russian and Chinese nuclear experts; the UN recommended more serious attention and recurring inspections of Iran’s nuclear program by the IAEA.

As Iran's leaders began actively pursuing the reopening of their nuclear facilities, Clinton signed two punitive executive orders in early 1995. The first one, signed in March, blocked the Conoco-Iran oil deal and the second, signed two months later, banned all trade and investment activities with Iran. In June 1996, as Clinton was campaigning for a second term, the Khobar towers in Saudi Arabia were attacked, killing 19 American servicemen. Some circumstantial evidence linked Iran to the incidents but there was no definitive information on Iran's actual role. The White House did not take military retaliation but harshly warned that further terrorism acts would generate swift military response by the U.S. However, the Khobar incident triggered the reenactment of the ILSA (Iran and Libya) sanctions by Clinton, furthering the animosity between the Washington and Tehran.

Despite the signs of hostility on both sides, within the first months of the president's second term (1996-2000) there were some signs of change: Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau spoke of the opening of possible negotiations with Iran and the U.S. media were speculating the possibility of an "Iranian Gorbachev" winning the upcoming 1997 Presidential elections.⁴⁴⁴

5.1.9 An Iranian Gorbachev? Khatami and the Dialogue of Civilizations

In May, reformist Mohammad Khatami was elected as Iran's fifth president on August 2, 1997. President Khatami was a well-known reformer and highly popular figure in Iran. Known as Iran's first reformist president, Khatami turned out a historical number of voters, according to Iran's own voting census at the time. Even in conservative cities such as Qom, Khatami managed to secure 70 percent of the votes.⁴⁴⁵

His tenure as Iran's cultural minister in the mid-1980s helped generate a new era of literature, poetry, cinema, and culture. His conciliatory approach and talk of "dialogue amongst nations" generated some hope within Washington of better relations with Iran. Khatami's win almost immediately generated debate on whether or not U.S. policies toward Iran should change. A few days after the election results *The New York Times* wrote:

The landslide election of a relatively moderate cleric, Mohammed Khatami, as Iran's President will put pressure on the Clinton Administration from critics as well as European allies to explore policy changes and not simply isolate Iran as a "rogue nation," senior American officials and Iran scholars said today.

But with the strong possibility of Iranian involvement in the bombing in Saudi Arabia last year that killed 19 Americans, the Administration will have to move slowly, the officials said, and it will be up to Iran to show signs of change first.⁴⁴⁶

Khatami's presidency relaxed social tensions in Iran and gave hope to those in the West who were looking for an opportunity to restore at least reasonable relations with Iran. But Khatami was no Gorbachev, nor did he desire to be. He insisted on wanting only "reform" for Iran and had pledged his allegiance to the Supreme Leader.⁴⁴⁷ For months both countries hinted at the possibility of improved relations. In December 1997, Khatami made the bold announcement in his first press conference that Iran would not act against broader peace in the Middle East. He noted that the unsuccessful attempts for better relations with the U.S. was a "source of sorrow" to him. The Clinton

administration cautiously responded. Sandy Berger, Clinton's national security advisor at the time stated that Iran would be judged by its actions not words, but admitted that Khatami's words were promising.⁴⁴⁸

Later, in January 1998, in an interview with CNN Khatami proposed his grand idea of the "dialogue of civilizations;" he conceptualized the idea of a "dialogue" by stating that such a conversation would help bring down the "wall" of mistrust between the two nations. In his interview, Khatami also stated that there were fundamental differences between the two countries, but that animosity was not the solution. He proposed a cultural exchange between the two nations involving artists and writers. Later that year Khatami issued a letter to Yasser Arafat blessing the upcoming Arab-Israeli peace talks and stating Iran's support for peace. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright viewed these gestures as an important sign that the U.S. should now move beyond the initial policy of Dual Containment against Iran. However, politics in Tehran were not on Khatami's side, the hardliners and especially the Supreme Leader were still following the anti-American narrative, causing Washington to conclude that Khatami and his gestures were not translatable into actual change in the Islamic Republic's attitude towards the United States.⁴⁴⁹

As high-level talks were taking place, the U.S. Congress and conservatives in Iran were still following the traditional lines of animosity. Iran was still labeled as the number-one state sponsor of terrorism and the U.S. Congress was pushing for more sanctions in response to Iran's nuclear program. Eventually, in 2000, the Iran Nonproliferation Act was signed that required the U.S. president to report and sanction any country providing Iran with materials to develop non-conventional weapons.

Meanwhile, in Iran, the Reformist Party won a majority of seats in Iran's parliament, an unprecedented event since the 1979 Revolution. Khatami's brother, Mohammad Reza Khatami, and the leader of the reformist coalition, stated that a détente with the U.S. was on his government's agenda.

That same year Madeline Albright made a historic speech on March 17, 2000, formally apologizing for the CIA's role in the 1953 coup that overthrew Iran's Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Albright also announced the lifting of sanctions on imports of Iranian food and carpets and approved the export of spare parts for Iran's aging Boeing aircraft. She offered to settle outstanding legal claims on Iranian assets frozen in U.S. bank accounts since the 1979 U.S. embassy seizure. But despite this outreach from the White House, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei dismissed Albright's offers as worthless. He accused the United States of backing Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War, and refused any official dialogue with America.

Despite promising signs in U.S.-Iran relations during Clinton's second term and the intellectual leap made by the Clinton administration to consider rapprochement with Iran, there was no meaningful progress in their relations. Pressure from conservatives in both countries, the distractions of Clinton's sex scandals and the limitations of Khatami's powers in Iran, added to the terrible timing of his "dialogue of civilization" and the continuation of U.S.-Iran animosity.

5.1.10 Shared Enemies and More Missed Opportunities

By many accounts, the presidency of George W. Bush was the closest the U.S. came to a normalization of relations with Iran since the Islamic Revolution. The Bush

administration's foreign policy derived from a realist approach to foreign affairs. From the outset, the administration articulated a foreign policy agenda that focused on a strong military, free trade, the use of American power, and the necessity to keep emerging powers such as China in check. As for Iran, Secretary of State Collin Powell started his tenure with the aim to further engage with Iran. In his Senate confirmation, he had stated that U.S. differences with Iran should not prohibit the U.S. from pursuing a dialogue with Iran.⁴⁵⁰

The Bush administration also brought on Richard Haass, veteran Iran analyst since the Carter administration, to reevaluate U.S. policies towards Iran. Haass proposed limiting the renewal of ILSA (Iran and Libya Sanctions) so that the administration would have time to thoroughly review both Iran and the sanctions policy. Congress did not approve and the sanctions were renewed, but Hass continued to reevaluate U.S. policy towards Iran.⁴⁵¹ He also proposed small changes that could show good will from the U.S., such as recommending that America "lean back" from its long-time opposition to Iran's entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO).⁴⁵² Outside the White House, well-known policymakers and analysts such as Lee Hamilton and Brent Scowcroft encouraged further engagement with Iran, especially after the report from the investigation of the Khobar incident was published in early June of 2001 and Iran was not directly named as the responsible party for the bombings.

A policy paper commissioned by the Atlantic Council, articulated the benefits of Iranian relations with the U.S. as follows:

To understand the role that Iran can play the achievement of the full array of important U.S. interests, it is necessary to take both a short- and a long-term view.

Iran is most obviously relevant to the achievement of U.S. geopolitical interests, but its energy resources are important enough to merit separate consideration, especially as they relate to future U.S. and worldwide energy requirements. The recent tendency in U.S. foreign policy to use its economic power as a weapon has diverted attention from the fact that the United States has an economic interest in maintaining the international competitiveness of its companies. When these companies prosper, new jobs are created and, through taxes, the contribution of the companies to the domestic commonweal is expanded.⁴⁵³

This type of careful optimism towards Iran could be attributed to the changes in Iranian society after the election of Mohammad Khatami as the Islamic Republic's fifth president. The Iranian public, motivated by Khatami's reformist approach, were keener on public engagement, a positive sign for analysts.

Brent Scowcroft noted these positive changes in his editorial for the *Washington Post* on May 11, 2001:

But what has changed in Iran is the attitude of the people themselves. Over the past four years, the Iranian electorate has three times (in presidential, parliamentary and local elections) voted, by majorities of as much as 2 to 1 in favor of liberal change. Sixty percent of the Iranian people are younger than 25, having no direct knowledge of the Iranian Revolution and the difficulties with the United States that followed. What is at stake for the United States is no less than the outcome of the struggle between the people of Iran and their harsh masters.⁴⁵⁴

American analysts in favor of better relations with Iran supported U.S. policy changes toward Iran, including the relaxation of sanctions, conditional acceptance of an Iranian peaceful atomic program and further engagement with Iran.⁴⁵⁵

However, world affairs once again diverted the U.S. from making progress with Iran. As Richard Haass and other advisors to President Bush were reviewing U.S. policies towards Iran, the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001. Consequently, Bush announced that henceforth combating terrorism would be the centerpiece of his foreign policy agenda. In Iran, many Iranians held candlelight vigils and the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei ordered a ban on “Death to America” chants and vehemently condemned the mass murders. Around 60,000 soccer fans observed a moment of silence for the victims two days after the attacks. President Khatami sent a message of sympathy to the American people and condemned terrorism in all shapes and forms. Khatami said:

I express my deepest sorrow to the people of America right after the tragedy, and I'd like to say how sorry I am, and express my sorrow. I would also like to say that the Americans were not only ones who suffered. Just today we had a ceremony where the flags of all nationalities present in that — who were victims of the terrorist attack — were raised. As you know, there were Iranians among them as well. Therefore, that was a tragedy, and a terrible one [...]⁴⁵⁶

Within weeks after the attack, the White House made the decisions to go after the Taliban in Afghanistan. The State Department, motivated by Powell's cautious optimism on Iran and the completion of Haass' review on better relations, sent a message via the Swiss (who protect Washington interests in Tehran), asking the Iranians to join the “war of terror” and provide information on the Taliban.

A series of events led to monthly face-to-face meetings between the two governments. While the meetings were mostly low-profile, they were the first of their kind since the early days of the revolution. These UN meetings were fruitful: Iran agreed to provide search-and-rescue help, as well as to assist the U.S. with planning, targeting, intelligence and cultural information. Iran also agreed to close its borders to Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters, and, most importantly, to allow coalition aircrafts to stage from airfields in eastern Iran. In return, the U.S. vowed to not violate Iranian airspace and to refrain from aiding ethnic opposition groups in Iran. Iran proved helpful in the establishment of an interim government in Afghanistan that was discussed and planned at the Bonn conference, in December 2001.⁴⁵⁷

The cooperation provided by Iran, enticed Powell to reaffirm his interest in reaching out to Iran and said that the U.S. was open to new opportunities. However, Powell's attitude towards Iran was not entirely consistent with the rest of the administration or Washington in general. For example, as the State Department was exploring possibilities for furthering relations with Tehran, the Department of Defense was advocating for the war to carry on into Syria and then Iran. In addition, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney and a few other prominent figures had lined up against Powell and his proposal for Iran. They believed that external pressure and isolation was the only way to contain the Islamic Republic.⁴⁵⁸

In addition to White House naysayers, in early 2002 a ship known as Karin A was intercepted by the Israelis en route to the Palestinian authority. Israeli intelligence concluded that the ship was sent from Iran. Even though President Khatami requested further information about the incident, Washington decided to ignore his requests. In the

U.S. many analysts speculated that this might have been an attempt by Iran's hardliners to undermine president Khatami, who was hugely unpopular amongst conservatives. In Iran, many blamed Israel for sabotaging a possible friendship between Tehran and Washington. Following the Karin A incident, the White House ignored recurring requests for cooperation on Afghanistan. Citing Iran's transgressions, the general belief in Washington became that Khatami was either limited in his power or deceitful in his motives. Thus, the narrative on Iran changed and less than a month after the Karin A incident, President Bush made a highly publicized speech where he labeled Iran, North Korea and Iraq as the Axis of Evil countries.⁴⁵⁹

In Tehran, the hardliners were livid that after all the cooperation on Afghanistan, Iran was still vilified as such by the American President.⁴⁶⁰ What followed after was a series of on-again-off again periods of cooperation between the two countries — they eventually led nowhere. As the Bush years came to an end, the possibility of war between the United States and Iran was rising. With the end of Khatami's presidency and the election of hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the hope for better relations between the two countries was squandered.

With Ahmadinejad in office, his often-ridiculous comments — about seeing a halo at the UN assembly or wanting to wipe Israel off the map — alarmed the international community. Within a few years, his actions and speeches in Iran soon transformed Iranians' opinion of him as a pious leader concerned for the poor to a "naïve and inexperienced"⁴⁶¹ political figure — in other words, a liability for Iran's leadership.⁴⁶²

Within months into his presidency, the United Nations Security Council reported Iran to the IAEA and a new round of sanctions by the UNSC was reinstated. Meanwhile, Ahmadinejad continued his anti-Westerns and Israeli rhetoric and hinted that Iranians had the right to nuclear energy. The Bush administration did make some diplomatic efforts by offering to join the nuclear talks if Iran stopped its uranium enrichment. But months of unfruitful concessions followed by threats led nowhere. Eventually in October 2008, the United States listed Iran's powerful Quds force as a sponsor of terrorism and named Iran's Revolutionary Guard as a proliferator of WMDs, thus ending any hope for improvement in the relations between U.S. and Iran.

Reformist-minded Iranians often compare the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to a hurricane or a tsunami. While many view Ahmadinejad as the reason why Iran is in its current economic quagmire, the sanctions imposed by the U.S. have left many Iranians with unanswered questions about the United States' values and interests. Many Iranians believe that the current surge in cancer and other public health problems is a direct result of U.S. sanctions on Iran.

5.1.11 Barack Obama: The Audacity of Diplomacy

When Barack Obama was campaigning in 2008, many in Iran jokingly said they would like him to become president, since his last name when broken down: "*O Ba Ma*" literary means "he is with us." Iranians were excited about a man whose middle name sounded familiar and a man who campaigned on a platform of hope and change. With Iran's own election looming in 2009, and the candidacy of reformist Mir Hossein Mousavi, many thought Iran's political climate could also change. Those in support of

Mousavi, hoped his peaceful approach would usher in a new era for Iran and its relations with the West.

However, to the surprise of many, Ahmadinejad won re-election and hardliners gained a majority of seats in Iran's parliament. Even though Obama had “extended a hand” in his inauguration, in hopes that the other side would agree to “unclench” their fists, in reality, Obama was confronted with an Iranian president and parliament that weren’t interested in reaching out. The most hardliners in the Iranian government saw relations with U.S. as an existential threat to their revolutionary values. Under Ahmadinejad’s leadership, the IAEA repeatedly reprimanded Iran for breaking previous nuclear arrangement with the international community.

The Obama administration employed what they called a dual-track policy: the U.S. kept up efforts for engagement with the Islamic Republic, while simultaneously pursuing tough new sanctions on Iran.⁴⁶³ Therefore, during Obama’s first term and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s second, both sides were unable to make any significant progress in relations.⁴⁶⁴

5.1.12 The Diplomat Sheikh Steps In

With the election of Hassan Rouhani in June 2013, the possibility of U.S.-Iran relations found new hope — especially since Rouhani had appointed a well-known moderate and U.S. educated career politician, Mohammad Javad Zarif, as his foreign minister and lead nuclear negotiator.

As was the case with many Iranian clerics and politicians who are 60 and older, Hassan Fereydoun Rouhani’s career in Iranian politics started during the years leading to

the 1979 Revolution. In the late 1960s, Rouhani publicized the title of “Imam” for Ayatollah Khomeini, a title usually reserved for holy figures in Shia branch of Islam. Soon after, Rouhani was forced into self-exile in Europe. In England, he became a well-known figure amongst the Iranian dissident diaspora and he later joined Ayatollah Khomeini in France. During his years abroad he also received a Ph.D. in constitutional law from Glasgow Caledonian University.

After the revolution, Rouhani returned to Iran with Khomeini and assumed critical roles during and after the Iran-Iraq War.⁴⁶⁵ Rouhani’s fluency in English also played an important role in his political career and made him an important figure in Iran’s international affairs and global negotiations. In 1986, when Reagan administration officials secretly arrived in Tehran, Rouhani was one of the three key negotiators with the Americans; these meetings and talks eventually became known as the Iran-Contra scandal. Also from 2003-2005, under the presidency of Khatami, Rouhani served as the lead negotiator for Iran during nuclear talks with the West. He resigned from that role when Ahmadinejad became president in 2005.

During his years of service, Rouhani became known as the moderate cleric who was open to more freedoms in Iran and improved relations with the West. His status as a reformer was enhanced when he turned down a job for the minister of intelligence, a post that is highly vilified amongst the Iranian public. He also held key positions in the Iranian Expediency Discernment Council, which is an advisory council, set up to resolve issue between the “Majlis” and the Guardian Council.

But Rouhani’s reformist report card is smeared with a dark period during the 1999 student movements. As secretary of SNSC (Supreme National Security Council) he is

partially blamed for leading the crackdown on students; he “dared” the protestors to show their faces and called them “opportunists and riotous elements.” Except for that episode, Rouhani is generally revered in Iran as a reformer,

Shortly after the election of Rouhani in 2013, he attended the UN National Security Council, where U.S. and Iranian foreign ministries met face to face and shook hands. Then, on September 28, 2013, while Rouhani was on his way to JFK Airport, President Obama called Rouhani and the two men spoke on the phone — breaking almost 34 years of silence between Iranian and American leaders. Both of these breakthroughs were highly publicized in both Iran and the U.S. During the same time period, Iran’s foreign minister Javad Zarif and his American counterpart, John Kerry, met face-to-face, signaling a new era of cooperation between the two nations.

5.1.13 Iran’s Nuclear Program

The history of Iran’s nuclear program is an important issue, given that one of the case studies for this dissertation is about the signing of the Iranian nuclear program. A program that ironically started with U.S. blessing turned into a source of tension between Iran and the U.S. There are numerous studies and analysis on why Iran was given the green light to establish nuclear reactors and how the issue of nuclear energy became one of Iran’s most complicated policies. Due to the importance of the nuclear issue in both cases chosen for this research, this dissertation will briefly review the history of Iran’s nuclear program.

The Iranian nuclear program was launched under President Dwight Eisenhower’s “Atoms for Peace” program in the late 1950s. In 1957, the U.S. provided Iran with its

first research reactor, giving Iran the initial necessities to start working toward a nuclear reactor. A decade later, the U.S. built a nuclear reactor in 1967 on the campus of Tehran University, one of Iran's most influential academic institutes. The Americans also helped fund and build the Tehran Nuclear Research Center, a center that still exists in Iran, and equipped it with a 5MWt research reactor, fueled by highly enriched uranium.⁴⁶⁶

The Shah was often quoted in the news media and interviewed about his nuclear ambitions. He vowed to install 23,000 MWe of nuclear power in Iran in a span of twenty years. The Shah established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and charged that organization to build more than 23,000 power plants by 2000. The Shah was often quoted making a prediction that the world's oil supplies would soon end and when that happened Iran would be left with nothing. Iran, therefore, needed to "act soon."⁴⁶⁷

The Atoms for Peace program benefited Israel, India, Pakistan and Iran; under the program the countries received their own small reactor and fuel. But with Iran's 1970s oil boom, the Iranian nuclear program transformed into a full-grown civilian nuclear program. In the mid-1970s the Shah's government paid for dozens of Iranian students to travel to the U.S. and study nuclear engineering, most notably to institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Contrary to public perception, disagreements about Iran's nuclear capabilities did not start post-1979. In fact, during the mid-seventies American officials feared that Iran would eventually become a nation seeking nuclear weapons. U.S. diplomats began negotiating to limit Iran's nuclear program. However, the Shah resisted and gave interviews condemning the American efforts, arguing that Iran, like any other nation had rights to nuclear power.

He famously said, “that unless it was clear Iran was not being treated as a second-class country, he would look for alternative vendors to pursue nuclear power.”⁴⁶⁸ The Shah had also stated that unless there was a change in Americans’ way of treating Iran, he would not work with U.S. companies to acquire nuclear technology for Iran. The American concern mounted to the level that in 1974 the CIA proliferation assessment wrote “if [the Shah] is alive in the mid-1980s [...] and if other countries [particularly India] have proceeded with weapons developments we have no doubt that Iran will follow suit.”⁴⁶⁹

Still, until the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the nuclear issue was rarely a source of serious tension between the two countries, although it came up now and again. Following 1979 all changed. At first, the post-revolutionary government with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as its supreme leader and Mohammad Ali Bazargan, a moderate from the national religious party, as its prime minister did not show much interest in the country’s nuclear program. In fact, according to analysts such as Ali Vaez, the new ruling government saw the nuclear program as a toxic symbol of American influence. In fact, Ayatollah Khomeini had famously said that the unfinished nuclear power plants in Bushehr should be used as silos to store wheat.”⁴⁷⁰

But within the first years of the Iran-Iraq War, Iranian officials began contemplating the renewal of the nuclear program. American and European officials began speculating how long it would take for Iran to repair the Bushehr facilities that Saddam Hussein’s forces had bombarded. Soon, Iranian leaders decided to revive the nuclear program. According to the official narrative from Tehran, the main reason for the revival was that the Iran-Iraq War had destroyed almost half of the country’s power

facilities, and so, Iran was, ironically in a power shortage crisis, with frequent blackouts experienced all around the country on a daily basis (with the exception of northern provinces).

Iran's regional foes, including Israel and Saudi Arabia, began warning the West that Iran's actual intentions for resurrecting its nuclear program was to develop nuclear weapons. Between 1990 and 2002 the West became more concerned with Iranian nuclear capabilities, as Iran and Russia began to cooperate on nuclear research. Boris Yeltsin for example, instituted a "two track policy" which meant that Russia sold commercial nuclear technology to Iran, but discussed nuclear issues with Washington. In the first few years of the reinstatement of the Iranian nuclear program, Iranian leaders often invited IAEA inspectors to visit all the sites and facilities.⁴⁷¹

Aside from the Russians, the Chinese were also eager to tap into Iran's thirst for nuclear capabilities. In 1996, even though Deng Xiaoping complied with U.S. requests to stop constructing nuclear plants in Iran, the Chinese continued to sell blueprints for uranium enrichment facilities to the Iranians. With pressure from Iran's regional foes such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, and especially after the attacks of 9/11, Washington became warier of Tehran's possible nuclear mischief.⁴⁷²

The concern amplified when in 2003 the IAEA reported discrepancies with Iran's compliance with NPT safeguards. Even though there was no evidence of nuclear weapons cited in the 2003 IAEA report, the report became a point of disagreement between Iran and the West about Iran's compliance with the NPT guidelines. The IAEA also reported that its inspectors in Iran had found traces of highly enriched uranium. Iran immediately refuted the claims that the uranium was for building a bomb and stated that

the amounts were contaminations from equipment brought from other countries. Later in 2003, Iran eventually signed the nuclear nonproliferation treaty that allowed unannounced visits to the country's nuclear facilities.

A few months later in February 2004, prominent Pakistani scientists named A.Q. Khan admitted that he had provided Iran and a few other countries with uranium-enrichment equipment. Later in 2005, Iran announced that they would restart uranium conversion, saying that the enrichments would be for peaceful purposes only. Iran also rejected European offers for enrichment and oversight. From 2005-2009 the history of Iran's nuclear program consisted of a series of sanctions from the West in response to Iran's continuation of uranium enrichment by Iran and their claims that its nuclear program was a peaceful one.⁴⁷³

In February 2009, the disagreements over Iran's nuclear program took a more serious turn, when the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) reported that while Iran had not reached nuclear weapons capacity, Iranian nuclear scientists had reached "nuclear weapons breakout capability."⁴⁷⁴ Later in October 2009, Iran revealed to the IAEA that they had built an underground nuclear facility near the city of Qom (about 45 miles from Tehran). Then in January 2011, Ali Akbar Salehi, Iran's acting foreign minister at the time and the head of Iran's nuclear program, announced that Iran had reached self-sufficiency in producing nuclear fuel. Thus, in November 2011, the IAEA released a report saying that it had "serious concerns" and "credible" information that Iran may be developing nuclear weapons. Throughout 2011 and 2012 a series of resolutions and discoveries were made by the IAEA. The most notable ones were revealed in early 2012, where the IAEA investigators concluded that Iran had begun

extensive nuclear enrichment at the Fordo nuclear facility in Qom. In the U.S., both James Clapper, the director of National Intelligence and CIA director David Petraeus testified to the Senate that there was no evidence that Iran was building a nuclear bomb.

Throughout 2012, Iran had many sit-downs with IAEA and P5+1 officials to reach a nuclear agreement, however, no deal was reached. Eventually, the government of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and most notably the lead negotiator Saeed Jalili warned the EU to avoid “unconstructive methods” with Iran. A month later, the EU issued an oil embargo on Iran, Iran’s president and administration started a public campaign with the slogan. “Nuclear energy is our ultimate right.” Despite Iran’s denials, in an August 2012 report, a UN report found that Iran had increased its production of high-grade enriched uranium and had also re-landscaped Parchin, an important military base, in an effort to hamper UN inquiries.⁴⁷⁵

Shortly after the election of Hassan Rouhani in 2013, nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 countries resumed on October 16, 2013. On July 14, 2015, after months of negotiations and a 17-day period of back-to-back talks, Iran and the P5+1 countries reached a historic deal putting an end to 12-year standoff, raising hopes for a new era in relations between Iran and the West. The agreement limited Iran’s nuclear program; Iran also agreed to halt the Arak heavy-water reactor and deplete its stockpile of medium-enriched uranium. In return, the P5+1 countries agreed to lift sanctions against Iran and unfreeze a considerable portion of Iranian assets.⁴⁷⁶

However, Rouhani faces serious opposition by Iran’s hardliners who see him as a pro-American sell-out. During the 2017 presidential campaigns in Iran, the Iranian state media, which is controlled by hardliners, refused to air his campaign

documentary. For the hardliners, the deal is seen as a concession that is only justified because the Supreme Leader blessed it with his “heroic flexibility” speech in September 2013. Some intellectuals and Iranian expats have also criticized Rouhani, but from the left — for his alliance to the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and for not fighting for the improvement of human rights in Iran. However, in the May 2017 elections, the majority of Iranians rallied around Rouhani and campaigned for his reelection. Rouhani won with 53 percent of the votes. For his supporters, Rouhani is a smart politician who gets things done without rattling the Supreme Leader and causing chaos in the country. Rouhani managed to save Iran from a military conflict with the West and toned down anti-Iranian rhetoric on the international stage. His foreign minister, Javad Zarif, has also been hailed as a “national hero” who has ushered Iran into a new era of peace and engagement.

5.2 Results: U.S. News Coverage of Hassan Rouhani and Iranian Leaders

Across the news outlets and across the two events — the ‘Obama-Rouhani phone’ call and the ‘nuclear talks’ — the content analysis conducted for this dissertation identified the following frames in the coverage of Iranian leaders through both case studies. The Khamenei, Power Frame and the Rouhani, Personality and Power Frame were directly related to the personality and power of the Iranian leadership. The other frames were general themes that emerged in the content analysis of the news coverage about Iranian leaders. Detailed description about the code sheet and explanation about each frame representing the Iranian leadership can be found in Appendix D. Also, Charts demonstrating the findings for each outlet can be found in Appendix E.

