

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN UNDERVALUING POLITICAL DIALOGUE: SYRIAN
WAR AS A CASE



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İSTANBUL, 2023

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT

YEDİTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
İSTANBUL, 2023

PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.



Mohammed Althiab

26.07.2023

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

Wars, the threat to social security, the destruction of infrastructure, and the displacement of human groups are still among the tools used mainly and increasingly in international conflict today. Although the literature of contemporary capitalism theoretically abounds with calls for maintaining international peace and stability, in practice, its political representatives place wars among the many tools available for use to divide areas of political and economic influence simply because this tool, the war, is one for measuring the weights of the conflicting forces when the various political tools fail. On this basis, many media outlets practice advanced techniques for justifying wars.

This study aims to show the means used in the media to justify wars and armed conflicts by claiming that it is impossible to provide corresponding or alternative means, such as dialogue, for example, or the general social desire to maintain stability through political solutions.

In this context, the Syrian case represents a typical case of the abovementioned circumstances. It is known that the Syrian crisis, which exploded for reasons mostly internal and local, coincided with an international situation witnessing a critical global balance between East and West, which led to the continuation of the war on Syrian territory with the political, logistical, and military sponsorship of dozens of countries in the world.

These circumstances prompted the media, owned by local and international parties involved in the conflict, to justify the war as an inevitable evil. Therefore, it underestimated all calls and attempts to hold a political dialogue between the conflicting parties by presenting the dialogue as a form of military surrender, or as a solution that contradicts the possibility of retribution for the perpetrators of crimes, or by questioning the eligibility of the counterparty and its ability to hold its promises, or by cynical examining the possibility of success of this path as a result. Our research selects four samples of television programs purposefully, within the framework of the qualitative method, to analyze their critical discourse and to test the hypotheses and questions on which the research is based.

Keywords: War, crisis, dialogue, undervaluing, political solution, Syrian war, pro-government media, opposition media.

ÖZET: Siyasi Diyalogun Değersizleştirilmesinde Medyanın Rolü: Suriye Savaşı Örnek Olayı

Savaşlar, sosyal güvenliğe yönelik tehdit, altyapının tahrip edilmesi ve insan gruplarının yerlerinden edilmesi günümüz dünyasında hala uluslararası çatışmalarda ağırlıklı olarak ve artan bir şekilde kullanılan araçlar arasındadır. Çağdaş kapitalizm literatürü teorik olarak uluslararası barış ve istikrarı korumaya yönelik çağrılarla dolu olsa da, pratikte onun siyasi temsilcileri savaşları, siyasi ve ekonomik etki alanlarını bölmek için kullanılabilen birçok araç arasına yerleştirir. Basitçe, bu araç, savaş, çeşitli siyasi araçlar başarısız olduğunda çatışan güçlerin ağırlıklarını ölçmek için bir araç olduğu için durum budur. Bu temelde, birçok medya kuruluşu, savaşları haklı çıkarmak ileri teknikler uyguluyor.

Bu çalışma, örneğin diyalog gibi savaşın yerini tutan ya da ona alternatif araçlar sağlamanın veya siyasi çözümlerle istikrarı sürdürme yönündeki genel toplumsal arzunun mümkün olmadığını iddia ederek, medyanın savaşları ve silahlı çatışmaları haklı çıkarmak için kullandığı araçları göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Bu bağlamda, Suriye yukarıda bahsedilen durumun tipik bir örneğini temsil etmektedir. Daha çok iç ve yerel nedenlerle patlak veren Suriye krizinin, Doğu ile Batı arasında kritik bir uluslararası dengeye tanık olan ve Suriye topraklarındaki savaşın dünyada onlarca ülkenin siyasi, lojistik ve askeri sponsorluğu ile devam etmesine yol açan uluslararası bir duruma denk geldiği bilinmektedir..

Bu koşullar, çatışmaya dahil olan yerel ve uluslararası medyayı, savaş kaçınılmaz bir kötülük olduğu gerekçesiyle haklı çıkarmaya sevk etti. Bu nedenle medya, diyalogu bir askeri teslimiyet biçimi olarak sunarak ya da suç işleyenlerin cezalandırılması olasılığıyla çelişen bir çözüm olarak sunarak ya da uygunluğunu sorgulayarak, veya karşı tarafın taahhüdünü yerine getirme kabiliyetini sorgulayarak

veya bu yolun başarı ihtimalini alaycı bir şekilde sorgulayarak hafife aldı.Araştırmamız, eleştirel söylemlerini analiz etmek ve araştırmanın dayandığı hipotezleri ve soruları test etmek amacıyla nitel yöntem çerçevesinde amaçlı olarak 4 televizyon programı örneği seçmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Savaş, kriz, diyalog, küçümseme, siyasi çözüm, Suriye Savaşı, hükümet yanlısı medya, muhalif medya.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the outset, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Özlem Akkaya, who supervised my dissertation patiently, deeply, and with an exceptional degree of confidence in light of the special circumstances we went through from interruptions due to health conditions.

I also thank my family who made sure I completed this stage and to my friends, who believed in the importance of my research and waited for it to be a document that would help them defend a point of view against violence and in support of social understanding in a time of war.

Mohammed Althiab

Istanbul, 2023

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A war does not necessarily arise between two armed forces simply because they disagree over a specific issue. War is a much more complex phenomenon. It occurs due to the convergence of various factors and circumstances at a particular time and place. As such, war is only one form of the ongoing political conflict between states or powers.

In today's world, the outbreak of war somewhere in the world is almost an international decision that is taken at the highest levels. Armed clashes worldwide represent the declared side of the international conflict between global centers of influence and mean its most bloody and deadly form. When political tools become seemingly unavailable, military forces interfere to re-share influence. Since politics ultimately reflects deep economic interests, we see that the governments of the most developed countries in the world are still fueling wars and armed conflicts around the world simply because war is still a valuable tool in achieving those economic interests, even though their constitutions, laws, and national institutions are rich in texts that recognize human rights and civilians' rights to life and safety. Some of these countries even provide those rights to refugees fleeing that war as soon as they reach their lands. This paradox reflects that war is still a "legitimate" game in the global system that allows the powerful to acquire increasing influence, or as Frederick Engels sees it, war is "the iron lung from which capitalism is breathing."¹

On the other hand, wars and armed conflicts do not arise except in regions where their internal crises allow that and where those crises enable regional and

¹ This phrase was mentioned by Frederick Engels in the introduction to the Polish edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1892.

international powers to intervene and direct internal forces toward fighting. As is well known, the emergence of nuclear weapons in the middle of the last century closed the door to "total wars," such as the First and Second World Wars, and set new rules for war between international powers, so the latter's attention went to fragile countries, which transformed into arenas to score points between major powers. There are many examples, some of which are: the Korean War (1950–1953), the American invasion of Vietnam (1955–1975), the Afghanistan War (1979–1989), the Yugoslav War (1990–2001), the US invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), the Libyan War (2010–present), and finally the Syrian War (2011–present), which constitute the subject of our study. As is known, the wars mentioned above took place during the nuclear deterrent of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States from 1945 until the late eighties of the last century and also during the stage that followed it, which was characterized by the winning pole's pursuit to establish its hegemony and inherit the traditional areas of influence of the former Soviet Union.

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

Many expectations at that time were that the Syrian regime might go toward deep reforms in the state's structure in response to popular protests. After all, it was considered one of the few symbols of govern in the Eastern Mediterranean region,

which is popular to some degree because it has supported the Palestinians in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict² unlike other Arab regimes (as is the case in Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, and the Gulf states) and because the state in Syria had a supportive role to some extent for the poorer classes in the country (for example, a broad role assigned to the public sector in economic life, free health and education, government support policies for basic living materials, etc.).³

The regime disappointed those hopes that had been placed on it. Through the first speech of the President of the Syrian Republic, Bashar al-Assad (March 30, 2011), the regime's intentions were made clear to consider what happened to constitute an external conspiracy. This speech coincided with the escalation of government violence against the protests, which were mostly peaceful. Government violence escalated significantly over the following months, killing and arresting demonstrators, and the ground was set for counter-violence as armed opposition groups began to form in the most affected areas.⁴

This happened, as it is known, in light of intense media follow-up at the global level, which made the Syrian event the first news in most newscasts around the world, and this came in parallel with political and diplomatic activity on the global scale to discuss the Syrian crisis. Within a few months, violent developments on the ground, on the one hand, and international and regional interventions, on the other hand, contributed to the establishment of violent and destructive warfare bases on Syrian

² Syria was the only country that did not conclude a peace agreement with Israel, unlike Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. Syria also openly supported the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance movements logistically at the official level.

³ It should be noted that the role of the state was declining in the last five or six years before the 2011 protests as illustrate by the Syrian government's decision to lift subsidies on basic materials and fuel 2006.

⁴ An opposition military faction initially called the "Free Syrian Army" appeared on July 29, 2011, and it was made up of soldiers who had defected from the regime and volunteer fighters. After that, the opposition military organizations increased greatly.

lands, which some consider the worst in terms of outcomes since World War II. Until 2022, more than half a million people are dead, with 6 and 7 million displaced outside the country and 6.9 million displaced inside the country.⁵

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

What interests us in this research is to shed light on the media's extreme disregard for the will and aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the Syrian people to stop the war and military operations, which have destroyed their lives in death and displacement, through negotiations or genuine dialogue which might lead to a solution that restores stability to the country and stops its bleeding. We claim that the evidence for the existence of this will among the "overwhelming majority" is evidenced by the distancing of a percentage exceeding 13 million from armed activity and from the locations of military operations, as data issued by the UN (UNHCR, 2022) indicates displacement (6.9 million) within the country from areas that are considered from this side or that to other areas. International figures and statistics indicate that a significant proportion of immigrants outside the country are young males escaping compulsory military service or decisions by the armed opposition to recruit them compulsorily.

There is tangible and recorded evidence of families who have recommended

⁵ These figures are quoted from the statements by the United Nations and statistics of Human Rights Watch and international human rights organizations.

their members, who are forcibly driven to armed action, to shoot in the air and not be involved in killing another, and videos show fighters from both sides on the battle fronts ceasing fire and initiating spontaneous conversations between them⁶.

This media disregard for the aspirations of most Syrians to reach partial or comprehensive solutions that guarantee their lives and stability is a deliberate disregard that reflects international and regional political positions in transferring the Syrian crisis from the level of a political crisis (between the regime vs. the masses) to an open military conflict in which major powers participate directly militarily, or indirectly, logistically, by financing or supplying weapons to fighters.

It should be noted that the international and local media have not hesitated to shed extensive light on the pain and suffering of Syrians, such as massacres, killings, displacement, detention, and conditions of asylum internally or in countries that have received Syrian refugees. However, it did not do so in the context of calling for a solution that would stop these tragedies, but rather in the context of employing them politically to condemn the opposite side and call for more violence and the expansion of military actions to eliminate it. Our current study will refer to media reports from pro-regime and opposition media outlets dealing with the same event and throwing responsibility on the other side to mobilize and instigate public opinion and legitimize subsequent military actions.

The clash of responsibility between the regime and the opposition was used in the media as a moral excuse for both sides not to accept dialogue. Both sides used the phrase "We will not talk to those whose hands are stained with blood" or "No dialogue with the killers." On the other hand, it is interesting that all these parties did not only

⁶ As examples, we can cite the famous video of Colonel Mustafa Shadoud, when he initiated a dialogue on the lines of fire, documented in the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhU9-rSS4eY>

go to dialogue in subsequent periods when the United Nations launched it.⁷ It even competed in the size of the representation of its delegations in the dialogue process (Kassioun newspaper ,2017).

The issue of "moral imperatives" itself needs standing. It is well known that political and diplomatic statements, in general, are not without moral pretexts that are used to address the public consciousness, such as the decision to go to war, which officials always issue under a moral justification, such as getting rid of a dictator, or protecting civilians, establishing democracy, etc. On the other hand, the public that may accept these justifications knows implicitly that more pragmatic and realistic interests are behind these decisions. For example, it can easily be known whether the actual goal of launching a war is to control a region rich in natural resources such as oil and others or a region of strategic importance in the international conflict.

However, the acceptance of moral and principled justifications in this form represents the ideology's role as a consciousness system that profoundly reflects the interests of the social group that propagates it. For example, a European citizen can pay no heed to the colonial crimes committed by his/her country's government in another country or even be proud of them, given that it provides her/him gains in return (de Luna, 2018). This proves that the ideological system produces moral justifications for things that are usually unacceptable as long as they are consistent with class and political interests. In other words, the pretexts, in this case, make people accept things that cannot be accepted normally. In Syria, moral pretexts have been widely used as justifications for the practice of armed violence by various parties, with the difference that the operation took place in the utmost crudeness, as the media, in its two parts loyal to the regime and the opposition, was working to

⁷ For the first time, representatives of the regime met with the opposition at the second Geneva conference on January 22, 2014, according to an American-Russian agreement.

incite people, push them to violence, and to be themselves the fuel for it. From month to month and one battle to the next, people were losing their relatives, fleeing their homes, jobs, and safety, in parallel with the heavy media pumping of the necessity to continue the war and make more sacrifices to reach victory.

The media, both loyal and opposition, portrayed the war as a holy struggle in order to "defend the homeland" from the side of the regime's media or for the "revolution of an oppressed people" by the opposition media, and whoever refused to do that struggle is treated as a traitor and should be punished.⁸ This point is critical to our research; the media's insistence, on both sides, on the necessity for everyone to be involved in the battle has an essential significance regarding the issue of dialogue. In an atmosphere like this, the advocates of dialogue among the people or some political forces were subjected to double attacks from both sides, and this is further evidence that the people's will to reach a solution has been subjected to severe repression by the parties to the armed conflict. This matter will give us sufficient space for our research.

Although the Syrian crisis has lasted nearly a decade, during which the country suffered heavy and catastrophic losses, it is not over yet. After the decline in military operations in Syria since the government forces took control of most of the country's lands and the parties to the armed violence were forced to go to the table of negotiations, they are still hostile to dialogue at the table itself. Those parties agree to dialogue verbally but are actually working to blow it up from within, and their performances have become harmonious and complementary. They still hope that the

⁸ Numerous cases have been documented in which opposition or government authorities in the areas they controlled have arrested persons accused of harboring or communicating with persons from the "enemy party". In many documented cases there have been executions for treason.

status quo will remain a reality,⁹ even if millions of Syrians remain either in refugee camps, unemployed, threatened with their lives, or detained in prisons, which has become possible to describe as a humanitarian disaster in every sense.

Our research aims at exposing and criticizing the media mechanisms used by the forces supporting and benefiting from armed violence, refuting the justifications for killing civilians cited by media of both sides directly and indirectly, and negating the propaganda claims about the acceptance of most civilians to wage war against others, and being ready for it, despite the loss of their loved ones, their cities, their villages, their safety, and their jobs. This propaganda directly indicated that revenge and retaliation are essential components of the culture of the Syrian people. It was overlooked that reconciliation and settlements are also popular culture's primary and prevalent means of ending revenge situations. We will provide enough space to discuss this point.

The study also aims to illuminate media learners about the importance of dialogue in political crises as a form of conflict (Habermas, 1983), that is, a bloodless conflict that allows the parties to develop their programs during the dialogue process. It also seeks to criticize vulgar analyses of dialogue as a luxury, betrayal, or merely forgiving and condoning mistakes, which appeared in the context of the Syrian crisis in an exemplary manner. Our current study will present concrete examples of the pro- and counter-media discourse about undervaluing the importance of dialogue. This matter would contribute to making media scholars seriously deal with the term

⁹ In many statements, the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Walid al-Muallem, and other officials asserted that military action was their goal. On the other hand, most of the representatives of the Syrian opposition abroad, despite their participation in negotiating rounds, are still calling for more weapons to topple the regime. (Walid Al-Muallem's statement before the United Nations General Assembly, September 30, 2013, at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxeillKBnWo>)

"dialogue" instead of being drawn into sites that justify counter-violence under the influence of media propaganda, as has happened to many intellectuals, researchers, and media professionals worldwide regarding the Syrian issue. In our current study, we will analyze the media discourse of news bulletins and talk shows for four TV channels, two of which are pro-regime: the local (Sama Channel) and the other Lebanese (Al-Mayadeen Channel). The other two opposition channels are the local (Orient) and Qatari (Al-Jazeera).

These channels were chosen because they are Arabic-speaking first, which means a direct and rapid impact on the Syrian recipient, which is represented in our research by the Syrian masses in the first place, and the masses close to the Syrian public in terms of geography, culture and social (such as neighboring countries) in the second degree, and because of the discourse difference between the local and international channels.

On this basis, our study follows the qualitative method in the research through purposive sampling, as it is known that the media materials published about the Syrian event are vast and extensive. Therefore, selecting specific samples is the best way to process them, by which we will be able to identify many of the mechanisms used in the media to legalize and justify violence and raise levels of tension, and in return, diminish the significance and possibility of dialogue and peaceful solutions. It is worth noting that the vast majority of local and international media have taken the same path in dealing with the Syrian issue, and we chose only those four media as a sample that reflects a more general case because the field does not expand in practice for all media.

This study adopts the methodology of critical discourse analysis, as it will simply be based on analyzing selected texts from newscasts and talk shows. We will

need to analyze the discourse structures (van Dijk 1993) used in the media not only to understand their direct political function but also to arrive at their deep ideological content. The media discourse we want to analyze is ultimately the discourse of the media elite, representing specific forces behind the scenes. In our concrete case, the advocates of violence and those who reject dialogue in the Syrian crisis are political and class forces in the ruling regime or the opposition locally. As for regional and international powers interfering in the Syrian issue, it is in the interests of certain countries or the interests of elites within these countries. For example, Al-Jazeera is a channel owned by the Qatari government, and Al-Mayadeen is an openly supported channel from Iran. Our study will focus on the significance of this data by mainly analyzing the media discourse.

Our study will also seek, through critical discourse analysis, to reach a new contribution to the issue of "managing the processes of understanding" (van Dijk) in unusual times for the masses, such as times of battles, exposure to bombing or raids, military campaigns, fleeing, and moving to new areas, etc., in light of the increasing speed of spreading news, rumors, false information, and more via breaking TV news and social media.

The current research will include five parts, the first being an introduction. The second is the literary review, through which we will shed light on many theoretical concepts that will support our study, such as the concept of war from a political and economic perspective, with some cultural analyses. The other concept will be dialogue in media discourse; we will distinguish between the utopian view of dialogue and its functional role. We will also discuss in the literature review the Syrian war, its causes, how it can be classified, and the portrayal of concepts such as war and dialogue in the opposition and pro-government media.

The third part is the research design. Through it, we will explain the importance of the studied topic, the research problem, the research methods, and the contribution to the literature. The fourth will show the applied analysis of the media discourse models on the four television channels and the models of public and political interactions. The fifth and final chapter will contain the most important conclusions drawn from this study.



CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of War

It is difficult for students in social sciences to discuss the concept of war independently of political, economic, and cultural phenomena. At the individual level, the subjective motives of individuals can play a role in making them decide to start a duel with other individuals, and this duel can expand to include additional people. However, it remains subject to the same subjective impulses. For example, a brother can stand up for his brother, a neighbor for his neighborhood companions, parents for their children, etc. However, in all cases, the motive remains to fight a duel with others individually or personally until it ends on its own or by the power of the organized state and the parties' separation.

