Declaration

I, Iver Kleiven, declare that this thesis is a result of my research, investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Abstract

This thesis examines how intelligence works as an element in international politics and diplomacy, and how it affects outcomes in state-actor conflicts in the international system. By looking at the discourse between Russia and the US following the chemical weapons attacks in Ghouta, Syria, in August 2013, the role of intelligence in political communications becomes clear. Intelligence in communications must be seen as something different than strategic and military intelligence. In terms of policy-makers' public discourse, intelligence is rather a claim to truth, a device in order to convince others of the validity of the policy-maker's argument. Herein also lies the problem, namely that the strategic importance of intelligence prohibits its full disclosure to the public, thereby denying the public any opportunity to assess the validity of the claim. In this thesis, both official government communications as well as communication that was reported in global media outlets have been analysed using critical discourse analysis in order to clarify the arguments and what was communicated as facts and reality by the two state-actors. While both sides allegedly possessed contrasting intelligence pointing to different perpetrators of the attacks, they were still able to gradually align their viewpoints and reach an agreement without either of them having to compromise on their perception of reality. Their original communication – always *based* on intelligence, according to them – was never dismissed as fiction nor proved as fact. This thesis argues from a constructivist perspective that the US and Russia operated in structures purely of their own making. This shows that intelligence as a device in political communication, in a state-level capacity, has the power to influence and even create the premises for which social interaction between states can be built.

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1. Introduction

Intelligence and classified information is growing ever more important in the world, and nowhere is this more apparent than in international relations and diplomacy. This is underlined by the massive outcry that followed WikiLeaks' release of war secrets and diplomatic cables and the countless debates on democracy and whistleblowing that followed after Edward Snowden leaked NSA secrets to the Guardian. Information is power, and it seems more and more states are increasingly aware of that. However, what role does intelligence actually have in international relations when it comes to decision-making and political communication? And is intelligence solely of any use when it is secret? This is a question that needs answering, which is why this thesis will explore the effect intelligence has on the making of politics and international interaction when it is *not* in its true form – *ie* secret – but public.

Public intelligence – that appears to be quite the oxymoron, doesn't it? Intelligence is hard, if not practically impossible, to come by unless one is directly or indirectly involved with the intelligence community. This thesis will assess how intelligence is used in communication – and as such not intelligence in itself. The aim is to analyse how intelligence – when it appears in public – shapes international politics as an element in political discourse. To achieve this the intention is to look at the case of Syria and the chemical weapons attacks in Ghouta, Syria, that became a major news story during the latter parts of 2013. Following a series of attacks during spring that year, it emerged that chemical weapons had killed many people in the Syrian Civil War. This garnered worldwide attention after the large-scale attack in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta on August 21st 2013. The actors in the Syria conflict vehemently accused others of the misdeed – and the situation escalated when Russia and Western governments (spearheaded by the United States) took opposing stands on the matter – and held seemingly contradicting intelligence information. How could their intelligence be so different? If one set of intelligence contradicted the other, surely one of them must have been fabricated, misinterpreted – or maybe even have been an outright lie? These are questions that will be addressed in this paper, but they stray slightly from the bigger picture: How was intelligence used in political discourse following the Ghouta attacks, and how did this discourse kick-start a process that ended with Syria, one of the few non-signatories of the Chemical Weapons Convention, signing a UN deal which required it to give up its chemical weapons?