- The Khamenei, Power Frame

- The Rouhani, Personality and Power Frame
- The Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame
- Iran, As Regional Threat/Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.) Frame
- The Anti-Americanism in Iran Frame
- Human Rights Frame
- The Iran vs. U.S., Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame

5.2.1 The Khamanei, Power Frame

Before analyzing the data, the main research question for the Iran case studies was to see how U.S. news outlets framed President Hassan Rouhani. However, once the content analysis had been conducted, it became clear that the U.S. media represented Rouhani in part by who he wasn't — in other words, the media spoke about Rouhani by referencing the Ayatollah Khamenei as the most powerful man in Iranian politics (see charts in Appendix E). In Iran, there is a joking phrase often mentioned when one comments on political issues such as elections or relations with an enemy nation: “Whatever Agha desires.” The joke is that the correct phrase is “Whatever *Khoda* (God) desires.” In Farsi the word “Agha” means “sir” — so the phrase “Whatever Agha desires” is referring to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, meaning that anything is possible in Iran as long as Khamenei allows it — even relations with the “Great Satan,” aka the United States.⁴⁷⁷

The notion that the Supreme Leader is the most important decision maker in Iran was reflected in background stories about Rouhani as well — for example, all the U.S. news outlets had pointed out that the Supreme Leader had “allowed” Rouhani’s election

and had also “permitted” Rouhani to pick Zarif as his foreign minister. This observation by U.S. journalists suggest a fairly good understanding of the domestic forces at play in Iran.

In the phone call case study, all outlets noted the Supreme Leader’s reaction to the historic event. In his usual calculated style, Khamenei did not initially respond to the phone call. A few days later, he addressed the issue in a speech to military commanders broadcast live from Iran’s state media on October 3, 2015. The Supreme Leader first endorsed the Rouhani administration’s approach to the nuclear deal, however, he added: “but some of what happened in the New York trip was not appropriate,” a quick, but telling reference to the phone call.

In the American news media, most journalists and Iran scholars speculated that Khamenei had labeled the phone call as “inappropriate” to ease the concerns of his conservative followers. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote the following about the Ayatollah’s remarks on October 5, 2013:

The comments from Iran’s ultimate authority were viewed as an important sign that the nation’s conservative leadership stood behind the new president’s conciliatory approach, despite the deep misgivings of hardliners in Iran [...] The Supreme Leader’s carefully chosen remarks Saturday, analysts said, probably reflect twin goals: to back the Iranian president while mollifying sectors of the country’s power structure deeply suspicious of Washington, mistrustful of Rouhani and opposed to any move toward reconciliation.⁴⁷⁸

The U.S. news outlets carefully watched what Khamenei said in his Leadership House (*Beit Rahbari*), understanding that his words were not only an indication of how

he thought about any given issue, but were ultimately a signal as to what he would — as the most powerful man in Iran — allow them to happen.

Surprisingly — and in contrast to their reporting on the other key Iranian political figures — the American news media rarely used adjectives to describe the Supreme Leader, and there were only limited references to his family, education, military service, and his reluctant rise to power. For all that the U.S. news outlets focused on Ayatollah Khamenei across the two news stories, their stories tapped into the evident cult of mystery surrounding the 77-year-old cleric.

Khamenei has kept an extremely low profile since he came to power almost three decades ago. Aside from dubious public gossip, a memoir by his former cellmate, and a handful of unauthorized and mostly critical Western documentaries, there isn't much information about the leader of Iran — despite the irony that in Iran images of him are visible everywhere and his name is heard repeatedly. In Iran, little is said about the Ayatollah's personal life, his personal likes and dislikes, or how he spends his days. In some sense Khamenei's cult of personality emerges from his not having a visible personality — a fact which makes him enigmatic to his followers and terrifying to his foes.

In the U.S. press, even the negative adjectives used to describe Iran's Supreme Leader were limited and mostly seen in the columns of a few op-ed writers who called him a "mullah," a "dictator," or a "theocrat." Most of the news outlets described Khamenei through his sermons and simply noted the "supreme" power he holds as the head of the Islamic Republic.

The media focused on Khamenei's role during the nuclear talks; his on-again-off-again support for both the nuclear deal and the talks in general caused confusion, a confusion that was reflected in the coverage. For example, on June 22nd (a week before the nuclear deadline) in a broadcast live from Iranian TV, Khamenei announced new demands for the nuclear negotiations. After the Supreme Leader's speech about what he expected to be in the deal, most Iran scholars and journalists expressed concern about what his "demands" would mean for the nuclear talks. *Foreign Policy* wondered, "Is this a bargaining tactic by Iran?" "Does the Supreme Leader plan to go back on the initial agreement, or is he really redrawing the red lines?" Two days later, on June 24, 2015, *The New York Times* wrote the following about Khamenei's mixed messages during the talks:

The Ayatollah has repeatedly mixed his unyielding statements with assurances that he supports the negotiations, and tributes to the patriotism of the negotiators. But his remarks on Tuesday were his strongest yet, and came just two or three days before Secretary of State John Kerry and other foreign leaders are supposed to convene in Vienna. One of his statements, for example, suggested that a central premise of the deal — that sanctions would be lifted only in close coordination with Iran's dismantlement of centrifuges and reduction of its stocks of low-enriched uranium — is not possible.⁴⁷⁹

At the same time, many outlets cited Khamenei's ultimate authority, and noted that his approval of the negotiations and a possible deal with the U.S. was a positive sign that Iran would comply with the terms of the deal. *The Washington Post* illustrated this point in a July 15, 2015 story:

Khamenei's remarks are often cryptic to Western ears, and during more than a

year and a half of negotiations, he alternately praised Iranian negotiators and condemned the United States. The negotiators were repeatedly assured during the talks that they were acting with the authority of Khamenei.⁴⁸⁰

News outlets also noted that Khamenei has maintained that it is both his ideals and Islamic values that have prevented Iran from building a nuclear weapon. After the nuclear deal was struck Khamenei affirmed his belief that nuclear weapons are anti-Islamic, noting that it was Iran's Islamic values that have prevented it from building nuclear weapons, not Western pressure. In other words, Iran does not need foreign supervision to adhere to its own standards and values. In the U.S. news media, most outlets interpreted his reasoning as a tactic to reassure and ease tension amongst his hard-liner followers. For example, *The Washington Post* wrote the following about the Supreme Leader's remarks:

Khamenei's remarks are significant because, as supreme leader, he has the final word on official policy; if he opposes the agreement, Iran could back out of the deal. His speech was broadcast on state television, and some members of the audience could be heard chanting "Death to America" and "Death to Israel," as is common at rallies attended by hard-liners [...] Khamenei's criticism appeared to be an attempt to appease hard-liners who oppose negotiations with the United States, which many still refer to as "the Great Satan"⁴⁸¹

U.S. news outlets spent much time parsing the meaning of his statements. The U.S. media noted Khamenei's contradictory views on the possibility of better relations

with the West. For example, on June 11, 2015 Khamenei took a hard stance against the West, calling the U.S. “the embodiment of global arrogance.” Yet a month later, a July 15, 2015 story in *The New Yorker* quoted an earlier comment of Khamenei’s, and noted the effect of his comments amongst the Iranian public:

On Friday, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, amid his customary anti-American bombast, offered a tantalizing remark: “If the other side gives up its usual diversionary tactics,” he told a group of poets, in April, “this will become an experience for us that, very well, we can negotiate with them on other issues.” Throughout the spring, Tehran was abuzz over Khamenei’s remarks and the prospect of cooperation with the United States.⁴⁸²

Most news outlets viewed his remarks as aimed at his domestic audience: to show he was still steadfast on declaring the U.S. as Iran’s number one enemy and to assure his hardliner supporters that a nuclear deal would not mean that he would welcome better relations with the United States across the board. Interestingly, however, as evident in the news stories, the Obama administration and the Republican Party were somewhat at odds on how to interpret Khamenei’s statements, a partisan debate especially visible during the nuclear talks. A *Foreign Policy* story published after Ayatollah Khamenei demanded the immediate lifting of sanctions and stated that he would not allow any inspections of Iran’s military facilities highlighted the disagreement in Washington:

“It is the Supreme Leader, not Iran’s president or foreign minister, who really calls the shots in Tehran,” McCain said in April. “So for him to say as he did today, that Iran will not permit inspections of its nuclear facilities anytime,

anywhere — and that sanctions relief must be complete and immediate — would appear to be a major setback.” At the time, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest responded to the Republican hawk in a tweet. “Naïve and reckless for @SenJohnMcCain to believe every word of the Supreme Leader’s political speech. (*June 23, 2015*)⁴⁸³

Khamenei was ever-present in U.S. news media coverage, especially before and after the nuclear deal. The media portrayed him as the sole opinion-maker who mattered in Iran and the only man who could control the hard-liners. Roughly 82 percent of the articles mentioned his power and dominance in Iran and the region. His views on Iran’s regional engagement and status were what were most troubling to Western journalists and analysts. In the months after the nuclear accord reporters repeatedly covered his troubling assurances that Iran would continue its support for those actors in the region that the U.S. government believed were most problematic, including Hezbollah, Houthi rebels in Yemen, and Bashar—al Assad of Syria.

5.2.2 Rouhani, Personality & Power Frame

Overall, the news stories and opinion pieces in the mainstream American media described the Iranian government and its leaders similarly during the months surrounding the presidential phone call and those months surrounding the nuclear deal. Critically, the news outlets distinguished between the Iranian government/regime led by the Ayatollah Khamenei and the presidential administration of Hassan Rouhani. Media extensively used the terms “Iranian government” and “Iranian regime” — often somewhat interchangeably — but neither of these phrases was used specifically to reference the

executive branch led by Rouhani, the elected president. These phrases, (especially “Iranian regime”) instead referenced the conservative leadership of the Islamic Republic, with the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei at the head and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as second in command. The IRGC were also often specifically mentioned in the U.S. news coverage of the talks.

In both case studies, Western news media extensively covered Rouhani: his demeanor, education, revolutionary background, and his social media accounts. In fact, his communication habits — unconventional for Iranian leaders — became a source of fascination. In June 2013, for example, Rouhani tweeted: “Women must have #active presence in society. #Women must have #equal opportunities, equal #pay, and equal #rights.” Commentators observed how extraordinarily uncommon it was for an Islamic cleric to talk about, let alone, publicly support women’s rights. For some, it was even more surprising that an Iranian presidential candidate was using Twitter as a form of communication — in Iran, Twitter and many other social media sites are filtered or outright banned.

Rouhani also posted photos of himself watching a soccer match at his home — but what was notable about the photos was that instead of his wearing his official Islamic cloak, he was dressed in the Iranian national team’s jersey and sweatpants. He posted as well numerous photos of his interviews with foreign journalists, publically congratulated successful Iranian expats such as Fields Medal recipient Maryam Mirzakhani, tweeted and publicized his meetings with world leaders such as Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Chinese President Xi Jinping, and uploaded selfies of himself at gatherings alongside Iranian artists and regular people. As was the case with the Chinese president,

it is clear that in this situation the leader is attempting to ‘frame’ himself in a Western-friendly way. Coverage doesn’t happen by chance — reporters must rely on the information (especially visuals and video) they are given or can have access to.

U.S. media outlets recognized that President Hassan Rouhani was a quiet “different” leader than his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in both rhetoric and appearance. Ahmadinejad ranted about wiping an entire nation off the map, denied the Holocaust, and famously refuted the existence of homosexuals in Iran. Rouhani congratulated the Jewish community on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, talked about peace in the region, and often stated that Iran was slowly opening up and becoming a freer civil society. After President Obama called his Iranian counterpart on September 28, 2013, many news outlets explicitly labeled Rouhani as “different” — observing that he was “more moderate” and “open” in comparison to the Iranian hardliners.⁴⁸⁴ The same characterizations were visible in the nuclear deal case study: across all news outlets, President Rouhani and his foreign minister Javad Zarif were both portrayed as moderate and “reasonable” men. However, as demonstrated extensively in this chapter, the moderation and openness of Iran’s president didn’t necessarily translate into Rouhani’s administration’s ability to change much of Iran’s policies. U.S. news reports and editorials often noted that Ayatollah Khamenei and his loyal Revolutionary Guard remained the real decision-makers in Iran.⁴⁸⁵

Hassan Rouhani, the seventh president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was the present figure in the coverage of news events investigated in this dissertation. As pointed out in the background section of this chapter, Iran’s policies with the West played an important role during the period of Hassan Rouhani’s presidency considered in this

dissertation. It was evident that President Rouhani's foreign policies and their effect on Iran domestically, especially on Iran's economy, would play a significant role in his re-election chances in Iran's next presidential election scheduled for May 2017. Thus, it was clear both at home and in the West why Rouhani made the nuclear deal and the lifting of sanctions a cornerstone of his presidential agenda. Rouhani had campaigned on the promise of "prudence and hope," and had showed openness to the possibility of better relations with the U.S. Thus, for many Iranians the Obama-Rouhani phone call, for instance, was understood as Rouhani's delivering on his campaign promises, and seen by spectators in the West as signaling a friendlier Iran. Even before the phone call the U.S. news Media's cautious optimism is evident. For example, shortly after the resumption of nuclear talks in October 2013 and the Obama-Rouhani phone call *The Washington Post* wrote:

President Hassan Rouhani's foreign policy team has presented a new face of Iran to the outside world, and the United States and other longtime adversaries are eager to test this outreach. The positive tone of talks in Geneva last week between world powers and Iran over its long-disputed nuclear program has raised hopes for a diplomatic solution, but hard-liners here are threatening to derail those efforts, reflecting political divisions that existed before Rouhani's surprise election victory in June.⁴⁸⁶

In Iran, the perception of Rouhani is highly correlated to one's political stance. Hardliners see him as a pro-Western sellout. Those who approve of Rouhani's reformist message view him as forward-looking and brave. For those who are skeptical critics of

the Islamic Republic, Rouhani is nothing but a ruse and a mullah. U.S. news outlets saw Rouhani in a different way — during period of the “phone call” the media viewed him as a ‘charmer;’ during the nuclear talks and following the nuclear accord, there was more commentary on the limitations of his authority.

In the weeks before and after the Obama phone call, critical stories in the American news media noted the new Iranian president’s welcoming demeanor and conciliatory tone, but skeptically dubbed his approach to Obama and the U.S. as his “Manhattan Charm offensive.”⁴⁸⁷ Friendlier commentators more simply referred to the newly elected Iranian president as a “moderate” or “a man of reason.” Later, during the nuclear talks, the U.S. news media depicted Rouhani as a man with limited powers on sensitive issues such as human rights and regional policies. For his critics in Iran, the limits he faced were the reason why he and his administration (especially foreign minister Zarif) could not be trusted. For his supporters in Iran, he was yet another reformer stuck behind the hardliner wall in Iran.

5.2.3 Rouhani the Charmer

U.S. media widely noted Rouhani’s friendly demeanor and charisma. Over three-quarters of the two months of news stories before and after the Obama-Rouhani phone call that referenced Rouhani, characterized him or his agenda using terms such as “charmer,” “the charming cleric,” “charm- offensive,” and “the Manhattan charm offensive.” A third of stories in the ‘nuclear talks’ news reports used similar terms (Appendix E).

All six news outlets studied in depth in this portion of the dissertation — as well as others investigated — used the word “charming” in one way or another during both periods under investigation. The “charm offensive” frame was used in news reports as well as editorials. Journalists quoted analysts and well-known politicians using such terms about the unconventional Iranian president. *The Wall Street Journal*, for example, wrote the following in a Sept 23, 2013 article titled “Sanction Pain Spurs Iran’s Charm Offensive”:

Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani aims to reshape the Islamic Republic’s image at the United Nations this week in a **charm offensive** motivated in large part by the dire condition of his country’s economy. At Tehran’s international airport before departing for New York, Mr. Rouhani told reporters that he would seek “a path for negotiations and moderation” to replace the economic sanctions that have defined the West’s relationship with Tehran in recent years. [emphasis added]⁴⁸⁸

The next day the same newspaper wrote the following about the effect of the “charm offensive” on one of Rouhani’s staunchest critics, Benjamin Netanyahu:

Israel’s predicament in dealing with Mr. Rouhani’s **charm offensive** was reflected in a political cartoon in Tuesday’s *Ha’aretz* daily newspaper. The image depicts Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu arriving at the United Nations headquarters in New York holding the same nuclear bomb cartoon that he displayed during his U.N. speech last year, with Mr. Rouhani on his heels. It shows the perspiring Mr. Netanyahu thinking to himself: “Where is Mahmoud

when you need him?” [emphasis added]⁴⁸⁹

And U.S. news media were quick to point out the successful results of the “charm offensive” that might have led to the Obama-Rouhani phone call:

Rouhani, who campaigned on a pledge to end Iran’s international isolation and gain relief from the sanctions, has embarked on a **diplomatic charm offensive** in recent weeks, capped by last month’s 15-minute phone call with President Obama, the first direct contact between U.S. and Iranian leaders in three decades.

[emphasis added]⁴⁹⁰

Others, such as this editorial by *The New York Times* took a cautious stance after the phone call, noting that the Rouhani’s words would matter only if they translated into action:

It’s hard not to be swept up in the euphoria, especially when an **adversary begins to seem not only reasonable but also personable**. Both leaders have now taken risks that would have been impossible even a few months ago, before Mr. Rouhani was elected to replace Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a hard-liner who spewed anti-American and anti-Israel diatribes. But so far, it’s only words; the Iranians haven’t actually done anything to satisfy concerns about their nuclear program. In fact, Mr. Rouhani has repeatedly affirmed Iran’s plans to continue enriching uranium.⁴⁹¹ [emphasis added]

As time passed, Rouhani's ability to put his words into action came into question, and many, like the editors of *The New York Times*, wondered even if President Rouhani believed in his moderate message, he would have the political muscle to effect change in his country.

5.2.4 Rouhani the Limited Cleric Frame

While reporting on Iran, most U.S. news outlets pointed out that despite President Rouhani's securing more than 50 percent of the required votes in the 2013 election, the real reason he held the title of the presidency was that the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, had *allowed* him to become president — an idea consistent with the Iranian public's belief.

As the nuclear talks resumed in mid-October 2013, a new narrative started to dominate U.S. news coverage about Rouhani. The question in the press shifted away from whether Rouhani meant what he said to whether he actually had the authority to do what he wanted and promised to do in Iran. Thus, in their coverage of the nuclear deal, U.S. journalists considered how closely Rouhani's speeches, interviews and tweets corresponded with what was actually unfolding in Iran's domestic and regional policy. During the weeks of coverage of the nuclear talks, reporters and opinion writers evaluated Rouhani's reformist promises through the lens of what he was actually achieving as Iran's seventh president.

For instance, in a September 29, op-ed for the *Los Angeles Times*, "Charmed by Rouhani, but only to a point," Doyle McManus wrote about Rouhani's limited powers even on the international stage:

But on other issues too the professorial president bumped into the limits on the amount of charm his boss, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, had authorized him to employ.

They [Rouhani's non-attendance at a UN luncheon and his refusal to condemn Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's stance on the Holocaust] revealed the constraints on Rouhani's running room. Khamenei sent him off to New York with a widely noticed speech calling for "heroic flexibility" in Iran's diplomacy. But Khamenei also said: "When a wrestler is grappling with an opponent and shows flexibility for technical reasons, let him not forget who his opponent is."⁴⁹²

Similarly, on June 25, 2015, *The New York Times* wrote about Rouhani's tenure as president and the state of Iran's human rights record:

This is the second time in two weeks that the State Department has asserted that Iran's policies do not appear to have substantially changed since Hassan Rouhani was elected president in 2013. Last week, the State Department said that Iran was still involved in "terrorist-related" activities, and that it was providing broad military support to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria... The expected nuclear deal has stoked a heated debate: Will the nuclear agreement be the first step in a long process that will lead to regional cooperation between the United States and Iran and less repression by Tehran? Or will such a deal provide Iran with billions more in funds to pursue an aggressive foreign policy while it represses dissent at home?⁴⁹³

This kind of characterization and questioning of the future of Iran after the deal and the questioning of the state of human rights during the Rouhani administration often emerged in the coverage of the nuclear deal. Some news stories and editorials blamed Rouhani's shortcomings on Iranian hardliners, while others pointed to the weakness and incompetence of the office of the presidency.

The harshest criticism of Rouhani and his presidency came from the speeches, tweets, and interviews given by the leader of one of the United States' closest allies and one of Iran's most persistent foes: Benjamin Netanyahu. The American news media adopted the habit of using the Israeli prime minister's critiques of Rouhani, the Iranian government, and sometimes even the Iranian public in their reporting. Through the two case studies in this investigation, Netanyahu's criticism of Rouhani was widely repeated. Indeed, Netanyahu was one of the most quoted figures in the coverage of Iran studied for this research and his criticism was a recurring theme in both case studies; the media themselves labeled the Israeli president during the nuclear talks as the most "outspoken critic of the deal."

Before Rouhani's UN appearance in 2013, for example, Netanyahu and Israeli officials had warned Washington that Iran would try to win relief from harsh sanctions through "charm," and argued that Tehran had cynically embarked on a "smile and enrich" strategy.⁴⁹⁴ Then, during the nuclear talks, Netanyahu accelerated his criticism of Rouhani. He made speeches, gave interviews, and even addressed the joint session of Congress in March of 2015, to warn the American public and decision makers about the Rouhani's administration charm offensive. Netanyahu's emphasized Rouhani and

Foreign Minister Zarif's allegiance to Khamenei and Iran's revolutionary past, as signs that they were never sincere about bringing change to Iran.⁴⁹⁵

5.2.5 Rouhani vs. Khamenei and the Hardliners

Another recurring theme in the U.S. media's Rouhani narrative focused on the actual power that the moderate cleric holds as Iran's president. The constant challenges between Rouhani and Iran's hardliners were an important theme in U.S. news coverage.

Rouhani came to office campaigning under the slogan of "prudence and hope" with the goal of social and political reform in Iran. During the nuclear deal talks, his domestic reforms and the hurdles they faced were often discussed in the American news media. For example, an article in *The Wall Street Journal*, on July 1, 2015, reported on how Iran's hardliners were attempting to derail the president's social and political reforms. That was the reality on the ground. During Rouhani's first months in office and especially in the midst of the nuclear negotiations, any step that the Rouhani administration took towards better relations with the West was met by hardliners retaliations. They disrupted public events in Iran's major cities, making Rouhani seem powerless in his own country.

For example, on August 24, 2015 when, after months of deal makings and negotiations, the British embassy re-opened in Tehran, *The New York Times* wrote:

The reopening was greeted with open skepticism and hostility in some corners. Iran's semiofficial Fars news agency, which is considered close to the country's conservative camp, captured the sentiment with the headline "Den of Fox Reopened." Many hard-liners called the British Embassy the "epicenter of

sedition” when they attacked it in 2011. They accused the country and its media, including the BBC, of fomenting unrest and encouraging rioters in Iran after the disputed 2009 presidential elections.⁴⁹⁶

The roadblocks to Rouhani’s efforts at reform started early. Two years previously a July 4, 2013, article published by *Foreign Policy* titled “The Man Who Stood Up to Khamenei,” listed multiple attacks against Rouhani’s efforts to support women’s rights, social freedoms, and human rights issues. It concludes:

Such examples of interference [by hardliners in Iran] highlight the limitations placed on Rouhani. While he looks to the West for investment and possible future cooperation in the event of a nuclear deal, such an outlook terrifies hardliners, who can mobilize powerful forces to take to the streets against him or use the legal cover of the judiciary to jail or sideline those they deem a threat to the revolution.⁴⁹⁷

A detectable pattern in U.S. news coverage of Hassan Rouhani was their reporting on the Iranian hardliner’s interference with and outright attacks against Rouhani’s reformist agenda. The clear thrust of those news stories was to ask whether Rouhani could stand up to the hardliners on the nuclear issue. The question became not just whether Rouhani had the power to close the deal, but if he did, could he be trusted — was he strong enough — to keep the conservatives from cheating on the accords?

5.2.6 Javad Zarif: A Reasonable Foe

The news media not only covered Rouhani extensively, they reported on some of his close allies and cabinet members. Amongst those men, Iran's foreign minister, Javad Zarif was the most present figure in the news coverage. Zarif's appointment caused tremendous chatter in Western media beginning in 2013, and during the nuclear talks Zarif was effectively omnipresent in the coverage. Roughly 88 percent of the nuclear stories mentioned Zarif, and most were overwhelmingly positive in their portrayal of him (Appendix E).

Amongst the most common adjectives used to describe the Iranian diplomat by U.S. news outlets studied "reasonable," "moderate," "affable" and "astute diplomat." About a third (30 percent) of stories mentioned Zarif's personality and appearance, at times lingering on the contrasts between him and previous Iranian negotiators. News outlets commonly discussed Zarif's short temper, clean-cut beard, clothing, and fluency in English (Appendix E). In an article that appeared on July 4, 2015, for example, *The Washington Post* drew an engaging portrait of Zarif, contrasting him to his American counterpart, Secretary of State John Kerry:

Zarif, short, stout and balding, hews to traditional Iranian collarless shirts, buttoned high at the neck, accompanied by a plain suit and black lace-up shoes. Their personalities are markedly different, too. Where Kerry usually keeps his emotions in check when in public, Zarif openly exhibits a full gamut of them. He often comes off as affable but is known for flashes of anger in a voice so loud he has said Iran's supreme leader once advised him to smile more and shout less.⁴⁹⁸

Yet when it came to policy specifics, the U.S. media were more cautious. Like their coverage of Rouhani, the U.S. media noted that Zarif's differences with past Iranian officials did not necessarily mean that he and Rouhani would be able to persuade the Iranian regime of their positions, especially when it came to sensitive topics during the talks.

Iran's Parchin military facility was a source of disagreement in the midst of the nuclear talks. The IAEA and the U.S.-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) claimed that there were high suspicions of nuclear weapons activities going on in Parchin. The Iranians maintained that (a) their military sites were off limits for inspection and (b) there were no grounds for suspicion in the facility.

Collectively there were roughly 21 news stories, six op-eds, and three editorials written about the Parchin issue alone. Naturally, Zarif had maintained the Iranian narrative. But his persistence had disappointed many international observers. While many, such as David Albright, stated that Zarif was the most reasonable Islamic Republic official to deal with, he was still very much denying the obvious:

He obviously angers easily. But he is also one of the more reasonable Iranian government officials. I can remember in the late 1990s discussions with Iranian government and nuclear officials in New York where the Iranians vehemently stated, despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that they did not have any gas centrifuge programs. I was presenting the evidence that they did, in fact, have a centrifuge program, one in fact aided by Pakistan, and at one of these meetings, Zarif quietly said to me that he had that Iran had the entire fuel cycle — technical language admitting to an enrichment program. His willingness to admit

the obvious gave me hope that the crisis over Iran's program could be solved diplomatically. But on Parchin, his words appear to reflect Iranian government intransigence on its past nuclear weapons program. Its action is an assault on the integrity and prospects of the nuclear deal.⁴⁹⁹

In the case of the nuclear deal one would never know whether Zarif really believed in his defense of Parchin or if he was wary of the scrutinizing eyes of Iranian hard-liners back home — especially since on a number of occasions he was reported to have derailed from the common Iranian narrative. For example, all outlets had hinted about reports that Zarif had suggested to Kerry that Iran “wants to play a different and less menacing role in the region.”⁵⁰⁰

In some cases, Zarif’s sincerity for Iran’s revolutionary ideals has been a source of criticism especially for more critical outlets such as the *Wall Street Journal*. For example, in an opinion piece, author and Mideast expert Marc Gerecht and sanctions specialists Mark Dubowitz, question Zarif’s commitment in reforming the IRI’s regional aggressions since he had “proudly” characterized the Islamic revolution as a “revolutionary Islamic Movement.”⁵⁰¹

5.2.7 General Frames about Iran and its Leadership

“Trust” is arguably *the* most prevalent frame in any policy-related discussion about Iran, and has been a central issue in U.S. discussions about Iran over the last three-plus decades. In the data collected for this dissertation’s research, the words “trust,” “mutual trust” and “distrust” appeared roughly 321 times, across all news outlets.

