



Original article

Framing Conflict: CNN’s Discourse of Geopolitical Institutionalization during the Syrian Regime Collapse

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ABSTRACT

This paper will combines the three-dimensional model by Fairclough, and the ideological square developed by van Dijk to examine the online coverage by CNN during the discursive turning point of the Syrian regime collapse in December 2024. The recurrent negative other-presentation, and positive self-presentation are indicated in a narrow set of five high-impact articles. Textually, CNN uses dysphemistic labels, and dehumanizing imagery, including repeated mention of the “slaughterhouse” prison, to construct moral binaries. In transitivity, and sourcing, opposition actors receive active agency, while actions by Western-aligned actors, including Israeli airstrikes, are mitigated through necessity frames, and strategic rationales. At the level of social practice, these choices converge in a narrative that legitimizes intervention, and casts the collapse as a geopolitical win over Russia, Iran. The article proposes a critical-juncture design that links micro-linguistic choices to ideological polarization at a single moment. It offers a template for analysing aligned conflict reporting.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideological Square, Syrian Conflict, Transitivity, Geopolitical Framing, CNN.

تأطير الصراع خطاب شبكة CNN حول إضفاء الطابع المؤسسي الجيوسياسي أثناء انهيار النظام السوري

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المستخلص

تطبّق هذه الدراسة إطاراً تكاملياً في التحليل النقدي للخطاب يجمع نموذج فيركلاف ثلاثي الأبعاد مع المربّع الأيديولوجي لفان دايك لفحص تغطية CNN للحظة خطابية حرجة ارتبطت بانهايار النظام السوري في ديسمبر 2024. تعتمد الدراسة على خمس مقالات إلكترونية عالية التأثير وتكشف حضوراً منتظماً لاستراتيجيات العرض السلبي للآخر والعرض الإيجابي للذات. على المستوى النصي تستخدم CNN ألفاظاً قذحية وصوراً نازعة للإنسانية مع تكرار الإحالة إلى سجن المسلخ لبناء ثنائيات أخلاقية حادة. في التعدي والإسناد تمنح أفعال المعارضة فاعلية لغوية بينما تُهَوّن أفعال الجهات المتحالفة مع الغرب مثل الضربات الجوية الإسرائيلية عبر تأطيرها بوصفها ضرورية أو استراتيجية. على مستوى الممارسة الاجتماعية تتقاطع هذه الأنماط في سردية تبرّر التدخل وتعرض الانهيار كنصر جيوسياسي على روسيا وإيران. يقترح البحث تصميم المنعطف الحرج لربط الاختيارات الدقيقة بالاستقطاب عند نقطة واحدة. ويقدم نموذجاً إجرائياً قابلاً للتكييف لدراسة تغطيات صراعية أخرى متسقة مع الهيمنة. الكلمات المفتاحية التحليل النقدي للخطاب المربّع الأيديولوجي الصراع السوري التعدي التأطير الجيوسياسي. CNN.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحليل النقدي للخطاب، المربّع الأيديولوجي، الصراع السوري، التعدي، التأطير الجيوسياسي،

1. Introduction

Since its eruption in 2011, the Syrian conflict has become one of the longest, and most geopolitically complex crises of the twenty-first century. A wide range of state, and non-state actors has taken part in the war, and their interventions have generated overlapping humanitarian, security, and political crises that extend beyond Syria's territorial boundaries. Global news media are central to how these crises are understood by policy elites, and by wider publics. Furthermore, they shape such understandings not only through overt editorial choices, but also through less visible practices of framing, and discourse construction that place specific actors, events, and interpretations in privileged positions (Kassab, 2018; Mirza, Abbas, & Qaisrani, 2021). Within this media field, CNN occupies a particularly powerful niche as one of the most prominent global news organizations, and it has a documented impact on Western public opinion, and on foreign policy discourse related to the Middle East (Al-Hindawi & Ali, 2018).