1.1.Problem statement

The purpose of this master thesis is, in short, to address the role of intelligence and its relationship with political communication in international relations. By looking at a concise case study it should be possible to identify where references to intelligence appear in the structure of political communication and the media cycle and therefore observe how it affects state actors' behaviour – or shapes their basis for a concrete action or argument. Intelligence, as it appears in political discourse, does not represent the factual analyses or interpretations that, say, the president of the United States possesses. It varies too much from actor to actor for this to be true – and it is too exposed to human error through misinterpretation, miscalculations and other similar problems. Instead, intelligence in political discourse represents arguments – based on an actor's values, perceptions and objectives – that can be used to threaten, persuade, dissuade, and overrule other actors. An observation of intelligence as it appears to policy-makers is, unfortunately, a challenge because of the explicit nature of the intelligence community as well as the difficulty in obtaining it. This means the detour via the world of political discourse and news reporting is required – so that we can observe intelligence as it is presented to the public. This in itself brings its own challenges, but herein also lies some of the elements that make this thesis a necessity: Actors in political news reporting has always been subservient and dependent on the element of leaked confidential information from sources in order to create their news stories. This is a two-way street – if a policy-maker plants a piece of information in a reporter's ear it may well be because of ulterior motives. Access to intelligence is not for everyone. Yet it does appear in the media more frequently than we at first realize. A probable assumption is that if intelligence appears in the public eye, it is because someone wants that particular bit of information to become public knowledge.

In the end, intelligence is a privilege of the ruling, those usually referred to as policy-makers (and in some cases decision-makers – more on the difference later). Traditionally, scholars are only granted access to intelligence information in the wake of major intelligence blunders – 9/11 springs to mind – yet its importance to governance cannot be understated.

1.2.Research questions

This thesis will operate with three sets of research questions. They are designed to get an overview of the news coverage of the political discourse with regards to the chemical weapons situation in Syria and how intelligence was an element of said discourse, to examine the dynamics of the subsequent «intelligence standoff» that followed, and to explore the relationship between the US and Russia and their differing perceptions of reality. The questions are set up so that the use of intelligence in political discourse can be tracked throughout the case study. This will grant the

opportunity to assess, at the end of the line, how important intelligence-based communication is to the dynamics of international interaction and crisis solving. In order for this thesis to be a success, three research questions for the data analysis have been constructed. These will have their own sub-questions in order to grasp the finer details of the research material.

Research question 1: How was intelligence an element in the political discourse on chemical weapons in Syria following the Ghouta attacks in august 2013?

Sub-questions:
- *Which elements of US intelligence were reported in the public sphere or communicated to the public through official channels?*
- *Which elements of Russian intelligence were reported in the public sphere or communicated to the public through official channels?*

Research question 2: How was the political discourse containing references to intelligence constructed, and how did authorities communicate their future strategies with regards to this intelligence?

Sub-questions:
- *How did US authorities react to critical coverage regarding their own intelligence?*
- *How was intelligence an element in the US discourse with regards to policy alternatives?*
- *How did Russian authorities react to critical coverage regarding their own intelligence?*
- *How was intelligence an element in the Russian discourse with regards to policy alternatives?*

Research question 3: How was intelligence a factor in the political discourse with regards to a potential chemical weapons deal?

- *How was intelligence an element in the US and Russian discourse leading up to the UN deal in September 2013?*
- *How was intelligence an element in the US and Russian discourse following the UN deal?*

1.3.   Hypotheses

The main hypothesis of this master thesis will be that intelligence, even when used as a device in political communication, is intrinsic to politics and diplomacy – and that this will be made clear when an international dispute is analysed properly. In terms of foreign policy, intelligence is the foundation of many government decisions made behind closed doors, but here it should be demonstrated that intelligence can also be used in political communication in order to describe a certain perception of reality or in order to convince another of the validity of an argument. Intelligence is a conundrum, as it is not a clean-cut concept and is rarely documented. In warfare, an actor will usually know roughly how many troops, tanks, or airplanes its adversary has got. In diplomacy, intelligence is often claimed as a reason to act or not act on a certain matter – the Iraq war and the "dodgy dossier" comes to mind – yet it is rarely made public and the sources of the intelligence are not revealed. The aim is that the analysis of the data collected for this thesis will be able to show clearly how intelligence information is central to decision-maker's discourse and the actions that stem from it and as such holds great importance in shaping the politics of the world. Furthermore, there is an expectancy that this thesis will display evidence for a secondary utility of intelligence – not only an instrument for policy-makers to base their decisions on, intelligence plays a key role in international politics by shaping the very realities of the actors of the international system. As such, its importance lies not necessarily in what it tells policy-makers, but rather how it helps construct their differing realities, essentially forming a key cog in the very structure of the international system.