American attitudes have tilted strongly towards *not* trusting Iran's leadership. The trust problem was initiated by an extraordinarily visible hostage crisis that lasted 444 days and brought down a U.S. president. The trust deficit also is a consequence of the three decades of highly publicized anti-American rhetoric spouted by Iran's post-revolutionary government. In addition, the trust shortfall has been further shaped by the years of coverage of Rouhani's predecessor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was known for his adversarial attitude and antagonistic comments.

The fraught history between the U.S. and Iran continues to permeate contemporary coverage. Discussion of the "historical mistrust" between the two countries was a major point made in the media's coverage of both the "phone call" and the nuclear talks — although most of the coverage outlined the American reasons for distrusting Iran; only a few news stories and editorials (roughly 11 percent) explained the reasons for Iranian resentment of the U.S.

President Obama publicly discussed the still present historical mistrust in a press briefing after his phone call with President Rouhani:

Just now, I spoke on the phone with President Rouhani of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The two of us discussed our ongoing efforts to reach an agreement over Iran's nuclear program. I reiterated to President Rouhani what I said in New York — while there will surely be important obstacles to moving forward, and success is by no means guaranteed, I believe we can reach a comprehensive solution [...] We're mindful of all the challenges ahead. The very fact that this was the first communication between an American and Iranian President since 1979 underscores the deep mistrust between our countries, but it also indicates the

prospect of moving beyond that difficult history.⁵⁰²

On one hand the mistrust between the U.S. and Iran was taken as a given. But on the other, the election of Hassan Rouhani, his conciliatory tone towards the West, complimented by his choice for the foreign minister, presented an opportunity for politicians and the media alike to shape an alternative narrative.

5.2.8 Historic Animosity and the Phone Call Case Study

Most background news stories throughout the weeks of coverage surrounding the two presidents' phone call noted that the Hostage Crisis of 1979 was the event that had ultimately "broken" all diplomatic ties between Iran and the United States. The news outlets used the hostage crisis and other historical grievances on both sides as context to explain the importance of the phone call. Stories and editorials published a few days and weeks after the phone call emphasized the historical reasons for the animosity. But as the nuclear talks approached, articles in October 2013 increasingly mentioned the concerns of U.S. allies such as Israel, who were anxious about Iran's regional influence current behavior in the region.

When U.S. news stories addressed the reasons for Iranians' animosity towards the United States, two major events were typically referenced: the 1953 coup d'état that overthrew Mohammad Mossadegh and the U.S. backing of Saddam Hussein during the brutal Iran-Iraq War. More rarely, other incidents that occurred during the Iran-Iraq War, such as the downing of Iran Air Flight 655 by Navy guided missile cruiser U.S.S.

Vincennes that killed over 200 Iranians, and Saddam's gas attacks against Iranian troops were also mentioned by Iranian sources quoted in the coverage.

Iranians' grievances towards the U.S. surfaced during discussion of Iran's infamous anti-American slogan "Death to America." For American journalists, the rhetoric surrounding the Iranian death chants were a puzzling element of Iranian politics. As explained in the background section, the protesters chanting of "Death to America" originated in 1978 when Ayatollah Khomeini led the opposition against U.S.-backed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and more broadly against American influence in Iran.

To this day the "death" chant is repeated at conservative political rallies and even at some religious ceremonies (especially the highly politicized Friday prayers held every week at the University of Tehran). Usually, these rallies are newsworthy to American news media for both their content and size. The turnout for the anti-Western demonstrations can be stunning, as can they be the visuals: hundreds and thousands of people are shown on Iran's state controlled TV, raising their clenched fists in the air and chanting slogans such as "Death to America," "Death to Israel," "Nor East, nor West, only the Islamic Republic." The conservative men and women demonstrators pledge their allegiance to the revolutionary values of the *Rahbar* (which means leader in Farsi and refers to Iran's Supreme leader), a pledge usually symbolized by burning the American, Israeli and sometime the British flag.

The spectacle of these rallies is exactly what the Islamic government wants them to be: magnificent and to some extent terrifying. However, after the Obama-Rouhani phone call and the possibility of a nuclear deal, many in Iran — even some hardliners — expressed doubt about continuing the anti-American chants. For example, in late August

of 2013, worshipers in Isfahan, which is one of Iran's largest and conservative cities, were stunned during Friday Prayers when a hardliner cleric said, "Death to America isn't a verse of the Quran that we have to say forever." His comment ignited a fiery debate amongst Iranians on social media. Many wondered, and some hoped, that Iran might be ready to discard the hateful slogan initiated almost four decades ago.

For the American news media covered in this research, the "Death to America" chants were a familiar part of Iranian identity since the Shah — yet the lingering language was a baffling counterpart to Mr. Rouhani's tone and message of "hope and wisdom." The American news outlets covered the awkward juxtaposition: stories about Rouhani's willingness to engage with the United States were weighed against the chanting crowds.

Across the coverage of the phone call, news reports and editorial pieces repeated the "Death to America" slogan 67 times. Journalists reported on the rallies or used them as background for stories on officials, especially Rouhani, who had supported the chants.

In stories during and after the nuclear deal, the explanation for and bewilderment over the death chants continued. Similar to the phone call case, the news coverage of the "Death to America" protests were often reported under episodic frames. In both case studies, editorials, especially those critical of the nuclear deal, used the slogan as evidence as to why Iranian officials such as Zarif and Rouhani could not be trusted.

5.2.9 Mistrust in the Nuclear Talks Case Study

Questions of trust dominated the news coverage — often raised via quotes by both Iranian and American officials. Words such as "trust" and "distrust" were repeated

127 times during the time frame for this case study. Out of the 25 editorials evaluated for this case study, 18 solely focused on the issue of trust (from an American perspective) and the other seven either started or ended their arguments with the question of Iran's trustworthiness. As was the case with the phone call coverage, articles again cited the 1979 hostage crisis and the 1953 coup d'état as the main historical events that explained the animosity between the two nations, and justified the lack of trust on both sides.

But as in 2013, U.S. news outlets again heavily quoted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, frequently referencing his specific criticisms about the nuclear talks as well as his general distrust of the Iranian leadership and his fear of Iranian mischief in the region. Netanyahu's speeches and interviews paralleled much of the criticism of the deal and of the Iranian leaders raised by American opponents of the talks.

Since Netanyahu's main issue with the deal was that the Iranians couldn't be trusted, the constant repetition of his viewpoints contributed heavily to the "trust" frame in the coverage. For example, in a July 13, 2015 article, *The New York Times* reported that the Netanyahu administration had launched a Twitter account in Farsi, and was using the account to discredit the Iranian government and its new approach to international relations. The story reported that the Israeli Twitter account had juxtaposed an image of a mildly smiling Rouhani at a 1979 anniversary rally with American and Israeli flags burning with a tweet that read: "U.S. & Israeli flags burned in Iran. Crowd yells 'Death to America! Death to Israel! Who's in front? President Rouhani.'" The same story quoted Netanyahu's dissatisfaction with the nuclear talks and his assessment of the deals:

Speaking to Israel's Parliament on Monday, however, Mr. Netanyahu denounced that rhetoric and argued that negotiators for the six world powers were caving in

to Iran's demands. "If the concessions continued even after these unequivocal calls for the destruction of those conducting the negotiations, it seems that there are those who are ready to make an agreement at any price -- and this bad agreement is unavoidable," he said.⁵⁰³

Many of the U.S. news outlets sourced their stories by speaking with named Iranian and American officials as well as anonymous figures. In a June 22 interview in *The New Yorker*, for example, veteran journalist Robin Wright asked Mohammad Nahavandian, Rouhani's chief of staff, about the anti-American chants and what their continued usage meant for the future of U.S.-Iran relations. She quoted Nahavandian's reply:

"If you go and ask anyone who uses that [Death to America] slogan [...] what he is against, it is interference in Iran's policies by overthrowing a nationally elected prime minister at the time of Mossadegh." He meant the 1953 C.I.A.-sponsored coup against Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh. "For them, what they are against is the kind of government who shoots an airplane full of innocent passengers," he said, referring to the 1988 downing of an Iranian airliner by an American naval vessel. "For them, it's not the people of America, per se. For them, they are opposed to that sort of policy, that sort of attitude, that sort of arrogance. It's not a nation. It's a system of behavior."⁵⁰⁴

The New York Times evaluated Rouhani and others' reformist approach in the light of the remaining anti-American sentiment in Iran:

While the [Death to America] slogan that became familiar to Americans during the hostage crisis in 1979 continues to echo on the streets at official events, reformists have recently urged American visitors to ignore it as a vestige of a bygone era.⁵⁰⁵

Each side claimed a different reality: Iranian and U.S. reformists asked the world to ignore the negative sloganeering, while Iranian and American hard-liners insisted that the “Death to America” and “Death to Israel” chants were evidence that Iran remained a threat. In an op-ed for *The New York Times*, for example, Republican senator Bob Crocker noted the “Death to America” chants “represented everything that the Iranian government stands for.”

While coverage of events surrounding the phone call took a more hopeful tone about the possibility of future relations between Iran and the United States, the reactions by leaders of both countries and the overall assessment of leadership attitudes after the deal was reached in the news outlets covered here, demonstrated a less optimistic view for the future of relations. For example, in a news report on July 19, 2015 about the finalization of the nuclear agreement, *Foreign Policy* wrote:

President Barack Obama and Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have cautioned that the nuclear rapprochement does not signal a fundamental change in the relationship between the two historic enemies. Iran has made it clear that it will continue to support regional proxies and allies, including Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihad, that Washington considers terrorists.⁵⁰⁶

The same story continued by quoting U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in an interview with Chris Wallace on Fox News — responding to the news that Khamenei had vowed continuing animosity towards the United States: “We’re still adversaries,” Kerry said. “We’re not allies and friends by any means.” He then added, however: “We believe that Israel, we believe the region will ultimately be safer with this deal.”

The *Los Angeles Times* editorial board made the same argument:

Tutting Iran is a gamble. No one should forget that in the past, it has been deceptive about its nuclear activities. Just last month, the director-general of the IAEA complained that Iran had answered only one of a dozen inquiries about the “possible military dimensions” of its nuclear program. Given Iran’s past evasions, it’s important that there be a robust monitoring and verification system, and the preliminary agreement is encouraging in that respect.⁵⁰⁷

The nuclear accord was a complicated political achievement between Iran and the P5+1 countries — built less on trust, than on hope. The Obama administration’s policy, as laid out in the media, was based on pragmatism and with a calculation that it would be worth giving Iran the benefit of the doubt. For the time being at least, the U.S. was willing to tolerate the clerical government.

5.2.10 Iran’s Regional Influence

In the news coverage about Iran, journalists and analysts often argued that Iran’s regional policies were another reason why the Islamic Republic could not be trusted. In both cases investigated in this chapter, stories noted Iran’s alliance with problematic

players in the region such as Bashar-Al Asad of Syria, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, Hamas in Palestine and the Gaza strip, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, with an alarming tone. Also, Iran's closeness to American rivals such as Russia and China were noticed by journalists and Iran scholars. Thus, in contrast to the "mistrust" theme, where in each case study journalists had focused on a different aspect of the Iranian leadership, U.S. news media covered the "regional influence theme" similarly in both cases.

The most visible difference was how much the coverage emphasized Iran's engagement in the region. In the phone call case, news outlets addressed Iran's regional policies in 21 percent of the coverage. In the nuclear talks case study, a high percentage of the coverage referenced the power that Iran exercises in the region — notably Iran's ties to Syria and to Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as the Houthi rebels in Yemen (Appendix E). On July 11, 2015 *The New York Times* published a story where Iran's regional ambitions and the nervousness surrounding the issue was characterized as follows:

For those worried about Iran's continued muscle-flexing in the Middle East — supporting the forces of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, Palestinian terror groups and Shiite militias in Iraq — keeping the ban in place is critical for containing Tehran, even after a deal is reached.⁵⁰⁸

Similarly, an August 13, 2015 news report by *The Washington Post* noted that critics of the nuclear deal believed an accord would only enhance Iran's powers in the region:

Critics of the deal fear that Iran will lose its incentive to stick to the accord and might use its windfall to finance its proxies throughout the region, including U.S.

foes such as Hezbollah, Houthi forces in Yemen, Shiite militias in Iraq and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.⁵⁰⁹

Word choices used to characterize Iran could be telling: critics of the nuclear deal mostly referred to Iran as a “regime,” and framed the deal as quest not just for power, but for “ideological supremacy” in the region. Those critics typically referred to the words and actions of Ayatollah Khamenei and the IRGC, and balanced them skeptically against the moderate tones of Zarif and Rouhani. For example, consider an article published on July 13, 2015, in the *Wall Street Journal*, — only one day before the nuclear deal was struck:

If there is evidence of an Iranian trend toward moderation it behooves proponents of a deal to show it. The transactional case. OK, so Iran hasn’t really moderated its belligerent behavior, much less its antediluvian worldview. And a deal won’t mean we won’t still have to oppose Iran on other battlefields, whether it’s Yemen or Syria or Gaza. But that doesn’t matter, because a nuclear deal is nothing more than a calculated swap. Iran puts its nuclear ambitions into cold storage for a decade. In exchange, it comes in from the cold economically and diplomatically. Within circumscribed parameters, everyone can be a winner.⁵¹⁰

In another example, a July 20, 2015 story in *Foreign Policy* also highlighted the importance of the Supreme Leader:

For his part, Khamenei made it clear that Iran would continue to support its allies and proxies in the Middle East. “We will always support the oppressed Palestinian nation, Yemen, Syrian government and people, Iraq, and oppressed

Bahraini people, and also the honest fighters of Lebanon and Palestine,” he said July 18 in a speech after prayers to mark the end of Ramadan.⁵¹¹

Most Western and regional skeptics of the deal worried that Iran’s access to its frozen assets after the lifting of sanctions — a sum estimated to be between \$50 and \$60 billion — could help the Islamic Republic fund problematic actors in the Mideast. The fear of a ‘richer Iran’ was especially tormenting for its regional foes. The U.S. news media mentioned such concerns in roughly half (52 percent) of the articles that addressed ‘Iran’s regional influence,’ noting that for Saudi Arabia, for example, a wealthier Iran meant further support for Houthi rebels in Yemen and a stronger support base within the Shia population of the region, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For Israel, Iran’s access to its money meant more security and support for Hezbollah and Hamas. Such concerns were often echoed in the coverage of the nuclear talks by U.S. news media, as seen in this example from *The Wall Street Journal*, published only days after the nuclear accord was signed:

A nuclear deal signed Tuesday between Iran and global powers aims to make the world a safer place. Many in the Middle East fear the opposite will prove true. Regional critics say the pact appears to reward Tehran for a series of interventions in conflicts that have ratcheted up sectarian tensions, from Syria to Iraq to Yemen. The conflicts have fueled perceptions in Sunni-dominant countries — and shared by rival Israel — that Shiite Iran is waging stealthy proxy wars to widen its role as a regional power broker and check Saudi Arabia’s influence.⁵¹²

The same tone was presented in *Politico* on August 14, 2015:

The comprehensive agreement will leave many powerful critics deeply dissatisfied. Netanyahu, who sees Iran as an existential threat to his country, has said repeatedly that the deal will “pave Iran’s path to the bomb”; several Sunni Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia, worry that the end of sanctions will free up tens of billions of dollars that Iran can direct to militant allies like Hezbollah and sectarian battles from Iraq to Syria to Yemen.⁵¹³

During the nuclear deal talks some advocated for the deal in hopes that it would encourage Iran to be a better neighbor. Zarif and Rouhani had repeatedly stated Iran’s readiness to have a more cooperative role in the region and that a deal could open “new horizons” to tackle “common challenges.” The Obama administration declined to acknowledge Zarif’s offer and repeatedly and publicly stated that the talks were being held solely to address Iran’s nuclear ambitions. But there remained journalists and experts who believed that the signals sent by the Iranian delegation during the nuclear talks pointed the way towards additional diplomatic openings for the United States. As an important editorial by *The New York Times* published on July 19, 2015 noted:

[...] with the breakthrough on the nuclear program, it would be a mistake not to test Tehran's professed interest in working on other issues. On Friday, Iran announced that Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif would soon visit unspecified countries in the Gulf region to pursue a “new opportunity for regional and international cooperation.” Secretary of State John Kerry is in talks with the Russians, Saudis, Iranians and others about a political solution to end the war in Syria [...] The Iranians and the Americans are already working cooperatively in Iraq, without explicit coordination, in the fight against the Islamic State. Other

potential areas for cooperation could include ensuring free passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz, shoring up the new Afghan government and halting the trafficking of opium, which bankrolls the Taliban.⁵¹⁴

Similarly, an op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times* optimistically saw the success of Iran's nuclear deal as creating long-term benefits for the U.S. in the Mideast:

Should that gamble [of trusting Iran] pay off, the result may take the form of an ironic reprise of the Nixon Doctrine. In an effort to lower the U.S. profile after Vietnam, President Nixon had looked to the shah of Iran to bear the burden of policing the Persian Gulf. As Obama peers a decade or more down the road, he may glimpse Iran playing a comparable role by choosing order over disorder and prosperity over antagonism.⁵¹⁵

Such hopes were rarely articulated, however. Only 6 percent of the coverage discussed a possible greater cooperative relationship between Iran and the United States that could lead to attention to and movement on pressing issues in the Middle East, such as the rise of ISIS, the civil war in Syria, and security in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the examples mentioned above were published in response to the nuclear talks — a diplomatic effort that directly addressed issues related to Iran's regional influence and what a possible deal could mean for the future of the region — similar comments were made during before, during and after the coverage of the Obama-Rouhani phone call. Over that period, while some articles related how Iran's regional adversaries had reacted to the phone call, Iran's regional influence was mostly presented as background information that complemented the coverage.

5.2.11 Human Rights: From Iranian Citizens to Jason Rezaian

As explained in the background section of this chapter, human rights and civil liberties were an important issue during the 2012 presidential elections in Iran. Reformist Iranians haunted by the hard-liner approach to civil and human rights during the eight-year presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, found hope in Rouhani's reformist promises.

Rouhani's color of choice for his campaign — the tradition of color-coding presidential campaigns dates back to the 2009 elections in Iran — was purple. Many in Iran romanticized the choice as a reference to the human rights bruises suffered by thousands of Iranians during the previous administration. Then, when Hassan Rouhani was elected president and traveled to the U.S. for the 70th UN General Assembly, the Western media also speculated whether Rouhani's presidency would mean an improvement in Iran's abysmal human rights record. With Rouhani's election, Iran's record on human rights became an important part of the coverage of Iran and the characterization of Iranian leaders by U.S. news media.

In the phone call case study, U.S. news coverage reported on Iran's human rights record as background to the diplomatic opening. For the first months of the Rouhani administration as reported below by *The New York Times* on October 18, 2013, there were some initial signs of hope that Iran's record on human rights might improve:

[...] There have been a few promising signs. More than 90 political prisoners were released, though for the most part their names have not been announced. Those who are known to be free, like the prominent human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, are staying out of sight, avoiding interviews or refusing to take public

stands on the issues they once went to jail for [...] A particularly antediluvian university president was fired. With the advent of autumn and cooler temperatures, the morality police are less noticeable but still present at central crossroads and shopping centers, warning and arresting women who show too much hair or wear clothes that are too tight or revealing.⁵¹⁶

All outlets evaluated in this dissertation covered the new administration's release of political prisoners. However, those outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal* — those more critical of Rouhani administration — complemented their reporting on the prisoners' release by reminding readers of the Iranian regime's harassment of religious minorities and by noting that Iran's jails were still full of political prisoners.

Interestingly, much of the criticism of Iran's human rights record came by way of criticism of President Obama's choice to engage with Rouhani. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* quoted then Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor who said: "It is particularly unfortunate that President Obama would recognize the Iranian people's right to nuclear energy but not stand up for their right to freedom, human rights, or democracy."⁵¹⁷

Overall, U.S. news coverage across the events reacted positively to the diplomatic openings; they characterized the diplomatic efforts as "progress," an "improvement" and a "promising sign" in U.S. and Iranian diplomacy. But the media's general optimism did not mean that American news media coverage was naïve about human rights issues in Iran. In the phone call case study, the U.S. news media covered Iran's human rights issues with a mixture of hope and skepticism.

5.2.12 The Nuclear Deal Case Study & Human Rights

During the weeks surrounding the presidents' phone call, the U.S. news media covered human rights issues as background information. For the weeks surrounding the nuclear talks, human rights became a more pressing topic of conversation. While most of the criticism of the talks came from Republicans in Congress and from Iran's regional rivals, journalists too criticized Iran's human rights record. The main reason for such an outcry was the arrest of *The Washington Post* Tehran bureau chief, Jason Rezaian on July 22, 2014. Iranian officials arrested Rezaian and his wife, an Iranian journalist, Yeganeh Salehi, on charges of espionage. Salehi was released within four months (on October 6, 2014) but Rezaian remained in prison until January 6, 2016 when he and a number of other Iranian-Americans were freed in a prisoner swap.

It is standard practice for mainstream American journalists to refrain from taking personal stands about the countries which they cover in order to maintain their objectivity. But Rezaian's arrest and imprisonment prompted journalists as well as scholars and politicians to take partisan positions. It is unsurprising therefore that journalists and the editorial boards of major news outlets wrote about Rezaian when they sought to contextualize the Iranian perspectives on the nuclear deal. Unsurprisingly, *The Washington Post* more stories that mentioned Rezaian than any other news outlet. But beyond referencing Rezaian in their discussions of all things Iranian, *The Washington Post* also vehemently defended Rezaian and criticized Iran for jailing their Tehran bureau chief. In an editorial titled: "Now, Free Jason Rezaian" that appeared on July 16, 2015, two days after the nuclear deal was announced, the Post's editorial board wrote about the hardships faced by Rezaian and his family:

Enough. Now that the nuclear deal is completed, it is past time for Iranian authorities to release Mr. Rezaian, along with two and possibly three other Americans imprisoned in the country, including Pastor Saeed Abedini and retired U.S. Marine Amir Hekmati. President Obama and Secretary of State John F. Kerry have spoken hopefully of charting a new course in relations between the countries. If that is to happen, the release of the prisoners must be the first step.⁵¹⁸

Jason Rezaian's arrest and prolonged detention raised awareness for other Iranian-Americans in Iranian jails. Many news outlets blamed Rezaian's situation on the Obama administration, as well as on the Iranian regime. A June 25, 2015 *The New Yorker* story titled "What Aren't We Asking for more of Iran?" demanded "immediate action" for Rezaian and his fellow Americans jailed in Iran:

Zarif's gesture [support for Iran's revolutionary ideology] raises a larger question about the negotiations with Iran: Why is the United States talking to the Iranian regime about its nuclear weapons program without seeking to change anything else it does, like sponsoring terrorism abroad or suppressing dissidents at home? At the nuclear discussions now unfolding in Vienna, American and other Western diplomats are asking the Iranians to do many things. But perhaps most interesting is what they are not asking them to do: they are not asking the Iranians to curtail their sponsorship of Hezbollah, or to scale back their aid to Assad, or to release any of the American citizens held in their country's prisons, including Jason Rezaian.⁵¹⁹

Journalists kept the news story of one of their own prominent, in part by contextualizing Rezaian's arrest and incarceration with analogies to the better-known 1979 Hostage Crisis. Some outlets also kept count of the number of days Rezaian was in jail, just as mainstream newspapers and television had done for the Embassy hostages. James Rezaian was released after 544 days, the U.S. Embassy hostages were released after 444 days.

Criticism over Iran's human rights was not limited to Rezaian and other American citizens in jails in Iran. While Rezaian's situation was the human rights issue covered the most, news outlets also addressed about the situation for Iranians inside Iran. Consider this example from *Politico* published in September 2015:

The odds that Iranian officials will simply release any or all of the prisoners as an act of mercy are low, if only because the government there would want to save face on the world stage. At the same time, Iranian officials are cognizant of Congress' ongoing 60-day review of the deal and many lawmakers' fury that Americans are being held in Iran. It's possible the prisoners' sentences could be commuted or they could be released on a legal technicality that makes it possible for them to leave Iranian soil. It's also possible Iran may keep holding them as leverage for other reasons.⁵²⁰

Seventy-one percent of the stories about the nuclear deal mentioned human rights in Iran. Many of the articles that did characterize the human rights environment with terms such as "disappointing," "abysmal" and "horrifying." Most of these stories were focused on Jason Rezaian and other jailed journalists and Americans in Iran. Other news

outlets let the facts speak for themselves, as in a June 22, 2015 story in the *Wall Street Journal* outlined the grim statistics:

The world recently has played down criticism of Iran on human rights in hopes of securing an elusive nuclear deal, which may or may not actually affect its nuclear ambitions. Meanwhile, the Iranian regime has doubled down its repression of domestic dissent.

More than 1,500 executions have been carried out in Iran since Hasan Rouhani became president in August 2013. With 721 individuals executed in 2014 alone, Iran boasts the world's highest per capita execution rate and is on pace to break its own record for executions in one year. According to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, the Iranian regime could top 1,000 executions by the end of 2015. All this under Mr. Rouhani, Iran's "moderate" president. While the international community wanted to believe that Mr. Rouhani's election would herald a sea change inside Iran, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei remains the real power. And it is persecution as usual in the Islamic Republic.⁵²¹

As demonstrated above, the stories that focus on human rights issues for Iranians inside Iran Rouhani's incompetency in changing the disappointing situation is mentioned. This trend is visible in most outlets thus making Iran's human rights record another reason why the Iranian leaders could not be trusted.

5.2.13 Sources

The research conducted for this dissertation investigated the sourcing habits of the U.S. news media. Most past research studies have criticized U.S. foreign news coverage for its heavy reliance on official sources. While attention to official sources does not necessarily mean that journalists are biased towards political elites or a certain narrative — since much foreign coverage features reporting on one government’s position towards another — still, such minimal sourcing means that stories are often limited to policy perspectives, too often giving short shrift to economic or social or rights perspectives. This dissertation’s examination of sourcing in the U.S. media’s coverage of Iranian leaders demonstrates that there was not much difference in U.S. journalists sourcing habits for the two case studies:

- U.S. news outlets do indeed lean on official sources. The content analysis shows that the media studied in this research generally relied on Iranian and American officials for information about Iran, the Obama-Rouhani phone call, and the nuclear deal. Iranian officials were cited repeatedly in the phone call coverage (overall, 91 percent) and in roughly 98 percent of the nuclear deal stories. Seventy-one percent of the articles included quotations from “unnamed” official sources (Appendix E , Chart E6).²
- Officials from other governments were also frequently heard from: Netanyahu was used as a source in 84 percent of the nuclear stories, while leaders from Saudi Arabia were cited in 47 percent of the articles. This difference appears stark, but

² Note these percentages were calculated by MAXQDA, the numbers appearing here are the accumulation of sources used in news reports , editorials , and Op-eds. In Appendix E each type of article has its own chart, therefore, the numbers may vary.

must be understood in the context that Saudi leaders usually keep a low-profile in the news. However, given the sensitivity of the nuclear deal, their presence was considerable.

- By comparison, members of the Iranian public were cited in 52 percent of all articles and Iranian journalists and other media figures were cited in just 18 percent of the articles. These findings document a general lack of diversity of sources in the news coverage of Iran and additionally suggest that for most stories journalists are conducting limited “on -the-ground” research.
- In general, the sourcing schema were comparable across all news outlets. The only outlying data point was that the *Los Angeles Times* devoted 3 percent of its sourcing to Iranian-American residing in the United States — the only news outlet in this study to do so. In other words, the voices of Iranian-Americans and Iranian expats were not part of the coverage.