As for war, it is a duel on a large scale, according to the Prussian General Clausewitz (1780–1831), the author of the famous book *On War*, who also says that countless duels can make war, but the whole image can be formed by two wrestlers, each seeking to force his opponent to submit to his will using his physical strength (Clausewitz, 1976).

The idea still considered the most important in Clausewitz's (1976) work is to explain the concept of war as a political phenomenon: War is waged for a specific political goal, or at least has political results. If the war is concerned with achieving a political goal, then everything that is included in it, such as military, economic, and social preparations, strategic planning, operations management, determining the levels of violence or available intensity, etc., is decided in light of that political goal, or at least in coordination with it (Barrett, 1976). It is not logical or practical to push the

soldiers to commit bloody violence, endanger them, and spend on them during that without waiting for particular results. Once these results are reached, someone will intervene to conclude a truce or peace so that the political leaders of the parties can start contact to settle (Barrett, 1976). So, "War is not an independent phenomenon but a continuation of politics by different means" (Clausewitz, 1976, p.87). This widespread quote from Clausewitz came from the battlefield, not from the dialogue rooms in the states' capitals sponsoring talks between political leaders. In this context, it should be noted that the very acts of violence on the battlefield are not unjustified; every aspect of fighting should be suffused by its political impulse, whether intense or moderate, in the minor details between soldiers and military commanders in the field (Barrett, 1976), not only at the level of senior military leaders and politicians.

The notion that was presented above is a very general conception of war. In this research, we are interested in the main components of the concept of war.

We can find dozens of manifestations on the ground through sub-types of wars, such as conventional wars, unconventional wars, defensive and offensive wars, global wars, nuclear wars, regular wars, gang wars, etc. However, what they have in common is the practice of bloody violence by various military means. That is, of course, if we exclude the categories in which the word "war" is mentioned as a metaphor, such as trade war, electronic War, information war, the Cold War, etc. Regardless of the correctness or incorrectness of the term "war" with these phenomena, the most important thing about our research is using the concept of "war" as bloody armed violence. At the same time, we will refer to the rest of the unarmed confrontations as "conflict" in various forms.

2.2 War from a Political and Economic Perspective

Although the political and economic aspects are intertwined in their relationship to the war, we will discuss each of them separately:

2.2.1 War and politics

If war is the continuation of politics by different means, what is politics? Of course, we cannot immerse ourselves in the discussion of large concepts, the explanation of which has required thousands or tens of thousands of volumes throughout history, but we will limit ourselves to highlighting some aspects that serve our current research.

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) does not separate war and politics in his writings. He considers any political confrontation a war, which in turn may be a “war of movement,” “war of positions,” or “hidden war.” Among these classifications, armed violence falls into the category of “the war of movement,” that is, the direct confrontation between the two conflicting parties, and it may also fall into the category of “the hidden war,” which means the secret preparations for the direct confrontation or “the war of movement,” while he says that “the war of positions” is an indirect conflict that aims to win by scoring points over the enemy. It should be noted that Gramsci’s above classifications are not limited to the “class struggle” in a single society but also extend to the struggle at the national and international levels. Among the examples given by Gramsci in his article “Political Conflict and War Battle” (Gramsci, 1971) is Gandhi’s passive resistance to British colonialism, in which Gramsci sees that Mahatma Gandhi combined the three forms of war: boycott was a war of positions, strikes were a war of movement, and secret storage of weapons and the preparation of some of the items for offensive combat were hidden

wars. Another example is presented by Gramsci, who criticizes Trotsky, the author of the theory of Permanent Revolution,” and who supported the export of the Russian Revolution of 1917 to the West, in contrast to Lenin, who applied the war of positions against the West, holed up inside Russia, saying that the war of positions “is the only possible war in the West, where armies can quickly amass huge amounts of ammunition and social frameworks can still turn into impregnable trenches. (Gramsci, 2017, p.117)" What is required of these examples, from the point of view of our research, are:

First, we note that Gramsci discusses the concept of war in the same way on several levels: either the struggle between classes in society itself, such as Italian society for example. Or a war on a national level between two or more countries, such as the war of the Indians against the British for national liberation from colonialism. Or the global conflict between the major alliances, such as the conflict between the Soviet Union and the West. This generalization was able to abstract the concept of conflict from its historical contexts and its tangible complexities so that it becomes possible to analyze it theoretically and discover its laws, working mechanisms, and impact and influence on the surrounding social phenomena, allowing us to understand the phenomenon of war that is the subject of this section of our literature review. Second, these examples were presented to indicate the intended merging that Gramsci is doing between the concepts of war and politics. The essence of this matter is the political conflict, which takes many forms but is still happening nonstop between classes in one society, between two economic forces, and between alliances, each of which includes multiple social and economic forces. As for war in the bloody armed military sense of conflict (Gramsci, 1971), it is a special moment of that struggle, the moment of “movement,” inseparable from the general context of

the political struggle. It can also be concluded that Gramsci was implicitly seeking to avoid talking abstractly about any military or armed action. He sees that “social frameworks” or “civil society,” “social institutions,” “consensus” achieved by the “state,” etc. constitute the core of the political struggle. The army can rapidly enhance its arsenal, just as “social frameworks” are transforming into “invincible trenches.”

In general, Gramsci develops the definition put forward by General Clausewitz about politics and war, and it is worth noting that Gramsci agrees with Clausewitz about that definition, which says that war is “the continuation of politics by different means,” but in return he pushes this definition more and more towards the arena of political practice based on what Gramsci calls “historical science,” that is, Marxism, which Gramsci considers to have introduced a fundamental renewal to political science and history as it says that there is no abstract and fixed “human nature.” In contrast to the ideas that were prevalent before and came from religious thought, human nature is the result of social relations historically established. On the basis of this revolutionary conception of human nature, Gramsci believes that talking about “politics as a science has become possible” (Gramsci, 2017, p.119), meaning that politics is an independent activity that has its own laws and principles that are distinct from the laws of ethics and religion.

2.2.2 War and economics

If war is the continuation of politics, the political goals required of wars represent immense economic interests. “The seeds of war in the modern world are industrial and commercial competition” (Wilson, 1990, pp.45-46). The book *Grand Chessboard* by Zbigniew Brzezinski (National Security Adviser to USA President Jimmy Carter), which was published in 1997, is perhaps one of the earliest examples in the

chronological sense of the strategic goals of American wars in the "post-Cold War" stage, which is controlling Eurasia and preventing the emergence of any Eurasian power. Brzezinski was more pragmatic, clear, and less critical in talking about the interests of the United States of America in Central Asia, especially since the Soviet Union no longer existed at that time and thus there was less needed to provide ideological pretexts for the expected American invasions at that time. Those invasions began shortly after the book was published—of course, we mean the invasion of Afghanistan in 2000 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Lenin pointed out in 1917 that the final partitioning of the globe doesn't mean that repartition is impossible; on the contrary, repartition is possible and inevitable, and the colonial policy of the capitalist countries has completed the seizure of the unoccupied territories on our planet. He explains that «the world is completely divided up, so that in the future only redivision is possible, i.e., territories can only pass from one "owner" to another, instead of passing as ownerless territory to an owner» (Lenin, 1963, p. 57).

We should not deal with the testimonies of political leaders about the political goals of war as evidence or clues about the bad intentions of specific political elites. Because, in addition to being superficial and illogical, politicians' statements and their confessions of their political goals of waging wars and invasions can be part of the political activity itself. For example, Emmanuel Macron, the current President of France (2021) apologized for France's disgraceful role in the Rwandan civil war in Africa in 1993. We believe, by virtue of historical experience, that such statements in French foreign policy are a prelude to regaining influence again before a possible political role and to erase the bad memory about the previous French role.

Most importantly, war is a phenomenon rooted in the world's socio-economic

system. Therefore, dealing with war as an objective product of the existing world order will be of greater importance in resisting and struggling against it at the cognitive and intellectual level than the superficial moral rejection and populist emotional disgust in exegesis of the causes and results of wars or attributing them to evil human nature.

In the same context, it will be difficult for any contemporary person who studies the concept of war to avoid talking about the American “Military-Industrial Complex”, and the latter, in our opinion, is a new political phenomenon that should be studied in depth because it may prompt us to re-evaluate the definition that Clausewitz made about war but Gramsci probed in depth from an analytical point of view:

The term "military-industrial complex" describes the political and financial relationship between defense contractors, representatives of the military industry, legislative committees, state institutions, and the armed forces of the United States. The first to warn of this alliance, which emerged after the end of World War II, was US President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his farewell address to the nation in 1961, saying:

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every state house, and every office of the federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources, and livelihood are all involved, as is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted; only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together (Eisenhower D, 1961).

It is likely that this Eisenhower warning was not taken into account in the later period, as the sequence of American wars since that date until the present day indicates that the war has become an economic investment, a business by itself. The issue is no longer just “the continuation of politics by other means,” but the war has become politics in itself from the military-industrial complex's point of view. Current US President Joe Biden said in 1989, in a speech before the Senate, when he was a senator, that it was time to stop those demanding an apology for America's support for Israel: "There is no apology. Israel is the best 3-billion-dollar investment we've made. If Israel did not exist, the United States would have to invent Israel."¹⁰ In principle, war is a special case of politics. And “politics is the most concentrated expression of economics” (Lenin, 1976), but what should be noted in this context is that war, being a profitable investment for defense contractors, can override other political means. In other words, war itself has become a “necessity” from the military industries' point of view. Previously, it was adequate to end the war when achieving the strategic goal of it was possible, meaning “that there is no doubt that it is impossible for one of the two armies to fight and that there is no doubt about the ability of the victorious army to occupy the enemy’s land” (Gramsci, 1971), or as Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (2011), a Syrian intellectual, one of whose most famous works was *The Nature of Tyranny*, written in 1902, says: “Preparation for war prevents war.”

As for the world post-emergence of the military-industrial complex, war is inevitable, even if the defeated party, in simple military and strategic calculations, announces its surrender or its desire to negotiate. The military-industrial complex will not miss the deal, so the “priests” of that complex will continue to pressure the

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYLNCcLfIkM>

political decision to declare war and ignore the calls of other countries and alliance leaders about their willingness to sponsor unconditional negotiations with the "in advance" defeated party. In this context, it must be pointed out that the warlike tendency works to generate a wide network of organizations, entities, and individuals to create wholesale pretexts that allow for launching wars and attacks against targeted countries.

The Soviet Union, before its collapse in the early nineties, was the scarecrow that gave the pretext for the American army to intervene on all the continents of the world under the pretext of protecting the interests of the capitalist West under the cover of the NATO alliance. But after its collapse, American policy worked to find alternatives to the Soviet Union in order to play the role of a threat to Western interests; for example, the Taliban movement as a pretext for the invasion of Afghanistan (in Central Asia) and chemical weapons as a pretext to invade Iraq. The last one raised the anger of the European allies on more than one occasion against the militarism of US policy because it contradicted their economic interests, the most prominent example of which was the French-German veto rejecting the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which took place under the pretext that Saddam Hussein's regime possessed a chemical weapon that threatened Western strategic interests. It is known that Saddam Hussein at the time opened the country to UN inspection committees over the allegations of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and the results of the reports of those committees indicated that the country did not possess weapons of mass destruction. The head of the commission, Hans Blix, said at the time that US Vice President Dick Cheney had told them that "We will not hesitate to discredit you in favor of disarmament."¹¹ The result is that the Americans, along with the British,

¹¹ <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/02/bush-oral-history200902>

invaded Iraq without international cover, despite the rejection of allied European countries in the military framework.

So, the military-industrial complex relies on multiple tools to provide a pretext for waging wars. Even if intelligence tools, research centers, individual agents, or even terrorist organizations such as the Taliban are considered well-known and traditional tools, the most effective and influential tools are the backward regimes in the targeted countries. These regimes provide a great service to the war-minded for their dictatorial policies, plundering their people and declining economic development, creating the appropriate ground for the emergence and outbreak of crises, extremism, and fundamentalist trends, and thus creating free pretexts to invade these countries. Only a few countries were able to resist the American military invasion, which inflicted heavy human and military losses. The results of such an American invasion turned into political and military failures alike, taking Vietnam as an example. This only happened when the popular will was united around reliable leadership from the community.

2.3 War from a Cultural Perspective

In this chapter we will present some cultural approaches to war that we believe are relevant to our research.

2.3.1 War and literature

We believe that in the field of media studies, literature should be viewed as an important material for analysis alongside the social sciences. If the latter is the skeleton of social scientific research, literature and sensory observations are flesh and blood. Accordingly, Tolstoy presents in his novel *War and Peace*, 1865–1869, what studies with numbers, statistics, and theoretical political texts cannot provide.

In his famous novel, Tolstoy was able to deprive the war of its shining, sacred, and heroic image, in contrast to what was prevalent in many other literary texts that talked about war. Hence, his work gained its uniqueness and distinction. Although Tolstoy, as a Russian, makes no secret of his pride in his country's ability to stand up to an arrogant occupier, he did not commit himself to polishing the image of war, soldiers, leaders, or Russian society. And at the same time, he turned the aura of grandeur conveyed by the fawning canvases of expedition painters of Napoleon Bonaparte and his imperial army (David, 1801) into the dust of battle, the smoke of artillery, and the misery of the trenches. Tolstoy did not need propaganda to show the world Russia's victory over the occupying enemy. This victory was done by murderers, thieves, swindlers, and Russian military leaders who lived in luxurious palaces according to French culture, the culture of the occupier, according to the novel.

In a pivotal scene in the novel, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, returning from the battlefield, enters the headquarters, carrying a message that summarizes the course of events there, the difficulty of the situation on the ground, and the severity of the loss on the Russian side. The prince enters, taking urging steps toward the headquarters, knowing that every second he is late means an increase in losses among his comrades. But he meets his old friend Belenin, who joined the "diplomatic corps" some time ago. His friend tells him that he is really lucky, for tonight there will be a concert by a French band, and he will be glad to attend it with the prince. Besides, the atmosphere in this city is unparalleled in the evening. Prince Andrei thanks him and continues his march towards the headquarters, and there he receives another shock: the shock of bureaucratic leadership and the adherence to miserable formalities at the expense of the speed of information transmission. He discovers that the leadership is far from

following what is happening on the ground, and the misery of the scene is complemented by the polite expulsion of the prince, who says that he delivered his message and that his role has ended.

Successive thunderbolts descend on the prince at the headquarters. The blood on his clothes has not dried yet, and the people are speaking the language of the enemy, the French language. They enjoy watching a French band while the soldiers suffer through the inferno of Napoleonic cannons. Bilibin tells him in a letter full of sarcasm that the people are not what you think; they do not view the enemy as an enemy but rather as a temporary problem that will disappear later. There is no need to interrupt the latest French fashion, stop speaking French, or even think about visiting Paris. There is no reason to stop admiring Napoleon himself. There is extreme dissonance between a sacrifice in the field of young people, who sacrifice their blood for the sake of homeland, and a class that does not even think about interrupting its way of life, a leadership that races to formulate the statements and decisions that are recited after every important event in homeland, but it does not take any serious work that would reduce the tragicness of what is happening (Tolstoy, 1949).

This famous scene in the novel, which reflects the difference in the atmosphere between those above and below, between aristocracy and common people, is a sensual witness to the reality of war, as it is known that Tolstoy served in the Tsarist army as a second lieutenant in the artillery and, in his youth, participated in the Crimean War (1853–1866), between Russia on the one hand and Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire on the other hand. His importance lies in the fact that he presents a completely opposite picture of the memories of war in peacetime. People tend to weave exceptional and extraordinary heroisms into the communicative and cultural memory in cases of victory, and vice versa, the memories of bitterness and betrayal remain

dominant in cases of defeat. As it is known, studies of memory confirm that communicative memory and cultural memory (Erll, 2008; Nünning, 2008) are not identical to historical events as they occurred from a documentary point of view; they change according to the particular location of the group concerned and in line with it. But in general, Tolstoy was able, through his novel (and the scene mentioned is only one example), to contribute to the formulation of cultural memory with affluent realistic elements and to remove it from its subjective tendency or narrow nationalism, if we consider that the Russians won over the French in that war.

2.3.2 Orientalist analyses of war and their criticism

Until now, “cultural” attempts to justify wars and military interventions in weak countries have been emerging from within the colonial ideology and political propaganda of the countries with the most influence in the world, not only in the academic field but also in the political and media fields. The idea, in short, is that there are clearly and others less clearly formulated analyses, examples of which we will mention later, that the less developed peoples in Asia, Africa, and Latin America cannot be left without the guardianship of the “civilized world,” the United States, and Western countries, because if they are left, they will enter into a cycle of ethnic, sectarian, and national conflicts, which will pose a great danger to them first, then to their surroundings and the world subsequently. The book *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1985) includes a broad classification of this series of analyses. Said identified the features of Orientalist thought as an essential component of Western culture that puts the Orient into question in terms of the ability of its peoples to produce, develop, innovate, maintain stability, etc., their tendency towards conflict and revenge, and their sinking into the darkness of metaphysics and spirituality.

Said created a wide controversy because he generalized this tendency to all

intellectual trends that exist in the West and considered it an essential component of Western culture at all levels. Thus, Said has narrowed the field for distinguishing between one intellectual trend and another, if not completely closed it once and for all, and equated them on the grounds that they all share the same view of the East. We, in turn, will avoid that controversy because it is outside the topic of our current research, but we will focus on one aspect of Orientalist thought: the colonial ideology that exists among some political and intellectual elites in the West. In particular, the issue of the inability of the eastern peoples (the east here is not in the geographical sense but in the political and historical sense: Asia, Africa, and Latin America) to rule themselves since they are going to eat each other because of their tendency to revenge and their preference for violence over political and social stability is of concern in this regard. In 1972, the American Journal of Psychoanalysis published an article written by Golden, who concluded the following results: Orientals can only perform well in crisis situations; they tend to have a culture of violence and consider revenge a virtue, so they are primitive, unlike the Anglo-Saxon peoples. Arthur Balfour presented to the British House of Commons a report about the problems that must be dealt with in Egypt. He believed that the English rule of Egypt is a duty of the English towards Egypt, and it is good for both nations, as the Egyptians cannot rule themselves (Said, 1979, p. 33). Such ideas constitute a theoretical basis for justifying the colonial invasion, which aims by military force to maintain the mechanisms of unequal exchange (Amin, 1974) between rich and poor countries, and of course this means laying hands on energy sources and raw materials, seizing them and taking them for what is less than their real value, and in parallel dominating the markets or colonies and selling manufactured goods at more than their value, and to complete the cycle of plunder: that is, a profit in the purchase of raw materials and a profit in the sale of

manufactured materials, both of which are for the benefit of the rich country.

The previous ideas seek to cover up the mechanisms of unequal exchange by creating different “targets” for invasion: the invading country aims to "maintain regional and international security, stop human rights violations, prevent a dictatorial government from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, stop ethnic cleansing against minorities, destroy terrorist organizations, etc." Despite the fact that some of the recent dangers may be present in underdeveloped countries, a broader look at the historical context of their formation shows the role of the invading countries in their formation, with the help of some local bourgeoisie or traditional leaders who maintained the tradition of loyalty to the West since the old colonial period (that is, the Mandate).