2. Methodology

This thesis will examine the political discourse of the American and Russian governments, both through the prism of the media and through their own channels. Intelligence is not something one can simply dig up and analyse, that would undermine the very purpose of intelligence – after all, its potency lies in its secrecy. That is why the focus is on the intelligence that comes into the public domain through political discourse and subsequent media reporting. The reporting of intelligence will be the essence in this thesis – as well as the discourse by various political authorities. In this part of the thesis the sources for the data collection will be identified and the reasons for choosing them explained. Furthermore, the intended method for the data analysis will be introduced and explained.

2.1.   Sources

Intelligence is, by and large, not easily accessible. That is why an early realization during the work on this thesis was that the role of the media and the public statements communicated by state actors and their political leaders had a part to play. Therefore, a selection of media outlets as well as official government statements will provide the reports needed to answer the research questions. The discourse they contain will be analysed using critical discourse analysis (CDA). The thinking behind this is that the selected media outlets have a wide-ranging – even global – appeal, and as such should provide an example of how the various state actors handle the information that is publicly available with regards to their own foreign policy. The inclusion of official government sources is to ensure that information that did not make the news cycle is also included. An advanced Google search using specified date and keyword parameters will be implemented in order to find all relevant articles.

2.1.1. Media sources

The following media outlets have been identified for data collection:

- *The Guardian*
- *The New York Times*
- *Al-Jazeera*

There are several reasons why these resources have been chosen. Firstly, they are all English-language news outlets (*Al-Jazeera* provides extensive coverage in Arabic as well, but has an English service). This is obviously an asset, as translating several sources from Arabic would ensure

a lot more work and a higher probability of making mistakes in the discourse analysis. Additionally, an extensive English-language service also indicates that the media outlet is available to an international audience. Furthermore, these sources are inherently different in terms of audience and the way they frame their news stories. The first two (*the Guardian* and *the New York Times*) have large followings not just in their respective countries, but also in the English-speaking world in general. They write for a global audience, but always with their country of origin as a vantage point. *Al-Jazeera* has become increasingly focused on global matters, but still remains the flagship of pan-Arabian broadcasting and will most likely be framing their news from this perspective. In order to establish a platform-neutral research sample, only data from the news outlets' websites will be considered during the work with this thesis.

2.1.2. Other sources

The media sources are bound to provide a solid platform for analysis, and will cover most angles of the Syrian conflict. However, the media sources will only report what they deem relevant and editorially sound – no matter how much various authorities want to communicate a certain message. Therefore, official statements from the US and Russian governments will be used in order to flesh out any gaps in the media coverage. The information published directly by the respective governments is, after all, their core communication – the message they want people to hear.

The following additional, non-media source have been identified for data collection:

- *The US State Department*
- *The Russian Foreign Ministry*

2.1.3. Source purpose

These media and non-media sources are identified for two purposes: They should yield ample amounts of research material and supply information relevant to this thesis - and they will provide a solid platform for the research questions to be addressed in a clear, consistent, and academic manner.

2.2.   Theory

A brief presentation of the relevant theories and concepts needed in order to provide a sufficient framework for this thesis should be provided. Theory is important in order to test hypotheses and contentions, and there are several concepts that should be identified properly in order to avoid confusion and ambiguity. This part of the thesis will present the relevant aspects of academic theory and, more specifically, the theories generally applied in the field of international relations.