Recent research has begun to examine CNN's role in constructing the narrative of the Syrian conflict, and it shows that this outlet is central to how the war is morally, and politically framed. Alitavoli (2020) demonstrates that CNN.com editorials on the Syrian war rely on sharp moral dichotomies, as they depict Assad as a brutal villain, and cast Western policies within a justificatory discourse of democracy, and human rights. Zhang and Luther (2020) compare the online reporting of CNN, Al Jazeera English, and Sputnik, and they find that both visual, and textual frames of distant suffering in Syria privilege certain victims, and simultaneously legitimize particular policy responses. Ghoul and Guerza (2023) focus on the representation of Syrian refugees on CNN, and Al Jazeera, and they argue that, although the coverage employs shared frames of victimhood, and

humanitarian concern, it nonetheless reproduces unequal power relations. Taken together with broader comparative work on Western, and non-Western news coverage, these studies confirm that CNN functions as a key site where ideological narratives about Syria are produced, and circulated. However, the existing literature still lacks a micro-level CDA investigation of discourse at critical geopolitical junctures, because most contributions remain at a general level, and do not examine how ideological frameworks are activated through specific linguistic mechanisms at clearly defined, pivotal moments of transition.

This article addresses this gap by presenting an intensive case study that focuses on CNN's coverage during the critical discursive moment marked by the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024. To this end, it analyzes a focused corpus of five high-impact news articles, and it applies an integrated theoretical framework that brings together Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, 1992), and Teun van Dijk's ideological square model(2006). Fairclough's three-dimensional approach makes it possible to examine media discourse at the levels of text, discursive practice, and social practice, and to relate lexical choices, grammatical patterns, and intertextual links to both newsroom routines, and wider sociopolitical structures. Van Dijk's ideological square, by contrast, foregrounds the processes through which in-groups, and out-groups are constructed, and it clarifies how media discourse systematically emphasizes the merits of Us, and the demerits of Them, while minimizing, or downplaying evidence that would challenge this polarization. Taken together, these two frameworks provide a rigorous way of showing how CNN's reporting constructs binary oppositions between freedom-seeking rebels, and an oppressive Assad regime, and how these oppositions reproduce a Western-centric understanding of the war.

Drawing on this integrated framework, and the specific methodology outlined above, the study addresses two primary research questions. The first asks how CNN deploys particular linguistic mechanisms, such as metaphor, transitivity, and source selection, to justify, or mitigate violence carried out by Western-aligned actors in the context of the regime's collapse. The second examines the ways in which CNN's coverage realizes van Dijk's ideological square, by instantiating patterns of polarization between Western-backed opposition forces, and the Assad regime during this geopolitical shift. By responding to these questions, the analysis shows that CNN's discourse is embedded in broader struggles over meaning, and legitimacy in the global reporting of armed conflicts, and it underscores the importance of critical media literacy in contexts where information can be strategically tailored to advance specific political agendas. The major theoretical contribution to the present research is that van Dijk ideological square is empirically demonstrated to operate in systematic fashion to produce geopolitical institutionalization, which is the local conflict coverage used structurally to reassert and legitimize Western hegemonic power in the international system. The introduction focuses on describing the political and media situation, in addition to failing to formulate a clear research problem.

2. Literature Review Discourse and News Media

Media discourse is not a neutral mirror of reality, but a structured mode of communication within news institutions that organizes how events, actors, and causes become knowable in the public sphere(Kassab, 2018; Mirza et al., 2021). Through recurrent patterns of wording, imagery, and

selection, news discourse defines what is treated as normal, exceptional, or dangerous in international politics, particularly in conflict reporting.

From this perspective, media discourse operates as a system of shared meanings, which is continuously produced across television, online platforms, and print outlets (Gryshchenko, 2024) (Tavadze, Diasamidze, Katamadze, & Davitadze, 2024). Through this ongoing circulation, content becomes recognizable because dominant ideologies stabilize how audiences perceive "who did what to whom", and why, particularly in long-running crises such as the Syrian conflict. These interpretive frames, in turn, help legitimize some responses, and render others marginal, or even unthinkable.