We will mention two examples of this issue. The first is the contribution of the United States of America to creating the Taliban movement in Afghanistan in the eighties of the last century, with Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf states' help, using their financial and religious influence in the Islamic world in order to create a constant focus of tension in the south of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Taliban turned from an ally to the West into a "danger" that justifies a direct military invasion. The second example dates back to the beginning of the last century in the eastern Mediterranean region, which is the Sykes-Picot Agreement¹², the famous agreement between the French and the English (Mark Sykes representing Britain, Georges Picot representing France), according to which a new map of the former Ottoman Empire's colonies was drawn and the current borders were set between Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, and Jordan was formed. It is noteworthy that this agreement was developed in such a way that there will always be

¹²<https://resources.saylor.org/wwwresources/archived/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/HIST351-9.2.1-Sykes-Picot-Agreement.pdf>

the possibility of an exploding border crisis between each of the two neighbors: Syrian lands were annexed to Iraq (Mosul), and Iraqi lands were annexed to Syria (Deir ez-Zor). Also, the Emirate of Transjordan was cut off from the Levant and granted to Prince Abdullah bin Al Hussein.¹³ Palestine was made an international area in preparation for the implementation of the Balfour Declaration for the Jews to establish a national home for the Jews in Palestine. Lebanon's borders were drawn in a way to ensure chronic sectarian tension in northern "Israel." As for the meeting point of the Turkish-Syrian-Iraqi-Iranian borders, which includes multiple nationalities, it has been left as a hotbed of tension ready to erupt at any moment until this day.

As a result, it can be said that each duo of neighboring countries in the aforementioned region is at its best in a state of border conflict in times of peace, which may turn into a war in later stages. More than that, each of those countries appeals to the influential Western countries to resolve disputes and disagreements, and it is also possible for the international powers to exert political pressure on any of those countries from the gateway of conflicts with their neighbors.

In the end, we may wonder: Is the responsibility only on the colonial countries? Were the less developed countries completely free of the possibility of conflict and war, had it not been for the interventions of the colonial powers?

We believe that the answer to this question must be as complicated as the question itself. The backwardness of the state in the countries of the third world and its inability to carry out its traditional functions threatened the stability and unity in the societies of those countries, and this created the space for local forces, consisting of the remnants of feudalism, aristocracy, and the new commercial bourgeoisie, to fuel

¹³ Being the son of Sharif Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca played a role in defeating the Ottomans with the help of the English.

national, ethnic, religious, and sectarian conflicts in the context of their own economic competition in local markets, so they resorted to asking for sponsorship from the colonial countries, which responded to the request immediately. It should also be noted that the emergence of nuclear weapons in the middle of the last century completely closed the way to global military wars between the major powers, like the first and second world wars. So the conflicts between them turned into duels on the territory of the (third world) countries; hence, the technology of stirring up national, religious, and ethnic contradictions has evolved in countries that have the ability to engage in legalized conflicts with limited and underdeveloped weapons, keeping them under the dominance and control of the major war-sponsoring countries, which is preventing undesirable developments outside the calculations of those countries.¹⁴

2.4 Dialogue

In this chapter, at the beginning, we are studying dialogue in its political sense, as distinct from dialogue in its philosophical and ethical sense, which we will address at the end of this chapter. Therefore, based on the previous chapter, it is obvious that political dialogue is the process of politics itself, if war is also “a continuation of politics by other means.” Although the concepts of dialogue, negotiations, discussions, understandings, talks, settlements, etc. suppose, nominally, that parties resort to rationality and civilization, in the contemporary sense, they often come only in parallel to violent and bloody armed conflicts, an arms race, a serious security threat, or even in preparation for a violent, bloody, and armed act.

¹⁴ For example, the weapons used in most of the confrontations in the Syrian war between the government and the opposition factions technically date back to the generation of World War I weapons: rifles, mortars, explosive devices, conventional artillery, and the like. Another example is the Rwandan War, where the most prominent killing weapons were knives and batons (Pauw, Jacques (reporter) (1994). 1994 special report on the Rwandan genocide (Television production). South African Broadcasting Corporation.).

In order to reach the conclusion that political dialogue does not carry an absolute moral value in itself, it is sufficient to pay attention only to the previous point, and therefore it is not useful for political dialogue to be a goal in itself. Rather, it can be said that it is politics in its uninterrupted phase, which, if interrupted, starts the war “as a continuation of politics by other means.”¹⁵

When we return to Gramsci, we remember that there is almost no separation between the political struggle and the war battle and that the most prominent form of the political struggle for Gramsci is the "war of positions," and this is the essence of the matter. If parties are engaged in an armed conflict or a political dispute, political dialogue or discussions of any kind come later to demonstrate the new balance of power and the demands of each party based on the new balance of power. It goes without saying that the political forces that are aware of themselves and their weight present their demands according to the possible. The demand at the dialogue table should be realistic to be achieved, or it may be higher within certain limits than the realistic possibility, so if mutual concessions are made by the two parties, it will come back close to the realistic possibility. It may also be that the demand is completely unrealistic, and then the goal of the requester is to thwart the negotiations or postpone them until it achieves new field progress that allows it to raise the ceiling of his demand to a higher level. Sometimes, the demand of one of the parties may be to impose surrender on the other party, with or without conditions, and this usually happens when that party has achieved a crushing and undoubted victory on the ground. In all cases, it should be noted that all forms of conflict ultimately need a political dialogue that translates the balance of power on the ground.

¹⁵ We can attribute such a conclusion to Clausewitz and Gramsci alike.

In this research, we will argue that the parties that were assigned the task of conducting negotiations in the Syrian war did not act according to the benefits of the negotiation process; that is, they did not put forward realistic demands commensurate with the interests of whom they were supposed to represent, not even with the balance of forces on the ground. Rather, it was made to suit the interests of narrow groups and the interests of specific regional and international parties. For example, the regime kept raising the slogan “Military Resolution” in its political and media discourse and even in rounds of dialogue,¹⁶ at a time when more than half of the population¹⁷ opposed it and rejected its management of the country following the same previous means, and they were afraid of the retaliatory reactions of its supporters if it regained control over some areas, so they fled outside the country or migrated to other areas. On the other hand, large parts of the unelected opposition forces that were named as the opposition through regional and international conferences against the Syrian regime¹⁸ raised the slogan “Overthrow the Regime” despite there is no real possibility of that, neither militarily nor politically. It should be noted that each of the aforementioned parties was getting more and more strict in their extremist rhetoric rejecting of the other existence as their military defeats on the ground worsened.

Of course, it is not intended here to talk about the political “inefficiency” of the two mentioned parties. On the contrary, we seek, by delving into this topic, to

¹⁶ The speech of Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem at the Geneva-2 in conference is a clear example of this (Jan 23, 2014): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFtTgpnGdxw>

¹⁷ Admittedly, there are no accurate statistics or estimates of the number of opponents to the regime. The most accurate in this case is not relying on media or research studies alone but is decided by the results of elections under international monitoring in the Syrian case, which unfortunately did not happen, but the protest map may present a perception about these estimates.

¹⁸ On November 12, 2012, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE, Kuwait, and Oman) recognized the coalition as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people and withdrew their recognition of the government of Bashar al-Assad. A few hours later, the Arab League countries, with the exception of Algeria, Iraq, and Lebanon, recognized the coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

reveal more profound aspects about the nature of the two negotiating parties and the Syrian dialogue process itself. Are the forces that were named as the parties to the dialogue truly representative of the Syrians' will? Were they really seeking to reach the supposed and required solutions through the dialogue process?

We will try to answer such questions in more detail in the next chapter of this research, but most importantly, we'll analyze the media discourse models parallel to the political dialogue process, which has “undervalued the political dialogue” through a demagogic discourse that seeks to make the masses addicted to violence and captive to the revenge tendency, rejecting safe solutions and political and social stability. This helps achieve specific international policy goals that are larger than Syria itself; for example, James Jeffrey, US Special Envoy to Syria, says:

Our military presence [in Syria], while small, is important to this whole overall calculation. So, we urge Congress, the American people, and the president to keep these forces on. But again, this isn't Afghanistan. This isn't Vietnam. This isn't a quagmire. My job is to make it a quagmire for the Russians.¹⁹

2.4.1 Utopian perspective of dialogue

In order to complete our debate, we had to delve into the concepts of war, politics, and political dialogue. But what about dialogue in its philosophical and ethical sense? Is it related to our topic?

Wars, social contradictions, injustice, and oppression still exist in abundance in our world today and pose a challenge to all the philosophical and ethical systems proposed for regulating relationships between people. And this matter is not new at all; it started with the ethical systems proposed in ancient Greek philosophy and later

¹⁹ <https://kassioun.org/en/articles/item/66097-the-quagmire-man-and-the-pencil-breaker-send-their-farewell-letters>

with the emergence of the ethical systems of religions, which represented an ideology of governance, both in the Arab Islamic state after the emergence of Islam in the sixth century AD and in the Roman state, which adopted Christianity as their official religion in the fourth century AD, passing through the rule of the Church in the Middle Ages, down to the proposed ethical systems in the Enlightenment era, to this day, which witness the emergence of modern ethical proposals to organize human relationships and solve their problems.

Perhaps any philosopher, scientist, or politician, whether ancient or contemporary, had the right to imagine and envision a world better than the existing one. However, every philosophical, religious, or moral proposal to regulate the relationship between human beings, even if it came in its inception as a solution to specific social contradictions, turns out, after decades or centuries, to be an obstacle to historical development or a cause for new contradictions. Even when revolutionary proposals become so, we will briefly mention an example from the Islamic heritage:

The heritage researcher Hadi Al-Alawi²⁰ describes the Shiite movement in its beginnings in Islamic Arab history as a revolutionary opposition movement to the change of the revolutionary values of Islam in its beginnings in the Arabian Peninsula towards the values of absolute rule, citing a long series of examples and historical discussions in this regard. The Islamic call in its early years attracted the poor, the weak, and the slaves based on a revolutionary proposal at the time that Islam equals all, rich and poor, masters and slaves. Religious affiliation replaced tribal affiliation or

²⁰ Mr. Hadi Nuri Salman Al-Alawi (1932–September 27, 1998) was a Marxist thinker, Islamic historian, and Iraqi Arab linguist. He was born in Baghdad and grew up in a poor family of Hashemite descent. He studied at the University of Baghdad and graduated from the Faculty of Economics in 1956. He left Iraq for China and then Syria, where he lived in exile until he died in Damascus and was buried there. He was interested in Islamic and Chinese philosophy topics and has done research and written books on language and Islamic and Chinese history.

blood ties, but as soon as a few decades passed, Islam turned into an ideology of absolute rule and shura turned into inheritance, as it was prevalent in every empire at that time, Persian and Byzantine (Al-Alawi, 1988). However, Al-Alawi (1988) adds that the Shiite movement, which arose as a movement in opposition to the transformation of these revolutionary values into the absolute rule of the Umayyad family, soon turned, in turn, after a short period, into a copy of the regime it opposes. Since it acquired political power, it has also become the ideology of absolute rule in the Fatimid Era and the Zaydis in Yemen (Al-Alawi, 1988).

It can be said that the degree of similarity between the different systems of absolute religious rule is similar in the governance style despite their different ethical systems, which reflects that the actual ruler is not the ethical system; the latter constitutes nothing but the ideology of the political-economic system. In fact, the debate on this issue is one of the most problematic debates in modern social science. Can a particular ethical system solve the problems of society, and if it can for a period of time, will it continue to do its function?

Such questions bring us back to the materialist-idealist philosophical struggle, in particular Marx against Hegel: at first Marx brought Hegel's world upside down to get back on its feet; social ideas do not determine social reality, but on the contrary, "It is not men's consciousness that determines their existence, but it is their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx, 1904, pp. 12-13). Although many credit Marx with establishing the first scientific materialist understanding of history, the debate escalated later about the relationship between the base and the superstructure and the marginal role given to the superstructure. If the base determines the structure, are the proposed social ideas and ethical systems incapable of changing

the base?²¹

Friedrich Engels clarifies later in a letter to Joseph Bloch in 1890 that the marginalization of the role of the superstructure was carried out by young Marxist economists with a narrow understanding of the historical material concept. and that the superstructure is determined by the base "ultimately," but with relative subjective independence, and returns and influences the base, or that the relationship between the base and the superstructure is dialectical (Engels, 1972, PP. 294-296).

In our concrete example, if dialogue (philosophical or ethical) is the “superior” proposal for resolving the contradictions and problems of reality, then we have the right to ask first: Who forces the strongest to engage in dialogue with the weakest? Who can persuade those who wage wars as a profitable investment to stop their military campaign? Today's world contains thousands of examples in the political field that ethical calls cannot impose solutions, as the climate problem, which threatens the entire planet, cannot stop the excessive depletion of the environment and polluting industries. Likewise, the need to maintain world peace has not been able to make the major nuclear powers in the world reach a world free of nuclear weapons, among many other similar examples.

Let us take, for example, the most famous proposal in the current stage of ethical dialogue, by Jürgen Habermas, the theorist of "communicative action," and put it to the test of the challenges that people face in today's world: according to Habermas, we make our choices in life as a result of dialogues. When we disagree with someone, we do not take out our guns and shoot that person. We have a conversation and express a series of arguments and counterarguments. We create

²¹ The base is productive forces plus relations of production, according to the Marxist concept.

relationships through dialogue and communication, which in turn may change our behavior and influence our choices. We, as participants in a dialogue, presuppose that we are rational individuals (Habermas, 1984), and this can be transferred to the level of states. Countries, by communicating with each other and establishing diplomatic relations, make decisions and adopt policies that lead them to act and behave in a certain way. However, Habermas does not resolve his opinion that the resulting changes from the dialogue of these countries are necessarily positive; instead, he asks: "Can this form of democratic self-direction of modern societies (within the framework of the nation state) extend beyond national borders?" Then he goes back and places an objective: "The long-term goal must be to continually overcome social division and stratification within a global community, but without detriment to cultural excellence" (Habermas, 2003, p. 99).

The actors involved in communication are presumed to be rational. Habermas formulates a definition of the process of communicative rationality. According to him, "This process is those actions in which the levels of action for the actors belonging to the communicative process are not related to the needs of politics but are related to acts of understanding" (Habermas, 1975, p. 108). Habermas posits that a discussion is an exchange of reasons and counter-reasons, arguments and counterarguments, between one or more participants who are presumed to be equal in the dialogue and open to the reasons of others. In the dialogue, participants have mutual behavioral expectations that "rise to the norm" (Habermas, 1975, p. 108). In other words, if two actors agree to engage in dialogue, we can assume that they are open to talking, listening, and adopting certain norms and behaviors. It is also assumed that they are open to the possibility of persuasion if the counterargument is better.

Dialogue participants must respect certain rules and agree in advance to avow

an equal relationship between them in dialogue. Under the pragmatic assumptions of an inclusive, non-coercive rational discourse between free and equal participants, everyone must take everyone else's perspective and thus project themselves into notions of themselves and the others' world. Therefore, in order to meet this ideal situation and "appropriate conditions," there must be the same capacities in discourse and social equality, the absence of coercive power, the mutual search for understanding, and the persuasive power of a better argument.

There is no understanding without language. This prompted him to introduce language as a factor in understanding communicative relationships. In order to enhance his conception of the communicative act and have a better understanding of the social relations within society, he argued that the communicative act is distinguished from other acts by not seeking to search for means that enable it to influence others but rather searching for how to reach an understanding with others and mutual agreement without coercion or compulsion, whatever type they are. If understanding is the ultimate goal of the communicative act, then it cannot be imagined between the negotiating parties except under certain conditions, the most important of which is that one party does not influence another, because if that happened, it would inevitably lead to the failure of communication. There is a great difference between agreement, which is the result of understanding, and influence, which is the result of coercion and pressure. The communicative act aims to reach the "consensus," without which the communicative action fails.

Habermas' doctrine is still subject to many criticisms due to the absence of evidence to prove its effectiveness or its obligation to the influential parties in the world, especially since its "self-direction of modern societies" is still limited to the formula of the European Union, which he sees as "a prime example of a form of

democracy outside the nation-state" (Habermas, 2003).²²

Is it possible on this basis that dialogue could be a source of change in the international system? Or does the nature of this change depend on the nature and conditions of the dialogue? (Marcuse, 2013)

One of the most prominent problems of the Habermas model, in our opinion, in addition to being an ideal moral proposal and its closure in the traditional monism of Western thought, the European Union model, is that it also reduces the political and economic contradictions between the interlocutors, hypothetically, to the language system and not to the political-economic system itself. Within the specifications he sets, the dialogue must reach "consensus." If this is the case, does language replace ideology in erasing differences and creating consensus?

Ethical systems are really a double-edged sword. Making dialogue stems from a certain moral necessity and can also give way to making fighting and revenge justified by corresponding moral imperatives. Sanctifying dialogue is the same as sanctifying war. The act of revenge can become a "moral necessity" under the guise of stopping violence with violence, and we can mention as examples the interventions of major military alliances for "deterrence" or "stopping killings and genocide," such as NATO's intervention in the Yugoslav war in the late last century and in Libya about a decade ago. These two samples, for example, were accompanied by campaigns of support, not only at the political and media levels but even at the level of human rights organizations and academics as well.

²² He adds, "and may be of Christianity, too." Habermas (2006, pp. 150–151) says: "For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or catalyst. Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical reappropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. "Everything else is idle postmodern talk."

The solution, then, is not to make dialogue an absolute moral value and thus sanctify it. Based on this concept, we can say that dialogue, in turn, is a conflict or a “war of positions” and may be sharp and radical, and its results may be positive or negative, and that resorting to dialogue does not necessarily presuppose that we relinquish the goal or the political motive, as Habermas suggests, and that dialogue does not necessarily have to end in “unanimity.” It can even achieve agreements at the level of the interlocutors, forcing them to save people's lives and spare their blood.

2.4.2 How can dialogue be functional?

The dialogue between two conflicting parties implicitly contains the idea that there is a possible third solution that is different from the first solution, in which one party eliminates the other, and the second, in which the exact opposite takes place. This third solution, in which the two sides make mutual concessions until an agreed-upon formula is reached, guarantees the cessation of the bloody conflict, the war of movement, and the transition to the non-bloody conflict, the war of positions, to stop the endless drain of the two conflicting parties' energy.

Contrary to what seems obvious, the third solution that we are talking about is the most likely to happen. It is rare when looking at the results of wars in human history to find a war in which one side was able to absolutely annihilate the other party with all its equipment and people, even in cases of overwhelming victory. There must be an end to mass killings and a way to turn them into settlements.

This leads us to look at the issue of dialogue as the most common possibility next to conflicts, no matter how fierce and bloody they are, and thus to pay attention to its necessity from the point of view of its ability to alter the bloody rolling course of wars and conflicts towards safe ends and towards stopping the bleeding, and this is most applicable to the thoughtful Syrian case. To reach this end, it is necessary to

remove the mantle of idealism from the dialogue concept, remove it from the aura of the ethical system, and remove it from its theological preaching throne. On the contrary, it should be bred from the womb of objective necessity to stop the bloodshed and trading in innocents' pains and find urgent and necessary solutions to stop their consecutive catastrophes. From this perspective, the necessity of political dialogue should be viewed as a tool that can bring tangible solutions and promise trustworthy hopes, contrary to the ethical dialogue that can be employed in procrastinating the masses, the most involved in the matter, feeding them with false hopes, and exploiting their religious and moral convictions to employ them in maintaining the existing clash.