2.2.1. Scientific theory and international relations

Berg & Lune (2012, p. 20) argue that a common definition of theory among social scientists is that it is «a system of logical statements or propositions that explain the relationship between two or more objects, concepts, phenomena, or characteristics of humans». This is a representation that seems to cover most bases in this regard. For this thesis, it is important to have a clear theory not only regarding discourse and the political structure in which actions and utterances appear - as part of a master's programme in international relations, it is also important to draw on the various schools of international relations theory in order to explore the existing frameworks of state behaviour and try to explore the role of discourse in this regard. As this thesis is written as part of a master's programme in international relations, it is important to view the analysis and the findings through the prism of international relations theory. Challenging theories and exploring new avenues of knowledge is a natural part of science, and as the world has changed there should be no surprise that the science of international relations has changed as well. Finding a theory that can be applied to the international system at any point in time in order to explain the behaviour of states seems a tough challenge – and fortunately not one to be handled at this point. Throughout the history of international relations as an academic subject, the "classical" theories of liberalism and realism have been the most prevalent among scholars (Knutsen, 1997). A common criticism of these theories (and their "*neo*"-successors) is their steadfast adherence to the set structure of the international system. These theories emphasize the view that it is the international system that dictates a state's behaviour and sets the premises for states to act. How would that work with this thesis? One of the essential premises of this paper is that state actors are able to shape their own realities through their political discourse, thereby themselves – as opposed to the international system – setting the stage for their actions.

2.2.2. Constructivism and the international system

A more apt theory for this thesis is constructivism, or *social constructivism.* Constructivists differ from realists and liberalists (and neo-realists and neo-liberalists) in that they argue that it is states' domestic policies and internal structures that create the premises for action and deliberation in the international system. Realism and liberalism can be described as a top-down approach to international relations, *ie* that they view the international system as the structure that shapes the realities that all state actors must abide by. *Systemic* is a term that is often applied to these two traditional theoretical views on international relations. Constructivism, on the other hand, is usually labelled a *non-systemic theory,* and it is for this reason it appears to be the most relevant for this thesis at it emphasizes that it is state behaviour that sets the premises for the structure in the international system – and not the other way around.

In order to address the research questions properly, there are two areas of theoretical literature that will be consulted and used as a foundation. The first is constructivist literature, represented for example by Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999), a cornerstone of the relatively new constructivist school of thought in international relations. Wendt and his contemporaries received recognition in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse for constructivism's approach to the new world order – it was said to come about as a response to the neo-realism of scholars such as Kenneth N. Waltz. Whether or not this is correct is of secondary importance, what is relevant is that neo-realism has been the dominant theory of international relations for the last few decades. Constructivism (or social constructivism) emerged as "a series of critical reactions to mainstream international relations theory in the USA, namely neo-realism and neo-liberal institutionalism" (Barnett, 2011: p. 149). The views of the "neo-" theories paint a picture of a world where states seek only power and material wealth in order to maximise their status in the international system. Neo-realism and its roots can be traced far back through history, for example to the French enlightenment period philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who wrote of "the law of the strongest" in the international system (Knutsen, 1997: pp. 131 - 137). This is important because it shows the longstanding tradition of *structure* as a key component of international relations studies. This tradition didn't start with Rousseau, however. According to Doyle (1997: pp. 111 - 136) Thomas Hobbes broke from the Machiavellian ranks in order to devise his own form of realism – structural realism:

"For international relations theorists, Hobbes' most important contribution was his laying
systematic and complete foundations for what is now the dominant model of international theory,

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structural realism." (Doyle, 1997: p. 113.)

These ideas are old, but they are no less relevant today. In fact, they have laid many of the foundations for the academic subject of international relations. Kenneth Waltz, one of the leading international relations theorists of the modern era, was another proponent of the systemic nature of the international system (2001: p. 160):

"In anarchy there is no automatic harmony. (...) A state will use force to attain its goals if, after assessing the prospects for success, it values those goals more than it values the pleasures of peace. Because each state is the final judge of its own cause, any state may at any time use force to implement its policies."