News organizations employ several strategies to shape public consciousness, and linguistic framing is central among these strategies. The labels used for actors, the metaphors selected for events, and the ordering of information in a report all guide how audiences interpret, and evaluate global developments (Omairi, 2025). When terms such as "regime", "terrorist", or "security threat" recur across reports, they embed specific evaluations in the discourse without requiring explicit argumentation, especially in complex geopolitical conflicts such as Syria.

Framing research indicates that journalists highlight certain aspects of reality, and downplay others, in ways that mobilize specific emotional, and political responses. Aporbo (2023) contends that such framing can galvanize public support for particular positions, and shape how audiences interpret both conflict, and peace processes. When news reports selectively emphasize casualties, atrocities, or humanitarian suffering, they may distort perceptions of events, even if individual facts remain accurate, and, over time, this selective focus tends to reinforce existing cognitive biases (Gryshchenko, 2024).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) adds an important dimension by examining how language reproduces, or contests power relations. For the purposes of this study, Fairclough's framework (1992) is especially relevant, because it links specific textual choices, such as transitivity, modality, and lexicalization, to institutional practices, and wider social structures. This micro-linguistic perspective is complemented by van Dijk's ideological square (2006), which foregrounds the cognitive organization, and ideological loading of in-group, and out-group categories.

Bringing these two models together yields a robust analytical instrument, since Fairclough clarifies the how of discourse, that is, the textual mechanisms at work, whereas van Dijk specifies the why, that is, the ideological functions that these mechanisms perform. This synthesis makes it possible to trace a systematic transition from linguistic form to ideological consequence. In this regard, Western media frequently legitimize humanitarian intervention as a natural, and even necessary response to conflict, while many non-Western outlets instead emphasize sovereignty, and anti-imperialism as counter-frames, which in turn underscores the need for critical, and reflexive news consumption.

From a CDA perspective, the Syrian conflict illustrates how media reporting reflects political alignments, and reproduces social hierarchies. Studies of Arabic, Turkish, and international outlets show that inclusionary, and exclusionary strategies determine which voices are amplified, and which are silenced (Ayu As' sa'idah, Ayu As' sa'idah, & Basid, 2024; Paksoy, 2022) . Even organizations that present themselves as neutral operate under ideological pressures, which shape how they select

sources, frame causes, and narrate responsibility, so that the same crisis can be represented as legitimate resistance, foreign-backed extremism, or necessary state security.

Building on this foundational work, the present study offers a distinct contribution by concentrating on CNN's coverage at a rare, and critical geopolitical juncture, namely the sudden collapse of the Syrian regime in December 2024. Whereas most previous research has examined conflict reporting across extended time spans, or broad samples of texts, only a small number of recent CDA studies on Middle Eastern crises, including work on the Egyptian revolution, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and the 2023 Israel–Gaza war, have operationalized van Dijk's ideological square, or Fairclough's model in a sustained way, yet even these analyses do not focus on a single moment of regime change (Echine, 2024). Against this backdrop, the present article introduces a critical-juncture design that zooms in on one pivotal discursive moment, and it systematically maps CNN's lexical choices, grammatical patterns, especially transitivity, and sourcing practices onto van Dijk's in-group, and out-group polarizations. In particular, it demonstrates how dehumanizing metaphors, such as the "slaughterhouse" metaphor, work in tandem with patterned selections of agents, and patients to legitimize Western-aligned intervention, and aid, and to institutionalize a specific Western-centric reading of the Syrian crisis at this transitional moment.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis. The corpus comprises five CNN online articles on the Syrian conflict, published between 8, and 10 December 2024, and it was selected to capture both the immediacy, and the breadth of CNN's response to the regime's collapse. The articles address detention, and enforced disappearance at Saydnaya prison, provide live updates on battlefield developments, offer a political profile of Bashar al Assad, analyze Russia's role in the conflict, and report on Israeli airstrikes in Syria. These texts collectively constitute the main genres of CNN, such as straight news stories, live pages, and analyses, and they all present regime collapse, local-level escalation, and foreign intervention in a narrow time frame. The key characteristics of this corpus are summarized in Table 1 and the rough parameters of the further analysis are established.