2.5 Syrian War

2.5.1 Syrian national identity

Syria is a small country located in the eastern Mediterranean. Its political borders were formed on the basis of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the agreement between the French and the British, which was discussed in the first chapter. Geographically and demographically, it constitutes the largest part of the Levant region, which includes, in addition to Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan. This small country contains intensive national, religious, and sectarian diversity, and these groups with multiple geographical and social identities overlap to a large extent.²³

It is necessary to point out that the British and the French sought, after the Sykes-Picot agreement, to further divide the new states as well, including Syria. The French offered some local leaders of minorities to establish small states for them: the

²³ There are no accurate statistics about the number of national and religious groups in Syria, but some estimates indicate that the national diversity includes Arabs, Kurds, Circassians, Armenians, Dagestan, Turkmen, Chechens, and others. Religiously, Sunnis constitute 63% of the population, Alawis 12%, Christians 10%, Kurds 9%, Druze 3%, Ismailis 1%, and other minorities estimate 2%.

Alawites state in the north-west of Syria (Latakia, Tartus) and the Druze Almohad state in the south (Suwayda), in an attempt to separate these two regions at least from the rest of Syria, which is predominantly Sunni. This attempt to create states collided not only with the rejection of the influential leaders in these two regions but even unified their resistance to the French occupation, as the activity of groups of Syrian nationalist intellectuals in Damascus and Aleppo,²⁴ in coordination with religious and tribal leaders in the regions, Sunni, Alawite, and Druze, according to the French classification, led up to unite the activity of the Syrian revolutionaries in various regions, and the banner of the Great Syrian Revolution leadership was handed over to the national leader Sultan Pasha al-Atrash,²⁵ who is from the city of As-Suwayda and belongs to the Druze sect, which is one of the smallest sects in the country, in a very important symbolic sign of rejecting partition on a sectarian basis. It should also be noted that these leaders were politically and morally inspired, at the time, by the Battle of Maysaloun, the battle in which the Syrian Minister of War Youssef Al-Azma, along with groups of volunteers and the Syrian army, confronted the French occupation in the Maysaloun region, west of Damascus,²⁶ and they were all annihilated in front of the advanced French arsenal at that time.

Despite knowing in advance that they would be defeated militarily, they wanted to win politically and prepare for future victories. Indeed, this battle established a Syrian national unity between local leaders, an outbreak of armed

²⁴ Ibrahim Hanano from Aleppo, Abd al-Rahman al-Shahbandar from Damascus, and others

²⁵ Sultan al-Atrash, better known as Sultan Pasha al-Atrash (March 5, 1891–March 26, 1982), was a Syrian nationalist and revolutionary leader who belonged to the Unitarian Druze sect and was considered the commander-in-chief of the Great Syrian Revolution that broke out against French colonialism in 1925.

²⁶ Youssef Al-Azma went out with about 3000 soldiers to Maysaloon armed with English rifles; his forces did not include tanks, planes, or heavy weapons, and they clashed with the French forces, 9000 soldiers, on the morning of July 24, 1920, in an unequal battle that lasted hours, in which French planes, tanks, and heavy guns participated.

resistance to the French in 1920, and Syria's independence in 1947 from French occupation. Of course, the whole scene was not like this; an opposite activity appeared, including some families, merchants, and clergy, who found from the beginning that their interests got along with the French. This gathering announced its appearance upon the first entry of the French into Damascus just after the Maysaloun battle ended, and they received General Gouraud, the leader of the French campaign, with music, chants, and celebrations, according to what was reported by the Syrian government's official newspaper, *Al-Assemah*, in 1920.²⁷ These later, after independence, turned into commercial agents in the country to Western companies, French and other, and became responsible for import sector.²⁸

This differentiation in the political attitude towards the French marked the beginning of the division over Syrian national identity. Despite the success of the patriots' efforts to put pressure on the French to get out of Syria in 1947, the other powers kept the French in particular and Western interests in general in the main joints of the basic economy based on their own interests. Since Syria, like other economically underdeveloped countries in which class inequality takes sectarian, family-based, and religious forms, these powers have been feeding alliances and divisions on minor bases (sectarian and religious) as an alternative to revealing their political and economic program.²⁹

²⁷ Some witnesses at that stage said that some of the recipients disengaged the horses from the general's cart and pulled it them themselves, as mentioned in the diary of Khaled Beik al-Azm, Prime Minister Syria later.

²⁸ As an example, among the most prominent recipients was Prince Nuri al-Shaalan, according to the newspaper *Al-Assemah* 1920, whose name bears one of the richest neighborhoods in Damascus.

²⁹ As an example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria declared disobedience and armed action to overthrow the regime in 1982 with fundamentalist and sectarian slogans against other sects in the country. The Syrian researcher Samir Abbas (2012) points out in a special study, *The State of the Brotherhood: The Theoretical and Intellectual Premises about the Political Project for the Future Syria*, that the social base of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria was among the wealthy city merchants with exclusive agencies for some European countries in the economic field. And they used religious

After the Syrian independence in 1947, a politically turbulent atmosphere prevailed, with massive military coups, and the Arab Socialist Baath Party (nationalist party) took power in 1963, followed by a coup by another Baathist current in 1966, and then another coup carried out by Hafez al-Assad in 1970, leading another Baathist current. Hafez al-Assad's rule was stabilized after that until his death in 2000, after he succeeded in establishing a frontal coalition (Baathist, communist, Nasserite), and was subrogated by his son Bashar al-Assad in 2000 with what was described as a family inheritance of power, and he continues to rule until now.

Therefore, the current regime in Syria is about to spend 52 years, during which it ruled the country unilaterally in accordance with Article 8th of the Syrian Constitution (1973–2012), which says, “The Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party is the leading party of the state and society,” so the Referendum was held every seven years for the Baath Party leadership candidate Hafez al-Assad between 1970–2000 and in the same way for Bashar al-Assad between 2000 and 2014. In 2014, it was forced to cancel Article 8 due to the protest movement and to organize elections described as "formal" in 2014 and 2021 because they took place after the destruction of the country, in the shadow of a major humanitarian disaster, and under the control of the security and military services loyal to al-Assad.

During his rule, former President Hafez al-Assad established a political and economic balance between the two trends mentioned above. On the one hand, he established the “National Progressive Front” with the participation of five nationalist and leftist parties, including his Baath party, within narrow margins of political action. At the same time, he gave an economic margin to the commercial bourgeoisie, which maintained its ties with the West, but he kept it under political control. They were

rhetoric to obtain the widest possible mass base, as long as their economic program was not sufficiently accepted.

unable to represent themselves politically within parties due to the absence of a party law outside the frame of the "National Progressive Front." He also confronted some of their wings militarily when they tried to provoke an armed protest movement,³⁰ but he returned and gave them room for economic activity in the following period.

At the level of foreign policy, President Hafez al-Assad tried to maintain a balance between the West and the East. Although Syria, according to the division of global influence areas, counted on the Soviet side, the country's leadership kept their contacts with the West through the economic gate. In the stages of the decline of the Soviet Union, al-Assad, the father, showed greater flexibility with the West as he participated militarily and symbolically in the international coalition after Saddam Hassan's invasion of Kuwait. In addition, he issued Investment Law No. 10 of 1991, which marks the beginning of Syria's economic "openness." This is the path that the administration of President al-Assad (the son) has focused on, and which we will talk about later.

2.5.2 Syrian Crisis

Bashar al-Assad assumed power in the year 2000 after the death of his father. Although the possible age for rule was not reached, a quick amendment to the Syrian constitution was made to enable him to be nominated by the leadership of the Arab Socialist Baath Party and to hold a popular referendum on him. Nevertheless, al-Assad's advent to power was accompanied by hope for "development and modernization" (the new slogan of his stage) not only at the public level but even at

³⁰ The so-called Hama events, an armed coup movement launched by the Muslim Brotherhood on a sectarian basis, which Hafez al-Assad confronted with great ferocity in the field, and his side fire hit thousands of civilians, killing and arresting, and in parallel, al-Assad flexibly managed understandings with its leaders from the merchants of the two major cities, Damascus and Aleppo So that they could later maintain their commercial and financial influence, in exchange for stopping their political activity.

the level of his opponents, some of whom had spent more than a decade in prisons. Many Syrians believed at the time that the new, young leadership could increase political freedoms and democracy and improve living conditions. Unauthorized opposition forces and civil institutions held conferences calling for general national dialogue and political openness to the opposition and the masses.³¹ That stage coincided with the Iraq war and the escalation of the Western threat to Syria.³²

The regime's response at that stage fulfilled expectations because Syria at that time rejected dictations and threats. Indeed, Syria did not hide its support and sympathy for the resistance movements in Lebanon and Palestine against the Israeli occupation, which gave the regime additional popular impetus, especially after the occupation of Iraq and the attempt to humiliate the countries of the region by the Bush administration at the time. However, on the other hand, the regime dealt with the issue of internal political reform as part of external interference and threats and did not distinguish between the types of opponents who were actually divided at the time between those who took advantage of the circumstances for political gain,³³ and the opposition that refused external interference³⁴ publicly and clearly so as not to confuse

³¹ At least two opposition groups held dialogue meetings about that: the Jamal Al-Atassi Forum in 2001 and the National Dialogue Symposium in 2004.

³² Colin Powell's dictates to Damascus in 2003 focused on changing its policy in regional and international alliances, especially with regard to the Palestinian issue and Damascus's support for the resistance movement. Also, after the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, they went on accusing the Syrian government of doing so and forcing the Syrian government to withdraw its forces from Lebanon months later.

³³ Some opposition forces' discourse at the time included references to linking the American threats to Syria and reform. Riad al-Turk, for instance, conveyed information to the opposition about American officials that the American administration is working to overthrow the regime and they must prepare themselves. See Muhammad Sayed Rasas' article (Didn't the Riyad al-Turk project fail?: <https://www.sahat-altahreer.com/%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%B4%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%9F%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%A7/>).

³⁴ The first item was almost in all the statements of the Syrian Opposition Dialogue Committee, which

the objective necessities of reform with the threat to the security of the country.

At the public level, the people's living and economic demands and the desire to get rid of corruption in the bureaucracy and unemployment and increase the social role of the state were the most urgent demands for people. Due to the absence of political freedoms for decades and the lack of political platforms to represent them, it has become common for people to demand "wise leadership" to solve problems directly because there is a state of historical familiarity in the social consciousness that this leadership is responsible for creating all balances within the country because of the balances established by Hafez al-Assad (the father), which we mentioned earlier, between the various political and economic forces in the country. In turn, the authority's media showed celebration and understanding of the way people presented their demands, as long as the demands were not made through opposing political formations and as long as the way the demands were presented suggests that trust in the leadership exists.

2.5.3 Economics of the crisis: A Trojan Horse

At a time when the Syrian regime showed stringency in its political positions, it was working on the contrary in the economic field. The influential people in power for three decades, since the seventies until the beginning of the new millennium, and who accumulated huge fortunes from corruption (Al-Barout, 2011), are now pressing the political decision towards liberalizing economic policies and eliminating social support that the state presents towards the poorest segments, providing privileges to rentier service sectors at the expense of industry and agriculture, privatizing the public economic sector, and selling institutions that have been lost or are being lost due to

related to the National Dialogue Symposium 2004, for example, the rejection of external interference, reform on the basis of popular will, and the linkage between the national and democratic position.

corruption. Indeed, the new economic orientation appeared in 2004–2005 under the name "Social Market Economy" as an alternative to "Central Planning of the Economy." The economic team at the time (the Economic Deputy Prime Minister and the Ministers of Finance and Economy) defended the new trend of increasing growth through foreign investments under the slogan "Foreign investments are the locomotive of economic growth." It will lead to recovery from the disease, meaning that social segments will initially suffer because of the decline in the social role of the state, but the growth in return that will be secured by foreign investments will reflect positively on those segments.

This speech was an introduction to justify the increase in fuel prices by 300%, the prices of agricultural fertilizers by 400%, and the abolition of support on basic foodstuffs, and thus the increase in prices. Of course, this came in light of the worst drought in the country since the fifties of the last century, whose effects had been predicted, and was also accompanied by strong resistance in political and civil circles and some circles affiliated with the state apparatus.³⁵ Agriculture stopped on most of the arable lands.³⁶ Prices, unemployment rates, and relative and absolute poverty rose in large numbers amid a media and statistical blackout from state departments.³⁷

At that time, the economic team in power was portraying the transformation process as following the German model and the South Korean model (according to Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Al-Dardari), at a time when it is almost impossible

³⁵ Barout M, (March 21, 2012) The dialectic of reform and stagnation, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

³⁶ Some statistics estimated that more than two hundred thousand people from Al-Hasakah Governorate, which has an agricultural pattern, migrated towards the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo.

³⁷ Unofficial estimates indicate that 40 percent of the population is below the poverty line. The share of profits from the gross domestic product, GDP, amounted to 70 percent, while the share of wages shrank to 30 percent (Qassioun Newspaper, 2008).

to compare the level of political freedoms between Syria and the two mentioned countries, as well as the level of external challenges previously mentioned, which were on a high level of intensity relating to the occupation of Iraq and the repeated Israeli attacks on Lebanon and Palestine. It remains to be noted also the emergence of the old Third World phenomenon when the President's relatives dominated important vital sectors,³⁸ entered partnerships with foreign investments and seized the rest of the state's sectors and contracts with the power of "kinship," which was causing hidden public discontent that became cumulative, as shown later.

2.5.4 Explosion of the crisis

Protest movements emerged in many Arab countries in 2010 for reasons similar to those we mentioned in Syria previously. Syria at that time was also like a heap of firewood waiting for any spark to ignite, and many accounts intersect that what happened was as follows: A group of children in the southern Syrian governorate of Daraa wrote anti-regime slogans they took from the news. The children were arrested and tortured by Atef Najeeb, head of the security department and President Bashar al-Assad's cousin, and when the people reviewed him, he directly insulted them and refused to release the children. The event immediately moved to the street, and protests began. Security forces immediately confronted the demonstrators with weapons, killed many, and arrested many during the period of March 2011. The scope of events widened in most parts of the country, as is known.

In the beginning, it was expected that the Syrian President would issue a verdict on what happened, and many bet, even from the protesters, that the President

³⁸ The telecommunications sector, for example, was owned entirely by the cousin of Syrian President Rami Makhlouf.

would punish the culprits, bring justice to those affected, and that matters would end with the implementation of a series of reforms in the country, which he had promised since taking power, and that “the heads of the corrupt will be eliminated” or that the honorable forces in the state could come forward to talk to the people and listen to their demands. Some argue that the corrupt people surrounding the president are conveying inverted and distorted information to him and that they are slowing down his expected decision to start reform.

The matter turned dramatically when the president came out with his speech in the People's Assembly on March 30, 2011, which carried a tone of challenge to what he described as the foreign conspiracy and frankly ignored the abuses committed by the security forces against people, killing and arresting.

The president's speech, in addition to the extreme violence directed at the popular movement, constituted the ground for the emergence of counter-violence and the pretext for extremists to call for taking up arms and confronting violence with violence. Actually, only a few months passed until the formation of the Free Army was announced in July 2011. This happened with heavy coverage by the Arab and international media. The major international television channels (CNN, BBC, France 24, Sky News, Al Jazeera, and Al Arabiya) contributed to a campaign to justify arms in the face of the authority, and as it is known, these media encouraged the phenomenon of military dissent and the act of revenge against the authority.³⁹

At that time, a split arose in the protesters' ranks over keeping the demonstrations peaceful or being drawn into violence. Many political opponents, intellectuals, and prominent figures in the field of protest warned that using counter-

³⁹ One of the pieces of evidence of this phenomenon is the labeling of the opposition militants as revolutionaries in the mentioned media.

violence would threaten the birth of democracy and freedom advocated by the protest movement and make the popular movement reproduce the model of the repressive regime. This discourse did not appeal to the international and Arab media ostensibly loyal to the popular movement; on the contrary, this media encouraged the phenomenon of counter-violence as “self-defense” and that the regime “which is about to fall” due to receiving counter-military strikes is the one that fuels calls for peaceful action to postpone his inevitable destiny. In fact, the counter-violence was a great political gain for the regime, as it gave the regime an important pretext to continue violence against the peaceful protest movement, and the “conspiracy” hypothesis adopted by the regime gained legitimacy, with which the authority media argued after about three months of embarrassment and confusion in justifying the extreme violence against the peaceful protest movement. Violence and counter-violence rolled like a snowball and tragically swelled in the months after the crisis erupted. The scenes of killing, torture, arrest, and kidnapping practiced by both the regime and the armed opposition against people became the most prevalent on the international media and social media, and over the subsequent years, media showed the tragedies of the Syrians in all their forms: death, escape, hunger, displacement, migration, loss, and drowning at the bottom of the seas after failed attempts to migrate to distant countries. However, despite the charge of deep sympathy with the victims of that devastating war, these data were not formulated for the purpose of ending and stopping the catastrophe. On the contrary, those materials published in the media served as fuel for the continuation of political debate between the conflicting parties and to give a certain party pretexts and justifications to continue its violence against other parties.

The media supporting the armed opposition issued the slogan "Down with the

criminal regime." Meanwhile, the media supporting the authority relied on the slogan "military resolution against terrorism." According to these two slogans, the field of dialogue or negotiation is not only forbidden but has become equivalent to "treason." Both parties agreed, each through its own media, that "we will not debate those whose hands are stained with blood." while the remaining voices calling for dialogue or national consensus were under double attack from the opposition and the loyalists.

In 2012, the military confrontations expanded to include almost all of the Syrian territory, and armed factions that operated under the umbrella of the opposition proliferated and branched out from Islamic organizations. According to the discourse of these groups, fundamentalist foreign militants influxed from neighboring countries began to wage jihad against the "infidel regime." In early 2013, internationally classified terrorist organizations were formed, such as ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front, whose leaders consider it a branch of Al-Qaeda. At first, they received Western and Gulf support, but then they were reclassified as terrorists. In the following two years (2014–2015), the Syrians migrated massively to European countries to escape the war after the neighboring countries (Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon) were crowded with large numbers of them, and the file of asylum appeared in the international negotiation space as a new element to exert mutual pressure between the parties affected by the Syrian war. Military operations began to gradually recede with the military interventions of the large countries—Russia, America, and Europe—and the intelligence activity of dozens of countries in Syrian territories increased significantly. Until now, the situation has settled on the fact that Syria remains divided into three regions, each subject to a different rule: Idlib is under the rule of the opposition factions, the north-east is under the rule of Kurdish units, and the rest of the areas are under the control of the regime.