Waltz is usually considered to be one of the most important neo-realist thinkers in international relations theory. As we understand from the above statement, he is also considered a structuralist. The *structure* in this case is of course the structure of the international system, which is, according to the tradition of Rousseau, Hobbes and Waltz, *anarchic*. That entails that the only way for a state to survive is through action that will elevate its status among other states. There is no escaping the system, nor changing it. And how do states elevate their own position? In countless ways for sure, but the most common are through economic growth, trough expansion, and through force.

Social theory was growing in popularity by the 1980s, and social ideas started to drift into the thinking of many international relations scholars that were growing disillusioned by the rigid structuralism of neo-realism (Barnett, 2011: pp. 150 - 151). Barnett writes that constructivists, inspired by social studies, argued how "social forces such as ideas, knowledge, norms, and rules influence states' identities and interests". That view involves that a state's identity and interests is *not* (just) shaped by the position of said state in the international system, but rather by a set of premeditated conditions of the state's own making. Or in the words of Barnett (2011: p. 150):

"They (various incarnations of constructivist theory) have a common concern with how ideas define the international structure; how this structure shapes the identities, interests, and foreign policies of states; and how state and non-state actors reproduce that structure – and at times transform it."

So constructivism represents a theory of international relations where it is not the necessarily a "state of nature" that shapes states' behaviour, but rather where individual states' behaviour adds up

to an international system that is ever changing and evolving. The belief in an international system is permanent regardless of whether you are a realist or a constructivist – but if you are a realist you are more likely to believe in a more permanent system, one that is not changeable by whatever notions and ideas states must have. It is exactly the structure, the *systemic* approach to international relations theory, which caused theorists inspired by social forces to break out into a new direction. Barnett (2011: p. 151) writes that John Ruggie's 1983 critical review essay of Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979) was an important text in this aspect. Ruggie challenged Waltz's strong belief in structure, and wanted theorists to place more importance to the second element of the international system – the differentiation of states. This seems the right time to bring Alexander Wendt into the equation. Wendt is regarded as an important voice in the constructivist camp of international relations theorists. In the opening paragraphs of his seminal work *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999: p. 2), he writes:

"Their (states') foreign policy is often determined primarily by domestic politics, the analogue to individual personality, rather than by the international system."

A firm critic of the "narrow" debate between neo-realism and neo-liberalism (1999: p. 3), Wendt argues against the neo-realism view of Waltz and other that a systemic theory which emphasizes the causal powers of the international system in explaining state behaviour (Wendt, 1999: p. 11 – 12). Most constructivist theories argue that state-differentiated ("unit-level") factors like domestic politics are more important. Knutsen (1997: p. 278) says of Ruggie, Wendt and other constructivist thinkers that they represent a host of scholarly reorientations. "One of these is a movement in analytic focus away from objects and towards meanings". Thus, many students of international relations are no longer preoccupied with states and state interactions. Instead, they explore the meaning of 'state'." In short, the advent of constructivism in international relations has been brought on by a desire to view the way different units (states) shape their surroundings and vice versa – constructivism does not mean that the system cannot influence a state; it just means that the system is not a definite variable. It changes if its components (again, states) change their modus operandi. This is an obvious departure from the neo-realism school of thought where the international system provides the framework for every state's behaviour.

2.2.3. Intelligence and its relationship with policy-making and the media

For this thesis, a constructivist prism seems to be the most relevant. Russia and the US, basing their communication on apparently different intelligence, are prime examples of how states actively participate in creating premises and scope for action in the international system. These states effectively create their own reality through synergising their political interests with the intelligence made available to them. For the public, be it the American or the Russian, there is no option but to choose to trust their governments – or not to trust them.