5.2.14 Conclusion

In the research conducted for this dissertation, “trust” emerged as *the* overall theme in the writing about Rouhani in particular, and Iran in general. U.S. journalists and opinion writers referred to events in Iran’s past as evidence of the Islamic Republic’s untrustworthiness. The news coverage of the phone call case study mostly emphasized the possibility of better — and more “trusting” — relations between Iran and the United States.

Initially, the content analysis had set out to investigate how news outlets covered Iran’s president Hassan Rouhani. However, the research unexpectedly revealed that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the hardliners in Iran were very visible in the coverage. The

U.S. media framed Iran's supreme leader as the ultimate decision maker in Iran and described Hassan Rouhani as a charming individual who had the public's support but was limited in his power as president. The content analysis revealed that Mohammad Javad Zarif had received similar coverage. Outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal* that had been more crucial of President Obama's policies on Iran, cited Rouhani and Zarif's power limitations more frequently than others. Also, across all outlets, Rouhani's conciliatory behavior was questioned — and ultimately (pejoratively) framed as a "charm offensive."

After the arrest of the Iranian-American journalist Jason Rezaian, U.S. coverage became more concerned with human rights issues in Iran. However, U.S. journalists and editorial contributors remained most concerned about Iran's growing regional influence, and its threat towards American allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. Regarding the news media's sourcing habits, the news followed the pattern of most foreign policy news coverage in their overwhelming use of official sources.

Notes

³⁷⁶ Millspaugh, Arthur C. *Americans in Persia*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1946.P:18

³⁷⁷ Millspaugh, Arthur C. The *Americans Task in Persia*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1925. Print.

By the end of his book, Millspaugh's writings become more critical of Iranians. For example, he finds Persians as procrastinators and day-dreamers with little to no respect for time, the pace of activity he sees in Iran in the early 1920s shocks him:

The Persian certainly is no slave of the clock or watch; he does not worship Time. He apparently does not view life as a closely times schedule... An observer in Persia seen on all side the appearance of idleness. The Peasants go to the fields at nine or ten O'clock in the morning; the traders in bazars sit cross-legged in their stalls, languidly letting custom [ers] come to them; in almost every Persian home one can meet a good-looking, well-dressed young men who are doing nothing...as well as the familiar traits of indecision and procrastination, all seem presumptive evidence of a lazy population.

³⁷⁸ In 1935, Reza Khan Pahlavi, the first king of the Pahlavi dynasty, agreed to the name change. It is rumored that the suggestion came from Iran's ambassador to Germany, who was under the influence of Nazi's. Iran in Farsi means the land of the Aryan race, which most Iranians descend from.

³⁷⁹ For example, between 1942-1945 the U.S. Army was in charge of the Trans-Iranian Railway and controlled the southern parts of Iran to get urgently required material to Russians and the Eastern Front too. For more on Iran and WWII see: Majid, Mohammad Gholi. *Iran under Allied Occupation in World War II: The Bridge to Victory & a Land of Famine*. Lanham, University Press of America. 2016.

³⁸⁰ Dorman, William A, and Mansour Farhang. *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987.

³⁸¹ Iran's geopolitical situation has changed over time; for example, Iran's Shite influence emerged after the 1979 revolution. But in general the geopolitical importance of Iran lies in its geographic situation in the heart of the Middle East and its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz were roughly 20% to 30% of the world's oil still passes through the strait. Iran is also the world's third largest oil reserve. Today, by many accounts, Iran is in effect a border between interests of the East and West and could either serve as a country that instigates war and conflict or as an important player for economic, political and cultural soft power.

³⁸² Gasiorowski, Mark J. *US foreign policy and the shah: building a client state in Iran*. Cornell Univ Pr, 1991.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Murray, Donette. *U.S. Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations Since the Islamic Revolution*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2010. Also see: Milani, Abbas. *The Shah*. 1st ed. New York, NY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. And for a more general view on how U.S. and Britain influenced his monarchy see: Daniel, Elton L. *The History of Iran*. Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 2001.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. 212.

³⁸⁶ In some texts Mossadegh is spelled as Mossadeq.

³⁸⁷ The Mossadegh Tragedy is a label most Iranian intellectual when discussing Mossadegh and his story. In Iran wrestling is a revered as an ancient and traditional sport, for many Mossadegh resembles the talented wrestler who despite knowing all the tactics and moves, just wasn't strong enough to win all his matches at the end. Thus, the legacy of Mohammad Mossadegh and his National Front political movement is an important one. For some Mossadegh was too naïve for politics and for others he was America's first target in Iranian politics.

³⁸⁸ Reza Khan was the father of Mohammad Reza Shah and the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty.

³⁸⁹ Byrne, Malcolm, editor. "CIA Confirms Role in 1953 Iran Coup." *The National Security Archive*, 19 Aug. 2013, / <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB435/> Accessed 7 Nov. 2017. Also see : Gasiorowski, Mark J., and Malcolm Byrne. *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 coup in Iran*. Syracuse University Press, 2004.

³⁹⁰ Kinzer, Stephen. 2003. *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*. Hoboken, N.J.: J. Wiley & Sons. Churchill had come up with the idea of linking Mossadegh to Communism.

³⁹¹ Dehghan, Saeed Kamali, and Richard Norton-Taylor. "CIA Admits Role in 1953 Iranian Coup." *The Guardian*, 19 Aug. 2013, www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/19/cia-admits-role-1953-iranian-coup. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁹² According to Kinzer (2003), Kermit Roosevelt sent Kashani \$10.000 a day before the coup. : Kinzer, Stephen. 2003. *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror.* Hoboken, N.J.: J. Wiley & Sons. Churchill had come up with the idea of linking Mossadegh to Communism.p:88.

³⁹³ The Shah was at first reluctant about agreeing to the over throw of Mossadegh and was persuaded his inner circle and advisors. A story that was mostly publicized by the Shah himself in his memoirs *An Answer to History*

³⁹⁴ Or TPAJAX. The British called it Operation Boot, *ibid.*

³⁹⁵ Maloney, S. "In Crafting a Nuclear Deal With Iran, Mossadegh Still Matters." *Brookings Institute*, August 19, 2013. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2013/08/19/in-crafting-a-nuclear-deal-with-iran-mossadegh-still-matters/> Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁹⁶ Gasiorowski, Mark J. *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran*. Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1991. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁹⁷ Alvandi, Roham. "Opinion | Open the Files on the Iran Coup." *The New York Times*, 9 July 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/07/10/opinion/open-the-files-on-the-iran-coup.html?_r=0. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁹⁸ McGlinchey, Stephen. US arms policies towards the Shah's Iran. Routledge, 2014. Johns, Andrew L. "The Johnson Administration, the Shah of Iran, and the Changing Pattern of US-Iranian Relations, 1965—1967: "Tired of Being Treated like a Schoolboy" ." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9.2 (2007): 64-94.

³⁹⁹ Bill, James A, and Rogers D. Spotswood Collection. *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 73

⁴⁰¹ During the Shah era the Islamic clergy were highly revered in Iran. Public belief in Iran holds that after the Islamic revolution and the popularity of the clergy has greatly declined.

⁴⁰² Pahlavi, Mohammed Reza. *Answer to History*. Stein & Day Pub, 1980.

⁴⁰³ April R. Summitt. "For a White Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Shah of Iran." *Middle East Journal*, vol. 58, no. 4, 2004, pp. 560—575. www.jstor.org/stable/4330063.

⁴⁰⁴ Byrd, Dustin. *Ayatollah Khomeini and the Anatomy of the Islamic Revolution in Iran: Toward a Theory of Prophetic Charisma*. Lanham, University Press of America, Inc., 2011.

⁴⁰⁵ Sahimi , Mohamad. "Ashura 101." *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, 24 Dec. 2009, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/12/december-18-marked-the-beginning.html. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

Also see : Wright, Robin B. *In the Name of God: The Khomeini Decade*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1989. Also see: Wright, Robin B. *The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran*. 1st ed. ed., New York, A.A. Knopf, 2000.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid. 23

⁴⁰⁷ I did not include the Iranian press in the list above because the Shah, like the current Islamic government, had tight control over Iranian media and often jailed journalists and censored the independent Iranian news media.

⁴⁰⁸ Murray, Donette. *U.S. Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations Since the Islamic Revolution*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2010.

⁴⁰⁹ Alvandi, Roham. *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid. 28

⁴¹¹ Ibid. 66

⁴¹² According to many Murray (2010) and many others British intelligence and news media picked up on far faster than their American counterparts. The British started to grow suspicious of the Shah's growing power. Within the early years of the 1970s, the Guardian ran a series of reports warning of the weak foundations of the Shah's rule. British intelligence echoed the same concerns, as noted by many historical accounts of the revolution, Shah's mounting self-confidence and the rise of anti-Americanism in Iran were major impediments for the West to take swift action and rein in the Shah.

⁴¹³ Milani, Abbas. "The Shah's Atomic Dreams." *Foreign Policy*, 29 Dec. 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/12/29/the-shahs-atomic-dreams/>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

⁴¹⁴ Dorman, William A, and Mansour Farhang. *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid. 33; Also See emmer, Christopher M. *Which Lessons Matter? : American Foreign Policy Decision Making in the Middle East, 1979-1987*. New York, State University of New York Press, 2000.

⁴¹⁶ Sick, Gary. *October Surprise: America's Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan*. 1st ed. ed., New York, Times Books, 1991.

⁴¹⁷ Jervis, Robert. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2010.

⁴¹⁸ Precht, Henry. *A Diplomat's Progress*. Savannah, Ga., Williams & Company, 2005. Outed in Murray, 2010 . Also see Houghton, David Patrick. Us Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis. Cambridge, Cambridge University press, 2001.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. 36.

⁴²⁰ During the revolution the Shah attempted to ease the publics anger by appointing Shapour Bakhtiar, Mossadegh's labor minister as Prime minister. But as Stated by Kinzer (2003), Khomeini fundamentally disliked Mossadegh and his party, therefore, even though the National front party held office in the initial years of the revolution, Khomeini soon changed course . In fact, the National Front party and their supporters have become one of the most persecuted political fragments in Iran.

⁴²¹ Axworthy, Michael. *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic*. London, Allen Lane, 2013.

⁴²² Ibid. 40.

⁴²³ In his own memoirs, President Carter states that the Ayatollah had sent his own representative to see ambassador Vance to pledge increased friendship and cooperation and to seek U.S. support for the new prime minister: Carter, Jimmy. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. Toronto, Bantam Books, 1982.

⁴²⁴ Dabashi, Hamid. *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction, 2006.

⁴²⁵ Murray, Donette. *Us Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations Since the Islamic Revolution*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2010. Also See Houghton, David Patrick. *Us Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁴²⁶ *The Fall of Heaven: The Pahlavis and the Final Days of Imperial Iran*. First edition. ed., New York, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 2016.

⁴²⁷ Operation Staunch was a mission was initiated in 1983 to stop illegal U.S. arms flow to Iran. The U.S. government also managed to convince its allies such as North Korea, Spain, and a number of other not to sell arms to Iran during the war. Operation Mantis was a retaliatory attack by U.S. forces in Iranian territory in response to Iran mining the Persian Gulf.

⁴²⁸ Chubin, Shahram, and Charles Tripp. *Iran and Iraq at War*. Boulder, Westview Press, 1991. Also see *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*. 1st ed. ed., New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

⁴²⁹ Tarock, Adam. *The Superpowers' Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*. Nova Publishers, 1998.

⁴³⁰ Allegedly Mehdi Hashemi , the son of the prominent Iranian politician Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, had leaked the story to Ash-Shiraa: For more see : Byrne, Malcolm. "Iran-Contra: Who Leaked Ronald Reagan's 1985-1986 Arms-for-Hostages Deals?" *UNREDACTED*, 4 Nov. 2014, <https://nsarchive.wordpress.com/2014/11/04/iran-contra-who-leaked-ronald-reagans-1985-1986-arms-for-hostages-deals/>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

⁴³¹ Trager, Oliver. *The Iran-Contra Arms Scandal: Foreign Policy Disaster*. New York, N.Y., Facts on File Publications, 1988.

⁴³² Foreign Policy Editors . "Think Again: Clinton's Foreign Policy." *Foreign Policy*, 19 Nov. 2009, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/19/think-again-clintons-foreign-policy/> .Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

⁴³³ For more on Bush's concept for the "New World Order" see : Bush, George HW, and Brent Scowcroft. *A World Transformed*. Vintage, 2011.

⁴³⁴ The mission by American troops proved to be a disaster and led to the resignation of Clinton's secretary of defense Les Aspin.

⁴³⁵ Namely, the crisis in Prešvo Valley (1999-2001) and the Insurgency in the Republic of Macedonia (2001).

⁴³⁶ Murray, Donette. 2010. U.S. Foreign Policy and Iran : American-Iranian Relations since the Islamic Revolution. Contemporary Security . Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge.

⁴³⁷ Long time Iran reporter, Robin Wright, Characterized Rafsanjani's presidency in a piece for The New Yorker , after his sudden death in early 2017:

Rafsanjani was the ultimate survivor of a fractious revolution and one of its most complex characters. He had been imprisoned by the last Shah at least four times—in a Tehran store, I once saw his mug shot, as prisoner No. 3324-1354, made into a silk carpet—so he endorsed the bloodthirsty purges and executions of the ancien régime. He also reportedly helped in the acquisition of nuclear technology—potentially used for either peaceful energy or a nuclear bomb—from both Russia and Pakistan. He was cited by prosecutors in Argentina for links to the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center in Buenos Aires, which killed dozens, and by prosecutors in Germany for ties to the killing of Iranian dissidents in Europe.

But compared to the other theocrats he was a political pragmatist, who orchestrated outreach to the United States, first in the Iran-Contra scandal of the mid-nineteen-eighties, and then in proposing the largest petroleum-development deal in Iran's history, a partnership with Conoco, in the mid-nineteen-nineties.

⁴³⁸ Lippman, Thomas W. "FOR CHRISTOPHER, IRAN IS PUBLIC ENEMY NO. 1." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 8 May 1995, www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1995/05/08/for-christopher-iran-is-public-enemy-no-1/a55b9583-f7d2-4a88-bdad-5cace58b172d/?utm_term=.ccd8c84e727d.

⁴³⁹ Fayazmanesh, Sasan. *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars and the Policy of Dual Containment*. London, Routledge, 2008.

⁴⁴⁰ Gause, F. G. "The Illogic of Dual Containment." *Foreign Affairs* , vol. 73, no. 2, 1994, pp. 56—56.

⁴⁴¹ Rubin, Michael. Into the shadows: radical vigilantes in Khatami's Iran. Washington: *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 2001.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Segal, David. "ATOMIC AYATOLLAHS." *The Washington Post*, 12 Apr. 1987, www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1987/04/12/atomic-ayatollahs/25715979-1f50-4124-9c3d-fd476ca4c6e6/?utm_term=.567b0f12d134. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

⁴⁴⁴ International Desk, "An Iranian Gorbachev?" *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 June 1999, www.wsj.com/articles/SB928445972894862564. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

⁴⁴⁵ Rubin, Michael. Into the shadows: radical vigilantes in Khatami's Iran. Washington: *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 2001.

⁴⁴⁶ Erlanger, Steven. "Iran Vote May Bring Pressure For a Change in U.S. Policy." *The New York Times*, 25 May 1997, www.nytimes.com/1997/05/26/world/iran-vote-may-bring-pressure-for-a-change-in-us-policy.html. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

⁴⁴⁷ Some of his critics charged that Khatami was in fact only alleviating Iran's social scene to prevent public uprising. While this criticism ignores all the power plays that an Iranian president must endure to carry out his policies, the fact is that even Khatami's modest reforms in Iran and his foreign policy ambitions, ultimately threw him out of favor with the establishment. As of writing, Khatami's voice and image is banned from Iranian state media and private newspapers who support him are often subject to governmental harassment.

⁴⁴⁸ Gheissari, Ali, and Vali Nasr. "Iran's democracy debate." *Middle East Policy* 11.2 (2004): 94-107.

⁴⁴⁹ Amuzegar, Jahangir. "Khatami's First-Term Presidency: An Outsider's Assessment." *SAIS Review* 22.1 (2002): 1-21.

⁴⁵⁰ Moens, Alexander. *The Foreign Policy of George W. Bush: Values, Strategy, and Loyalty*. Routledge, 2017.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Iran obtained an observer status in 2005 beginning its accession process as a full member in the organization.

⁴⁵³ Hamilton, Lee, et al. "Thinking Beyond the Stalemate in U.S.-Iranian Relations." July 2001, pp. 1—114

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⁴⁵⁴ Brent, Scowcroft. "An Opening to Iran." *Washington Post*. May 2011.

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⁴⁵⁶ "Iranian President Condemns September 11 Attacks." *CNN*, 12 Nov. 2001, edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/meast/11/12/khatami.interview.cnna/. Accessed 30 May 2017.

⁴⁵⁷ Moens, Alexander. The foreign policy of George W. Bush: Values, strategy, and loyalty. Routledge, 2017.

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⁴⁶⁰ Shortly after the speech Iran released Afghan War lord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was under house arrest in Iran. More importantly, the speech had reintroduced Iran as a high-profile enemy of the United States. Even though some cooperation resumed after Buhs's remarks Hekmatyar's release, but neither Iran nor the U.S. were able to revisit the idea of better relations.

⁴⁶¹ Beeman, William O. "After Ahmadinejad: The Prospects for U.S. Iranian Relations." *Iranian Challenges, Chaillot Paper* 89 (2006).

⁴⁶² The drift between Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Khamenei is especially telling and interesting. For example, the supreme leader had advised Ahmadinejad not to run in the 2017 presidential election. The former president defied the supreme leader's advice and nominated himself, his nomination was later rejected.

⁴⁶³ Parsi, Trita. *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's Diplomacy with Iran*. New Haven Conn., Yale University Press, 2012.

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e9bc84a2c8e4_story.html?utm_term=.fe6669bec238, and <http://www.politico.eu/article/if-you-cant-do-this-deal-go-back-to-tehran-iran-us-nuclear-deal>. Both Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

⁴⁶⁵ Some of the jobs he had were: Supreme Defense Council (1982-1988), deputy commander of Iran's armed forces (1988-1989). Commander of Iranian air defenses (1985-1991), National Security advisor to Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997), and secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (1989-2005).

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⁴⁷³ Langewiesche, William. "The Wrath of Khan." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 1 Nov. 2005, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/11/the-wrath-of-khan/304333. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

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⁴⁷⁶ "Iran Deal." National Archives and Records Administration, 18 Jan. 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.

⁴⁷⁷ The Term Great Satan was first used by Ayatollah Khomeini to describe the U.S. during the 1979 revolution.

⁴⁷⁸ Mostaghim, Ramin, and Partrick McDonnell. "Iran's Supreme Leader Mostly Pleased with Rouhani's U.S. Trip." Los Angeles Times, 5 Oct. 2013, www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-iran-khamenei-20131006-story.html.

Also Note: Different news outlets use different style guides when it comes to capitalizing "Supreme Leader." Some news outlets, such as *The New York Times* uses lower case when the title is not part of the full name, while others, such as AP capitalizes it. This dissertation attempted to follow the style guide of the news outlet quoted.

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Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This dissertation preformed a content analysis on the coverage of Chinese and Iranian leaders in major U.S. print publications, through different case studies. By revisiting various theories and methodologies in Journalism Studies, the dissertation contributed to filling the gap on scholarship about political leaders and their mediated persona in U.S media. Moreover, the dissertation examined new aspects of political communication, which is the coverage of enemy leaders in the United States news media.

The final chapter will discuss the overall findings of the dissertation and some related issues to foreign affairs reporting that could further illuminate the important factors in the coverage of foreign leaders in U.S. news media coverage of foreign leaders. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research.

6.1 Findings

This dissertation set out to investigate the U.S. news media's coverage of two men, Xi Jinping of China and Hassan Rouhani of Iran. The data showed key differences in coverage between the two men. Simply put, American media referenced Xi, as a singular leader. All coverage focused on X; in news stories, he essentially became synonymous with "China." By comparison, the elite news outlets studied here spoke about Rouhani as one among many holders of power in Iran. The U.S. news outlets reported a shared level of influence by the hardliners and the moderates in Iran — often noting that the hardliners controlled key positions in the military, judiciary and the media, while observing that Iranian society tended to favor the moderates.

6.1.1 Framing Xi Jinping

American politicians and journalists have long referred to China as an economic rival — an observation that at once acknowledges China’s stature in the world, and its direct influence on the U.S. economy and foreign policy. Understanding how Xi Jinping is portrayed in the media deserves scholarly attention.

In 2016, at the annual Central Committee meeting in China, the Party was charged to “unite around the Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core.”⁵²² By the fall of 2017, Xi was enshrined in the pantheon: China watchers noted that Xi Jinping had become an “untouchable” figure — not only the most powerful man in the country, but a figure to be considered in the same ranks as Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping⁵²³. As *The New York Times* noted in October 2017:

“China’s Communist Party on Tuesday elevated President [Xi Jinping](#) to the same exalted status as the nation’s founding father, Mao Zedong, by writing his name and ideas into the party constitution.... The decision solidified Mr. Xi’s position as China’s most powerful leader in decades after only five years of leading the country, making it harder for rivals to challenge him and his policies.”⁵²⁴

While there may be no “Little Red Book” of quotations for mass consumption like in the bygone Mao era, Mr. Xi’s thinking will now infuse every aspect of party ideology in schools, the media and government agencies.

In the near future, Chinese people are likely to refer to Mr. Xi’s doctrines as simply “Xi Jinping Thought,” a flattering echo of “Mao Zedong Thought.”⁵²⁵

Xi has acquired an assertive public profile, well beyond Beijing. His influence holds sway over political figures in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Internationally he has shown time and time again that China's issues are to remain his to solve. For example, when President-elect Trump accepted a precedent-breaking phone call with Taiwan's president, Xi ordered the Chinese military to fly a nuclear bomber over the South China Sea.⁵²⁶

Reporting on China is not an easy task; foreign journalists can face harassment, visa restrictions may hamper their freedom of movement, and their local staff such as stringers and translators can be subject to intimidation. Since Xi took office in 2013, China has heightened its restrictions on foreign journalists; a 2016 PEN America report surveyed more than three dozen journalists, as well as local Chinese employees of foreign outlets, and concluded that foreign journalists "face more restrictions now than at any other time in recent history."⁵²⁷ One symptom of those restrictions, as discovered by past research and this dissertation, is that most foreign journalists and media organizations are not only based in cosmopolitan, political and financial centers in China, such as Beijing and Shanghai, that is all they report about; there are very few stories that run internationally about rural China.

Based on the coverage of Xi's anti-corruption campaigns and the Umbrella Movement, the content analysis conducted for this dissertation detected the following frames for the coverage of Xi Jinping:

1. Xi, Power & Personality Frame
2. Xi, Policy & Ideology Frame
3. Xi, Military Policies Frame

The analysis also detected the frames below as more general themes about China and its government during the anti-corruption campaign in U.S. news media coverage:

1. Anti-Corruption Campaign, Rivalry Frame
2. China, Rising Power Frame
3. Free Speech & Human Rights Frame
4. China's Past, Cultural Revolution & Tiananmen Frame
5. Mao, Xi's Idol Frame
6. Anti-Corruption, Positive Action Frame

Additionally, for the Umbrella Movement, this dissertation detected additional frames that focused on Hong Kong's political structure, Chinese influence in Hong Kong, and Beijing's attitude towards the Movement. It is important to note that while media coverage of the Umbrella movement, did repeatedly frame Xi, by referencing his "Power" or his "Ideology," his military policies were seldom mentioned.

7. Free Speech & Human Rights Frame
8. Hong Kong Politics & History
9. China, Authoritarian Regime
10. China's Past, Tiananmen Frame
11. Protests, Demands & Tactics

As noted above, both case studies presented the "Xi, Power and Personality Frame" in length. U.S. journalists often focused on Xi's reaction to the opposition and public movements, portraying him as an "iron-willed" leader who would not tolerate dissent. U.S. news media additionally often used the term "regime" to identify the Xi

administration, implying that the Xi government is non-democratic. When covering anti-corruption, U.S. news media noted that the Chinese government would not allow “independent investigators” to identify corrupt politicians. Due to such rules and regulations, journalists observed that the fight against corruption quickly became a “purge against rivals.”⁵²⁸

During the Umbrella Movement, the totalitarianism of Xi and his government were a constant theme in the coverage. Unsurprisingly, the American news media focused their reporting mostly on the protestors’ demands, methods and leaders. Most stories sided with the protesters, characterizing them with words such as “democracy-loving,” “pro-democratic,” “creative,” and even “polite” and “friendly.” By focusing on the protesters and China’s past, the Umbrella Movement protests were framed as a possible repetition of the Tiananmen student movements in 1989. As scholars discussed in the literature review section noted, the U.S. news media’s references to Tiananmen reminded readers of China’s past and of the possibility that horrific events could reoccur — references and possibilities reinforced by the state-owned news outlets’ described the protests as “shameful,” “unlawful” and “anarchistic,” and the protestors as “barbaric” and “disgraceful.” Thus, the content analysis confirmed that the U.S. news media framed Xi Jinping’s management of the Umbrella crisis under “preexisting views,” as pointed out by Norris and other scholars.⁵²⁹

Other frames such as the “Xi, Power & Personality Frame” and the “Xi, Military Policy Frame” were mostly visible in the anti-corruption case study. Within a few weeks into the campaign and Xi’s presidency, U.S. news media focused on the “reasons” and “motives” behind the anti-corruption campaign. U.S. journalists and analysts constantly

pointed to Xi's growing power because of his fight against corruption. Quickly, U.S. news media labeled the campaign as a "purge" against Xi's "rivals" and suggested that he had singled out high-level officials, in order to ensure his dominance.

Finding out — and then examining — Xi's ulterior motive for his fight against corruption became a major part of the coverage. The U.S. news media discussed Xi and his ambitions at length during the anti-corruption campaign. Xi's crackdown on military corruption, his growing influence in the region — as well as the semi-philosophical Chinese Dream policy — were mostly attributed to the growing ambitions of the Chinese president.

This study found that U.S. news media covered China's internal and regional politics, such as the anti-corruption campaign and the Hong Kong democratic movements extensively. Reasons for U.S. news media to show such interest in China and its politics were due to the extraordinary economic changes in China that transformed the country into a economic powerhouse. Due to its economic domination of so many markets and regions, China's international influence — and media exposure — have grown. Scholars such as Ahern 1984; and Peng, have found that China's economic and political dominance have shaped the news coverage of both the country and Xi.⁵³⁰ Xi has been portrayed as a neo-dictator in U.S. news media — as a leader who is conscious of his own public image, and unwilling to concede to democratic values such as freedom of speech and human rights. As Dorogi points out: throughout the history of American foreign news reporting there has been a strong "ideological inclination" to interpret foreign cultures via domestic standards.⁵³¹ The same can be said when considering the coverage of political leaders. The more a foreign political leader from non-democratic

political systems such as China adheres to Western models and values of leadership, the more the news media tend to cover them in a more positive light.

Also, the content analysis demonstrated how U.S. journalists characterized the persona of Xi Jinping. Journalists commented on his relations with his wife Peng-Liyuan, to show that unlike his predecessors, Xi was paying more attention to public appearances. U.S. media outlets repeatedly compared Xi to Mao, drawing passages from his speeches and writings to showcase the similarities between China's seventh president and the founder of the PRC — Mao, mostly known in the West for his atrocities during the Cultural Revolution.