2.5.5 How can the Syrian war be classified?

Most descriptions tend to regard the Syrian war as a civil war. This is because the two main notable parties appear to be the regime and the opposition. It seems that the crisis in the country is a crisis of governance between an authority and a people, and the truth is that it started as well, and the levels of conflict have even branched out until they have become more complex: the basic division is loyal to the authority and opposed, which is the most common division on the ground and in media, and it is the main dichotomy fed by the global and local media. We will discuss it in detail in the media discourse in our research.

This dichotomy existed on the ground thanks to objective factors: those loyal to authority were a heterogeneous mixture of those close to the state apparatus and those enjoying its privileges; the social environment of the military and security circles; among the national and religious minorities who fear that a lack of stability will lead them to be harmed by the fundamentalist and terrorist forces; looting and economic corruption forces that have benefited over decades from their relations with the authority; some classic parties allied with the authority historically; and others. Opponents of the authority were also a heterogeneous mixture of people from rural areas that were greatly affected by drought and oppressive economic policies, residents of slums and marginalized areas economically, developmentally, and in services, bourgeoisie who were marginalized according to the authority's method of dividing influence (urban bourgeoisie), and people directly affected by the emergency law and laws. The exceptional remnants of political forces who were suppressed for decades, including political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, the remnants of sectarian parties that were subjected to military strikes by the authority in the eighties of the last century, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, terrorist elements with regional

contacts seeking to establish an Islamic caliphate, and the like, repressed national minorities deprived of their cultural rights,⁴⁰ the Kurdish minority in particular, from which about 200 thousand people were deprived of Syrian citizenship and remained unregistered (exceptional census 1962).

We can expand to the extent of studying every Syrian neighborhood and village, but the scope of this research does not allow it. It should be noted that a part of the loyalists, the security services, and the economic plundering forces, and a corresponding part of the opposition, the fundamentalist and terrorist forces, and the opposition bourgeoisie say, for example, that the regime is Alawite, and the revolution is Sunni or talk about a Sunni-Shiite conflict that was borrowed from the Iraqi and Lebanese models. However, these efforts did not find their way to success in the first and second years among the Syrians (2011–2012), who were conflicting over the authority's survival or changing, but this discourse became common starting in 2013 with the emergence of ISIS and similar terrorist organizations and the entry of foreign militants and their “opposition” leadership to the country. On the other hand, the entry of foreign Shiite militants, mainly loyal to Iran (footnote: Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas, Liwa al-Nujaba, Fatemiyoun, Zainabiyoun, and others) to support the regime and their field military operations command. It is necessary to point out that 11 million Syrians out of 23 million fled their areas during that period, and thereafter, they statistically constitute almost the entire population of the burning areas. In other words, the local Syrian element in the alleged "Sunni-Shiite" war has become almost nonexistent. It was replaced by foreign fundamentalist armed forces from all over the world and took control of the field (ISIS map, Kurdish fighters, Shiite factions). This particular fact constitutes one of the main pillars of this study.

⁴⁰ All nationalities except Arab nationalism, the excuse declared by (the Arab Socialist Baath Party) is a national ideological reason.

As is well known, the years after 2013 witnessed Russian, American, French, and British intervention. This prompts us to look closely at what the Syrian war has become: is it really a civil war? It can also be said, "Is it really a Syrian war?"

In order to analyze this question, let us put these indicators next to each other:

First, the internal and external displacement took place in areas that witnessed direct military operations, and as a numerical indicator of the number of fleeing people from those areas (13 million people), it can be said that the rate of flight exceeded 95% (according to the United Nations website, March 15, 2022), which reflects a reluctance to participate in war.

The second was the number of foreign militants. From April 2011 until the end of 2015, there were 360,000 foreign fighters in rotation; that is, they did not meet at once. That large number also reflects the departure of the field leadership and management from the Syrians' hands and their shifting to another location.

Third: The political and media conflict witnessed the existence of non-local dichotomies, especially the "Sunni-Shiite" dichotomy. The percentage of Shiites in Syria, for example, is 0.4%. This dichotomy, for example, reflected the Iranian-Saudi conflict, which is known to be spreading on Iraqi and Yemeni lands to a large extent. Fourth: The years 2011 and 2012 witnessed calls from various political and public circles to maintain the peacefulness of the conflict, and the prevailing dichotomy at the time was a loyalist-opposition dualism in the Syrian political and media discourse in all its different locations.

Fifth: The high degree of Syrian file internationalization in the following years reached the international division degree over the file (American-Russian) and regional division (Turkey-Iran-Saudi Arabia-Egypt). It came to form international bodies that have been working for years. "Friends of Syria Group," "International

Coalition Against ISIS," "Astana Group," and they largely control the field and political operations related to the file.

Based on the previous points, it can be said that the Syrian war can now be described as a proxy war and not a civil war. It is no secret that Syria has become a laboratory in which the entire international conflict is simulated and represented—a laboratory for measuring weights, sharing areas of influence, making deals, striking, and bartering over other than the Syrian file.

On the other hand, the presence of Syrian forces participating in and supporting the war on both sides of the conflict, or its multiple parties, cannot be overlooked. These forces appear on the media level through a group of politicians and soldiers in the regime and the opposition who reflect the various regional and international wills, and their function is to give the armed conflict the local “Syrian” character, to make it legitimate, and to portray it as a popular demand. But they also represent some local Syrian groups, as examples: on the regime side: the major corrupt who benefit from their domination of the state’s capabilities and resources due to the conditions of the war; the merchants and intermediaries who benefit from the exceptional situation of war, fluctuation in prices, and the loss of basic materials as a result of the Western economic siege on the Syrian state; and the groups that have been documented as perpetrators of war crimes. On the opposition side: arms dealers and agents of countries involved in financing and arming the opposition; the beneficiaries of the Arabian Gulf financing flow in particular; some leaders of the local armed factions in many low-development areas in the north and east who focused their activities on stealing public utilities, stored grain silos, extracting oil in a primitive way, dismantling factories in northern Syria, and transporting them to other regions.

On the bottom line, it can be said, as a result of the previous data as a whole, that the option of war represents the interest of numerically limited groups of the Syrian people. However, this group managed to direct the events since late 2012 until now, and it was also able to impose its political and media discourse in reality because it was supported regionally and internationally, and because the political and field climate that was imposed on Syria internationally was giving extent to these groups and the existing foreign element on Syrian territory to continue, develop, and deepen their military confrontations to the level of the international division. The groups calling for war did not dominate the scene because they represented the desire of the majority of Syrians, or a significant percentage of them, as they claim. The evidence for this matter, according to our research, is the flight of the vast majority from the fighting areas and their settlement until today, either internally in other safer cities or externally in other countries. Also, the period between the emergence of armed confrontations and today has not witnessed any fair and tangible elections or polls that showed that war is an option for most or some of the Syrians.

2.6 War and Dialogue in Media Discourse

The management of the media in both the loyalists and the opposition was in the hands of powerful forces with direct and indirect interest in continuing the war, simply because they possessed the financial and logistical tools and were receiving regional and international financial support. In the following pages, we will talk about the propaganda in the discourses of both the regime and the opposition in calling for arms, rejecting political dialogue, and constantly undervaluing it. We will also draw attention to the degree of similarity and even congruence between the two opposing discourses in terms of form and their agreement to glorify war and reject dialogue.

2.6.1 Pro-government media

The media loyal to the authority on TV are the Syrian government TV, the official Al-Ekhbariya channel, and the private Sama TV owned by businessmen close to the authority (which is one of the samples we study). As newspapers, there are three official ones: *Al-Baath*, *Tishreen*, and *Al-Thawra*. As for radio, there are several Syrian radio stations loyal to the authority, the official radio, and many private radio stations. On a foreign level, the most influential media are the Arab TVs (non-Syrian) due to being Arabic-speaking. For example, there is the Lebanese Al-Mayadeen channel, affiliated with Iran (a studied sample), and a group of channels belonging to the Lebanese parties loyal to the regime (New TV, NBN, Al-Manar, OTV), the Iranian official TV Al-Alam (Arabic speaking), and others. On these channels, the discourse was very similar in all its fluctuations during the stages of the crisis, receiving the same analysts and politicians, some of whom appeared on two or three of these channels in one day. We will list the expressions and descriptions used by these channels over time and their changes in portraying the Syrian crisis to shed light on their positions on war and dialogue.

The aforementioned media interpret the events taking place in the country as a "foreign conspiracy," or sometimes "universal," and that this conspiracy aims to confront the Syrian regime's steadfastness in the face of Western and Zionist policies. The conspiracy started with the "deceived" citizens who became "agents" abroad by protesting and opposing the regime. As for the regime's violence against the protest movement, according to the loyal media, it was carried out by "terrorist armed groups" to strike "national unity between the people and the state." As for evidence-based violence, it is categorized under the framework of "individual errors."

At first, the inaccuracies in this speech appeared in a very crude way,

especially since hundreds of recordings and eyewitness testimonies documented the attacks and arrests of the security services against peaceful demonstrators. However, the emergence and gradual growth of counter-violence, starting in the second half of 2011, gave these channels a new impetus after at least six months of political embarrassment and lack of credibility. In order for these channels to move to a higher level of escalation, the "deceived" people have become "terrorists," and their cities and villages have become "an incubating environment for terrorism." The inflammatory sectarian references were highly present, especially in the Lebanese channels that are mainly accustomed to this type of discourse due to their long experience covering the Lebanese civil wars. With the emergence of international dialogue initiatives through the first and second Geneva conferences and subsequent rounds, and calls from peaceful opposition forces for raising the voice of reason, listening to people's demands, activating internal dialogue, and directing the guns of the regime and the opposition towards ISIS and Al-Nusra. Those channels' calls intensified to combat dialogue under the slogan "No dialogue with those whose hands have been stained by the Syrians' blood," "No dialogue with terrorists," and "No dialogue with killers," refusing to distinguish between an opponent and a "terrorist." and that "the demand for dialogue is a trick to gain time and avoid the inevitable defeat." As for the coverage of the Geneva Dialogue Rounds, which are taking place under the umbrella of the United Nations and the Americans' and Russians' auspices, between the regime and the opposition forces, they demand to make the title "fighting terrorism" before any other condition and that the dialogue "will lead to nothing." And if the state forgives the killers, "we will not forgive" and "the people of the martyrs will not forgive," the solution is not dialogue but rather "military resolution," which is the slogan that has become the mainstay in this direction.

2.6.2 Opposition media

The list of media outlets opposed to the regime goes on and on. Locally, their numbers are few due to the unstable field situation of the armed opposition forces, most notably Orient TV, which broadcasts from Turkish territory (a studied sample). As for the Arab world, the Qatari channel Al-Jazeera (a studied sample) topped the list, which launched a new channel called Al-Jazeera, Syria Mubasher, as well as the Saudi Al-Arabiya channel and its affiliate Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath channel. Instead of enumerating the names of all the opposition channels, it can be said that they are the media outlets that revolve in the orbit of the Gulf media and a number of local media outlets in northern Syria supported by the Turkish government.

Let us briefly review the common discourse of these media, and in parallel to what we reviewed about the pro-government media, we can say the following:

The beginning is with the emergence of a "popular movement" with justified popular demands to gain "freedom" and "dignity." With the emergence of excessive government violence, the ceiling of popular demands rose to the maximum, and the necessity became to "overthrow the regime." Therefore, the popular movement has become a "popular revolution." This revolution tried for six months to maintain its "peacefulness," but government violence forced it to "arm." Weapons are "a necessity imposed by the regime," and their job is to "protect peaceful demonstrators." This latter analysis prevailed in the second half of 2011 until 2012, when the "Free Syrian Army" and "unification of its factions" appeared to be a "revolutionary alternative" to the "regime army" or "Assad's army" (relative to Bashar al-Assad). The idea was that the political opposition must "unify its ranks" in order to form a "transitional governing council" to lead the country in the phase following the "fall of the regime." As for the ISIS organization that emerged in 2013, it was claimed to be "the creation

of the regime," which wants to shuffle the cards because it knows for sure that it has "inevitably fallen."

The overall discourse of news on a daily basis from early 2012 until late 2016 was as follows: The "regime is floundering" because its fall is approaching, as the information leaked by "Western diplomats" promises to "arm the opposition" and provide them with "quality weapons" and establish "training camps," which indicates that "the fall of the regime is imminent." People have to do nothing but have patience because "the Russians sold Assad in exchange for their interests in Ukraine." And that the Iranians accepted their abandonment of Assad in exchange for concluding the nuclear agreement with Washington, "Assad has become isolated," "a state of panic is dominating his militias," and that regular soldiers are "rushing to defect," assisted by "their brothers in the Free Army," and so on.

As for dialogue, "there is no dialogue with the criminal regime except to hand over power to the opposition," "trial Assad," and "execute him." Except for this, "dialogue is a deception in order for Assad to gain more time" and "to reproduce his regime." The Syrian people have tribal values, and "revenge" is one of their cultural values. The Syrians will not accept, "after so much bloodshed," to forgive the killer.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Objectives

In today's world, media organizations generally play an increasing role in shaping public opinion, making positions and decisions for individuals, and building collective memory. However, the role of these institutions is of exceptional importance in critical moments, such as election campaigns, social tensions, political crises, and others.

Wars come above all of the above in terms of the speed and succession of events and the need to quickly form positions, alignments, and alliances, so that the role of the media as “ideological institutions” becomes more revealing and franker, as said in *Manufacturing Consent* (Chomsky and Herman, 2004), imposing a specific scenario as a *fait accompli* and portraying it as the only available possibility.

In the case of the Syrian war, we claim that opportunities for dialogue and a political solution were possible from the first moment in the conflict and that specific international conditions and balances imposed an increase in the division and its transformation into a military conflict and thus weakened the possibility of a political solution. On this basis, the media, owned by parties that support military options, sought in their discourse to portray that military confrontation is the reality of the matter and that other options that would stop bloodshed are an unavailable possibility.

And although the Syrian war did indeed continue, deepen, and expand, claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of victims and displacing millions, as those media had expected, many years ago it returned to conclude its last chapters

through the path of a political solution and dialogue.⁴¹ What is remarkable is that the political solution was not impossible or imaginary from the beginning, as long as today it is making strides and successive rounds on the rubble of the grinding war.

The governments and political parties that own the same media, which tried to deny the possibility of a political solution in the past, are the parties that meet today at the dialogue tables in many capitals of the world. On this basis, our study aims to identify the techniques used by the media in persuading the masses of what contradicts their deep interests, by promoting war to finally eliminate the opposite side, glorifying and justifying it morally, presenting it as a practical possibility for liberation and solving social problems, and undervaluing the options of dialogue and political solution.

On the other hand, our study is an attempt to keep the door of the question open regarding all the wars waged in the world: is there the possibility of resolving the crises that cause wars through political means and international understandings? What about the difference between the declared reasons for war propaganda and the real reasons for waging war? Thus, the goal is to always shed light on the techniques of justifying war in media discourse in general.

3.2 Scope and Limitations

Four TV channels were selected purposefully. We deliberately selected these media outlets that have been among the most followed ones since before the outbreak of the Syrian war, and therefore they had a previous public stock that they were able to benefit from while covering the Syrian war.

⁴¹ It ranges from reducing military escalation to stopping it completely. Through the Astana track, the negotiations of the Constitutional Committee, in which representatives of the opposition and the regime participate, resulted in Resolution 2254.

All four channels are Arabic-speaking, and this is intended in our study, which focuses on the discourse directed specifically at the masses of Syrians who speak mostly in Arabic, not at the masses or elites of other countries, as the focus in our study is on the attempt of these channels to mobilize the masses of Syrians in the war and blow up the idea of dialogue or the political solution in their minds.

Two of these channels are local: Sama TV, which is a pro-Syrian government channel owned by a businessman close to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad,⁴² was founded in 2007 under the name Donia TV, and in 2012, its name was changed to Sama after it was obscured by the Nilesat satellite. The other is the Orient Channel, which supports the Syrian armed opposition forces and began broadcasting in Damascus in 2009 and moved to Turkey during the Syrian war.⁴³

The other two non-local channels are Al-Jazeera, which is owned by the Qatari government and is a channel with a clear confrontation that matches the direction of its government, which is an opposition direction to the Syrian authority. The other is Al-Mayadeen TV, which is based in Lebanon and is a channel supported by the Iranian government and loyal to the Syrian authority. It is worth noting that this channel is the only one that was established after the Syrian war in 2012, except that its main media staff is from Al-Jazeera channel,⁴⁴ who left it immediately after the start of the Syrian war, in what looked like a collective resignation, in protest of Al-Jazeera's speech hostile to the Syrian authority. However, although it was founded after the outbreak of the Syrian war, its faces have a previous legacy through the Qatari Al-Jazeera channel.

⁴² Being owned by Muhammad Hamsho, this channel can generally be classified as being directly affiliated with the ruling elite in Damascus.

⁴³ It is owned by a Syrian businessman named Ghassan Abboud, a supporter of the armed opposition.

⁴⁴ The staff included Director Ghassan bin Jiddo, Sami Kulaib, Lina Zahreddine, and others.

So, the study deliberately chose opposite samples: two local channels versus two channels from other countries, and two channels loyal to the Syrian regime versus two channels opposing it. Such a sampling, we believe, allows us to be extremely objective in monitoring the discourse of the two parties regarding issues of war and a political solution in a balanced manner.

Our study will also focus on analyzing the discourse of TV presenters for the four channels, who are almost the main symbols in each of them. This is because the focus on the speech of the guests of these programs is not objective because they may have tendencies contrary to the policy of the channels in which they are hosted.

3.3 Research Questions

Our research will analyze the pro-government and opposition media's portrayals of dialogue or efforts to reach a political solution to the Syrian crisis by asking what answers they give to the following questions:

1. How is dialogue viewed from an ethical point of view, considering that the parties nominated to engage in the dialogue process may have practiced acts of violence and bloodshed, and that dialogue means recognizing their legitimacy? And if so, with whom should the dialogue take place, given that the violence is mutual?
2. Is one or both of the parties ineligible for dialogue in order to reach a political solution?
3. Is the dialogue between two militarily conflicting parties, whether in order to gain power or to exact retribution from the opposite party for committing acts of violence, in essence a political exit for a military surrender process?

4. Is accepting a resort to dialogue instead of achieving a decisive military victory over the opposing side before that a kind of falling into the trap of deception or political stupidity?

3.4 Method

The research was designed on the basis of purposive sampling and adopted a qualitative methodology. This selection helps to access informative cases (Patton, 2002) and sources composed of individuals or groups of individuals with specific knowledge of the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell and Plano-Clark, 2011). The talk here applies concretely to the media professionals and politicians who discuss the Syrian war on the four TV channels that were selected as samples and who work in this capacity as “specialists,” which is more eligible for analysis by a qualitative research method.

Work has also been done to ensure that the selection of samples is consistent with the objectives and underlying hypotheses of the research. Deepening understanding is the goal of most qualitative methods, in contrast to quantitative methods that aim to broaden understanding (Patton, 2002). Here it should be noted that the huge content that was broadcast through the international and local media about the Syrian war and its ramifications, which constituted a major event over several years in the media, prompted us in turn to select a limited number of samples and follow the qualitative method during a specific period of time that extends from the end of 2015 until the first three months of 2016, which we consider an ideal period for our subject, because it is the period that coincided with the issuance of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 against the backdrop of an American-Russian consensus that defined the initial features to start a political solution to the Syrian

crisis. This stage is of particular interest to our research. Because it is the stage that followed the expansion of armed conflicts in a way that included almost all of the Syrian lands, which led to almost total destruction of the infrastructure and waves of mass displacement towards neighboring countries and Europe. The popular desire for an end to the war at home and abroad and for urgent solutions to the humanitarian catastrophe deepened. At this particular time, we will analyze the discourse of media professionals and politicians specialized in Syrian affairs and monitor their reactions to the issues of war and dialogue, in a circumstance that can be said to provide at least the possibility of establishing a non-military solution.