The analysis is guided by Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework, and van Dijk's ideological square (Fairclough, 1992, van Dijk, 2006). At the textual level, the study examines vocabulary, evaluative adjectives, metaphors, transitivity, and voice (active vs passive), while paying particular attention to oppositions such as "regime" versus "rebels", and "strategic strikes" versus "slaughterhouse prisons". At the level of discursive practice, it focuses on source selection, and intertextuality, since CNN not only relies on Western officials, and Western-funded NGOs, but also invokes earlier conflicts such as Iraq 2003, and Libya 2011 as interpretive templates. At the level of social practice, the analysis relates these textual, and discursive patterns to wider Western geopolitical interests, especially the legitimisation of intervention, and the delegitimisation of the Assad regime. In parallel, van Dijk's ideological square is used to track systematic patterns of positive self-presentation of Western actors, and negative other-presentation of Assad, Russia, Iran, and their allies, so that the broader logic of polarization can be made explicit.

All five articles were imported into NVivo, and coded in two stages. In the first stage, open coding was used to identify recurrent linguistic, and ideological patterns, including victimhood framing,

humanitarian imperative, regime delegitimation, Western moral authority, and proxy war framing. In the second stage, axial coding clustered these initial codes into broader categories, and mapped systematic links between lexical choices, source types, and evaluative stances toward key actors. Table 2 lists the main code groups that emerged from this process. This stepwise procedure responds to calls for combining CDA with systematic coding, so as to reduce impressionistic interpretation, and enhance transparency (Baker et al., 2008). The data consist entirely of publicly available news texts, and therefore raise no confidentiality concerns. To strengthen the reliability of the analysis, a second analyst independently reviewed the coding, and any disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached, and the resulting interpretations were cross-checked against background scholarship on the Syrian conflict in order to limit bias.

Table 1. Discursive Corpus Classification and Analytical Focus

Article ID	Headline	Section	Main theme	Publication date	URL
A1	Syria's Saydnaya prison and the missing	World / Middle East	Detention, enforced disappearance, prison abuse	10 Dec 2024	https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/10/middleeast/syria-saydnaya-prison-missing-intl-
A2	Syria war, rebels, Assad and Israel live updates	World / Live news	Ongoing battles, regime collapse, regional moves	10 Dec 2024	https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/syria-war-rebels-assad-israel-intl-hnk-12-10-24/index.html
A3	Bashar al-Assad Syria profile	World / Middle East	Leadership profile, political trajectory	8 Dec 2024	https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/08/middleeast/bashar-al-assad-syria-profile-intl-hnk/index.html
A4	Syria Russian	World /	Russian role,	9 Dec 2024	https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12

	a and Basha r al Assad analys is	Europ e	strategic implications of Assad			/09/europe/syria-russia-bashar-al-assad-analysis-intl-hnk/index.html
A5	Israel Syria Assad strikes	World / Middl e East	Israeli airstrikes, cross border intervention	10 Dec 2024		https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/10/middleeast/israel-syria-assad-strikes-intl/index.html

Table 2. Main analytical categories and codes

Code group	Examples of codes	Brief description
Victimhood framing	torture, missing persons, “black holes of despair”	Representations of civilian suffering and regime brutality.
Humanitarian imperative	humanitarian imperative, protection, aid	Justifications for external involvement based on moral duty.
Regime delegitimation	brutal dictatorship, slaughterhouse prisons	Lexical and metaphorical attacks on the legitimacy of Assad’s rule.
Western moral authority	strategic response, precision strike	Positive self-presentation of Western actors and their allies (e.g., Israel).
Proxy war / geopolitics	proxy war, regional balance, Russian defeat	Frames linking Syria to wider power competition and strategic interests.