This dissertation confirmed that the complexity of Chinese society is often missing in the narrative of Western news media about China. While this dissertation focused on political leaders of China and Iran, the U.S. news media failed to demonstrate (at least in the cases looked at here), how the Chinese people themselves view Xi Jinping. As stated in the findings section of this dissertation, only a small percentage of the sources used by each outlet focused on the Chinese public during the anti-corruption campaign. In the Umbrella Movement, the mainland Chinese public was non-existent in coverage, which is understandable since the events were unfolding in Hong Kong. But it would have been useful to the American reader to know where the Chinese public stand on the issue of political freedoms in Hong Kong. Perhaps that lack of public voices in the coverage is attributable to the wariness of ordinary Chinese of Western media, and specifically of American journalists.⁵³²

In discussing how U.S. news media reports on China, Xi and the upper tier of leadership served to underline pre-existing beliefs about Xi and his government. In the

hundreds of stories surveyed, there was little to no discussion about those segments of the Chinese population that agree with Xi Jinping and his policies. A 2013 study conducted by the Reuters Institute at Oxford University noted that for British journalists there seems to be a “template” on reporting China. This dissertation makes the same observation about American journalists; the US news media across all outlets wrote about the anti-corruption campaign and Umbrella Movement in ways that would indirectly steer readers to think about issues such as “human rights,” and “authoritarianism.” Traditional and online native news media made similar narrative and sourcing choices in their reporting on China.⁵³³

6.1.2 Framing Hassan Rouhani and the Iranian Leadership

Initially, for the Iran portion of the dissertation, the research set out to simply investigate the coverage of President Hassan Rouhani of Iran in U.S. news media, much as the dissertation had investigated the coverage of Xi. However, the initial data collected discovered that the U.S. media characterized the Iranian leadership less monolithically than it had of China. In the case of Iran, U.S. news media reported that hardliners and moderates had a shared level of influence. While the hardliner branch controls a more powerful fraction of the decision-making muscle in Iran (namely the judiciary and the military), moderates have a deeper influence on Iranian society. Ayatollah Khamenei and his inner circle are protective of their power and dominance in Iran. However, the popularity of moderates is an important factor in Iranian politics. (One very recent testament to the popularity of moderates in Iran can be seen in the May 2017 presidential

elections, in which voter turnout was high (73%), over 53% voted for the reelection of the moderate candidate, Hassan Rouhani.)

To push important policies forward, Rouhani (as other reformer presidents) needs the Supreme Leader's support; but in turn the Ayatollah Khamenei needs a popular moderate from time to time to ensure public support for the regime. While many Western outlets have speculated that most Iranians want regime change, the high voter turn out in 2017 suggests that most Iranians are looking for reforms in the Islamic Republic, rather than a full-blown revolution, such as the one they experienced in 1979. Even during the reporting in both cases, outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal* often featured writings by activists and ex-Iranian politicians who advocated for a firm stance by the Obama administration in Iran, so that it would eventually lead to the Islamic Republic's demise.

The content analysis conducted for this dissertation detected two frames in relation to Iranian leadership, based on the coverage of the Obama and Rouhani phone call and the signing of the Iran nuclear deal:

1. Khamenei, Power Frame
2. Rouhani, Personality & Power frame

Also, the content analysis also detected additional frames in the coverage by U.S. news media of Iran:

1. U.S. Allies in the Region, Security Frame:
2. Human Rights Frame
3. Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame
4. Iran, Post-Revolutionary Behavior Frame
5. Iran, As Regional Threat /Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.)
6. Iran vs. U.S., Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame

Both case studies shared the Khamenei, Power Frame. Most coverage discussed — at length — the power and dominance of the Ayatollah. Because Khamenei is the

ultimate decision-maker on the main issues in Iran, most U.S. journalists were dissecting his speeches and sermons for signs and clues about his approach on issues. Few articles provided much background information about Khamenei, most likely due to his low-profile style of rule, but U.S. journalists consistently noted that Khamenei controls the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, one of the most notorious organizations in Iran — a fact that enhances the narrative about Khamenei and his power.

In both case studies, journalists deemed the reactions by the hardliner factions of the leadership in Iran as important. U.S. journalists and analysts, for instance, often raised concerns about the possibility of the hardliners trying to sabotage the historical deal between Iran and the P5+1 countries.⁵³⁴

During the phone-call case study, the U.S. media highlighted what the reporters believed were drastic differences between Rouhani and his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. But even though Rouhani had mentioned the importance of “hope, rationality, and moderation” and reiterated his people’s belief in “stability, tranquility, peaceful resolution of disputes and reliance on the ballot box as the basis of power, public acceptance, and legitimacy,” the U.S. news media did not necessarily trust the Iranian cleric. The coverage described Rouhani’s consolatory words and calm demeanor as his “charm offensive.” All news outlets, without exception, described Rouhani as a charmer more than once in their coverage. Quotes from other foreign leaders such as Benjamin Netanyahu that repeatedly describe Rouhani as a charmer and deceiver, often accompanied the U.S. news coverage.

The same frame was present during the nuclear deal case study. However, within this case study, Iran’s foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif became a focus of

attention. Zarif's portrayal was far more neutral than Khamenei and Rouhani. However, outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal* often pointed to his allegiance to revolutionary ideals and maintained the Islamic Republic's narrative in sensitive issues.

U.S. journalists and analysts often questioned the amount of power Rouhani and his team held in Iran. Most articles pointed to the fact that for all his charm and wise words, Rouhani holds limited power Iran. The "limited power" frame became an important part of the coverage the closer Iran and P5+1 countries got to the finalization of the deal.

For U.S. news media, the main question during both the historic phone call and the nuclear deal was the question most of their readers likely had in mind: "Can Iran be trusted?" The issue of trust became a central part of the coverage. Even though the "trust" frame did not uniquely focus on the leaders, their behavior, power and past became a part of the "trust narrative."

As with China, U.S. news media covered Iran by reminding readers of Iran's past, including the 1979 Hostage Crisis and Ayatollah Khomeini's oft-repeated characterization that the United States was the "Great Satan."⁵³⁵ Also, issues such as the "death to America" chants in Iran were brought up throughout the coverage. Outlets such as *The New Yorker* ran lengthy interviews with well-known Iranian figures to explain the chant and what it meant for the future of U.S.-Iran relations. Another issue that U.S. journalists often mentioned about Iran was Iran's growing regional influence and the Islamic Republic's support for Hamas and Hezbollah. Relations with American rivals such as Russia and China were also an important part of the coverage.

Frequently, U.S. journalists argued that Iran's human rights record was another sign of Rouhani's limited power in Iran. Since Iran is considered one of the most dangerous places for journalists, there are few on-the-ground foreign reporters in the country — and the few that are present usually face excruciating circumstances in order to report about Iran. The case of *The Washington Post*'s Tehran Bureau chief correspondent, Jason Rezaian, who was imprisoned in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran for almost 600 days, is a chilling example of the cruel treatment of journalists in the country. Rezaian's arrest occurred in July 2014, thus his case and a discussion of "human rights" in general, were not a major part of the coverage of the Obama-Rouhani phone call. The issue of "human rights" and "press freedom," however, did become more of an issue during the coverage of the nuclear deal, especially as the June-August 2015 time frame of that deal coincided with the anniversary of Jason Rezaian's arrest (July 22, 2015).

Content analysis revealed that during the first case study on Iran in this dissertation, U.S. news media often focused on issues such as "security" and "Iran's regional influence" when talking about Iranian leaders. In the second case study, journalists added human rights to the mix. The framing of both case studies was mostly thematic, filled with background information about past behavior by Iran and its leaders. The point here is that, when the historic phone call occurred between presidents Obama and Rouhani, the new media covered issues with Iran from a security standpoint, often echoing the question "What would a relationship with Iran mean for U.S. interests in the Mideast region?" But as the nuclear deal talks resumed in October 2015, and the possibility of relations with Iran became more real (at least in theory), Iran's internal

issues such as human rights and freedom of speech became an important part of the coverage.

Overall, the U.S. news media viewed positively both the phone call and the nuclear deal. The critical voices quoted in the news outlets were mostly Republican politicians or journalists who historically were critical of President Obama's foreign policy. Unsurprisingly, *The Wall Street Journal*, given its conservative ownership and editorial stance on most issues, was among the most critical outlets on Iran. The other news outlets studied in this research typically ran stories about the deal and the phone call that had an overall positive tone.

6.2 A Discussion on Sources

In the case of China, U.S. news media mainly relied on “unnamed” informants, the Chinese state media, and dissident voices as sources in their coverage. The Chinese state media were not seen as professional journalists by US news media, however; they were often labeled as “government mouthpieces.” Dissident voices along with human rights lawyers, activists, and Chinese expats critical of Xi’s policies were amongst the most recurrent sources. U.S. journalists rarely quoted members of the Chinese public in the two case studies researched for this dissertation. However, U.S. news media did mention social media posts and blog entries that espoused both positive and negative ideas about Xi and his policies. But there were limited quotes from Chinese people, especially those who agreed with Xi and his policies. While most of the speculations about Xi seem to confirm US media distrust of Xi, it is to be remembered that Chinese society does not consist of 1.3 billion dissidents.

Journalists often used analysts and China scholars as sources in the coverage. Most of these individuals were either residing in the US or other locales outside of China. Surprisingly, economic financial, and even government corruption specialists were not commonly used as sources in the anti-corruption campaign coverage — this is surprising since Xi's main justification for fighting corruption in China was the damning effect corruption had on the Chinese economy.

Thus, as Cohen and many other foreign news coverage experts have pointed out, the use of similar sources throughout the coverage affirms that the news media follow a specific pattern in their coverage.⁵³⁶ Also, the number of pro-Xi analysts was limited. The sourcing of the Umbrella Movement was far more extensive than the coverage of the anti-graft events. U.S. journalists used human rights activists and lawyers as sources, but given the nature of the protests those choices seemed justifiable.

Since the case studies related to Iran and its leaders mainly focused on foreign policy issues, the coverage mostly relied on ‘official sources’ from Iran, US, Israel, and member countries of the EU. During the phone call case study, U.S. news media often referred to “unnamed Iranian and American” sources in their speculative accounts about the impact of the 15-minute phone call and the future of U.S.-Iran relations. U.S. news media also used the phrase “the Iranian public” more frequently than they did covering China. However, the majority of the public voices quoted in the coverage were those in agreement with Rouhani and his policies. A few stories quoted Iranians who opposed stronger ties with the U.S. or the nuclear deal. The reality is that while many Iranians approved of the nuclear deal and better relations with the U.S., a large fraction of the society are still devoted to the anti-American revolutionary rhetoric. Some American

news media had remarkable reporting from Iran, including outlets such as *The New York Times*, which has reporters such as Thomas Erdbrink who live in Iran. Erdbrink's series *Our Man in Tehran*, for example, used multiplatform journalism to introduce less-known segments of the Iranian society to American readers. One specific report, called "Mr. Big Mouth," featured a "true believer in theocracy" and outlined his views on the Western way of life and the social changes in Iran.⁵³⁷

Stories that give voice to everyday Iranians are important to tell. They were noticeably scarce in the coverage of Iranian politics and its leadership, even though the Iranian public has proven across time that ultimately — for better or worse — they will change the course of their country's politics. In U.S. news coverage those segments of society who oppose the hardliners are often present in the Iran coverage, but those for the regime are usually missing — despite the clear importance of understanding at least the main divisions of this complicated society.

If U.S.-Iran history has taught decision-makers from both countries anything, is that neither can afford surprises resulting from the lack of information about the other. While American media were on point about decades-old Iranian resentment towards the U.S., recent grievances were largely missing from the coverage. The U.S. news coverage often mentioned the economic sanctions placed on Iran — a diplomacy tool used by the Obama administration to bring Iran to the negotiating table. What the coverage failed to discuss is that for many Iranians, the sanctions are the reason they have faced emotional and physical hardship for almost a decade. For many Iranians, sanctions are responsible for airplane crashes, a cancer epidemic, and skyrocketing inflation. Many Iranians would not fly on Iranian airlines, for instance, because news of airplane crashes was recurrent.

For almost eight years Iran was banned from importing clean, refined petroleum from Europe.⁵³⁸ Therefore, the Ahmadinejad administration started to develop its own refined petroleum by turning petrochemical factories into refineries. However, whether because of mismanagement by President Ahmadinejad or simply because oversight and infrastructure were lacking, the switch to refineries were devastating to the country's public health — in the last years Iran has seen what experts have called a “cancer tsunami.” While the U.S. government was not alone in imposing sanctions on Iran, the majority of Iranians call them the “American sanctions.” Therefore, many Iranians resent the United States — and they continue to do so.

6.3 Suggestions and Recommendations

While this dissertation tackled a scarcely researched area in foreign policy news reporting, there remain unexamined areas that would benefit from future research — including research into the professional and personal experiences of journalists covering China and Iran. Conducting meaningful interviews with journalists tasked with covering “enemy” states would contribute to researchers better understanding the challenges and limitations of international reporting in those two difficult countries.⁵³⁹

Given the situations they face, U.S. journalists are performing relatively well in their coverage of foreign countries. However, U.S.- and Western-trained journalists who have enjoyed freedom of speech most of their lives, who can conduct straightforward interviews with politicians and who work in countries that allow FOIA-type requests, giving them access to information from public records, will find it difficult to report

adequately in countries where most political and economic information is either classified or very hard to obtain.

Also, due to the severe consequences of sharing information, few people in China or Iran risk leaking information or becoming whistle blowers. Local print journalists in Iran, for example, still produce notable works of investigative journalism — but the consequence is that there are hundreds of brave men and women in jails for doing their jobs. There would be tremendous value in studying those journalists who have managed to survive the excruciating situations of their job in societies with limited press freedom.⁵⁴⁰

A fruitful avenue for future research would be considering the coverage of a greater range of outlets; most of the outlets chosen for this study were chosen because they themselves originated the reporting from China and Iran. But as a consequence, the outlets are among the most well-resourced news outlets anywhere in the world, and perhaps as a consequence, they ultimately are quite homogenous in tone, sourcing and coverage. Adding more conservative outlets, such as *The Washington Times* or *Breitbart News* — outlets that have become popular for right-wing voters in part because their viewpoints have often countered existing U.S. policies towards the world — would help researchers understand the variety of perspectives on foreign policy, even if what was studied was their opinion and editorial articles, rather than their breaking news coverage.

Looking into more online native outlets and social media websites could also enrich the field of research into narratives of international reporting. Since the advent of Twitter and Facebook, more and more politicians are using social networking platforms as communication tools. More and more it is the leaders themselves who are breaking

their own news stories ahead of the press — this was the case in the Obama-Rouhani phone call story, and in more recent days Donald Trump’s Twitter use has become a source of fascination and concern for many. But internationally social media is becoming a tool (or at least a topic of conversation) at the highest levels: President Rouhani tweets about his favorite soccer team. Ayatollah Khamenei’s official Twitter account has reached 294,00 followers (as of May 2017), even though Twitter and Facebook are filtered in Iran. In fact, as of October 2017, Xi Jinping is the only G20 country leader without official Twitter presence — although some state media outlets do have a presence on Twitter. (Xi’s lack of his own account became a story of its own in a recent *Foreign Policy* report.)⁵⁴¹ Thus, studying governmental leaders through their social media presence is not just fascinating topic, it is increasingly critical.

Further research into the international coverage of China and Iran by TV and video news outlets would also add value to how the world understands a leader’s persona. For example, the image of Vladimir Putin sitting half naked on horse is often talked about in both humorous and serious terms when discussing the Russian president. As news becomes more visual, across both mainstream and social media platforms, an investigation of those images would complement the kinds of inquiries conducted by this dissertation.

Further research could also be undertaken on the state-supported media outlets, such as the BBC Persian and VOA Farsi that beam news to audiences, in Iran, for example. Iranians, like many in the Middle East, use “outside” channels as their go-to news channels. Unfortunately, these networks are seldom held accountable by researchers to see whether their news practices are in accordance with journalistic values and

professionalism. The coverage of leaders in Iranian diaspora media or Chinese blogs would also be important to consider; expats run many of these. Usually, news media that are in opposition to the current power establishments offer interesting insights about news media habits and framing practices. In addition, these outlets often provide counter narratives to the official narratives in Iran or China. Thus, knowing these competing frames in a country's political discourse is of high value.

In addition to alternative media, it is important that journalism research also pays attention to fake news — an increasing problem in countries with limited press freedom. In countries such as Iran and China, it is necessary to understand how news is disseminated, and why the emergence of fake news is inevitable. Unfortunately, fake news has long been a grim reality in countries where freedom of press is under attack. However, with the advent of other social networking sites such as Telegram and Viber, rumor-based stories are on the rise from countries such as Iran and China. What are people both within and outside such countries doing when there are limited resources for the public to verify information, either information coming from mainstream sources or channeled through social media? While some Western outlets are relying on social media sites to reflect public sentiments or important news from these countries, it is essential that journalists and researchers examine these to ensure the credibility of this information.⁵⁴²

Even though, according to the *Columbia Journalism Review*, foreign news bureaus are shutting down and transitioning into digital entities, outlets need to further scrutinize information from such societies.⁵⁴³ Scholars of journalism can help provide an environment where the press is held accountable for the information they publish.

Another important and rather overlooked issue is research on Iranian and Chinese immigrants who reside in the U.S. and other Western societies. In many instances, these immigrants are often the first to be impacted by foreign policy decisions. For example, when Donald Trump signed his first Executive Order in late February 2017, commonly known as the “Muslim ban,” tourists and expats became the center of Trump’s order.⁵⁴⁴ Along with citizens from six other Muslim majority countries, Iranians were banned by the president’s order from entering the United States. At first, the ban even included valid VISA and Green Card holders; many Americans took to the streets and airports in opposition of the president’s decision. It would be beneficial to the American public as well as its policy makers to include more coverage about the struggles and issues facing immigrants and refugees in the United States, especially those, such as Iranians, Libyans, Sudanese, Syrians, Somalis and Iraqis (included in the first draft), etc., who are often affected by the state of relations between the United States and their respective countries – something they have no control over.

Also, more research is needed on transparency in foreign affairs and international reporting. While some scholars such as Hannerz, 2012; Hess, 1996; Peterson, 1979; have examined the role of fixers in foreign news.⁵⁴⁵ The issue remains. An understudied aspect of reporting is the role of stringers, fixers and locals who provide information to journalists, act as their translators or provide access to places and people. In a highly politicized society such as Iran, for example, most people have some sort of political opinion. Thus, when journalists are dependent on stringers or translators for information, it’s important that reporters are aware of the political affiliations of those individuals. Obtaining information only from those who reinforce the anti-IRI or Anti-PRC narrative

is not helpful to the American reader. Similarly, further research on the importance of bylines in foreign news is needed. For example, does it matter to the reader if news about China is written by Chinese-Americans or not? From personal experience, I would often look for Jason Rezaian's bylines in *The Washington Post* when important news about Iran would break. Even though this didn't mean I would disregard other reporters' valuable reporting, Rezaian's dual nationality and last name enticed me to read his work more carefully.

Additionally, there is a need for more comparative studies on the coverage of foreign leaders and foreign policy in Western news outlets. Europeans do not necessarily have the same foreign policy approach to countries such as Iran and China as Americans do, thus, examining their coverage and comparing it to that of the United States, would be valuable. This research would shed some light on the relations between a country's foreign policy approach and the reporting in the news media. More inquiry about "otherness" and what this means in terms of foreign policy and international news coverage from a comparative perspective would greatly benefit this field of research.

In general, more comparative studies are needed between countries with drastically different media systems. For example, it would be valuable to compare the coverage of U.S. and Iranian news outlets on the same event — and similarly to compare the reporting of U.S. and Chinese media. How do the media in countries such as Iran, China, or Russia — those that have grievances with the United States — frame and talk about the U.S.? One assumes their sources and editorializing would be dramatically different, but are there similarities in tone and terms of reference? How do they reference historic events that have led to animosity? How are American presidents portrayed?

There is value in understanding framing techniques and journalistic attitudes in other nations. In my opinion, although journalistic values are different in Iran and China, and there is state media, it does not necessarily follow that journalists from these countries are “mouthpieces” for the government. The lack of Western-style freedom of speech in these societies does not mean that there aren’t interesting journalistic trends evolving in these countries. When it comes to foreign policy, ultimately it is the news outlets that define new policies to the public. Thus, further investigating journalism norms and habits could benefit both researchers and foreign policy decision-makers.

Finally, let me end with a personal observation. Iranians who were born and raised in post-revolutionary Iran are misunderstood. In my years in the United States and Canada, I have been struck by how many times I am asked the same question: “Why do Iranians hate the West? Why do the protesters in the streets of Tehran say, ‘Down with USA!’?” Then I have had friends ask me questions that start something like: “We know you hate your country...”

The reality is most Iranians neither chant “Down with America,” nor “hate” their country. For 30-something years we were taught by the Islamic Republic that America was the enemy, yet many of us who have a choice, choose to live in the United States or one of the other “evil” Western countries. We may choose to live abroad, but at the same time we all want to go back to Iran — which is still home. We visit every chance we get. Since the post-revolutionary generation and Iranian millennials are coming of age, it would make sense for U.S. news media to report more about who they are and what they stand for. Through them, the American public and the American policy makers would gain a more nuanced view of this pivotal country.

Then, shouldn't the media do the same for China?

I hope this dissertation is a small step in that direction.

Notes

⁵²² Martina, Michael, and Benjamin Kang Lim. "China's Xi Anointed 'Core' Leader, on Par with Mao, Deng." *Reuters*, 27 Oct. 2016, www.reuters.com/article/us-china-politics-idUSKCN12R1CK.

⁵²³ "Xi Jinping 'Most Powerful Chinese Leader since Mao Zedong'." BBC News, BBC, 24 Oct. 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-41730948. Accessed 5 Nov, 2017. Phillips, Tom. "Xi Jinping Becomes Most Powerful Leader since Mao with China's Change to Constitution." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 24 Oct. 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/24/xi-jinping-mao-thought-on-socialism-china-constitution. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵²⁴ Buckley, Chris. "China Enshrines 'Xi Jinping Thought,' Elevating Leader to Mao-Like Status." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 24 Oct. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-communist-party.html?_r=0.

⁵²⁵ Buckley, Chris. "China Enshrines 'Xi Jinping Thought,' Elevating Leader to Mao-Like Status." [Https://Www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/World/Asia/China-Xi-Jinping-Communist-Party.html?_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/World/Asia/China-Xi-Jinping-Communist-Party.html?_r=1), The New York Times , 24 Oct. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-communist-party.html?_r=0. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵²⁶ Chen, Christine, and Dawn Liu. "China Flew Nuclear-Capable Bombers Near Taiwan Before Trump Call." *NBCNews.com*, 6 Dec. 2016, www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-flew-nuclear-capable-bombers-near-taiwan-trump-call-n692421. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵²⁷ DARKENED SCREEN: Constraints on Foreign Journalists in China." *PEN America*, 3 Mar. 2017, <https://pen.org/darkened-screen-constraints-on-foreign-journalists-in-china/>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵²⁸ Wong, Edward. "A Top Target of China's Graft Purge Gets Life in Prison." *The New York Times*, 10 Dec. 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/12/11/world/asia/liu-tienan-gets-life-in-prison-in-china-anticorruption-campaign.html. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵²⁹ Norris, Pippa, Montague Kern, and Marion R. Just, eds. *Framing terrorism: The news media, the government, and the public*. Psychology Press, 2003. Also see: Powell, Kimberly A. "Framing Islam: An analysis of US media coverage of terrorism since 9/11." *Communication Studies* 62.1 (2011): 90-112.

⁵³⁰ Peng, Zengjun. "Representation of China: An across time analysis of coverage in the New York Times and Los Angeles Times." *Asian Journal of Communication* 14.1 (2004): 53-67.

Ahern TJ Jr .1984.Determinants of foreign coverage in U.S. newspapers In R. L. Stevenson, & D. L. Shaw (Eds.) Foreign news and the new world information order pp. 217–236 Ames IA Iowa State University Press.

⁵³¹ Dorogi, Thomas Laszlo. "Tainted perceptions: Liberal-democracy and American popular images of China." (2001). Lanham University Press: 1032-1032.

⁵³² Allen-Ebrahimian, Bethany. "How China Won the War Against Western Media." *Foreign Policy*, Foreign Policy, 4 Mar. 2016, foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/04/china-won-war-western-media-censorship-propaganda-communist-party/. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵³³ Griffiths, Daniel. "The International Media Coverage of China." Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, *Thomas Reuters Foundation*, 8 Jan. 2015, <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/international-media-coverage-china>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵³⁴ P5+1 countries are: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States; plus Germany.

⁵³⁵ For example, in the coverage of Jason Rezaian's unlawful imprisonment in Iran, U.S. news media would often point to the similarity of his situation with the hostages back in 1979.

⁵³⁶ Cohen, Bernard Cecil. *Press and foreign policy*. Princeton university press, 2015. Also see: Hamilton, John Maxwell, and Eric Jenner. "Redefining foreign correspondence." *Journalism* 5.3 (2004): 301-321.

⁵³⁷ Erdbrink, Thomas. "Mr. Big Mouth." *The New York Times*, 14 Apr. 2015,www.nytimes.com/video/world/middleeast/100000003518176/mr-big-mouth.html. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵³⁸ Naji, Kasra. "Iran Nuclear Deal: Five Effects of Lifting Sanctions." *BBC News*, BBC, 18 Jan. 2016, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35342439. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵³⁹ There has also been too little recent analysis of the profession of foreign correspondence. Journalists covering news from abroad have invaluable experiences that are beneficial to future journalists. Conversations with journalists can help illuminate editorial or personal biases journalists encounter when writing about “enemy” countries, and knowing how to act, as a “foreigner” in countries with traditional customs and rules is an important advantage. Also, more is needed to know from journalists who cover countries such as Iran and China, where the press is under special government scrutiny. By understanding the situations under which journalists work, both future journalists and researchers gain a more realistic view of how news is produced by foreign policy reporters.

⁵⁴⁰ Gladstone, Rick. “Record Number of Journalists Jailed in 2016, Press Advocacy Group Says.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 13 Dec. 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/world/europe/record-number-of-journalists-jailed-in-2016-press-advocacy-group-says.html?_r=0.

⁵⁴¹ Groll, Elias. “These Are the Most Influential World Leaders on Twitter (and Why That Doesn’t Matter).” *Foreign Policy*, 28 Apr. 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/28/these-are-the-most-influential-world-leaders-on-twitter-and-why-that-doesnt-matter/>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017. Also see: “Twiplomacy Study 2017.” Twiplomacy, 31 May 2017, twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2017/. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017. Also see: “Following the Chinese Government on Twitter.” Follow China’s Government on Twitter | The World of Chinese, Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵⁴² Chen, Christine, and Dawn Liu. “China Flew Nuclear-Capable Bombers Near Taiwan Before Trump Call.” *NBCNews.com*, 6 Dec. 2016, www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-flew-nuclear-capable-bombers-near-taiwan-trump-call-n692421. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵⁴³ Kaphle, Anup. “The Foreign Desk in Transition.” *Columbia Journalism Review*, 2015, www.cjr.org/analysis/the_foreign_desk_in_transition.php. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵⁴⁴ “Trump’s Executive Order On Immigration, Annotated.” *NPR*, NPR, 31 Jan. 2017, www.npr.org/2017/01/31/512439121/trumps-executive-order-on-immigration-annotated. Accessed 5 Nov. 2017.

⁵⁴⁵ Hannerz, Ulf. *Foreign news: exploring the world of foreign correspondents*. University of Chicago Press, 2012. Also see: Peterson, Sophia. "Foreign news gatekeepers and criteria of newsworthiness." *Journalism Quarterly* 56.1 (1979): 116-125. Hess, Stephen. *International news and foreign correspondents*. Vol. 5. Brookings Institution Press, 1996.