Purposefully, the four TV channels were also chosen on the basis of their explicit and clear affiliation with specific government trends to highlight the link between discourse and power. As van Dijk states, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk, 1994)⁴⁵. On this basis, our current research discusses the discourse of multiple authorities, not one authority. These authorities meet in two opposite military trenches, yet they practice a common social injustice on the public by persuading and pushing it to accept the war through enticement and intimidation under various justifications. And when looking from the angle of duality (between the war and a political solution), we can notice that the contradictory authorities, who sponsor the media selected as samples, are only one authority: it is an authority calling for war in different locations.

⁴⁵ The source is available at <http://srirahayupku.blogspot.com/2016/10/critical-discourse-analysis-from-teun.html>

Norman Fairclough's theoretical framework on the relationship between language, discourse, and ideology provides a suitable foundation for the media texts we discuss. One of the most proximate ideas to our subject is that the recipient is responsible for bringing many assumptions into the process of interpretation, not the text. This suggests a powerful way to «impose assumptions upon recipient and interpreters generally: by placing the interpreter through textual cues that she has to entertain these assumptions if she is to make sense of the text» (Fairclough, 1989, p. 83). Persuasive discourse and propaganda always do this, often in quite obvious ways. Moreover, the operation of ideology can be seen in constructing texts «which constantly and cumulatively 'impose assumptions' upon text interpreters and text producers, typically without either being aware of it.»

The text interpreted according to implicit assumptions and textual cues ultimately formulates what Norman Fairclough calls «common sense,» which in-depth reflects a hidden ideology. He says: «Ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible. If one becomes aware that a particular aspect of common sense is sustaining power inequalities at one's own expense, it ceases to be common sense» (Fairclough, 1989, p. 83).

Invisibility is achieved when ideologies are brought to discourse not as explicit elements but as background assumptions, which, on the one hand, lead the text producer to "textualize" the world in a particular way and, on the other hand, lead the interpreter to interpret the text in a specific way. Texts do not typically show ideology, so they position the interpreter through their cues that bring ideologies to the interpretation of texts – and reproduce them in the process! Therefore, «the 'gap-filling,' the supplying of 'missing links' needed sequential coherence without

inferential 'work,' and automatic 'fitting' of text to the world, is of particular interest from an ideological perspective» (Fairclough, 1989, p. 85).

Accordingly, in the next chapter, we will seek to analyze both opposition and loyalist media discourses and reveal the imposition of assumptions and textual cues to build the public's "common sense" to accept the war.



CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

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

4.1 Al Jazeera Channel

Al-Jazeera is a channel owned by the Qatari government, according to its identification data.⁴⁶ The *Opposite Direction* talk show, which has been broadcast live every Tuesday evening since 1996 until today, is one of the most popular programs on the island. This program is presented by the Syrian broadcaster Faisal Al-Qasim, who hosts two opposing personalities on the topic of discussion, and this is accompanied by an online vote by viewers in one of the two formulas (yes-no). With the encouragement of the broadcaster, the discussions between the two parties often witness intensity, which may sometimes lead to an exchange of personal accusations or insults and the withdrawal of one of the guests from the dialogue.

Since its outbreak, the Syrian war has occupied a large part of this program. Personalities loyal to the Syrian regime were hosted against opposition figures, and the discussion often took the form of accusations and abuses. However, in our studied case, the episode entitled “Why the Syrian People Revolted” was chosen, which was shown on December 12, 2015, several days after the issuance of Resolution 2254 on the political solution to the Syrian crisis (on December 18, 2015). These were the

⁴⁶ Chairman of the Board of Directors: Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani, from the Qatari ruling family.

guests: Nasr Hariri (former head of the Syrian opposition coalition and later head of the opposition negotiating committee in Geneva), versus Kamal al-Labwani, a more radical Syrian oppositionist who is hostile to dialogue and a political solution.

4.1.1 Ethical perspective

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

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

The first direction: How does the Syrian opposition accept negotiating power-sharing with a regime that has killed more than a million Syrians and displaced half of them? How do you secure the side of the treacherous intelligence system? (...) Have the lambs ever negotiated with the wolves? What is left for the Syrians to lose? Shouldn't they negotiate with Bashar al-Assad in the form of the execution he deserves? Will the opponents of Bashar get anything but a Ministry of (National) Garbage and Sanitation? What is the value of negotiating with the regime as long as intelligence and the army are in the hands of the fascists? (...) Isn't the negotiation a total surrender to Hitler of the era and his associates from murderers and thieves?⁴⁷

The opposite direction: But on the other hand, do not all conflicts and wars usually end in negotiation? Do those calling for the continuation of the conflict want to fight to the last Syrian? Has the Syrian catastrophe not turned into the worst tragedy in the world since World War II? Isn't the victory of the opposition over the regime or the regime over the opposition forbidden in the first place? Is there an international will stronger than all Syrians to stop the conflict? Aren't negotiations the most effective way to preserve what is left of Syria? Isn't the alternative dividing the country forever? Isn't the exit of the murderous president a foregone conclusion, even if it was not included in International Resolution 2254?⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (00:21-01:45): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo>

⁴⁸ *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (01:45-03:5): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo>

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

In fact, the presenter's introduction, which we have cited almost completely, provides a rich example of the media discourse that Al-Jazeera pursues in its approach to the Syrian crisis. Although the presenter put forward what is supposed to be two opposite points of view, which is the protocol followed in the program, the position is clear in both cases. It is undervaluing the importance of the dialogue because he either completely rejects it as a “principled” position in the first direction or portrays it as an annoying concession in the opposite direction. In the beginning, the assumption that there are just two opposite points of view in approaching the subject is in itself a reduction and exclusion of many approaches on any subject. Subsequently, presenting the descriptive data accompanying the questions of the episode, such as the numbers of dead and displaced persons, without having a clear reference and ignoring the existence of counter-military violence from the armed opposition and its responsibility for the numbers of displaced dead, is one of the shorthand methods in the propaganda industry. In the intervention of Ahad Nasr Al-Hariri, he also refers to numbers that the broadcaster Al-Qasim does not comment on. Nasr Al-Hariri says:

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

heroes of the Free Army (opposition fighters) took control of most of the Syrian lands.⁴⁹

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

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

⁴⁹ *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (04:40-05:25): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo>

Noam Chomsky, in the context of exposing propaganda, refers to the theory of Walter Lippmann, which looks at how to create a public consensus towards something that was rejected in the beginning. Within six months, the committee tasked with mobilizing Americans to participate in World War I, with a good mix of the real and the mythical, was publishing pictures of the Germans as exceptional war criminals, cutting off the hands of children in Belgium, destroying cities, heading towards the annihilation of humanity, and so on. propaganda that turned the Americans' negative attitude towards the war into a hysterical desire to destroy all that is German and save the world from their fire (Chomsky, 1991). The similarities between the above and our case can simply be noted.

When examining the composition of the aforementioned TV episode, starting from the title to the affiliations of the guests, the introduction given by the broadcaster, and the percentage of votes on the episode's question, Norman Fairclough's argument that media texts impose certain assumptions on interpreters comes to mind. Fairclough (1989) says: "The powerful way in which to impose assumptions upon readers and interpreters" is to do so by "placing the interpreter through textual cues that she has to entertain these assumptions if she is to make sense of the text" (p. 83).

In our concrete case, and specifically related to morality, the question and answer are driven in a way that prompts the recipient to reach one conclusion, which is the immorality of going to dialogue with the opposite party and makes it seem intuitive, so the discussion becomes about dealing with that step that lacks morality in a principled spirit. There are many examples of this in the data quoted above: The episode's title is "Why Did the Syrian People Revolt?" According to the method and

presentation of the text, the interpreter-recipient is obliged to accept that the dialogue is a bad option, and the discussion ultimately begins after this idea.

4.1.2 Eligibility

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

Al-Qasim asks the following:

What do you say to people? This regime does not work with solutions, so save what you have in money to buy weapons to confront this murderous regime. Because if they return, they will slaughter every Syrian who presses 'like' on Facebook (against power). These are the existing gangs. What do you tell them? Are you saying he understands something other than the barrel of a gun?⁵⁰

Al-Labwani says:

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

⁵⁰ *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (07:10-08:00): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo>

destroying the social contract. If you destroy the basis of social existence, this will result in a real catastrophe, and we will pay the price for it all.⁵¹

As for the Syrian regime, Al-Labwani says: "If an employee wants to apply for a job, he needs a clean criminal record." He then asks, "How do you establish a dialogue with an international criminal (Bashar al-Assad), who has no legal capacity?" Al-Qassem follows, "nor mental capacity." Nasr al-Hariri also, according to a previous quote in the previous paragraph, considered the regime "non-existent" according to the losses it received.

The style followed by the three in this episode presents an almost unified approach to the dialogue that is taken as axioms by the viewer. First, the regime, which does not understand the language of violence, is legally or mentally incompetent or does not exist for one of the guests. Second, according to Al-Labawani, it proved disqualified because he regarded the possibility of going to dialogue as an "immoral" political solution. In this context, we must discuss the idea of what is required of dialogue, or the function of dialogue. If the conditions for legal capacity, legitimacy, and a record free of acts of violence were basically met by both the regime and the opposition, then there would be no need for dialogue in the first place. Power could have been transferred through elections, for example. The three attendees ignore the idea that dialogue is a process that will gradually restore the level of eligibility and legitimacy of both parties and that dialogue is a struggle (Habermas, 2003) that leads to new positions different from those before the process. Signs like these, which the three attendees work jointly to portray, give audiences the impression that dialogue has an unattainable purpose. On the other hand, the issue can be raised in a completely opposite way, in the sense that if certain obstacles hinder the start of a

⁵¹ *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (08:00-11:05): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo>

dialogue, what is needed to secure the minimum conditions for starting a dialogue as an alternative to bloody violence might be asked, like a last point of view not featured in the full episode.

The set of implicit assumptions to which media discourse is driven constitutes what Norman Fairclough calls "common sense," closely related to ideology. Fairclough (1989) says: "Common sense' is substantially, though not entirely, ideological.... that ideology be regarded as essentially tied to power relations. Let us correspondingly understand ideological common sense as common sense in the service of sustaining unequal relations of power" (p. 84). The announcer and the two guests collectively launch many "axioms" that constitute "common sense" in rejecting dialogue in terms of the lack of conditions that qualify for this dialogue. This matter aims to make the audience forget that dialogue without preconditions is necessary to stop a humanitarian disaster.

4.1.3 Dialogue: a victory or a surrender?

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

Whoever does not accept Assad will be classified as a terrorist, and whoever accepts him will fight alongside him. So you lost militarily. Politically, you accepted that your opponent would remain in power (saying to Nasr al-Hariri), and therefore you lost politically.⁵²

Faisal Al-Qasim says:

This is a very important point. As soon as I started dialogue with this regime, I gave it a deed of innocence. Some say that if they were in Bashar

⁵² *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (12:10-13:10): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo>

al-Assad's place, he would have made the day of Resolution 2254 a "Assadian" day (like a holiday) because it exempted him from everything.⁵³

Nasr al-Hariri says:

Bashar al-Assad and those who support him will not go away unless there is a strong positive military balance in favor of the Syrian revolution, and this requires the revolutionaries to close ranks and increase support from our friends for these fighters (meaning the countries supporting the opposition).⁵⁴

In the same way, the three attendees continue, but from a new angle. Sometimes the regime will win politically if the opposition accepts dialogue (Al-Labwani), and sometimes the political solution is based on the military victory of the opposition, which makes the solution political-military (Nasr Al-Hariri). The broadcaster makes the international resolution an instrument of the innocence of the regime from its crimes. The issue of dialogue or a political solution is not approached in the three previous statements except on the basis that it is part of the military deception.

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

⁵³ *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (14:15-15: 12): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo>

⁵⁴ *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (17:30-24:50): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo>

from the two existing models. At the same time, the outcomes of victory or defeat are exclusively one of the two sides of the old model.

4.1.3 Political naivety

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

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

You say that the fighting could stop. Do you really believe that? If it were possible, it would have at least certain signs. What you are doing is not right. You are manipulating the feelings of people who have been brought to a state of acceptance by the international community for any solution in exchange for a bite to eat. If the negotiation fails, Syria will be divided. Therefore, you have entered us into an untrue battle. You promise to return the people to the country; how will you return under the authority of the regime? This is a joke, right? I am not only afraid of negotiation; I am even afraid of the negotiating team itself. They want our youth in the "Free Army" to fight their brothers in "Jabhat al-Nusra" and "Ahrar al-Sham"⁵⁵ on the grounds that these are extremists. I morally cannot accept what you say⁵⁶.

Nasr Hariri answers back as follows:

I am not at all optimistic about the political process, and I do not expect its fate to be better than that of Geneva 2, as the gap between the two parties is very deep. The international resolution seeks to re-float Bashar al-Assad, and our expectations are very low on this issue.⁵⁷

Thus, we find that Al-Labwani portrays those who deal with the idea of dialogue, even as an option, as deceived. He makes general assumptions about the fact that, as soon as you accept dialogue, you have politically admitted the regime, as if what is

⁵⁵ Organizations classified internationally as terrorists.

⁵⁶ *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (19:21-20:15): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo>

⁵⁷ *Opposite Direction*, (22/12/2015), (34:45-41:00): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpXeJKledo>

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

The mentioning of a dialogue or meeting between the government and the opposition has shaken Mr. Labwani's "common ideological sense." This necessitated the return of sound ideological sense to the primacy position. Norman Fairclough points out that when discourse is disturbed, its producers seek to "foregrounded common sense, or to return it to the forefront." (Fairclough, 1989, p. 106) Another situation where common-sense elements are "spontaneously' foregrounded is where there is a "sufficiently large social or cultural divide between participants in an exchange, or between participants in and observers of an exchange, for the

arbitrariness and social relativity of the common sense of one to be evident to others." (Fairclough, 1989, p. 106).

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

4.2 Sama TV Channel

This sampled channel appeared in 2007 under the name of the Dunya satellite channel, as a private channel, at the stage when the Syrian government at that time adopted a liberal approach in the economic sense and with the emergence of new businessmen supported by President Bashar al-Assad, among whom was the owner of the channel, Muhammad Hamsho, a businessman and a member of the Syrian Parliament. It can simply be said that this channel falls within the common description of "pro-government," and it continues to follow the same trend today. It is noteworthy that its name was changed to Sama TV in 2012 because it was blocked on the Nilesight satellite with its name and previous frequency as part of the sanctions against the regime at the time.

The TV program "Nabd Al Sharq,"⁵⁸ presented by Hanaa Saleh, who is one of the most prominent media figures on the channel to this day, hosted Dr. Mahdi Dakhilallah, the former Minister of Information and the former Syrian ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on November 3, 2015, to talk about the consultations and preparations for the dialogue conferences in Geneva on the Syrian crisis.

⁵⁸ The name of program means "east pulse."

4.2.1 Ethical perspective

The introduction to the program was as follows:

Geneva is witnessing intense movement to prepare for new rounds of dialogue, the date of which is still standing, amid many disagreements. The Syrian state will not dialogue with armed terrorist groups, and the opposition coalition is still awaiting the Saudi order and disputes over who represents the opposition. Amidst all this, the Saudi pledge to take over the war on Syria remains in light of training, arming, and trying to find a moderately armed organization in brackets. The Syrian wind blew in a way that the ships of its enemies did not desire until this moment.⁵⁹

Hanaa Saleh asks: “Is it possible to reach a consensual formula according to what the Syrian state says, as Dr. Faisal Mekdad⁶⁰ said, nothing will pass without informing the Syrian presidency of it. We will not engage terrorist armed groups whose hands are stained with Syrian blood.”

Dakhlallah states: “Syria hopes and tries, and there is a diplomatic game, but I am not speaking according to desires. I speak according to reality. Desires are what you say, but the reality is that Syria is under external attack.”

The announcer then questions: “Could this be required to improve their negotiating conditions (the opposition) in order to obtain sovereign portfolios in the government, for example, from the Syrian presidency in the presence of Geneva?”

Dakhlallah replies:

The legitimate Syrian party plays diplomatic games with great skill. Notice that they sometimes equate themselves with the opposite party, and they represent 23 million Syrians legitimately and under an existing Syrian constitution. But in reality, the Syrian state cannot be represented as a party. The Syrian state represents a people. Well, let's say that they

⁵⁹ *Nabd Al Sharq*, (03/11/2015), (00:30- 01:25): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wIwILSPDt4>

⁶⁰ He was then deputy foreign minister, and he is currently foreign minister.

represent a percentage. How much do they represent? The Istanbul Coalition: how much does it represent? For example, who chose them? Saudi Arabia, America, Turkey, and those who pay them salaries—how do these represent the Syrian people? And even if they represent someone, what is our business with Geneva? There are ballot boxes, so please go ahead and let the Syrian people elect you, and the story ends; there is no need for Geneva or anything else. The criterion is that the people who come to the polls have this courage, isn't it?⁶¹

He also adds: "Syria, which has popular legitimacy, cannot accept international legitimacy because Syria is not a state in a vacuum or that is forming now."

First, It can be noted that the broadcaster has a biased position on the side of the Syrian authority, and does not show any form of formal neutrality in her performance. The broadcaster is describing the Syrian government, regime, or authority as the "Syrian state." The opposite side is the "terrorist groups," not the opposition. The opposition is waiting for orders from regional countries. And Saudi Arabia runs the war in Syria. This discourse, in such a case, especially since it is issued by a program presenter, rises to the level of the war media, which seems clear that it is not only far from talk with other parties about the idea of dialogue but also the opening of a discussion with the same party itself. The introduction to the program is full of words with clear ideological content, and the results are also summed up in Hanaa Saleh's saying that "the Syrian government will not dialogue with those whose hands are stained with blood." As for the guest, he describes the war in the country as an "external attack," in another reduction of the scene in which, in addition to the external attack, there are local opponents, some of whom are armed and some of whom are peaceful, in addition to the existence of a crisis of governance in the country.

⁶¹ *Nabd Al Sharq*, (03/11/2015), (19:40- 20:44): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wlwILSPDt4>

It can be said that this dialogue represents a typical case of the abuse of power as manifested in discourse. One of the representative descriptions of this matter is the guest's naming of the authority as the "legitimate party" as a noun rather than an adjective, which assumes that an illegitimate counterpart will sit on the opposite side of the table. Likewise, the program's guest believes that the authority represents all Syrians and that its acceptance of negotiation is just a diplomatic game. The circle is completed by all of the previous statements to form a structure of discourse, which corresponds to one of social perceptions.