4. Results and Discussion

This critical discourse analysis of five CNN articles (A1–A5), which were published at the pivotal moment of the Syrian regime’s collapse in December 2024, shows that CNN deploys discourse strategies in a systematic, and coordinated way. These strategies not only operate across headlines, leads, and quotations, but also work together to consolidate a polarized, and distinctly Western-centric narrative. While the surface focus of the reports is on immediate military, and diplomatic developments, the underlying patterning of lexis, transitivity choices, and evaluative framing consistently privileges Western actors, and problematizes Syrian, Russian, and Iranian roles. For this reason, the central finding is that Fairclough’s linguistic-textual mechanisms function as the practical realization of van Dijk’s ideological square, since they translate abstract ideological positions into stable patterns of wording, and representation. Taken together, the three dimensions of critical discourse analysis, text analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, jointly advance

two linked ideological aims, namely maximizing positive self-presentation of the in-group, and its allies, and maximizing negative other-presentation of the out-group, and its rivals.

Empirical Evidence

The following tables provide the quantifiable evidence substantiating the ideological claims.

Table 3. Key Lexical Items and Dysphemism Frequency (N=5 Articles)

Lexical Item / Metaphor	Frequency in Corpus	Ideological Function (Van Dijk)
"Regime" (vs. "Government")	18	Directly Denies Legitimacy (Negative Other-Presentation).
"Dictator/Dictatorship"	9	Pathologizing the Political System (Negative Other-Presentation).
"Slaughterhouse" (for Saydnaya)	3	Dehumanization; establishing moral horror (Maximizing Negative Other-Presentation).
"Brutal/Brutality"	6	Evaluative Adjective for Condemnation (Maximizing Negative Other-Presentation).

Table 4. Transitivity Analysis: Distribution of Agent Role in Conflict Actions (N=5 Articles)

Actor Group	Active Voice (Attributing Agency)	Passive Voice or Mitigated Language
Rebels/Opposition	85% (e.g., "Rebel fighters toppled Assad")	15% (Often related to casualties)
Assad/Syrian Forces	80% (e.g., "Regime forces committed the attack")	20% (Often in quotes from opposing sources)
Israel (In-Group Ally)	25% (e.g., "Israel launched airstrikes")	75% (e.g., "Strikes were aimed at strategic capabilities")

4.1. Textual Level (Fairclough): Ideology through Lexicalization and Grammar

This dimension addresses both lexical choice, and grammatical configuration, which are primarily mobilized to maximize negative other-presentation of the out-group.

A1 & A3: Dysphemism and Dehumanization

The coverage of the regime's facilities, and leadership functions as the principal engine of delegitimation, since it consistently employs Dysphemism (Table 3). In particular, Articles A1, and A3 make extensive use of aggressive lexicalization, as the repeated noun "Regime" (18 occurrences), and metaphors such as "slaughterhouse" (A1) are not mere descriptive labels, but linguistic resources that directly implement van Dijk's strategy of Maximizing Negative Other-Presentation. The particular application of the metaphor of slaughterhouse serves as a potent tool of Dehumanization, making the regime become as morally diseased and incurable at all. This pattern of aggressive lexicalization, in Fairclough's terms, recasts a state institution as an inherently criminal entity Alitavoli (2020), and thus offers an efficient discursive route to justify its immediate, and absolute rejection. The recurrent use of "Dictator/Dictatorship" (9 occurrences), and the

emphasis on "opulent wealth" (A3) further intensify moral, and political condemnation, so that the negative identity of the Out-Group is consolidated, and rendered difficult to challenge.

A2: Nominalization and Condensation of Guilt

Article A2 employs Nominalization to underscore the systemic character of the regime's guilt. Through forms such as "forcibly disappeared," it shifts attention away from identifiable perpetrators, and redirects it toward the victim's condition, and the dictatorship as an overarching system. This kind of linguistic condensation reinforces the ideological premise that atrocities are an intrinsic, and stable feature of the Out-Group's rule, and thereby provides discursive support for representing the In-Group's (rebels') violent actions as both necessary, and justified.

4.2. Discursive Practice (Fairclough): Managing Agency and Sourcing

This dimension considers how participants' actions are represented, and how sources are selected, so as to secure Positive Self-Presentation of the In-Group, and its allies, while at the same time minimizing any Negative Self-Presentation of these same actors.