The aspect of intelligence in the public – be it as part of communication or as part of news reporting – deserves some attention. There are important questions to be asked with regards to what intelligence actually constitutes in this context, why it is (or isn't) reported, and why it is not given greater credence. Aldrich (2009) writes that in an American context, the media and the intelligence community have long had a closer relationship than most people realize. However, a brief flirtation with more transparency and a deconstruction of the intelligence community ended quickly when the planes crashed into the World Trade Center. Aldrich argues that the official accountability systems of intelligence communities are growing weaker because of the perceived need for more secrecy in order to combat threats. Additionally, he claims that there is a counter-movement in the form of new media, whistle-blowers and activists that now form what he calls an "informal accountability" system – which may also bring about a change in the way the intelligence community handles the press. Aldrich (2009, p. 34) concludes that what lies in store could be "a more nuanced legal regime for the reporting of intelligence matters that would provide, not only for disclosure when reporters consider it to be in the public interest, but also a formula for non-disclosure by the press that would try to prevent obvious harm". He argues that that the intelligence community have realised, to some extent, that it is important to keep the press onside, and that cooperation will reduce the damaging effects of uncontrolled leaking of confidential information. Regardless, the general trend is that the focus on controlling intelligence does underline how the media are more and more dependent on a willing informant or a leak in order to assess any claim of truth that may be communicated by a policy-maker.

Examining the Russian intelligence community is a tougher challenge, as it is more secretive and its relationship with policy-makers is much more tangled. Vladimir Putin rose to power on the back of his work in the notorious KGB, and according to Lo (2003, p. 35) the input of the Russian security and intelligence apparatus on the country's foreign policy is almost impossible to measure. "It is logical that Putin should obtain much of his information from those he most trusts." Russia's

policy-makers, with their state-owned TV channels and strictly regulated newspaper market, have fewer concerns than their American counterparts in terms of what is communicated – after all, they have ways to decide for themselves what reaches the headlines. As such, the Russian public is, to a much greater extent than the American public, dependent on what the government feeds the press in order to know what is going on. The ownership and censorship issues also mean that Russian media are less likely to print/broadcast critical coverage of official government communications. This is an especially important point when you directly compare Russia and the US directly, as several researchers (Ormond, 2009) have argued that after the Iraq War, American media coverage of intelligence has become more and more critical.

Assessing the case for "public" intelligence in both states, it appears that (although there is some hope for change in the US) intelligence is still the best kept secret in the business, and that government cooperation at some level is required in order to cover it. This leads to the conclusion that, as long as the results intelligence is communicated, but the data, methods and analysis behind it is not, there is no way for the media (and by extension the public) to assess its validity. Intelligence is communicated to the public through policy-makers, so what then when communicated intelligence doesn't add up? When perceptions of reality are so blatantly different as those of Russia and the US in the chemical weapons situation in Syria was, it creates a roadblock in the international structure that is not easy to bypass – but it should be possible, and this thesis will demonstrate how.

2.3.   Concepts

A concept will often differ from any one person you ask. That is why it is very important to be clear about the various concepts that will appear in any given academic work. This thesis is no different. According to Turner (1989, p. 5), concepts are the "building blocks of theory". This is a very descriptive quote, as one cannot feasibly expect to utilise academic theory to create a framework without presenting a clear definition of the variables within that very framework.