Appendix A Data Collection

The dissertation selected certain news outlets based on their importance in agenda setting and political discourse in the United States. For example, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* are important news outlets in terms of both domestic and international reporting. The research also analyzed other key outlets such as *The New Yorker*, *Politico*, *Huffington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, *Foreign Policy*, *Los Angeles Times*. The research did not include region-specific editions from publications, such as *The Wall Street Journal's* Asian and Middle East editions (e.g. *Wall Street Journal Asia*).

For *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, the dissertation used the LexisNexis archival system. *The Wall Street Journal* articles were collected using the ProQuest digital archives. Both, LexisNexis and ProQuest are made available through the University of Maryland's library website. For other outlets such as *The New Yorker*, *Foreign Policy*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Politico*, *Huffington Post*, and *The Daily Beast*, data was collected through online archives, through paid and free subscriptions.

A.1 Key Words and Data Collection

For the collection of data in each case, the research used different keywords. For the anti-corruption campaign, the documents retrieved from LexisNexis were gathered using keywords such as (Xi and corrupt! or graft or bribe!) and (China or Chinese and corrupt! or graft or bribe!). The (!) in each of the word sets enabled the researcher to retrieve different variations of any given word. For example, the combination of Corrupt

and (!) allows LexisNexis to generate results for corruption or corrupt as a verb or as an adjective.

For outlets such as *The New Yorker* and *Foreign Policy* that have an archival database (upon subscription), keywords such as (Xi and corruption) and (Xi and graft) were used. But other forms of each word were also used to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. For example, (Corrupt Chinese Officials), or names of high –level officials arrested in China such as Zhou Yongkang.

Unfortunately, online native outlets such as *Huffington Post* and *The Daily Beast* do not have archival search engines for searches via keywords or specific date ranges. For these outlets, I searched words such as Xi, corruption, separately. To ensure the accuracy of data, I also used the names of high-level Chinese officials, as mentioned earlier.

For the Umbrella case study, keywords such as (Xi and Hong Kong!) or (Xi and protest! and Umbrella) were used to retrieve articles through LexisNexis. Again, for the online native outlets, I only used the term Umbrella Movement. For other news outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Politico* and *The New Yorker*, I used keywords such as (Xi and Hong Kong) or (Xi) and (protest/Hong Kong protesters), (Hong Kong and Umbrella) and (Umbrella).

For the “Rouhani-Obama phone call” case study, I utilized keywords such as (Rouhani and Phone Call) or (Rouhani and Obama and relations!) to retrieve data from LexisNexis. For those outlets not archived by LexisNexis, the research utilized terms such as (Rouahni and Obama) or (Rouhani and Phone Call).

For searches on “nuclear deal” I used keywords such as (Rouhani and Deal!) for the outlets archived by LexisNexis and used the keywords (Iran Nuclear Deal and Hassan Rouhani) for the other outlets.

In total, the dissertation analyzed 574 articles for the study of Chinese leaders and 570 articles to study the coverage of Iranian leaders in U.S. news media (tables 1, 2, 5, and 6). Each data set was carefully examined to avoid repetition of the stories and articles, as well as to ensure the articles were related to the topic of research.

A.2 Software

The dissertation used the data analysis software MAXQDA (Version 12). The software is a powerful tool for qualitative and quantitative analysis. MAXQDA is especially useful for content analysis when considering large amounts of data. The retrieved data were entered in the MAXQDA’s “document system” as PDF or RTF's (Rich Text Formats); the software is unable to read Word (docx.), plain texts (txt.), or webpages (.htm) documents.

The software has a separate section titled “coding system” that helps researchers insert codebooks for easier coding. For calculating percentages of sources and frames, the research defined specific sources such as analysts, unnamed, etc. as sub codes. This method proved useful for calculating the percentages presented in the charts (Appendix C & E).

To understand the tone and framing of Iranian and Chinese leaders in the high volume of data downloaded for this research, I performed an initial analysis. For each publication, I thoroughly read 20 articles each to designate the common frames and grasp

the tone of the coverage. Afterwards, specific categories regarding recurrent themes and sources were defined (see table 3 & 6).

Due to a large amount of data, the research also identified keywords for each frame. For example, in the anti-corruption case study for China, the “anti-corruption, rivalry” frame was often associated with words such as “power consolidation,” or “political rivals.” Thus, using the software’s “lexical search” tool, these words were located in each document and coded appropriately.

Appendix B Frequency of Coverage and Code Sheet for Analysis of Xi Jinping's Coverage in U.S. News Media

The eight news outlets used to study the coverage of Xi Jinping in American News media:

- *The New York Times*
- *The Washington Post*
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *Politico*
- *Foreign Policy*
- *The New Yorker*
- *Huffington Post*
- *The Daily Beast*

B.1 Frequency of Coverage & Time Frames for analysis of the coverage of Xi Jinping

Tables 1 and 2 show the number of news stories, op-eds, and editorials downloaded for the Chinese Case studies. Naturally, based on the importance of the stories and their newsworthiness for American audiences, the quantity varied from one publication to another. However, for all of the instances selected for this dissertation the amount of coverage was considerable.

For the anti-corruption case study, the dissertation focused on two timeframes. The first timeframe focused on the March-May 2013 and the second timeframe examines the last quarter of 2014 (October-December 2014). The reason for the first timeframe was that it encapsulates the first months of the Xi presidency. This timeframe seemed appropriate to show how the U.S. news media were addressing China's new president and his policies. The second timeframe is also important because some high-profile

arrests took place during this period, which generated a high volume of news reports and opinion pieces.

For the Umbrella Movement, the dissertation looked at the whole timeframe of the movement from September to December 2014. For both cases, the research included news reports, editorials, and opinion pieces.

Table 1

Number of Articles Downloaded, The Anti-Corruption Campaign

Publication	Number of Stories Downloaded (Two Timelines)	
	2013	2014
<i>The New York Times</i> (News Reports)	31	19
<i>The New York Times</i> (Op-eds)	15	12
<i>The New York Times</i> (Editorials)	10	15
<i>The Washington Post</i> (News Reports)	25	13
<i>The Washington Post</i> (Opinion Pieces)	15	12
<i>The Washington Post</i> (Editorials)	12	19
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (News Reports)	26	15
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (Op-eds)	10	14
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (Editorials)	3	4

<i>The New Yorker</i>	5	4
<i>Politico</i>	15	18
<i>Foreign Policy</i>	14	15
<i>Huffington Post</i>	16	10
<i>The Daily Beast</i>	13	12
Total for Each Timeframe	210	182
Total Articles for Both Timeframes	392	

Table 2**Number of Articles Downloaded, the Umbrella Movement**

Publication	Number of Pages Downloaded (September-December 2014)
<i>The New York Times</i> (News Reports)	31
<i>The New York Times</i> (Op-eds)	6
<i>The New York Times</i> (Editorials)	2
<i>The Washington Post</i> (News Reports)	24
<i>The Washington Post</i> (Opinion Pieces)	10
<i>The Washington Post</i> (Editorials)	3
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (News Reports)	24
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (Opinion Pieces)	7
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (Editorials)	0
<i>The New Yorker</i>	15

<i>Politico</i>	18
<i>Foreign Policy</i>	15
<i>Huffington Post</i>	16
<i>The Daily Beast</i>	14
Total	182

Table 3**Coding Sheet for the Anti-Corruption Campaign & Umbrella Movement Case****Studies**

Category: Notable Themes and Words in the Coverage	
Code	Analysis
Free Speech & Human Rights Frame	References to China's human rights abuses. Issues such as China's treatment of journalists (foreign & domestic), treatment of human rights activists, journalists, and dissidents in China. Keywords and phrases include "human rights," "political dissidents," "political prisoners," "jailed journalists," "limitations for journalists," "free press," etc.

Xi, Power & Personality Frame	This code refers to Xi's personality as a leader and power in China. Xi's position as the most powerful man in China is coded using this category. References to Xi's authority as China's most powerful man and its sole important leader. Keywords and phrases include "China's strongman," "authoritative leader," "China's supreme leader," etc. In addition to his power, references to Xi's personality also fit under this category. Stories that discussed "Xi's demeanor," "attitude" and references to his family life and relationships were also coded using this category.
China, Rising Power Frame	References to China's rise as an influential player in international affairs. This category was also used in instances where China's increasing power and its international influence was labeled as a threat. Words or phrases such as "China's rise" or "China's growing influence."
Xi, Military Policies	References to Xi's military policies and ambitions to bolster the PLA. For example, the discussion of "Chinese military expansion," "beefing military," "increased military spending," etc.
China, Regional Influence Frame	References to China's influence in the region through the South China Sea, Taiwan, Tibet, etc. This category also refers to instances where China and its influence in the region are labeled as a "threat."
Anti-Corruption, Rivalry Frame	References to Xi's ulterior motives for his anti-corruption policy. Stories where the campaign is described as a "purge" or "power consolidation" or where the accused officials are labeled as "Xi's rivals."
Anti-Corruption, Positive Action Frame	References to the anti-corruption campaign as a positive step by the Xi administration. Keywords and phrases include "effective campaign," "popular campaign."
China, Authoritarian Regime Frame (Umbrella Movement)	References to China as an authoritarian government in the past and during Xi's presidency. Keywords include "regime," "dictatorship," "tyrant," "unfree society," "neo-dictatorship," etc.
Protests, Demands & Tactics	References to the Hong Kong Movement, the protesters and their demands, and tactics.

Xi, Policy & Ideology Frame	Mentions of Xi's policies such the Chinese dream, his speeches about the new rule of law, etc.
Mao, Xi's Idol Frame	References to Mao Zedong and his influence on Xi Jinping.
China's Past, Cultural Revolution & Tiananmen Frame	References to the 1967-1976 cultural revolution and the 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square.
Hong Kong, Politics & History	References to Hong Kong and its government and political history. Issues such as “the two countries one system” policy, “Hong Kong during the under British rule,” etc.

Types of Articles

The research differentiated the notable themes and words in three different types of articles: News Articles, Editorials, and Opinion Pieces.

Code	Analysis
News Article	Articles written by journalists and that were published in the “news” sections of the outlets.
Editorials	Articles by the newspapers editors.
Opinion Pieces	Articles written by activists, analysts, former politicians, etc.

Sources

Sources used in the three article types (news article, editorials, opinion pieces).

Code	Analysis
Analyst & China Watchers	Analysts and scholars (China Watchers) that study China and its politics and are identified as analysts or scholars of China.
Xi Jinping	Quotes, speeches, and interviews given by Xi Jinping.
Human Rights Lawyers/Activists/ Specialists	Human rights activists or scholars that specialized in issues related to human rights.
Unnamed	Quotes attributed to unnamed Chinese officials or any source that has spoken to the press under the condition of anonymity.
President Obama	Quotes, speeches, and interviews given by President Obama.
Western News Media	Quotes attributed to news reports from other Western news media (excluding the one being analyzed) reporting in China.

Weibo / Chinese Social Media	Comments attributed to postings in Weibo (Chinese microblogging website) and other Chinese social media.
Chinese State Media	Quotes or reports by the state-controlled media in China.
Anti-Corruption, Positive Action Frame	References to the anti-corruption campaign as a positive step by the Xi government.
Chinese Public	Quotes and interviews attributed to Chinese citizens or expatriates.
Financial Analyst	Analysts that specialized in Chinese financial issues.
Lawyers of accused officials	Lawyers of arrested officials accused of graft.
Pro Xi Analysts	Analysts and China watchers that were in agreement with Xi and his policies.

Appendix C Charts Representing Findings on the Coverage of Xi Jinping

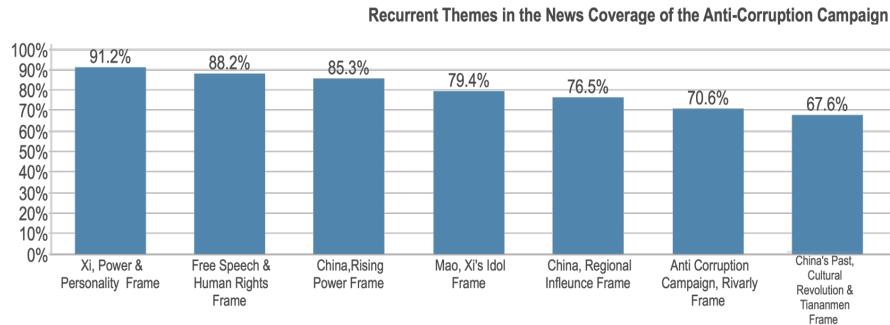


Figure 1 Recurrent Themes in the Anti-Corruption Campaign News Reports

- Xi, Power & Personality Frame: 91.2%⁵⁴⁶
- Free Speech & Human Rights Frame: 88.2%
- China, Rising Power Frame: 85.3%
- Mao, Xi's Idol Frame: 79.4%
- China, Regional Influence Frame: 76.5%
- Anti-Corruption Campaign, Rivalry Frame: 70.6%
- China's Past, Tiananmen & Cultural Revolution Frame: 67.6%
- Xi, Policies & Ideologies Frame: 64.7%
- Xi, Military Policies Frame: 58.8%
- Anti-Corruption, Positive Action Frame: 17.6%

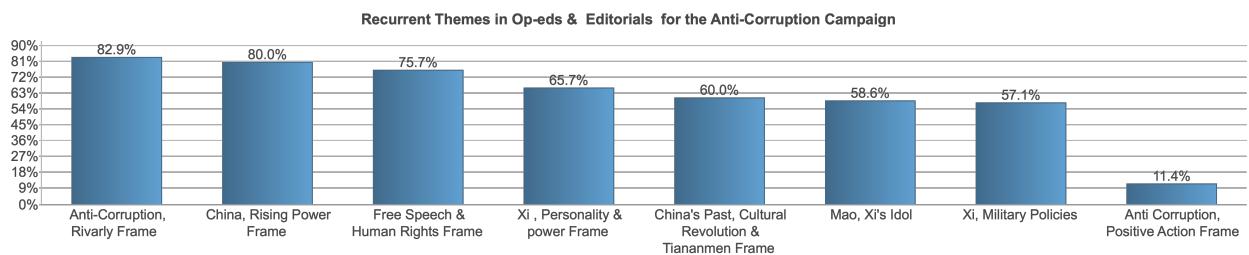


Figure 2 Recurrent Themes in Opinion Pieces & Editorials

a. Note: Press editorials followed a similar framing as op-eds, therefore they were presented in the same charts as opinion pieces.

- Anti-Corruption Campaign, Rivalry Frame: 82.9%
- China, Rising Power Frame: 80.0%

- Free Speech & Human Rights Frame: 75.7%
- Xi, Personality & Power Frame: 65.7%
- China's Past, Cultural Revolution Frame & Tiananmen: 60.0%
- Mao, Xi's Idol Frame: 58.6%
- Xi, Military Policies: 57.1%
- Anti-Corruption, Positive Action Frame: 11.4%

C.1 Analysis

In the news coverage and opinion pieces of the anti-corruption campaign, American news media often related Xi's treatment of corrupt officials to rivalry and conditions of human rights and freedom of speech. Journalists often mentioned Xi's motives of power consolidation and rivalry as primary reasons for the campaign against graft in China. Regarding free speech and human rights, American journalists noted the difficulties of reporting on corruption in China, which lies in deep contrast with Xi's promises of transparency in his fight against corruption.

News reports and commentary articles often cited China's growing influence in international and economic affairs. In some cases, China's rise was interpreted as a threat and in other cases a warning against Xi's interest in furthering Chinese dominance around the two.

To further explain Xi, American journalists and op-ed writers often described his idols and ideologies in the news coverage of the anti-corruption campaign. U.S. news media often noted Mao Zedong, the founder of the PRC, as Xi's political idol. Journalists often stated that Xi aspired to become as consequential as Mao in China's history.

Similar to the "Xi, Power & Personality Frame," journalists and analysts carefully described the methods, procedures, and suspects of the anti-corruption campaign. These articles often noted that most of the officials arrested or under investigation were long

time political rivals of Xi. Also, they used the lack of due process in the sentencing of the accused officials as evidence of Xi's ulterior motives in the campaign.

Journalists and opinion writers often discussed China's past such as the Tiananmen Massacre and government purges during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Journalists often noted the treatment of dissidents during both periods and compared it with Xi's methods in his fight against corruption.

The news coverage and opinion pieces often mentioned Xi's military policies and ambitions. These discussions were enhanced after Xi announced plans to rid the PLA (Peoples Liberation Army) of Corruption (October 2014). Journalists and China watchers argued that Xi's interest in purifying the military of corruption stemmed from his interests to revolutionize the PLA's might and China's influence in the region.

The coverage also discussed China's past government purges during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the Tiananmen Massacre. Journalists and analysts often compared Xi to Mao and how both leaders used similar tactics to marginalize their rivals.

Only a limited number of stories quoted pro-Xi analysts that advocated for Xi's anti-corruption campaign and its procedures. For American journalists, the government's lack of transparency in the campaign sabotaged the sincerity of the campaign.

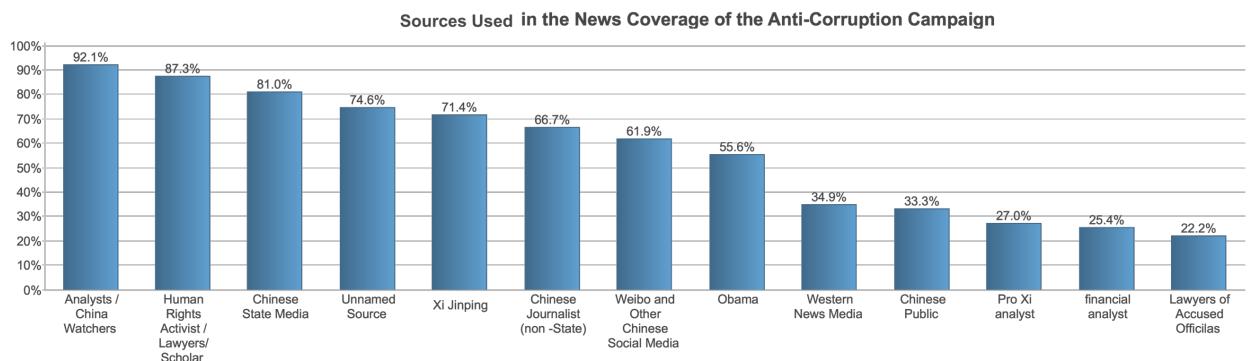


Figure 3 Sources Used in News Reports of the Anti-Corruption Campaign

- Analyst/China Watchers 92.1%
- Human Rights, Lawyers, Activist, specialists: 87.3%
- Chinese State Media: 81.0%
- Unnamed Sources: 74.6%
- Xi Jinping: 71.4%
- Chinese Journalists (Non-State): 66.7%
- Weibo/ Chinese Social Media: 61.9%
- President Obama: 55.6%
- Western News Media: 34.9%
- Chinese Public: 33.3%
- Pro Xi Analyst: 27%
- Financial Analyst: 25.4%
- Lawyers of Accused Officials: 22.2%

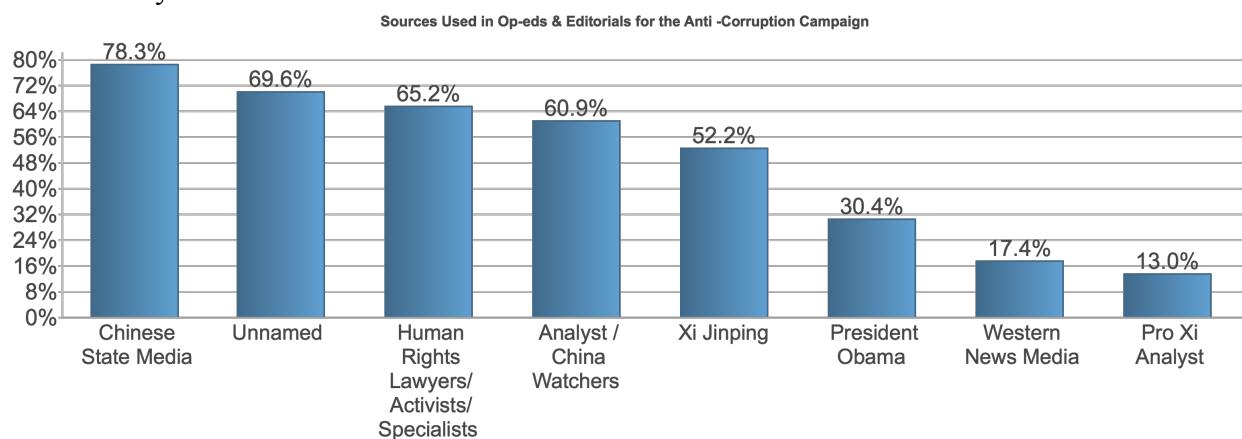


Figure 4 Sources Used in Op-eds & Editorials for the Anti-Corruption Campaign

- Chinese State Media: 78.3
- Unnamed: 69.6 %
- Human Rights Lawyers/Activist/Specialists: 65.2%
- Analysts/China Watchers: 60.9%
- Xi Jinping: 52.2%
- President Obama: 30.4%
- Western News Media: 17.4%
- Pro Xi Analyst: 13.0%

C.2 Analysis

The content analysis did not reveal much difference in the sourcing habits of the news reports, opinion pieces, and editorials in the coverage of the anti-corruption campaign. Analyst and China watchers were repeatedly quoted in all formats of news coverage to provide more insight into Xi and his influence over China. Journalists and analysts repeatedly cited China watchers to explain the Chinese society, Xi's popularity, and the effect of his policies on China's growing influence around the world.

As mentioned earlier, human rights and freedom of speech were constant themes in both news reports and opinion pieces. Thus, the coverage often used human rights lawyers and scholars to discuss China's human rights record. Human rights-related sources would comment on Xi's intolerance for dissent and his treatment of critics who disapproved of his government.

Since Xi Jinping and other key Chinese figures do not grant interviews to foreign news media, the Chinese state media is often reflective of their views. Thus, U.S journalists and op-ed writers depended on state-controlled media to report and analyze the views of the central government.

President Obama and his comments on Xi also appeared as a recurrent source in the coverage. In addition, publications used in this research would quote other Western news outlets on anti-corruption stories.

Journalists only quoted pro-Xi (Chinese government) analysts in 27% of news stories and 13% of opinion pieces. Most of the analysts supporting Xi and his policies were from Chinese think-tanks in Beijing. Financial analysts were also seldom mentioned

as sources in the coverage. Rarely, news reports or opinion pieces analyzed the financial consequences of the anti-corruption campaign in China.

News stories also used lawyers for accused officials as sources, to shed light on the situation of those arrested under the anti-graft campaign. These lawyers often discussed the lack of due process in the anti-corruption campaign that led to the arrest and conviction of their clients.

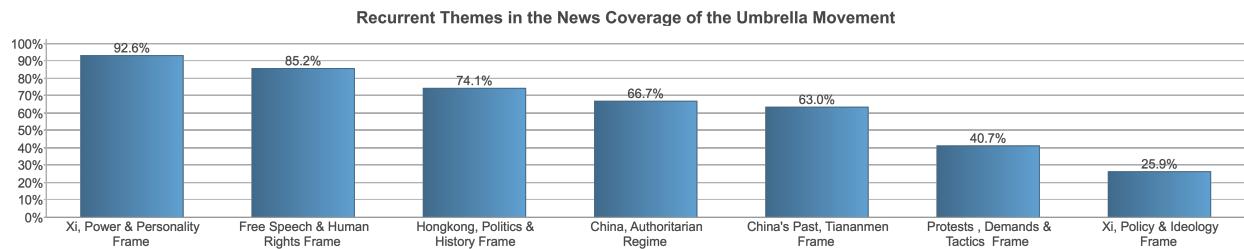


Figure 5 Recurrent Themes in the Umbrella Movement News Coverage

- Xi, Power & Personality Frame: 92.6%
- Free Speech & Human Rights Frame: 85.2%
- Hong Kong Politics & History: 74.1
- China, Authoritarian Regime: 66.7%
- China's Past, Tiananmen Frame: 63.0%
- Protests, Demands & Tactics: 40.7%
- Xi, Policy & Ideology Frame: 25.9%

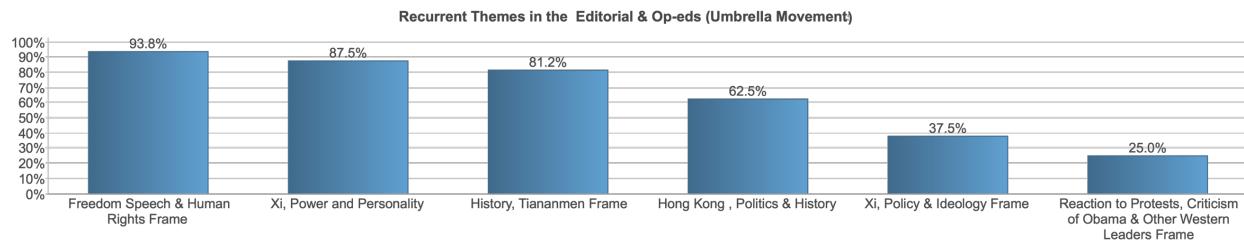


Figure 6 Recurrent Themes in the Umbrella Movement Op-eds and Editorials

- Freedom of Speech & Human Rights Frame: 93.8%
- Xi, Power & Personality: 87.5%
- History, Tiananmen Frame: 81.2%
- Hong Kong, Politics & History: 62.5%
- Xi, Policy & Ideology Frame: 37.5%
- Reaction to Protests, Criticism of Obama & Other Western Leaders: 25.9%

C.3 Analysis

In the coverage of the Umbrella Movement, American news outlets mostly focused on Xi's power in Hong Kong and China. While there were some hints of Xi's personality in the coverage, most of the "Power & Personality Frame" focused the dominance of Xi's government in Hong Kong. The news reports mostly indicated that since Xi Jinping took office back in 2013, Beijing has managed to dictate terms and conditions in every aspect of Hong Kong affairs. For American news media, Beijing's potent influence in Hong Kong was as a direct result of Xi's power and strongman personality.

The issue of freedom of speech and human rights also emerged as a recurrent theme in the coverage of the Umbrella Movement. American reporters, cited the treatment of protesters, the harsh labeling of the movement in Chinese state media, and the additional arrest of government critics in mainland China as signs of Beijing's unapologetic authoritative approach.

China's past was also often discussed across news outlets as well as the coverage of the Umbrella Movement. Most importantly the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre and the Deng government's handling of the protests back then were often mentioned in the coverage. News outlets anticipated that if the Umbrella Movement continues, Beijing would respond the same way it did 25 years ago (the study was from stories in 2014).

Naturally, the news media covered protesters tactics and demands. The way they staged sit-ins or the kind of slogans they used were especially important in the news media visual coverage. American news media often published videos and photo essays of the protesters and their methods of protest in Hong Kong. Outlets studied in this dissertation, often labeled Hong Kong protesters as “polite” and “peaceful.”

The news media also contrasted Xi’s ideology and policies with his handling of Hong Kong. For many reporters, Xi’s talk of the “Chinese dream” or the “rule of law” did not sync with the treatment of protesters in Hong Kong.

The themes used in op-eds and few editorials were quite similar to those of the news reports. Op-ed and editorial contributors often discussed human rights and Xi’s power in mainland China. Tiananmen and Hong Kong’s history and ideology also appeared repeatedly in the articles.

Opinion pages of major news outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* expressed disappointment in the Obama administration and other Western governments, such as Britain and the European Union for their reactions or lack thereof to the protests in Hong Kong. Op-ed contributors and newspaper editorial boards criticized Western leaders for their weak reactions to the events in Hong Kong, often attributing their weakness to China’s growing power in the international arena.