A2: Unqualified Agentive Action for the In-Group

Table 4 demonstrates a clear linguistic bias in favor of the opposition. Across the corpus, rebel and opposition actors are assigned Active Voice in 85% of clauses that encode positive, dynamic actions, for example, "Rebel fighters toppled Assad." This systematic preference for Active Voice, in Fairclough's terms, operates as a form of linguistic heroism, because it foregrounds their agency, initiative, and capacity for effective intervention. In van Dijk's framework, this grammatical patterning directly serves the ideological aim of Maximizing Positive Self-Presentation of the In-Group, since it attributes competence, force, and moral authority almost exclusively to the rebels, so that their eventual victory is framed as both justified, and practically inevitable. Most importantly, the asymmetry in the attribution of agency that occurred as demonstrated in Table 4 offers a solid testimony of a structural ideological bias within the media in how actors are framed according to their geopolitical orientation.

A5: Ideological Mitigation of Allied Action

Article A5, which reports on Israeli strikes, and troop deployment, offers the strongest evidence of how the discourse mitigates Negative Self-Presentation of a Western-aligned actor. As Table 4 indicates, 75% of the actions associated with the In-Group ally (Israel) are subjected to Mitigation, since the narrative systematically avoids direct verbs of aggression, and instead resorts to linguistic rationalization, for example by referring to strikes against "strategic capabilities", and describing operations as "limited and temporary measures." In van Dijk's terms, this pattern constitutes a textbook instance of Minimizing Negative Self-Presentation, because the reliance on official, and technical language, in Fairclough's sense, functions as a Discursive Filter that shields the ally from ethical scrutiny, and frames military intervention exclusively through a register of security, and strategy, thereby preserving the moral integrity of the In-Group's coalition (Wang, Sannusi, & Kadir, 2024).

A1, A3, A5: Hierarchy of Credibility

The analysis shows that CNN relies consistently on Western-aligned NGOs, such as Amnesty International in A1, and on official diplomatic voices, such as UN Ambassador Dannon in A5, thereby establishing a strict Hierarchy of Credibility. The discourse marks such actors as main narrators and their words are treated as objective evidence, but not as a situated intervention, where other voices are backgrounded or absent. In the context of van Dijk, this sourcing practice guarantees that the truth presented to readers is the one that solely propagates the ideological narrative of the In-Group, since it preempts information that can be used to the advantage of the Self, silencing, marginalizing, or implicitly dismissing the views of the Out-Group (Ghoul & Guerza, 2023).

4.3. Social Practice (Fairclough): Geopolitical Institutionalization

This is the dimension that links the whole linguistic and discursive apparatus to its final purpose, which is placing the local event in the context of a global power game.

A4: The Geopolitical Pivot and Triumphalism

Article A4, which is dedicated to the response of Russia, is the conclusion of the ideological project. The article, in the opening paragraphs, alters the frame of the humanitarian crisis, and re-frames it as a narrative of global power play. Topicalization (Fairclough) is used in the discourse to preempt this geopolitical defeat over the competing powers. The fall of the regime is therefore being referred to as a huge setback on Putin and a geopolitical setback to Russia. In terms of van Dijk's ideological square, this represents the highest level of realization, because the discourse moves beyond straightforward condemnation, and instead institutionalizes the idea that Western global superiority is being reaffirmed. The Syrian civil war is consequently framed not merely as a national conflict, but as a sequence of victories for the In-Group's values within a broader East–West confrontation, thereby maximizing Positive Self-Presentation at the highest geopolitical level (Wijeyewardene, 2024).

4.4. Conceptual Synthesis: The Integrated Framework

The systematic analysis of all five articles demonstrates a clear operational pathway between the two theoretical frameworks, since Fairclough's levels specify the concrete linguistic mechanisms (the *HOW*) through which van Dijk's ideological goals (the *WHY*) are realized in practice. This figure conceptually shows that the ultimate effect of the discourse is the systematic justification of interventionist policies, and the institutionalization of a Western geopolitical worldview, both of which are achieved through the targeted linguistic manipulation documented in this section.