To the question of "What is the connection of naturalization to the ideological common sense?" Norman Fairclough (1989) replies: "Naturalization is the royal road to common sense. Ideologies come to be ideological common sense to the extent that the discourse types which embody them become naturalized" (p. 92). The saying here applies to the guest's claims that the regime represents all the Syrians and that its going to negotiations is nothing but a maneuver. He presents a so-called natural truth the state authority represents all the people.

4.2.2 Eligibility

The announcer asks the following:

International newspapers are talking about the fact that the relationship between the opposition and its operators has become fragile and that it no longer receives support; corruption in the ranks of the opposition; the increase of Islamic influence; and the cleverness of the Syrian state with the political file, according to the New York Times. Is this a concrete reality?⁶²

⁶² *Nabd Al Sharq*, (03/11/2015), (29:25- 31:08): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wIwILSPDt4>

Dakhlallah replies:

As for the so-called foreign opposition, it certainly suffers from loss, and I will tell you why: They expected that Syria would fall within two or three months and that they would come as presidents and ministers instead of the regime. This did not happen. They promised military support, but they did not succeed. They promised to overthrow the state through an American attack, but they did not succeed. The army, the people, and the state are cohesive despite the pain, the victims, and the fierce terrorist war, and this disappointed them.⁶³

The announcer then asks, "That is why some of the gunmen laid down their weapons and fled. Do you think that if a meeting is held in Geneva next month, it will be the end of the Syrian crisis? Yes or no?"

Dakhlallah replies back as follows:

If it succeeds, the well-known path is a popular referendum and a national pact, an agreement between the Syrians without outside interference, so with whom will you agree among the Syrians if these (the opposition) are employed abroad? This is the problem.⁶⁴

According to what was mentioned above, the party that does not have the capacity for dialogue is the opposition, as long as the regime has solid foundations. The presenter of the program uses various references to confirm this: "fragile relations with allies," "corruption," and "increasing Islamic tide" as phrases with a clear meaning for the opposite side's inability to engage in dialogue. The guest meets it with a description he calls the "external opposition," and they are "employees abroad." It also has a similar style. The word "external" in the aforementioned context has a specific meaning, which is the opposition's affiliation with the outside as an identity. This is required to challenge the patriotism and locality of the opposition. Despite the

⁶³ *Nabd Al Sharq*, (03/11/2015), (31:30- 32:30): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wIwILSPDt4>

⁶⁴ *Nabd Al Sharq*, (03/11/2015), (32:30- 33:00): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wIwILSPDt4>

possibility of the presence of foreign, external, and non-local parties in the ongoing fighting in Syria, the guest did not distinguish or separate the presence of more than one direction but rather used the generalization to put the name of the opposition under national suspicion in a state of denial of the other.

Fairclough (1989) considers that “common sense in its ideological dimension is an effect of power. What comes to be common sense is thus, in large measure, determined by who exercises power and domination in a society or a social institution (p. 92). This idea prompts us to look at the guest’s background as a long-term political official serving the authority, as a minister and ambassador. Therefore, classifying the opposition as a foreign agent is at the heart of his job as a manufacturer of “common sense.”

4.2.3 Dialogue: a victory or surrender?

The announcer says the following: “Can we say that the Geneva 2 convening is a victory for Syria?” Mahdi Dakhlallah’s reply was as follows:

Yes, in the form that Syria and the Syrian people want, it is a victory for Syria." When we talk about any dialogue, and there is a difference between dialogue and negotiation, dialogue means that every gain for one party is a gain for the other, while in negotiation, every gain for one party is a loss for the other party. We look at it as a dialogue. Therefore, it is necessary first to create the environment, whether for dialogue or negotiation, and for there to be unity in the general objectives, and then talk about the structure. The environment that precedes Geneva—is it ready? The state environment is better than before, but let's talk about the goals: regardless of whether America, its followers, or the Istanbul coalition, they want to achieve through Geneva what they were unable to achieve through negotiation.⁶⁵

He continues with the following sentences:

⁶⁵ *Nabd Al Sharq*, (03/11/2015), (11:30- 13:12): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wIwILSPDt4>

With regard to Syria, and I do not represent the government, but I also read the position of the Syrian legitimate side, let this body be a national unity government, but according to the existing Syrian constitution, because it is not possible to deal with Syria as if it is a non-existent state, as if they want to create a state called Syria, so it must be dealt with within the framework of the will of the people and the will of the institutions that were elected by the people. Therefore, the disagreement lies in the premises and in the goals. Their goal is to end the Syrian phenomenon and achieve what they were unable to do with weapons.⁶⁶

According to many of the previous meanings, including the description of the authority in the Syrian state in the introduction to the program, the announcer's reference to "Syria's victory" symbolizes the Syrian authority. and we do not believe, after the introduction that we described in the first part of this chapter, that it means the whole of loyalist and opposition Syria. Likewise, the guest's proposal that victory is possible through Geneva if "a government of national unity within the current constitution" is an idea in itself is inherently hostile to a political solution. The current constitution grants absolute powers to the President of the Republic, including the dissolution and reconstitution of the government, for example. Through this maneuver, the guest, who is a former diplomat, is actually seeking to say that victory could be achieved by burying the initiative for a political solution in a specific legal status in the current constitution. Because he knows that such a proposal does not resonate among the opposition, he goes back and says that everything other than this scenario is an attempt to achieve what Syria's enemies failed to achieve with weapons. So, the formal support for the idea of a political solution in this case is nothing but a case of raising the blame.

The imposition of certain assumptions on the listener can also lead to other functions. According to Norman Fairclough (1989), "They also do other things, also

⁶⁶ *Nabd Al Sharq*, (03/11/2015), (13:12- 14:25): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wIwILSPDt4>

in varying degrees, such as establishing and consolidating solidarity relations among members of a particular social grouping" (p. 84). Excessive talk about victory on a channel loyal to the Syrian regime and from a former Syrian official lead to strengthening solidarity with the alliance or the loyal trench without making any effort to negotiate with the opposing side.

4.2.4 Political naivety

The announcer asks, "Do you think that the road to Geneva 2 has become paved and easy, or are there many bumps?"

The host replies as follows:

Absolutely not. If it were easy, it would have been held next week. But giving a two-month period is, in fact, because this uproar hides disappointments and unsuitable positions for Geneva. Another reason for the uproar emanating from Geneva is to distract the Syrians from other dangerous possibilities, which is for Israel to do, for example, what the United States could not do, namely the comprehensive aggression against Syria in support of the terrorists. Ashes are practically being thrown into the eyes, and there is talk of peace and that we have reached the point of a political solution, while an aggression against the country is being prepared.⁶⁷

He adds the following:

We must not put our heads in the sand and say that Geneva is coming and that a political solution seems very close, as if the United States of America and its allies suddenly loved peace... I am talking about reality, not desires.⁶⁸

In this context, the guest also points out that talking about dialogue and a political solution is a trap to lure those who believe in them. For example, the saying that the

⁶⁷ *Nabd Al Sharq*, (03/11/2015), (03:10-04: 45): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wIwILSPDt4>

⁶⁸ *Nabd Al Sharq*, (03/11/2015), (04:45- 06:34): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wIwILSPDt4>

political solution is to “distract the Syrians” calls us to ask the question: what exactly is distracting the Syrians? We believe that what is intended is to give hope to those who have been forced to fight on the frontlines, including soldiers, members of the military and security forces, and their families. As for the guest's warning of a military action launched by Israel at such moments, it is nothing more than a maneuver to alienate viewers from the idea of a solution. It is logical that, as a former diplomat close to the decision-making circles in Syria, he knows very well that sponsorship of the dialogue in Geneva is under the supervision of the two most prominent international powers in the world, Russia and the United States, and that this umbrella does not allow regional powers to venture in the way he warns of.

The warning against a political solution by trying to highlight an allegedly significant danger, such as the Israeli aggression, confirms what Fairclough (1989) puts forward: "Those who hold power at a particular moment have to reassert their power constantly" (p. 68). The guest does this by raising a dangerous possibility to eliminate the need for dialogue or a political solution because the latter makes his authority (the authority of the regime) subject to discussion and criticism.

4.3 Orient News Channel

Orient News was established in Damascus in late 2008 and is owned by a Syrian businessman, Ghassan Abboud. The channel was launched under the new direction of the Syrian authorities at that time, which was the gradual licensing of private channels owned by businessmen connected to the government. in line with the stage of economic openness under the title "Social Market Economy," but under the control of political authority. With the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, the channel's orientation towards the opposition changed completely, and due to the Syrian

authorities at the time closing and holding all opposition media accountable, the channel's focus moved to Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. To this day, the TV channel adopts a hard-line opposition discourse on the Syrian crisis.

On December 21, 2015, Radio Orient, which is broadcast on the channel, hosted, in the *Zawia Harija* program, Syrian dissidents to discuss Resolution 2254, three days after its issuance. The episode was presented by Hani Mawed. And guests: Ahmed Kamel (a Syrian journalist who worked for the BBC and Al-Jazeera previously) and Mulham Droubi (a member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood). The episode title was "The complex of Assad's fate continues after Resolution 2254."

The introduction was as follows:

Bashar al-Assad is still in power in Syria, despite the recent UN resolution. Many obstacles prevent the implementation of the decision, most notably the fate of Assad, and if attitudes towards him remain as they are, then how will the solution be pronounced early next year? Perhaps the fate of Assad will be a reason for thwarting or delaying the solution. Is the latter consistent with the Russian orientation? Is the decision a coup against the decisions of the previous Geneva, and is not placing the resolution under Article VII beneficial to the opposition so that it is not bound by its implementation, and why is the Syrian revolution ignored in the UN resolutions, considering that what is happening is a crisis and a struggle for power?⁶⁹

4.3.1 Ethical perspective

The announcer asks to Ahmed Kamel the following: "There is a lot of talk that this decision is in the interest of Syria. Do you agree with that?"

Ahmed replies back as follows:

⁶⁹ *Zawia Harija*, (21/12/2015), (00:30- 02:40): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LVXQCuHxwI>

Never. This decision is 100% in favor of the regime and Russia. It is not binding and does not address the essence of the problem, which is Bashar al-Assad; that is, if the problem is the authoritarian regime in Syria, this decision does not address this problem.⁷⁰

The announcer then says:

Mr. Ahmed, why don't we wait for negotiations and the start of the political process to see what happens, because the international community has not and will not recognize the Syrian revolution; it only recognizes that there is only a struggle for power, and we know fully that there is no real support for this orphan revolution?⁷¹

Ahmad Kamel's answer was as follows:

Since the beginning of the revolution, the world and the major powers have been against it, but it continued and expelled the regime from 80% of the territory. We are victorious, and the regime and the Russians are in trouble because they failed to win the will of the Syrian people. There is nothing left for the regime to negotiate with, and it is now defeated and using its last card. As for us, we have to exercise our full rights because the issue is likely to be a compromise and there is no middle ground. Syria needs freedom, and the decision aims to keep the regime in perpetuity. Well, where is the settlement? Do they want us to mark our slavery? No, we will fight. We will fight. Either the massacre continues and the regime remains without our consent, or the massacre will continue and the regime will continue with our consent.⁷²

The opposition media in general, including the studied sample, insist on using the phrase “the Syrian revolution.” Regardless of whether or not this description applies to the popular movement in Syria from the point of view of social science, in terms of discourse analysis, we can shed light on a number of issues with the ideological content of this statement. First, the use of the word “revolution” has a legal meaning from a moral point of view, and it can contribute to gaining political and media

⁷⁰ *Zawia Harija*, (21/12/2015), (04:30- 04:56): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LVXQCuHxwI>

⁷¹ *Zawia Harija*, (21/12/2015), (05:07- 5:40): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LVXQCuHxwI>

⁷² *Zawia Harija*, (21/12/2015), (05:40- 6:10): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LVXQCuHxwI>

support and sympathy. Secondly, this word has a specific connotation that suggests inclusiveness; in other words, it suggests that it is the choice of an entire people and not a specific political group. Thirdly, this word is a legal and moral cover for acts of bloody violence.

As for the guest, Ahmed Kamel, he believes from the outset that the removal of the "tyrannical regime" is what should be issued by the UN resolution, not a decision by dialogue.

Guest Ahmed Kamel, according to his "moral" principle, believes that the massacre will continue without our agreement. He never discussed any ways to stop the massacre. Recording a stance for him remains the only possible revolutionary ideal.

Moreover, since all discourse producers "must produce with some interpreters in mind, what media producers do is address an ideal subject, be it viewer, listener, or reader," Fairclough (1989, p. 49) says. "Media discourse has built into it a subject position for an ideal subject, and actual viewers or listeners or readers have to negotiate a relationship with the ideal subject" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 49).

Accordingly, talking about the "Syrian revolution" with the whole moral, legal, and representative charge we mentioned above only embodies that discourse directed at the ideal self. The recipient finds himself compelled in front of this type of discourse, which is, in essence, a rejection of a political solution and dialogue, to deal with it, negotiate with it, and go along with it temporarily until it is confirmed.

4.3.2 Eligibility

The announcer asks, “So what is required?” Ahmed Kamel says the following:

What we need to say is that the opposition delegation is no longer like that. Rather, the regime has its own delegation, and three-quarters of the other delegation also has one. These people are going to put their fingerprints on the survival of the regime and the defeat of the Syrian people. There is nothing left but to ask us to sign on for the survival of the regime. They will agree to the regime’s demands because they brought many of the regime’s agents into the Riyadh delegation. The worst thing about this decision is that it makes Staffan de Mistura (the United Nations envoy to Syria) the guardian of the Syrian people, and he is an ally and friend of the Russians. We must say no. Either we negotiate with the regime to transform Syria into a democratic state according to Geneva One, or we say to them, “No, we don’t want to.”⁷³

The announcer then says, “The question is for Mulham Al-Droubi: Do you agree with Ahmed, and how do you see the decision?” Mulham answers, “We are still studying the decision because it is not clear,” and adds the following:

There is a continuous process of diluting the Syrian cause and the revolutionary color of the Syrian opposition through the continuous expansion of the delegation representing the Syrian opposition in Riyadh and the introduction of personalities who can be described as the Trojan Horse, including the outputs of Moscow, Cairo, and Astana. There are only a few of them left who we can say are patriots and that they really represent the Syrian revolution.⁷⁴

Ahmed Kamel classifies half or three-quarters of the opposition as traitors, classifying them as agents of the regime, which means that the proposed opposition delegation is completely disqualified. But he returns and demands the transformation of Syria into a democratic state. This is contradictory, as according to the quotations of the previous chapter, he rejected the UN resolution completely, but in the quotation

⁷³ Zawia Harija, (21/12/2015), (10:20- 12:00): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LVXQCuHxwI>

⁷⁴ Zawia Harija, (21/12/2015), (12:04- 12:30): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LVXQCuHxwI>

contained in the current chapter, we find that it transcends its first principle and moves to formation in the second stage. Likewise, he excludes, by value judgment, three-quarters of the opposition delegation, so that his future Syria will be democratic. As for Molham Droubi, he also goes back to practicing prejudgment against the opposition delegation, “reducing the opposition’s revolutionary color.”

In fact, this indicates exactly that the personalities proposed to be added to the opposition delegation are not involved in armed action but rather reject it.⁷⁵ This makes it, according to al-Droubi, less patriotic and does not serve the "revolution" with an armed legacy. In fact, many opposition media frequently repeat these two “revolutionary patriotic” adjectives to describe the armed opposition on the ground as having “sacrifices” and “blood” on the ground in exchange for an unarmed peaceful opposition or figures calling for dialogue since the beginning of the crisis; the latter, according to them, lose weight as a result of this duality. Therefore, it is indicated that they should not be represented at all (according to Mr. Ahmed Kamel). Or they should be represented symbolically, as Mulham Droubi suggests.

In this particular context, a problem arises in this discourse. Who has priority in representing and leading the dialogue process? Is it for those who bet on the military option and still confuse it with a political solution, or for the political forces that rejected violence on both sides and called for dialogue instead of violence?

Such irony is true of Norman Fairclough’s (1989) description that “Common sense turns out to be something of an ideological sleight of hand!” (p. 94). At the outset and in whole “principled spirit,” the two guests put forward their first option, the armed “revolutionary” option. They condemn the forces that did not participate in militarization and that bet on a political solution, describing them as weak,

⁷⁵ The outputs of Moscow, Cairo and Astana generally refuse the armed conflicts.

revolutionary, and patriotic. Then, they say that the party that should be represented in the dialogue is the forces most attached to military action.

4.3.2 Dialogue: a victory or surrender?

The announcer states, "There are those who say that cease-fire perhaps save the country and prevent the flow of refugees and the flow of blood in Syria."

Ahmed Kamel replies back as:

These are texts to laugh at us and pass the time. President Obama stayed until the end of his term for several months because he wanted to waste time, and the Russians got the legitimacy of being in Syria. Imagine that there is no mention of the Russian or Iranian occupation in the resolution, while the terrorists are mentioned and their actions are mentioned. In detail, the fact that the number of killings doubled after the issuance of this decision indicates that whoever signed the decision does not have good intentions and does not guarantee that he will be compelled in any way.⁷⁶

Ahmed Kamel haphazardly presents a set of facts from international politics, "Obama's term," and broadcasts a secret about "handing over Syria to the Russians." He asserts that the decision focuses on the terrorists' actions in detail and confirms the multiplication of killings after the issuance of the decision.

It is the same process of intimidation from the political solution that is presented to the audiences. It is to pass the time by killing more opponents to achieve a military victory. This is what the guest seeks to achieve by describing the international and Syrian situations in this way.

Norman Fairclough (1989) uses the concept of automatic gap-filling to imply "coherence between the sequential parts of a text." He says, "Implicit assumptions

⁷⁶ *Zawia Harija*, (21/12/2015), (06:10- 07:08): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LVXQCuHxwI>

chain successive parts of texts by supplying 'missing links' between explicit propositions, which the hearer/reader either supplies automatically or works out through inferencing" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 81). The successive parts mentioned by Ahmed Kamel prove his idea that the dialogue round aims to stop the opposition's military victory or that it is a scenario for Obama to get out of his impasse. It is precisely the process of automatically filling the gaps to promote his ideological assumption that the military option must succeed. It is expected that specific segments of the masses can adopt the same ideological position regarding the political position of the dialogue without regard to the degree of correspondence between this discourse and the objective facts.

4.3.4 Political naivety

The announcer then asks, "Is not placing the latest UN resolution under Article VII⁷⁷ more beneficial to the opposition than the regime so that the opposition is not forced to implement it, given that the resolution has not yet been approved by the opposition?"

The following is said by Molham Droubi: "Any decision not under Article VII has no value because the decision is not concerned with terrorist factions, and therefore we are facing an unknown list that may include all Syrians under the title of terrorism."

We rely on the last quote and the quote in the previous paragraph together: The decision is to "laugh at the opposition," according to Mr. Ahmed, or that the decision in a legal situation gives the opposition a privilege "not to implement it," according to

⁷⁷ The seventh item refers to the implementation of the outcomes of international resolutions by international armed forces.

the broadcaster's question. Or it is also worthless because it is not under Article VII, according to Droubi.

In any case, the three characters do not take the decision seriously. Rather, it raises the discussion about it from the angle that it is either a trick or it can be dealt with in the spirit of deception because it is not implemented. All the phrases used indicate a fundamental rejection of the idea of dialogue in the first place and an attempt to create consensus and acquiescence among the audiences about the impossibility of a political solution.