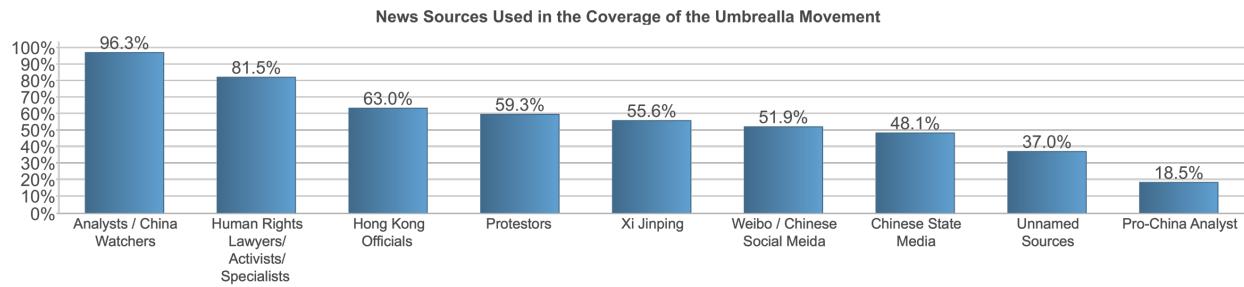


Figure 7 Sources Used in the News Coverage of the Umbrella Movement

- Analyst/China Watchers 96.3%
- Human Rights, Lawyers, Activist, Specialists: 81.5%
- Hong Kong Officials: 63.0%
- Protesters: 59.3%
- Xi Jinping 51.9%
- Weibo/ Chinese Social Media: 48.1%
- Chinese State Media: 48.1%
- Unnamed Sources: 37.0%
- Pro-China Analyst: 18.5%

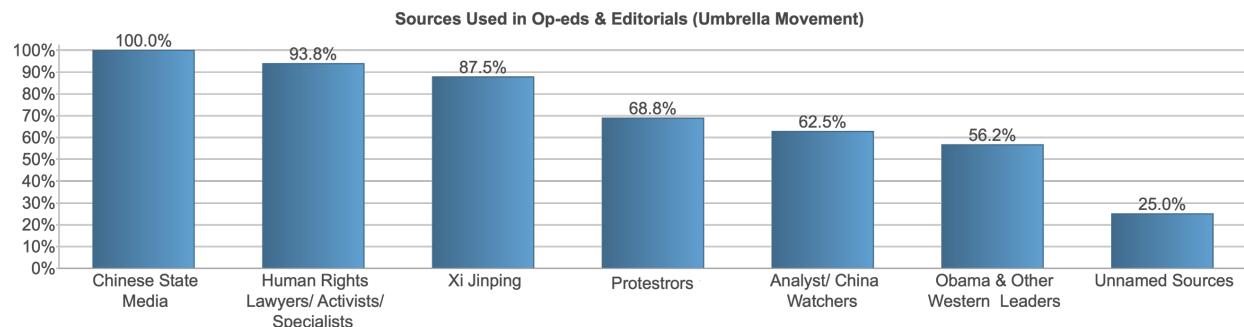


Figure 8 Sources News in Opinion Pieces and Op-eds (Umbrella Movement)

- Chinese State Media: 100%
- Human Rights Lawyers/Activists/Specialists: 93.8%
- Xi Jinping: 87.5%
- Protestors: 68.8%
- Analyst/ China Watchers: 62.5%
- Obama and Other Western Leaders: 56.2%
- Unnamed Sources: 25.0%

C.4 Analysis

Both news reports and opinion pieces seldom used pro-China (Xi) analysts in their articles. In cases where journalists or China watchers used analysts by pro-government sources, they would often contradict the comments made by pro-Xi analysts by quoting a human rights activists or analysts that refuted their analysis.

News stories and opinion pieces commonly quoted and cited stories from the Chinese state media to report and explain the Chinese government's narrative of the movement. To show the Chinese government's extorted framing of events, U.S. news media repeatedly used Hong Kong protesters and their leaders as sources.

While Xi did not make any public statements directly related to the Umbrella Movement, U.S. journalists, and opinion writers often mentioned his speeches, writings, and state media interviews to reveal Xi's behavior towards dissent and criticism.

Appendix D Frequency of Coverage and Code Sheet for the Coverage of Iranian Leaders

D.1 News outlets for Iran and the coverage of Iranian Leaders

- *The New York Times*
- *The Washington Post*
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *Politico*
- *Foreign Policy*
- *The New Yorker*
- *Los Angeles Times*

Note: As explained in the method chapter online native outlets – *Huffington Post* and *The Daily Beast* – mostly reprinted articles from other news outlets, such as the *Associated Press*, *Reuters*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, etc. As a result, since some of the outlets used by *Huffington Post* and *The Daily Beast* originate from European countries, they were excluded from this research.

Starting in the summer of 2017, from the outlets mentioned above only *The New York Times* has an on-the ground reporter in Tehran. *The New Yorker*'s Robin Wright also regularly visits Iran and judging by her exceptional reporting she seems to have credible contacts with the Iranian government. However, she does not reside in Tehran as does Thomas Erbnick of the *The New York Times*, or Jason Rezaian from *The Washington Post* used to before his arrest and imprisonment. Other news outlets mainly conduct their reporting on Iran using stringers, social media, or reporters stationed in regional areas close to Tehran, such as Istanbul or Abu Dhabi. Since 2009, with the Iranian Green Movement, dozens of foreign news outlets have been shut down.

Table 4**Number of Articles Downloaded, the Phone Call Case Study**

Publication	Number of Pages Downloaded (September-December 2014)
<i>The New York Times</i> (News Reports)	41
<i>The New York Times</i> (Op-eds)	14
<i>The New York Times</i> (Editorials)	6
<i>The Washington Post</i> (News Report)	36
<i>The Washington Post</i> (Opinion Pieces)	12
<i>The Washington Post</i> (Editorials)	4
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (News Reports)	30
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (Opinion Pieces)	17
<i>The New Yorker</i>	5
<i>Politico</i>	22
<i>Foreign Policy</i>	20
<i>Los Angeles Times</i> (News)	25
<i>Los Angeles Times</i> (Opinion)	6
<i>Los Angeles Times</i> (Editorials)	3
Total	241

Table 5**Number of Articles Downloaded, The Nuclear Deal Case study**

Publication	Number of Pages Downloaded (June-August 2015)
<i>The New York Times</i> (News Reports)	45
<i>The New York Times</i> (Opinion Pieces)	17
<i>The New York Times</i> (Editorials)	4
<i>The Washington Post</i> (News Reports)	54
<i>The Washington Post</i> (Opinion Pieces)	13
<i>The Washington Post</i> (Editorials)	7
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (News Reports)	58
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (Opinion Pieces)	28
<i>The New Yorker</i>	7
<i>Politico</i>	22
<i>Foreign Policy</i>	33
<i>Los Angeles Times</i> (News Reports)	30
<i>Los Angeles Times</i> (Opinion Pieces)	8
<i>Los Angeles Times</i> (Editorials)	3

Total	329
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Table 6**Coding Sheet for the Coverage of Iranian Leaders in American News Media**

Category: Notable Themes and Words in the Coverage	
Analysis: The research identified the words and themes that were used repeatedly in opinion pieces and news articles. In the “coding system,” Opinion Pieces, Editorials, and News Articles are separated and all the following themes are coded.	
NB: For Editorials, the themes were much more limited, as evident in the presented charts below.	
Code	Analysis
Rouhani, Personality & Power Frame	Any hint by journalists or analysts that focus on Rouhani and his charm. Words or phrases such as “charm,” “charming,” “charm offensive,” appeared in the coverage. Also, stories with references to Rouhani’s “conciliatory tone” or discuss Rouhani’s personality, demeanor, and approach to the West were coded using this category. In addition to personality attributes, Rouhani’s power in Iran and his position vis-à-vis the hardliners also fit under this category. Paragraphs and words that discuss Rouhani’s power in Iran and his ability to carry out his campaign promises were also coded using this category.
Khamenei, Power Frame	References to the power of Ayatollah Khamenei and his power and influence in Iran. This code refers to Khamenei’s power in Iran. References to his “dominance,” “supremacy” fit under this category.
U.S. Allies in Region, Security Frame	References to Iran as a considerable threat to important U.S. allies in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Israel.
Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame	References to Iran’s support for problematic organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah, etc. were coded using this category.
Iran, As Regional Threat/Influence Frame (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.)	References to Iran’s influence in the region through Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc. This category is also used in instances where the Iranian government and its influence in the region was labeled as a threat.
Iran, Post-Revolutionary Behavior	References to Iran’s behavior after 1979. Focus on Iran’s hawkish domestic and international behavior by journalists and analysts since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Words and phrases such “mullahs” and “hardliners” the “IRGC,” “hawkish,” etc.

Anti-Americanism in Iran Frame	References to anti-American sentiments, such as the “down with America” slogans in Iran.
Human Rights Frame	References to Iran’s human rights abuses. Issues such as Iran’s treatment of journalists (foreign & domestic), treatment of human rights activists, personal freedoms in Iran, the treatment of prisoners, number of executions, freedom of speech and Internet freedom.
Iran vs. US, Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame	References to issues of “mistrust” between Iran and the U.S., historic issues between Washington and Tehran that resulted into their mistrust of one another.
Types of Articles	
The research differentiated the notable themes and words in three different types of articles: News Articles, Editorials, and Opinion Pieces	
Code	Analysis
News Articles	Articles written by journalists and that were published in the “news” sections of the outlets.
Editorials	Articles by the newspapers editors.
Opinion Pieces	Articles written by activists, analysts, former politicians, etc.
Sources	
Sources used in the three article types (news articles, editorials, opinion pieces).	
Code	Analysis
Khamenei	Khamenei’s speeches and sermons.
Obama & Administration	Quotes, speeches, and interviews given by Obama and named officials from his administration.
Rouhani	Quotes, speeches, and interviews given by President Hassan Rouhani.
Netanyahu and Israeli officials	Quotes and speeches attributed to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his administration.
Zarif	Quotes attributed to Iranian FM Javad Zarif.
Human Rights Lawyers/Activists/Specialists	Human rights activists or scholars that specialized in issues related to human rights.
Republican officials	Republican lawmakers who were against the nuclear deal or against better relations with Iran.
Saudi Officials	Quotes attributed to officials from the Saudi government.
Unnamed	Quotes attributed to unnamed Iranian or American officials or any source that had spoken to the press under the condition of anonymity.
Iranian Public	Quotes and interviews attributed to Iranians citizens or expatriates.

Iranian State Media	Quotes or reports by the state-controlled media in Iran.
European Officials	Officials from European countries or institutions.
Democrats Officials	Democratic senators or congressmen that opposed the nuclear deal or better relations with Iran (in the case of the phone call case study).

Appendix E Charts Representing the Findings on the Coverage of Hassan Rouhani and the Iranian Leadership

In this section, a series of charts represent the findings on the coverage of Iranian leaders in American news media. Each chart represents the themes and sources used in each outlet. Due to similarities in themes and sources utilized in both case studies, the charts are differentiated based on the media outlets rather than the case studies.

For publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, opinion pieces and news reports have their separate charts. For *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, there are also separate charts for editorial pieces.

For *The Wall Street Journal*, the data collection did not generate many editorial pieces written by the paper's editorial boards. Thus, the results from three articles labeled as "editorials" are presented in the op-ed charts.

For *Los Angeles Times*, since the University of Maryland's LexisNexis database does not maintain catalog archives of the paper's current stories, the collection of articles occurred using a paid subscription of the LATIMES.com. However, *Los Angeles Times'* limited archival search system mostly produced news reports. Due to the number of limited editorials and op-eds, they have been merged with news reports.

For the remaining outlets (*The New Yorker*, *Politico*, and *Foreign Policy*) a single chart was used to represent the findings from each publication.

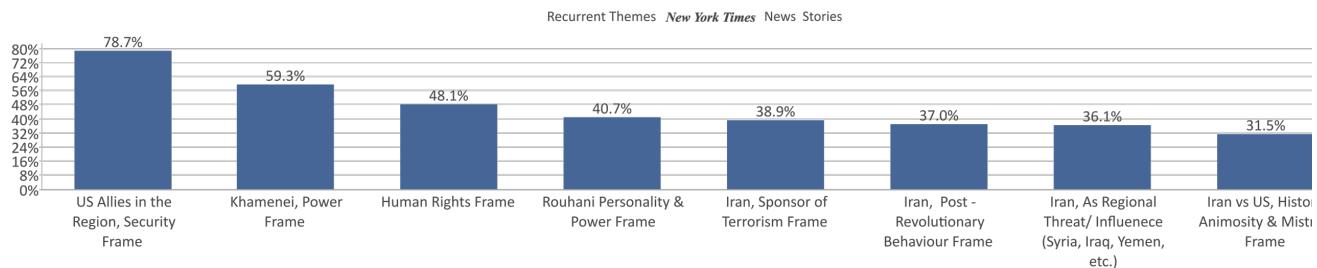


Figure 9 Recurrent Themes in *The New York Times* News Stories, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- U.S. Allies in the Region, Security Frame: 78.7 %
- Khamenei, Power Frame: 59.3%
- Human Rights Frame: 48.1%
- Rouhani Personality & Power: 40.7%
- Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame: 38.9%
- Iran, Post-Revolutionary Behavior Frame: 37.0%
- Iran, As Regional Threat /Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.): 36.1%
- Iran vs. U.S., Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame: 31.5%

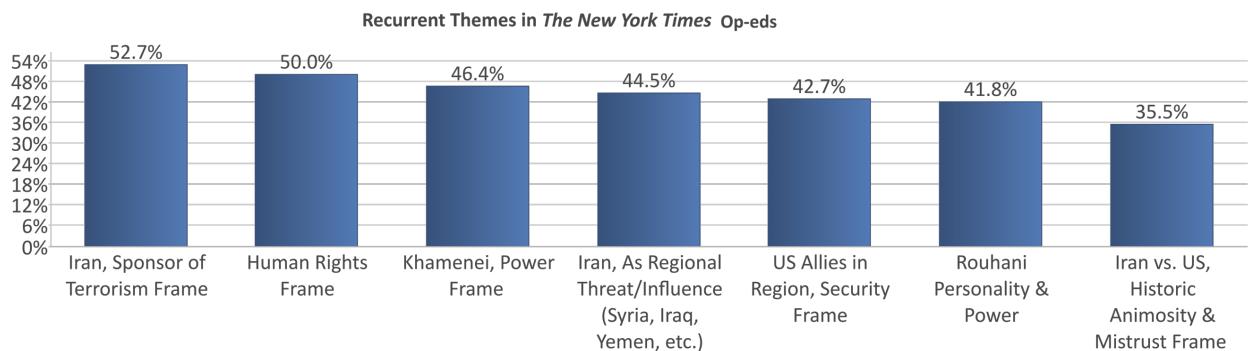


Figure 10 Recurrent Themes in *The New York Times* Op-eds Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Iran Sponsor of Terrorism: 52.7%
- Human Rights Frame: 50.0%
- Khamenei, Power Frame: 46.4%
- Iran, As Regional Threat/ Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.): 44.5%
- U.S. Allies in Region, Security Frame: 42.7%
- Rouhani, Personality & Power Frame: 41.8%
- Iran vs. U.S. Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame: 35.5%

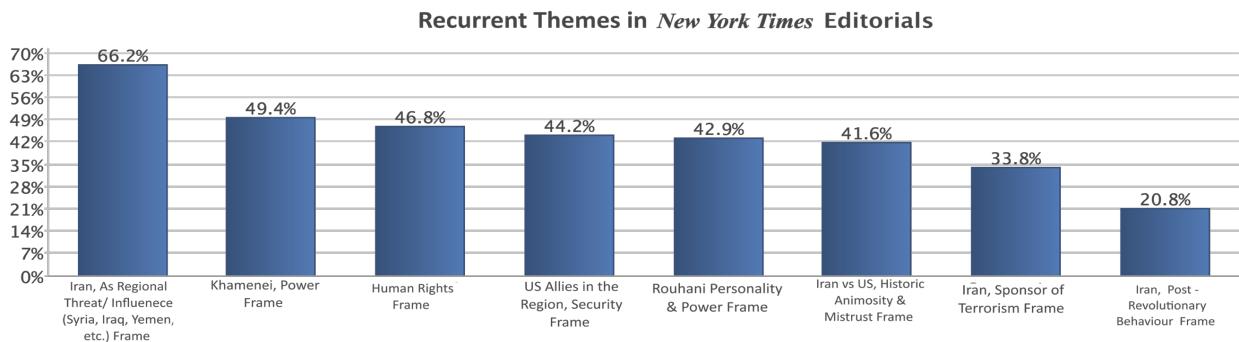


Figure 11 Recurrent Themes in *New York Times* Editorials Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Iran's as Regional Threat /Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.): 66.2%
- Khamenei, Power Frame: 49.4%
- Human Rights Frame: 46.8%
- Security Concerns for U.S Allies in the Region: 44.2%
- Rouhani, Personality & Power Frame: 42.9%
- Iran vs. U.S. Historic Animosity & Mistrust: 41.8%
- Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame: 33.8%
- Iran, Post-Revolutionary Frame: 20.8%

E.1 Analysis

In *The New York Times*, the main emphases of the news stories were on Iran's internal politics and the Islamic Republic's regional behavior. In both the "phone call" and "nuclear deal," the security of U.S. allies in the region was of main concern. After the historic phone call between Presidents Obama and Rouhani, many news reports wondered about the possibility of better relations between Iran and the U.S. and how improvement in relations would affect allies in the region, namely Israel and Saudi Arabia. Other recurring themes discussed in the stories were the power plays in Iran. Journalists often reported on the supremacy of Ayatollah Khamenei, and President

Rouhani's limited executive power but growing popularity power in their news articles. Iran's human rights violations emerged as a recurrent theme, especially during the nuclear deal case study that coincided with the sentencing of *The Washington Post*'s Tehran bureau chief, Jason Rezaian.

In addition to concerns for the Islamic Republic's hawkish domestic attitude, Iran's regional behavior raised concerns in news articles. Iran's sponsorship of terrorism and its influence in the region's most dangerous countries such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, etc. consisted 75% of *The New York Times* news stories studied for this research.

Rarely were the Iranian skepticism and grievances of the United States mentioned in the news coverage.

The New York Times opinion pieces in both the "nuclear deal" and the "phone call" case study, were mostly concerned with Iran's relationship with problematic groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah and its overall sponsorship of terrorism. For the *The New York Times* opinion contributors, the undeniable power of Ayatollah Khamenei and his anti-western rhetoric contributed to the fear of Iran's continuous support of terrorism. From the total of 31 opinion pieces analyzed in this research, well-known politicians and American lawmakers that opposed the nuclear deal or better relations with Iran wrote 15 of them. Contributors to *The New York Times* opinion pages repeatedly cited human rights and Iran's regional influence as troubling issues that needed to be addressed by the Obama administration.

Opinion writers that advocated for a deal with Iran still raised concerns about the Islamic Republic and its leaders. Mostly, contributors focused on Rouhani, his personality and the amount of actual power Rouhani and Zarif held in Iran.

In all the ten editorials analyzed from *The New York Times* (six for the phone call case and seven for the nuclear deal), the editorial board often noted Iran's influence in countries such as Syria, Iraq, and many others in the MENA region. Iran's support for terrorism and security concerns for Israel and other U.S. allies often complemented discussions over Iran's regional influence.

Those editorials published during the "phone call" case study timeframe mostly discussed Iran's internal politics and the power struggles between President Rouhani and Ayatollah Khamenei. In general, *The New York Times'* editorial board viewed Rouhani's election in Iran as a positive change for the country and its international engagement. However, during the nuclear deal case study timeframe, the editorial board often questioned Rouhani's commitment to improve Iran's human rights record, or halt its sponsorship of terrorism's hawkish behavior in the region. *The New York Times* editorials portrayed President Rouhani as a leader that is willing to negotiate with the West and alleviate the anti-American sentiment in Iran. However, his capability in doing so seemed questionable for the editorial board. Influenced by Iran's continuous support of terrorism, its abysmal human rights records, and its past behavior since 1979, *The New York Times* editorial board often painted Iran as a country in need of scrutinized containment.

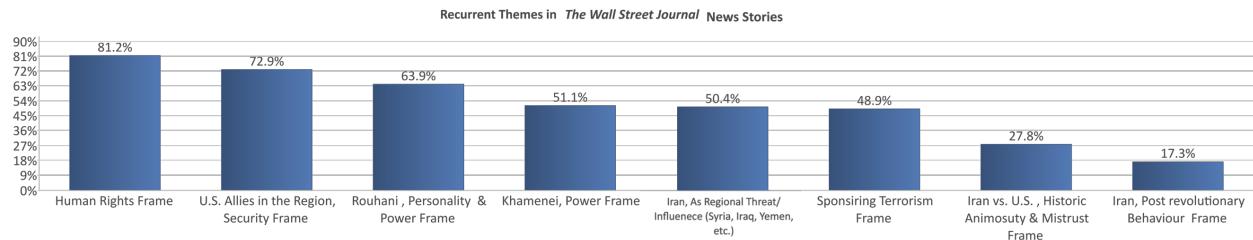


Figure 12 Recurrent Themes in *The Wall Street Journal* News Reports, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Human Rights Frame: 81.2%
- U.S. Allies in The Region, Security Frame: 72.9%
- Rouhani, Personality & Power Frame: 63.9 %
- Khamenei, Power Frame: 51.1%
- Iran's Regional Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.): 50.4%
- Sponsoring Terrorism Frame: 48.9%
- Iran vs. U.S., Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame: 27.8%
- Iran, Post-Revolutionary Behavior Frame: 17.3%

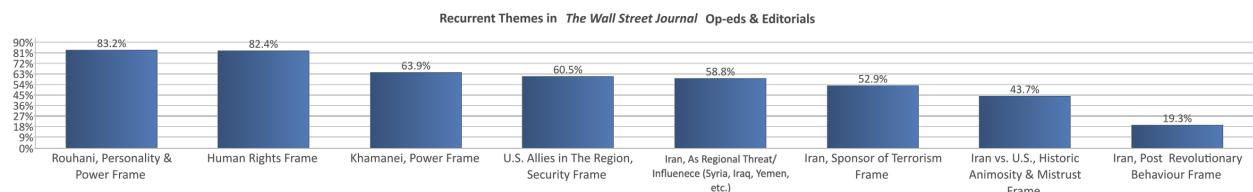


Figure 13 Recurrent Themes in The Wall Street Journal Op-eds & Editorials, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Rouhani Personality & Power Frame: 83.2%
- Human Rights Frame: 82.4%
- Khamenei, Power Frame: 63.9%
- U.S. Allies in the Region, Security Frame: 60.5%
- Iran, As Regional Threat / Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.): 52.8%
- Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame: 52.9%

- Iran vs U.S., Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame: 43.7%
- Iran, Post-Revolutionary Behavior: 19.3 %

E.2 Analysis

Iran's human rights abuses appeared in 81.2% of *The Wall Street Journal's* news Stories. The publication's journalists also cited Iran's past threatening language towards U.S. allies such as Israel as evidence of Rouhani's limited power in Iran. Also, journalists noted Iran's influence in Syria and its support for Shia forces in Iraq and Yemen as indicators of Islamic Republic's hawkish foreign policy in the region.

Themes used in the opinion pieces and editorials published in *The Wall Street Journal* were fairly similar to the news stories. Human rights appeared as one of the most prevalent issues amongst publication's op-ed and editorial pieces. Human rights activists or analysts that were wary of potential U.S. closeness to Iran often contributed to the op-eds and commentary sections. Of the 45 opinion pieces analyzed from *The Wall Street Journal*, 15 were written by Iranian dissidents or expatriates critical of the Islamic regime, often reciting their own horrific experiences in Iran.

Nuclear and Middle East experts also contributed to the opinion pages of *The Wall Street Journal*. Most of these articles warned against Iran's clandestine uranium proliferation and Rouhani's "charm offensive" and limited executive power in Iran. Commentary on Rouhani's behavior and attitude constantly appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* opinion pieces. The word "charm offensive" during the "phone call" case study appeared 87 times in the opinion and editorial pieces.

Op-ed contributors also discussed security concerns for U.S. allies in the region such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. During the phone call case study, the idea of better

relations with Iran, and its effect on Israel and Saudi Arabia appeared as a common theme in *The Wall Street Journal* opinion pieces. Similarly, during the nuclear deal case study, the deal and its ramifications for U.S. allies in the region were major themes.

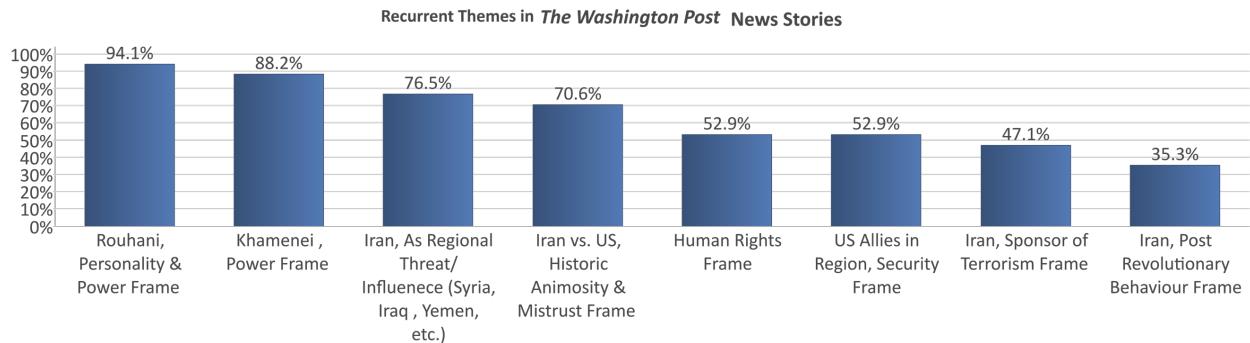


Figure 14 Recurrent Themes in *The Washington Post* News Reports, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Rouhani, Personality & Power Frame: 94.1%
- Khamenei, Power Frame: 88.2%
- Iran's, As Regional Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.): 76.5%
- Iran vs. U.S., Historic Animosity & Mistrust: 70.6%
- Human Rights Frame: 52.9%
- U.S. Allies in The Region, Security Frame: 52.9%
- Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame: 47.1%
- Iran's, Post-Revolutionary Behavior: 35.3%

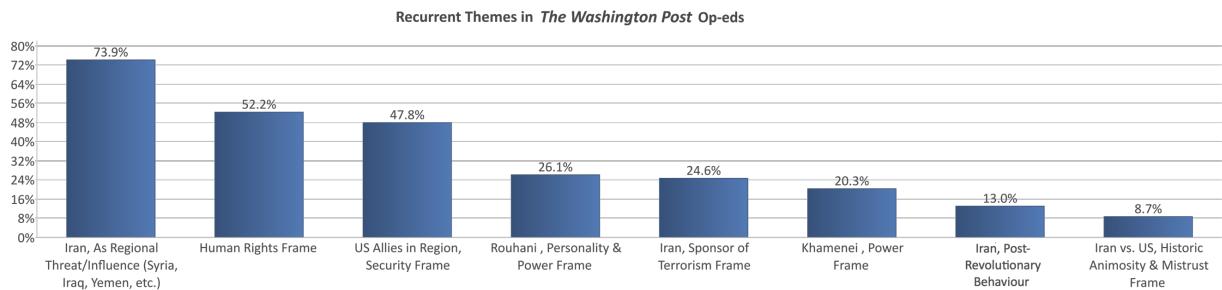


Figure 15 Recurrent Themes in *The Washington Post* Op-eds, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Iran, As Regional Threat/Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.) Frame: 73.9%
- Human Rights Frame: 52.2%
- US Allies in Region, Security Frame: 47.8%
- Rouhani, Personality & Power Frame: 26.1%
- Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame: 24.6%
- Khamenei, Power Frame: 20.3%
- Iran, Post-Revolutionary Behavior Frame :13.0%
- Iran vs. US, Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame :8.7%

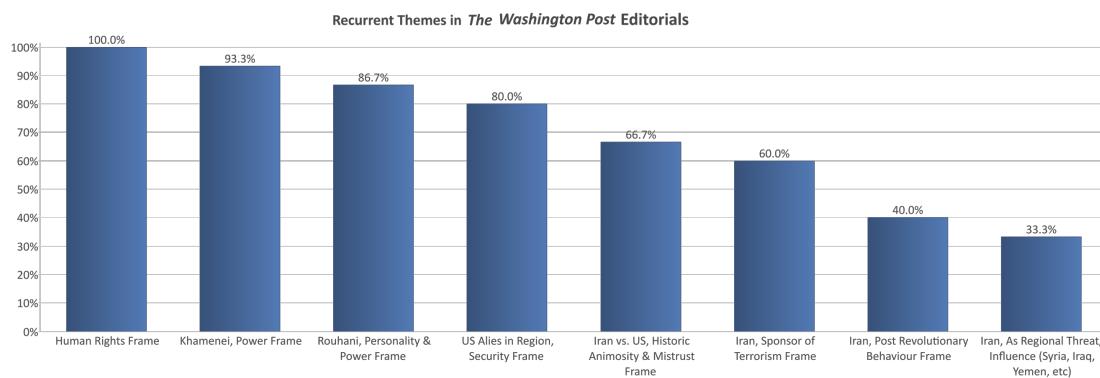


Figure 16 Recurrent Themes in *The Washington Post* Editorials, Nuclear Deal

- Human Rights Frame: 100%
- Khamenei, Power Frame: 93.3%
- Rouhani, Personality & Power: 86.7%
- US Allies in Region, Security Frame: 80%
- Iran vs. US, Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame: 66.7%
- Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame: 60%
- Iran, Post-Revolutionary Behavior :40%
- Iran, As Regional Threat/Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.): 33.3%

E.3 Analysis

The Washington Post journalists repeatedly reported on Iran's internal politics in both case studies. Rouhani's constant battle with hardliners, his popularity in Iran, and his background and personality appeared in 94.1% of the stories. Additionally, Khamenei's

dominance in Iran's military and other key sectors of government and his devoted hardliner based also appeared repeatedly in *The Washington Post* news reports.