5. Conclusion

I. Research Conclusion and Objectives

This paper has explored the discursive patterns of CNN in the context of the critical geopolitical moment when the Syrian regime crumbles in December 2024 and has achieved it through a synthesized approach to analysis that united the micro-linguistic aspects of critical Discourse Analysis of Fairclough, and the ideological functions of the ideological square of van Dijk. The discussion supported the thesis statement of the paper that the media coverage offered by CNN was not objective reporting of the events, but an ideological reporting that had an effect of

institutionalizing a Western narrative that was oriented toward delegitimization, and even intervention.

II. Summary of Key Findings and Discursive Mechanisms

1. These findings demonstrated a systematic application of discourse strategies which functionalized the binaries of the ideological square and in favour of the pattern, both textual and quantitative findings were discovered.
2. Delegitimation by Dysphemism (Negative Other-Presentation): On the textual level, the coverage was highly lexicalized in the area of aggression in particular, via Dysphemism. They were recurrent and were in the form of metaphors such as slaughterhouse and brutal dictatorship as indicated in Table 3 and they were exploited to make the regime as negative as possible. This pattern and this finding authenticate and further particularize the more general results that are reported by (Alitavoli, 2020).
3. Ideological Management of Agency (Transitivity Analysis): The Transitivity analysis revealed that there was an immense asymmetry in division of the Agent role that is manifested in Table 4. Neighboring activities of the opposition were never ceasingly and dynamically agency-based, unlike those of allies, which were systematically linguistically down-played, and positioned as a strategic reaction. This arrangement was all that was needed to positively Self-Present the In-Group, and discursively justify its practices.
4. Geopolitical Institutionalization (Social Practice): At the social practice level, the regime crumbling was instantly associated with the wider East-West conflict that placed Russia, and Iran on the opposite side of western actors. It was positioned as a geopolitical success and the press coverage shifted to the humanitarian aspect of the issue and emphasized the alleged need of Western leadership in ensuring that the world order is kept.

III. Scholarly Contribution and Significance

There are two points on which the academic worth and the topicality of this research are grounded. The primary significance lies in the depiction of the institutionalization of geopolitics which confirms the application of the discourse of conflict as the structural one which restores the Western hegemony. To start with, it is addressing a large gap at a critical point of concern.

First, it fills an obvious gap during a critical point. The article is one of the first to perform a micro-level CDA of one, central discursive event in the Syrian conflict, and it demonstrates how ideological intensifications can be triggered in a period of swift regime change. In this way, it compliments recent CDA, besides studies of CNN and Al Jazeera of the 2023 Gaza war, corpus-based studies of news about the 2023 Israel-Hamas conflict, and geopolitical representation work in the war between Russia and Ukraine (El Damanhoury, Saleh, & Lebovic, 2025).

Second, the paper operationalizes the interface between the three-dimensional CDA of Fairclough and ideological square of van Dijk by locating the particular textual mechanisms to dysphemism, nominalization, transitivity, and hierarchies of source to the stable patterns of in-group, and out-group polarization. This combined model cuts across recent uses of the ideological square in political, media and social-media talk, and it provides a clear and repeatable template to analytic studies of ideological legitimation (Apirakvanalee & Zhai, 2023; Kareem & Najm, 2024).

IV. Recommendations for Future Research

In light of these findings, the study proposes several directions for future research.

First, the comparative analyses may survey the coverage of this critical juncture by CNN in December 2024, and that of non-Western news sources, including Al Jazeera, or Sputnik and such work may chart the difference between the targeted metaphors, and assignment of agency where such resources are deployed to promote sovereign, or anti-imperialist discourses.

Second, the visual framing that surrounded this coverage might be the subject of further study so that the textual analysis is accompanied by a systematic description of images, and their contribution to the creation of the victimhood frames, mobilizing the opinion of the population, and inviting to the humanitarian intervention. Advance Critical Media Literacy: As the present study has established, the current systematic nature of linguistic mitigation and othering, critical media literacy training should be on the agenda of the policy makers and educators so that the textual analysis can be complemented by a systematic description of images, and their contribution to Together, these results indicate the importance of the role.

Combined, these results indicate the central role of media in forming the geopolitical consciousness, and they point to the relevance of Critical Media Literacy to a reader who wants to know more about the intricate narrative architecture the international conflicts are displayed in.

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