2.3.1. List of concepts

- Intelligence: Intelligence, for the purpose of this thesis, is identified as information that gives a strategic advantage to whoever possesses it. As is stated in Jensen *et al* (2013, p. 2): "However we examine intelligence, (...) its purpose is to provide that critical edge in decision-making that shifts the balance in favour of the decision-maker. This is a concept known as *decision advantage*, where one knows more than a competitor or adversary." However, the only information that is of importance when it comes to the collection and analysis of data in this thesis is the *intelligence* that is *communicated* to the public. As such, when intelligence is referred to later in this paper, it is understood to mean *secret or strategic information that is not openly accessible to the public* unless it has been communicated to the public. It should also be underlined that any reference to what is conceptualized as intelligence does not necessarily imply any judgment of the validity or even existence of said intelligence. Intelligence can be manipulated, and it can be made up. When a government communicates something based on intelligence, there is usually no way for the audience to separate fact from fiction – apart from the element of trust. It must be kept in mind that for the remainder of this thesis, any reference to intelligence is a reference to *intelligence as a device in political communication*, *ie* as grounds for an argument, action, etc.
- The media-intelligence cycle: This is quite a broad concept, and could perhaps better be described as a structure or phenomenon; nevertheless it deserves an attempt at an explanation. The cycle is the continuity loop in which policy-makers attempt to communicate the validity for their claims and/or actions, but also the loop in which the media attempt to contest these claims and actions. It is in this ever-evolving structure this thesis will conduct its research. While many researchers argue that the intelligence community needs the media – as well as the other way around, the relationship can often be fraught and filled with mutual enmity. Ormand (Dover & Goodman, 2009) writes of the troublesome relationship between the media, the intelligence community and the public. He

claims that trust in the intelligence communities is much lower in the wake of the spectacular intelligence failures that accompanied the War in Iraq – this lack of trust now causes two problems for policy-makers. Firstly, the media apply more scrutiny when faced with governments' claims of relevant intelligence in the wake of a situation, and secondly, policy-makers and others with interests in the intelligence community face a tougher and more proactive role in convincing the public for the continued need of a strong intelligence community. Quite how the level of public support of and trust in the intelligence community has changed is hard to say, but the massive backlash following Edward Snowden's NSA leaks (Greenwald, 2014) shows to some degree how much of a political hot potato the intelligence community has become.

- Policy-makers and decision-makers: Policy-makers and decision-makers are terms used interchangeably both by Jensen *et al* (2013) and Lowenthal (2012). The former describe a decision-maker as "someone who has to make decisions, oftentimes for an agency or organization" (Jensen *et al*, 2013: p. 10) – whereas a policy-maker is described as a decision-maker who has the power to affect policy and as such carries strategic decision-making capabilities. "Every policymaker is a decision-maker, but the opposite is not necessarily true. Each, however, is a potential consumer of intelligence" (Jensen et al, 2013: p. 11).

- The public: A very broad concept, and in the case of this thesis understood to be the global audience to the situation in Syria – some of whom Russian and American policy-makers have to answer to. As Coleman & Ross (2010, pp. 8 - 9) put it: "Never meeting in one place or speaking with one voice, the public is unable to represent itself. It is doomed to be represented.» The representatives of the public for the purpose of this thesis are the global media, who are contesting state actors' claims of validity and legitimacy.

- Open-source intelligence: The intelligence community refers to various types of intelligence, such as for example human intelligence (HUMINT) and signal intelligence (SIGINT) (Lowenthal, 2012). These are not of much importance here as the intelligence collection process is not on the agenda. However, a note on open-source intelligence is necessary. Lowenthal (2012, pp. 111 - 113) describes open-source intelligence as freely available public information. This entails media reports, photos and videos spread through social media, public data, academic works, etc. As a lot of discourse will be analyzed through the prism of the news media, it is important to be able to differentiate between what is open-source intelligence and what is a claim of secret intelligence.

- Discourse: Conceptualised as «the social use of language» by Fairclough & Fairclough (2012: p. 78). For this thesis *discourse* is the *political communication* that emanates from the actors in the conflict, whether it is reproduced in the media or communicated through their own channels. The *discourse* will give an indication of the communicator's perceptions and the reality he or she wishes to project, as well as the potential for action.

- The Ghouta attacks: In this thesis it is the chemical weapons attacks in Ghouta on the 21st August 2013 and their aftermath that is the relevant case study. If a reference is made to another chemical weapons situation that will be made clear. The Ghouta attacks were chosen because of the scope of the attacks – the first of their kind to jolt the international community into taking action in Syria.