With the arrest of *The Washington Post* reporter, Jason Rezaian, in July of 2014, human rights and free speech became a central theme in the coverage about Iran. More importantly, the publication's reporters pointed out that despite Rouhani and Zarif's constant reassuring of the international public that Iran is changing its ways, Rezaian's arrest and his 544 days of imprisonment contradicted their promises. For journalists, Rezaian's arrest put into question Iran's trustworthiness and its sincerity for change.

Consequently, the theme of historic animosity and mistrust appeared more frequently in the stories published after the nuclear deal case study. Iran's regional behavior and its sponsorship of terrorism also added to the skepticism of Iran. Interestingly, background information about Iran's past and its behavior since 1979 appeared more frequently in *The Washington Post* compared to *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*.

The Washington Post opinion pieces mostly focused on Iran's regional influence and the threat it poses to the U.S. and its allies in the region. Iran's regional influence was a recurrent frame in both case studies, but the danger of Iran in the Middle East (Iran as a regional threat) became a more pressing issue during the nuclear deal case study. Human rights and security concerns for U.S. allies also were recurrent themes in the coverage.

The opinion pieces often discussed Rouhani's charm and Khamenei's supremacy. However, *The Washington Post* opinion writers mainly focused on what better relations with Iran (during the phone call case study) and what a possible nuclear deal with a long-time enemy would mean for the security of the region and Iran's future behavior.

In the editorials analyzed from *The Washington Post*, all articles discussed Iran's human rights and Khamenei's power in Iran. Similar to the news reports and op-eds, the editorials published during the "phone call" case study mostly focused on other concerns such as security of U.S. allies and Iran's sponsorship of terrorism. But editorials published for the nuclear deal case study specifically focused on human rights and especially the sentencing of Rezaian and other Iranian/ Americans held in Iran.

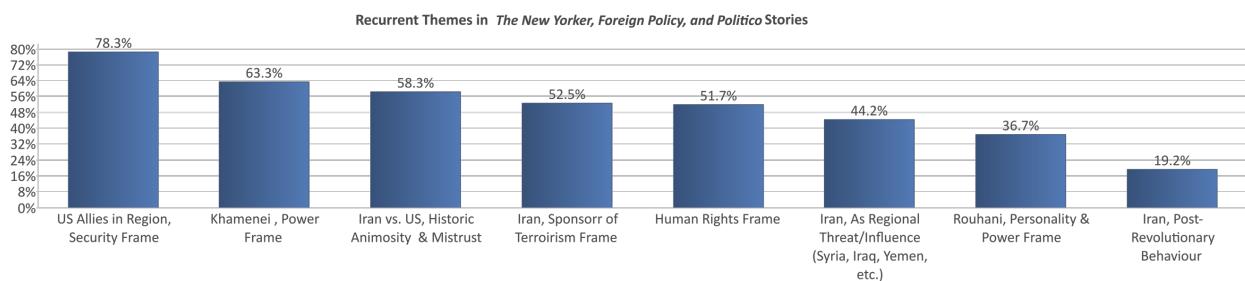


Figure 17 Recurrent Themes in *The New Yorker, Foreign Policy, and Politico*, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- US Allies in Region, Security Frame: 78.3%
- Khamenei, Power Frame: 63.3%
- Iran vs. US, Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame: 58.3%
- Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame: 52.5%
- Human Rights Frame: 51.7%
- Iran, As Regional Threat/Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.): 44.2%
- Rouhani, Personality & Power Frame: 36.7%
- Iran, Post-Revolutionary Behavior :19.2 %

E.4 Analysis

For the stories from *The New Yorker, Foreign Policy*, and *Politico* background information on Iran and its politics were a recurrent theme. In the 12 stories from *The*

New Yorker (phone call case study: 5 and nuclear deal case study: 7) most focused on the background about the Iran–US animosity and Rouhani’s promise of change.

Human rights was a recurrent theme in all stories. Unsurprisingly, most of the stories in *Foreign Policy* focused on Iran, and its international policies. The publication extensively reported on Iran’s influence in the region, and differences and similarities in Rouhani and Khamenei’s approach to foreign policy decision-making.

Politico stories mostly focused on American foreign policy decision-making regarding Iran. Thus, Iran’s behavior since 1979 and its historical issues with U.S. and other western powers appeared frequently. In all three publications, anti-American sentiments in Iran and the Islamic Republic’s behavior in the Middle East region, especially its influence in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen were a common theme, often questioning any possibility of stability in the region without the cooperation of the Islamic Republic.

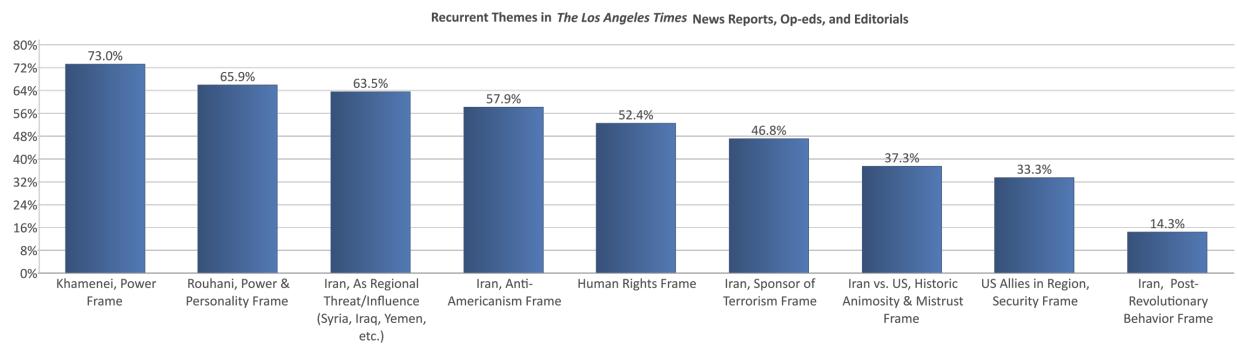


Figure 18 Recurrent Themes in the *Los Angeles Times* News Reports, Op-Eds, and Editorials, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Khamenei, Power Frame: 73.0%
- Rouhani, Personality & Power: 65.9%
- Iran, As Regional Threat/Influence (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.): 63.5 %
- Iran, Anti-Americanism Frame: 57.9%
- Human Rights Frame: 52.4%
- Iran, Sponsor of Terrorism Frame: 46.8%
- Iran vs. US, Historic Animosity & Mistrust Frame: 37.3%
- U.S. Allies in Region, Security Frame: 33.3%
- Iran, Post-Revolutionary Behavior: 40%

E.5 Analysis

In the articles collected for *Los Angeles Times*, the supremacy of Ayatollah Khamenei and the power he holds in Iran were amongst the most recurrent themes in the news coverage, opinion pieces, and the few editorials used in this research. During the coverage of both case studies, *The Los Angeles Times* focused on Khamenei and his sermons and often compared the supreme leader's speeches to Rouhani's promises.

Reporters and op-ed contributors also noted Rouhani's "charm offensive" and questioned his power in Iran. Interestingly, anti-American sentiments in Iran were amongst the recurrent themes in *The Los Angeles Times* coverage in both case studies. In the weeks progressing to the "nuclear deal," Iran's human rights (with focus on Jason Rezaian) and Iran's regional behavior became more important in *The Los Angeles Times* coverage.

E.6 Sources Used in the American News Coverage of Iranian Leaders

E.6.1 Analysis

The content analysis did not detect any significant differences in sourcing habits across news media coverage of Iranian leaders studied in this dissertation. Since the both cases studies in this research were focused on political events –a historical phone call and a highly anticipated nuclear deal – it is not surprising that American journalists used

Iranian or American officials as sources. In all outlets “unnamed sources” were repeatedly used by journalists, especially in the height of the nuclear talks.

Analysts and Iran scholars were amongst the highest sources used in the coverage. Scholars and analysts quoted in the coverage were often from American or European think tanks studying Iran’s social and political situation. Other analysts quoted in the news reports, op-eds, or editorials were either Middle East conflict experts or nuclear proliferation specialists.

Ayatollah Khamenei and his sermons were another recurrent source. Since the Ayatollah does not grant interviews to domestic or foreign media, most of the quotes attributed to him focused on his sermons (usually given once a month), occasional tweets from his official Twitter account (@khamenei_ir).

Rouhani and Zarif, whether it was their direct quotes, tweets, Facebook posts, and Instagram posts, or interviews were also amongst the highest sources used in both cases. In contrast to the supreme leader, both Rouhani and Zarif are fond of appearing in the press (domestic and foreign). Also, despite social media filtering in Iran, both men have active social media accounts often tweeting and posting images and comments on Instagram and Facebook. During the nuclear talks in 2015, Foreign Minister Zarif would post weekly video messages on Facebook updating his followers on the progress of the talks in Vienna.

The Iranian public and some analyst or politicians in favor of the Islamic government were not quoted as often in any of the news outlets. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, which had journalists in Tehran, had a higher percentage of quotes

attributed to everyday Iranians. But all outlets rarely quoted those Iranians in favor of Iran's hardliners and their revolutionary values.

News reports and op-eds often quoted Iran's state media in their coverage. Especially since supreme leader appoints the head of IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting), and hardliners devoted to Khamenei heavily controls its content. The Iranian state media is often used to reflect the views of the hardliner officials such as the generals from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Council (IRGC), hardline clerics opposing Rouhani, and the supreme leader himself.

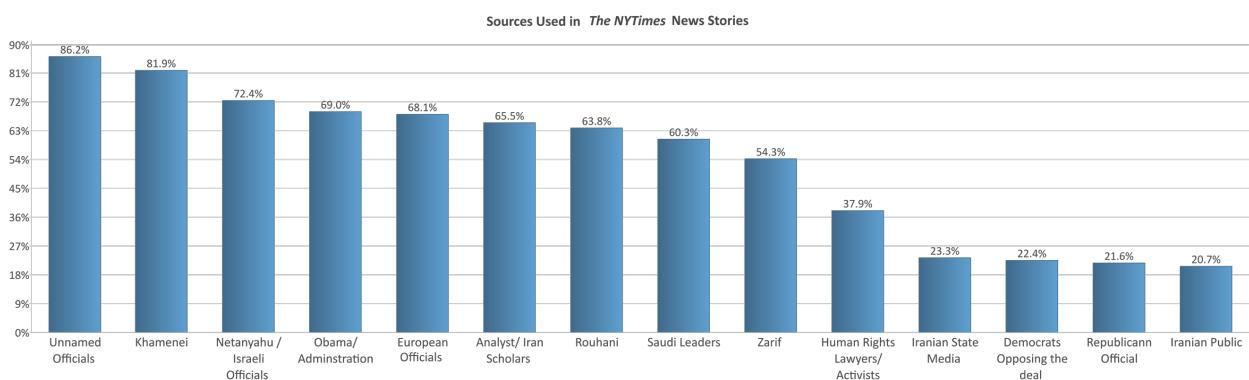


Figure 19 Sources Used in the *New York Times* News Stories, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Unnamed Officials: 86.2%
- Khamenei: 81.9%
- Netanyahu/Israeli Officials: 72.4%
- Obama & Administration: 69.0%
- European Officials: 68.1%
- Analysts/Iran scholars: 65.5%
- Rouhani: 63.8%
- Saudi Leaders: 60.3%
- Zarif: 54.3%
- Human Rights Lawyers/ Activists: 37.9%

- Iranian State Media: 23.3%
- Democratic Officials (Critical): 22.4%
- Republican Official: 21.6%
- Iranian Public 20.7%

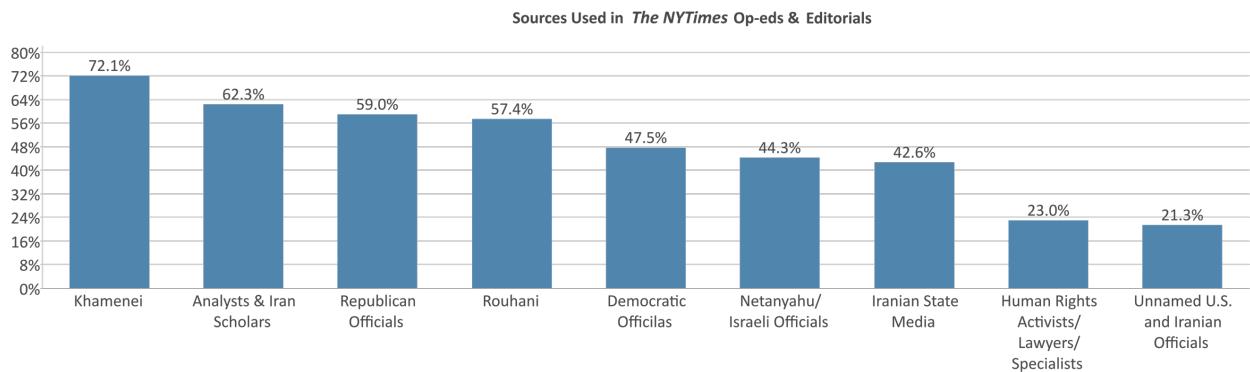


Figure 20 Sources Used in *The New York Times* Op-eds & Editorials

- Khamenei: 72.1%
- Analyst & Iran Scholars: 62.3 %
- Republican Officials: 59.0%
- Rouhani: 57.4%
- Democratic Officials: 47.5%
- Netanyahu & Israeli Officials: 44.3%
- Iranian State Media: 42.6%
- Human Rights Activists / Lawyers/Specialists: 23.0%
- Unnamed U.S. and Iranian Officials: 21.3%

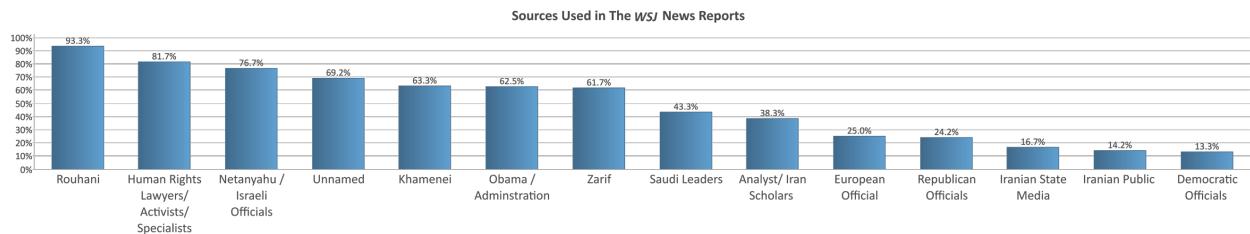


Figure 21 Sources Used in *The Wall Street Journal* News Reports, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Rouhani: 93.3%
- Human Rights Lawyers/Activists/Specialists: 81.7%
- Netanyahu / Israeli Officials: 76.7%
- Unnamed: 69.2%
- Khamenei: 63.3%
- Obama/ Administration: 62.5%
- Zarif: 61.7%
- Saudi Leaders: 43.3%
- Analyst/ Iran Scholars: 38.3%
- European Officials: 25.0%
- Republican Officials: 24.2%
- Iranian State Media: 16.7%
- Iranian Public: 14.2%
- Democratic Officials: 13.3%

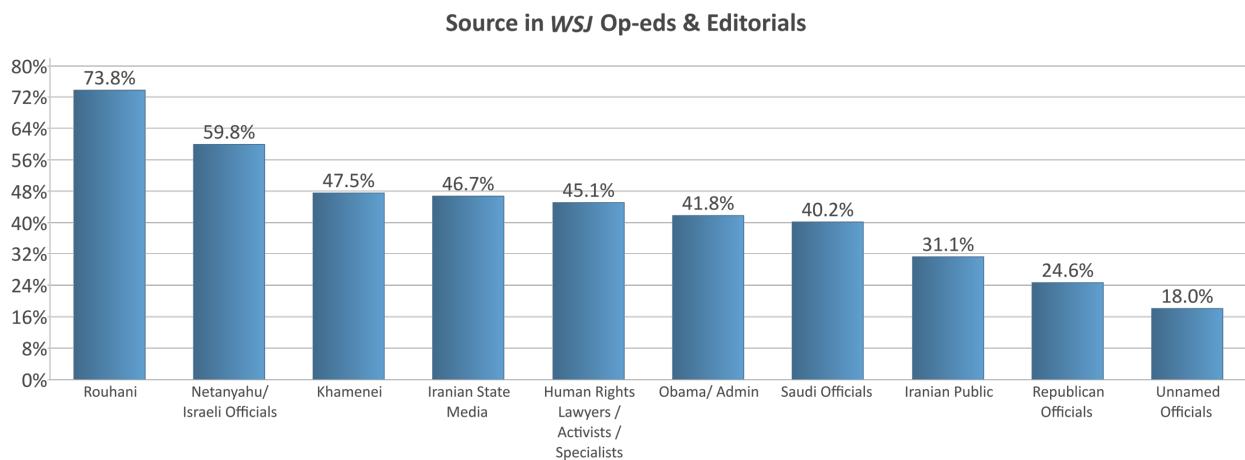


Figure 22 Sources Used in *The Wall Street Journal* Op-Eds & Editorials, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Rouhani: 73.8%
- Netanyahu & Israeli Officials: 59.8 %
- Khamenei: 47.5%
- Iranian State Media: 46.7%
- Human Rights Lawyers / Activists / Specialists: 45.1%
- Obama /Administration: 41.8%
- Saudi Officials: 40.2%
- Iranian public: 31.1%
- Republican Officials: 24.6%

- Unnamed Officials: 18.0%

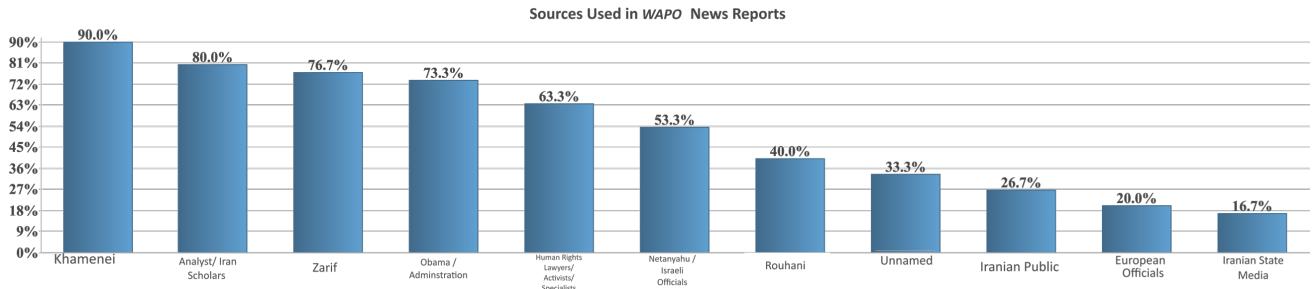


Figure 23 Sources Used in *The Washington Post* News Reports, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Khamenei: 90.0%
- Analyst & Iran Scholars: 80.0%
- Zarif: 76.7%
- Obama / Administration: 73.3%
- Human Rights lawyers / Activists/ Specialists: 63.3%
- Netanyahu & Israeli Officials: 53.3%
- Rouhani: 40.0%
- Unnamed 33.3%
- Iranian Public: 26.7%
- European Officials: 20.0%
- Iranian State Media: 16.7%

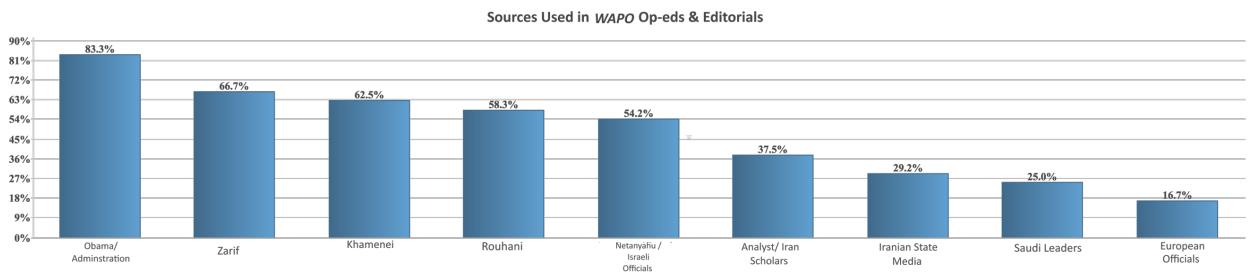


Figure 24 Sources Used in *The Washington Post* Op-eds & Editorials, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Obama / Administration: 83.3%
- Zarif: 66.7%
- Khamenei: 62.5%
- Rouhani: 58. 3%
- Netanyahu/ Israeli Officials: 54.2%
- Analyst / Iran Scholars: 37.5%
- Iranian State Media: 29.2%
- Saudi Leaders: 25.0%
- European Officials: 16.7%

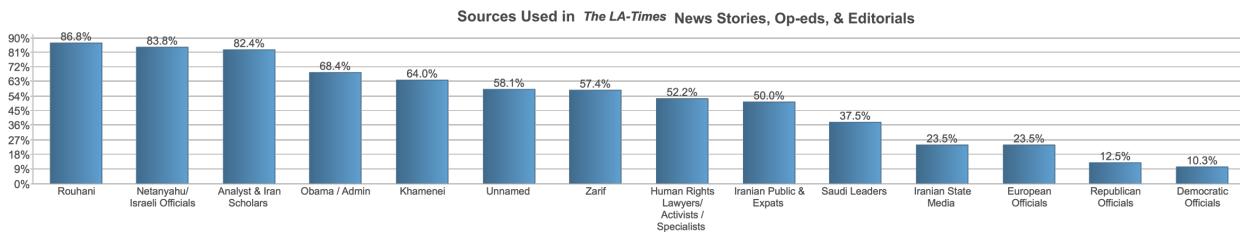


Figure 25 Sources Used in *The Los Angeles Times* News Stories, Op-Eds, and Editorials, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Rouhani: 86.8%
- Netanyahu/Israeli Officials: 83.8%
- Analyst & Iran Scholars: 82.4%
- Obama/Administration: 68.4%
- Khamenei: 64.0%
- Unnamed Officials: 58.1%
- Zarif: 57.4%
- Human Rights Lawyers/Activists/ Specialists: 52.2%
- Iranian Public/Expats: 50.0%
- Saudi Leaders: 37.5%
- Iranian State Media: 23.5%
- European Officials:23.5%
- Republican Officials :12.5%
- Democratic Officials:10.3%

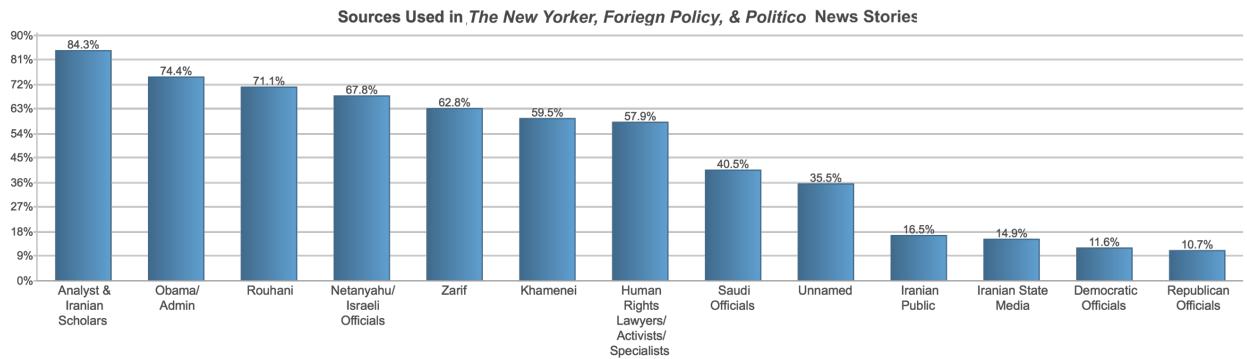


Figure 26 Sources Used in *The New Yorker*, Foreign Policy, and Politico, Nuclear Deal and Phone Call Case Studies

- Analyst & Iran Scholars: 84.3%
- Obama/Administration: 74.4 %
- Rouhani: 71.1%
- Netanyahu/ Israeli Officials: 67.8%
- Zarif: 62.8%
- Khamenei: 59.5%
- Human Rights Lawyers/Activists/Specialists: 57.9%
- Saudi Officials:40.5%
- Unnamed: 35.5%
- Iranian Public: 16.5%
- Iranian State Media :14.9%
- Democratic Officials :11.6%
- Republican Officials: 10.7%

Notes

⁵⁴⁶ The MAXQDA Software calculates the percentages using the count of all sub codes function – this option corresponds, in principle, to an evaluation of multiple responses. In this case, the analysis is performed assuming that when several sub codes can be coded in a document, the sub codes are not mutually exclusive. MAXQDA analyzes the number of documents to which a sub code has been assigned. All sub codes that occur in a given document will be counted, on a per-document basis. This type of analysis would typically be employed to answer the question “What percentage of cases (= documents) mention a specific theme/frame. It’s important to only activate the specific document in the “document system” using the “activate documents” function of the software. So, for the recurrent themes in *The New York Times* news reports, only codes in documents identified as *The New York Times* news reports were calculated.

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