Ideology is most effective when it operates in the most invisibility. As for the latter, it is achieved, as Norman Fairclough (1989, p. 85) says, when ideologies are brought to discourse not as explicit elements of the text, but as the background assumptions which, on the one hand, "lead the text producer to 'textualize' the world in a particular way, and on the other hand lead the interpreter to interpret the text in a particular way." Texts do not typically spout ideology. "They so position the interpreter through their cues that she brings ideologies to the interpretation of texts - and reproduces them in the process" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 85).

Talking about the ineffectiveness of the dialogue round as long as it is not under "Item VII," or portraying it as a hoax, with the consensus of the three program's characters, is essentially an ideological position in support of the war, hiding behind specific analytical and legislative arguments that are presented to formulate an integrated discourse that justifies violence.

4.4 Al-Mayadeen TV

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

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

The sample studied in this chapter is the “*Akhir tabaa*,”⁷⁸ a program on January 20, 2016, about a month after the issuance of Resolution 2254. It was presented by the Syrian broadcaster, Fatoun Al-Absi, and hosted Sharif Shehadeh, a member of the Syrian Parliament, as a main guest. The introduction to the program was as follows:

A few days separate us from the Geneva 3 conference, which is still facing obstacles to its scheduled date of the twenty-fifth of this month. There is no agreement yet on the list of terrorist organizations or on the representation of the opposition, and therefore there are no UN calls directed at this time when all eyes are on the meeting of the Russian and US foreign ministers, which it is hoped will result in understandings that overcome obstacles and contribute to the achievement of the conference on time to talk about whether or not the Geneva conference will take place and the prospects for a political solution in light of the current situation.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ The name of the program means “Last Edition.”

⁷⁹ *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (00:20-01:04): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg>

4.4.1 Ethical perspective

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

Sherif Shehadeh says the following:

I do not see that there are features confirming that the conference will be held on time. Terrorist groups cannot be allowed to infiltrate the dialogue as opposition groups, because whoever wants to go to Geneva means that he wants to go to a political solution, and therefore there is no dialogue without the Syrian government knowing who it is going to talk to. It is not possible to pass a name to one of the terrorist groups and thus say that he is a political opponent; then the Syrian government sits at a table to talk to him, and thus this group takes on the status of the political opposition.⁸⁰

He continues as follows:

You heard, at least a year ago, calling the opposition the Saudi representative, the Qatari representative, and the Turkish representative, and this is an unfortunate thing, and it makes the opposition from now on tend to be a betrayer. Allow me to say that whoever wants to be an opponent is not a shame. But if he is affiliated with this side or that, this is a very dangerous matter.⁸¹

He adds the following:

The opposition had met in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabia is part of those who participated in the war against Syria and is the one who finances terrorist groups in Syria. The Qatari and Saudi roles in Syria are clear. There are countries that pay terrorist organizations.⁸²

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

⁸⁰ *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (03:40- 4:48): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg>

⁸¹ *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (5:00- 5:25): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg>

⁸² *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (5:25- 6:08): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg>

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

It is very clear that this introduction is the beginning of the rejection of the counterparty. And this is what happened in the subsequent sentences, where Mr. Shehadeh moved from terrorism to "treason," attributing opposition figures to groups of regional powers without proof. So such discourse leads to the idea that the dialogue process is not national. Like many of the media professionals representing the Syrian authorities, Mr. Shehadeh takes advantage of the fact that the negotiations are taking place under an international umbrella in order to challenge their patriotism and locality, and thus their moral dimension. Ignoring the existence of the authority itself within specific international alliances and that the authority's failure to open the door to dialogue led to the internationalization of the crisis.

The emergence of a political solution and dialogue through an international resolution or an international effort has disturbed the sound ideological logic of the supporters of military solutions, including Mr. Sharif Shehadeh in our particular case. "When things go wrong in discourse... where people attempt to 'repair' their discourse, as a way of highlighting and foregrounding discursal common sense". (Fairclough, 1989, p. 106).

In such cases, they "return common ideological reasoning to the fore," according to Norman Fairclough (1989, p. 106), who uses the term "foregrounding common sense," which occurs "when things go wrong in discourse." Mr. Sharif Shehadeh rearranged the scene to return it to its previous state of stability. The

previous context of the Syrian crisis was based on the continuation and escalation of the spiral of violence. When signs of political solutions appeared, Shehadeh rushed "to 'repair' their discourse, as a way of highlighting and foregrounding discursal common sense." Therefore, the words "treason," "terrorist groups," "sponsoring terrorism," and others that we mentioned earlier were used to arrange "sound ideological logic" within an appropriate version of the event.

4.4.2 Eligibility

The announcer says the following:

The most prominent obstacle threatening Geneva 3 is opposition representation. Moscow rejects the Riyadh list because it includes terrorist organizations and is devoid of important opposition figures. Do you expect a broader representation of the opposition in an agreement between Russia and Washington? In return, what will Washington give to accept that?⁸³

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

The simple assertion that the opposition "does not represent the Syrian people" indicates in itself one of the causes of the crisis. Representatives of the Syrian authority, even before the Syrian crisis, including Mr. Sharif Shehadeh, often deal with the fact that any opposition movement represents certain external agendas, which

⁸³ *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (25:45- 29:00): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg>

have emerged as a title for the regime's media discourse since the beginning of the crisis, represented by the term "conspiracy." He believes that any internal movement is merely a result of foreign policy in the sense that part of the masses, due to their lack of awareness, are driven like a herd behind loud slogans or petty material temptations.⁸⁴

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

It is also necessary to mention the attack on Saudi Arabia and its sponsorship of terrorism.⁸⁵ Historically, the Syrian regime has had deep relations with Saudi Arabia in dealing with the file of the Lebanese civil war and the formation of governments of sectarian division since the mid-seventies of the last century. Recently, Syrian-Saudi relations have returned through President Al-Assad's visit to Saudi Arabia and his attendance at the Arab Summit this year. This leads us to believe that despite Saudi Arabia's involvement in nurturing terrorist tendencies historically in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, respectively, Sherif Shehadeh's questioning of Saudi

⁸⁴ The Syrian president says in one of his interviews that citizens were seduced with an amount of two thousand Syrian pounds, which corresponds to a few dollars at the time, to go out in demonstrations against the government. President Bashar al-Assad's speech at the Syrian People's Assembly on June 4, 2012 – quoted by the official Syrian news agency, SANA: <https://sana.sy/?p=3218>

⁸⁵ The 2015 Vienna Conference on the Syrian Crisis assigned the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to organize a conference for the Syrian opposition to negotiate with the Syrian regime.

Arabia's eligibility at the time for sponsoring terrorism was not at the time an attack on Saudi Arabia as much as it was an attack on the political solution process itself.

Fairclough (1989) says: "Acknowledging the phenomenon of naturalization is tantamount to insisting upon a distinction between the superficial common-sense appearances of discourse and its underlying essence" (p. 92). However, what then are we to make of the people's explanations of their discourse practices? "Explanations should be seen as rationalizations which cannot be taken at face value but are themselves in need of explanation." So "We can see rationalizations as part and parcel of naturalization: together with the generation of common-sense discourse practices comes the generation of common-sense rationalizations of such practices, which serve to legitimize them" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 92). The continuous use of justifications and pretexts to challenge the eligibility of the forces that should participate in the political dialogue is an attempt to make war a natural phenomenon in the consciousness of the recipient. In politics and life in general, we can always repeat many justifications to reach a conclusion that maintains the status quo to prevent a transition from one situation to another. This is the essence of what Mr. Shehadeh is doing.

4.4.3 Dialogue: a victory or surrender?

Sharif Shehadeh says the following in the program:

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

defeated on the ground or until the decisions of the conference are confiscated, which will not happen.⁸⁶

He adds:

Washington desires military control of southern Syria as well as northern Syria, which confirms that there is no solution other than the victory of the Syrian military forces on the ground. I believe that what we are witnessing now of the progress of the Syrian army has terrified others, and this is what stopped the convening of the Geneva 2, 3, 4, or 5 conference, which is a new picture of the scene in Syria.⁸⁷

It is also noticeable that the media professionals of the Syrian regime follow a tactic with every improvement in the course of the political process. They usually warn of a major military action that the enemies will prepare for, and that talking about dialogue aims to numb the powers of the authority and its public. Most likely, the use of this method arose during the years of the Syrian crisis under the pressure of the popular bases operating in the state or residing under the control of the Syrian government. Those bases are deprived of safety, a decent standard of living, and the most basic services such as electricity, water, and fuel. On the other hand, these bases are exposed to heavy media pumping from pro-Syrian authorities about victories, military progress, the approaching date of decisiveness, and the collapse of the opposition fronts. Therefore, the authority's media often carries a paradox, which coincides with the progress of the Syrian government forces and the end of the crisis with victory, while at the same time the enemies hide a treacherous and dangerous attack under the guise of a political solution and dialogue.

The warning of a significant military danger is disguised as a political solution or dialogue. Or the claim that the dialogue is a maneuver to stop the series of military

⁸⁶ *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (38:25-39:40): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg>

⁸⁷ *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (39:40-40:40): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg>

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

4.4.4 Political naivety

Sharif Shehadeh says the following:

The United States seeks to create a new army in southern Syria to fight ISIS. It means that there is a reprogramming of what the United States of America wants, in the sense that it should hold on to the south of the country as well as its east. This indicates that we are still in the midst of the battle and that saying that America wants a solution in Syria is incorrect, as is saying that the Arab parties agree to a political solution. and that the military factor will determine the situation on the ground.⁸⁸

Sherif Shehadeh provides no way to get the idea of a solution out of people's minds. For this reason, it activates the memory of the masses that the United States of America often plays the role of triggering wars and conflicts around the world and that regional parties comply with its policies, and this is a reality without a doubt. Assuming that Sherif Shehadeh, or whoever represents them, is in the opposite camp to the United States, as we conclude from his words, isn't confronting the warmongers

⁸⁸ *Akhir Tabaa*, (20/01/2016), (41:15- 43:10): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYW6qyOWxg>

by finding a formula to prevent war, or at least to call for it? On the contrary, we find that the "trenches" agree on the military conflict so that each serves the other and provides an excuse to continue in the same direction. Approaching a tragic situation such as the Syrian catastrophe requires, in fact, exceptional diligence and initiatives that block the continuation of the bleeding. This is supposed to be the goal of the discussion: to provide the least opportunities for that, instead of invoking the violence of the opposite party to justify more future violence, which we have seen in the previous samples of both parties.

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

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

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

While completing this research, we sought to provide an integrated understanding of its topic between theoretical and applied study. Theoretically, in the literature review, we dealt with the concept of war in general, according to Carl von Clausewitz, and then reviewed Gramsci's approach to the forms of the relationship between politics and warfare. We aimed to discuss the concept of war in its broadest and deepest form when dealing later with media texts in the findings chapter, where the media discourse in those texts sought to soften and glorify the image of war for the recipient. Therefore, we reviewed some cultural and literary approaches that stripped the war of its sacred and mythical cloak and presented its miserable, tragic, and realistic face, as Leo Tolstoy did in his novel *War and Peace*.

As for the concept of dialogue, the literature review discussed the difference between the ideal value of this concept and its being a political demand. For this, the materialistic understanding of history in Marxist literature was drawn upon in criticizing the moral approach. In light of this, our study criticized some aspects of Habermas's concept of ethical dialogue, especially its conditions and rules, as difficult to apply in practice in light of the world governed mainly by material interests. On the other hand, efforts were made to focus on the need for dialogue as a concrete political demand that constitutes a specific public interest, such as stopping the killing and restoring stability.

It was also necessary for the literature review to provide an overview of the modern history of Syria until the outbreak of the crisis in 2011 to provide a glimpse of its reasons. We also reviewed the performance of the pro- and opposition media to facilitate receiving analyses in the findings chapter.

Moreover, because our study relied on the qualitative research methodology and purposive sampling, the four samples were selected, and their texts were analyzed according to the CDA methodology, primarily based on Norman Fairclough's framework of analysis, which we found most appropriate to clarify the relationship between media discourse and ideology. Among the most prominent formulas that we borrowed from Fairclough (1989) were the group of "implicit assumptions, coherence, inferencing" (p. 85) that the media discourse imposes in some of its details on the recipient to form the required image that he calls "common ideological sense," which is preserved by "normalizing" it in one way or another. Generalizations and "foregrounding" the discourse are also the main rhetorical strategies used when the discourse is subjected to imbalance, criticism, and others. We have dealt with it in greater detail and in an applied manner in the previous chapter.

Admittedly, the research faced many limitations during its preparation, most notably the absence of accurate figures and statistics about the Syrian war due to the ongoing chaos until the research was completed. The refusal of the opposition and the regime media to host personalities who support the political solution and dialogue prompted us to develop hypotheses and research questions to focus on the similarity between the discourses of the opposition and the regime in rejecting dialogue and calling for war, instead of examining the contrast between a position supporting and opposing dialogue. Finally, the linguistic determinants, because the data and speech of the studied samples and many of the data contained in our study were in Arabic, required translating many texts due to the absence of the source in the research language.

The applied study for each of the studied samples was approached from four angles: the first is the endeavor of the loyal and opposition media discourse alike to

undervalue the political solution by considering it an immoral option because it legitimizes the other party, and the second: questioning the eligibility of the parties invited to dialogue. The third portrays the political solution as a victory for one party and a defeat for the other. Fourth: the insinuation that dialogue is a trap in which the naive fall into in politics. When analyzing the four texts through the four corners, which formed 16 independent paragraphs, we found that what was common to all of them was the ideological content of the media discourse of the opposition and the regime that was supportive of the military option based on the interest of a few groups seeking either to retain power or to gain it, in contrast to the interest of the vast majority of people to access to a safe way out of the crisis.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Our world is still witnessing many military conflicts and political crises in different parts of it. The media around the world closely monitors, on a daily basis, the slightest changes in the various battlefields and political platforms. Analytical and political talk shows broadcast a huge amount of information, figures, analyses, strategies, and tactics without interruption. With regard to the causes of conflicts, their continuity, escalation, and recurrence, the daily analysis of the event often refers to momentary and immediate developments on the scene, while the deep causes are rarely discussed, which we believe to be complex, meaning that they are internal and external at the same time.

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

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

Our research focused largely on the discourse of media outlets owned by parties supporting and opposing the regime in approaching the Syrian event, at a time

when the choice of those parties was to continue the war for certain political reasons. In other words, our research sought to monitor the discourse of the media in the case of justifying war and military actions, demonizing dialogue, and distancing it from the imagination and minds of the masses.

Because of the huge amount of media materials published about the Syrian war for more than 12 years until today, the qualitative research method was adopted by purposefully taking specific samples over a period of time in terms of the topic under discussion.

Four TV channels were chosen: Al-Jazeera TV is not local and supports the opposition; Sama TV is local and supports the government; Orient TV is local and supports the opposition; and Al-Mayadeen TV is non-local and supports the government.

The event discussed is UN Resolution 2254, which calls for a political solution to the Syrian crisis, and the Geneva dialogue sessions accompanying the issuance of the resolution.

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

One of the results that we believe we have reached in our current research is that whoever practices violent speech, even if he does not carry weapons, is part of the violence. In other words, we should not believe a party that claims that it aspires to democracy by urging the public to violence or that violent discourse is inherently undemocratic. Therefore, we can conclude that the media discourse that belittles political solutions or dialogue is dictatorial discourse and is part of the military system itself and an auxiliary to it.

We can also, at the end of our research, carefully consider the difference between revenge and achieving justice. Often, the pro-violence media discourse seeks to incite the vengeful tendency in society and suggests that the practice of violence calls for counter-violence. In fact, holding perpetrators of violence accountable and achieving justice first requires stopping violence in order to secure the appropriate environment for that. On the contrary, hasty calls for the implementation of counter-violence have always served the purpose of preventing criminals from being held accountable and expanding the cycle of violence and counter-violence. Let's look at the culture of the social formations that preceded the emergence of the national state, such as the clan structure, for example. Just as there are customs of revenge whose function is to respond to violence with another violence, there are also customs of negotiation and dialogue that lead to stopping the violence process. Families, tribes, armies, etc. do not fight endlessly but stop at a certain point.

We took into account when selecting the samples that the language used in them should be simple and clear and not deep in analysis or terminology, and the aim was to focus on the relationship between that language and the public, as it was required from the point of view of these media to facilitate its delivery to the public and its reproduction and repetition. The "reductive" words and phrases were extracted

from the discourse of the media and were employed superficially and intentionally to keep the tension going.

The word "revolution" was frequently repeated in the opposition media. As we have seen in the study, this word has been employed to imply that it is the choice of an entire people, that the violence of those under it is justified or sacred violence, and to win sympathy and cordiality through the sacrificial dimension of the word. But in the context in which it was used, we noticed that it was used to justify undemocratic, divisive, and violent practices, thereby contradicting the deep concept of the national democratic revolution.

We also find that the word "conspiracy" occupies a large area of the discourse of the pro-government media, and it is almost being used for the same reasons that the word "revolution" is used, albeit in reverse, such as legitimizing violence to defend the homeland, comprehensive representation of the people, and expressing vigilance towards the interests of the homeland and the people. We also find that, in the context, it was employed to describe important and vital sections of the Syrians as engaged in treason. The two parties also remarkably used the phrase "the Syrian people will accept or not accept, or will prevent or not, etc." It is also a way to give legitimacy to a specific issue that one of the parties to the conflict demands without making an exact reference to the "people" they mean. Is it only the people loyal to them, whether the opposition or the authority? Is it the whole population? Or not? Any answer to any of the previous questions is a disaster in itself, especially since the Syrians were not asked for their opinion throughout the years of the crisis, not in fair elections or referendums. It is also illogical for all "people" to agree with the opinion of the politician from the studied samples.

Also, there were many fallacies that our study focused on, such as mentioning the authority as the “state” or the “legitimate side” in the loyalist media, as opposed to being “Bashar al-Assad” or the “security regime” in the opposition media, and the great disregard for the specific political-economic regime that is being talked about, which interrupts the field of discussion with the deep nature of the regime and the required alternatives.

Against replacing the word "opposition" with “terrorists” or “militants” in the regime’s media, in contrast to the "revolutionaries," there are the “forces of the revolution” in the opposition media. Also, the use of these dichotomies in this way prevents the possibility of sorting out the pluralistic opposition forces in Syrian society. Some of them are the peaceful and democratic opposition, and some of them are forces forced by reality to take up arms, and some of them call for armament and violence, etc. In this way, everyone is put in one basket.

Our research suggests that a more prominent space should be devoted to discussing some headlines independently, such as the role of media discourse in threatening security in some politically and economically unstable countries. Moreover, the direct and indirect responsibility of the media before and after a war or massacre and the extent of its contribution to violence should be questioned. This is particularly essential in light of the recent emergence of conflicts, wars, and political crises in the eastern Mediterranean, eastern Asia, central Europe, Africa, and South America. It is also important considering the unequal exchange between the developed and developing capitalist countries, the political and economic instability in the latter, and the emergence of large and remarkable waves of refugees toward Western countries in the last two decades.

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



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