- Actors in the conflict and its aftermath: The US and Russia are the two major international players that will be under the most scrutiny, as they disagreed on key matters throughout the dispute – and because their relationship is of most interest precisely because of their frequent disagreements. Official discourse from these actors comes from their respective presidential offices, foreign ministries or heads of armed forces. Other actors and their points of view will be included in order to provide a frame of reference for the American and the Russian discourse – but these actors will not see their discourse analyzed in full. Some of these include the UN, with its largely diplomatic, non-partisan view on the situation, and other powerful states such as the United Kingdom.

- Syrian actors: References will be made to the Assad regime, government forces, loyalists, etc. These are all the considered to be sympathetic to, or under the control of, Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian opposition is more rag-tag, and consists of several groups with various ethnic, religious and political allegiances. They share the common goal of toppling Assad's regime however, and as such they are considered one for all intents and purposes in this thesis.

- Chemical weapons and the international community: For the purposes of this thesis, chemical weapons are conceptualized as any type of weapon deemed illegal by the Chemical Weapons Convention (OPCW, 1997).

2.4.   Theoretical approach to methods

Berg & Lune label discourse analysis as a form of content analysis – a research discipline «not inherently either quantitative or qualitative, and may be both at the same time» (2012, p. 354). They argue that there is a debate as to which of these positions is true. A positivist theorist could perform a discourse analysis using word counts and similar approaches, while an opposing method would consist of exploring the social structures in which texts and/or language is communicated. For this particular thesis it is imperative to explore the narratives of the collected texts and to interpret the position of the communicator. The social and political worlds within which these texts are produced are key to understanding the role of intelligence in world politics. Berg & Lune (2012, p. 364) acknowledge this approach:

"To the social scientist, however, the interesting aspect of this discourse is not merely what is said, or which words are used, but the social construction and apprehension of meanings thus created through this discourse."

Johnstone (2003) describes discourse analysis as simply the study of language, but from the preceding quote one could just as likely argue that language alone does not shape discourse. The social structure – the international system, in the case of this thesis – in which language is communicated is arguably as important.

2.4.1. Aristotle's view of man as a political animal

The importance of communication and political interaction has been stated since ancient times. The Greek philosopher Aristotle argues that the state is an inherent feature of mankind, and that «man is by nature a political animal» (Aristotle, 1992: 1253a1). There is, by his definition, one defining feature that separates us from other animals:

"But obviously man is a political animal in a sense in which a bee is not, or any other gregarious animal. Nature, as we say, does nothing without some purpose; and she has endowed man alone with the power of speech." (Aristotle, 1992: 1253a7.)

By Aristotle's reasoning, it is speech that enables us to engage in a debate of what is right and what is wrong, good and evil – and herein also lies the capability to become true political animals. It is what separates a politician's argument from the lion's roar:

"Speech is something different from voice (...), [it] serves to indicate what is useful and what is harmful, and so also what is just and what is unjust. For the real difference between man and other animals is that humans alone have perception of good and evil, just and unjust." (Aristotle, 1992: 1253a7.)

According to Chilton (2004, p. 5), this reasoning is key in order to understand the political communication of our species: "It is shared perceptions of values that define political associations. And the human endowment for language has the function of 'indicating' – *ie* signifying, communicating – what is deemed, according to such shared perceptions, to be advantageous or not, by implication to the group, and what is deemed right and wrong within that group."

Chilton's view of these shared perceptions is critical in order to form a coherent method of discourse analysis that will be of any use to this thesis. Shared perceptions, or *association*, is an element in the creation of social structures, and this thesis holds that it is only within structures that political communication can make sense. As we'll come to later, many political scientists and other social scientists still defer to Aristotle's views on structure and constructed spheres of reality when debating discourse and communication. For now, suffice to highlight another point from Aristotle's *Politics:* that of association and the common good. Aristotle claims that every association (*eg* a state) is formed with a good purpose – or at least what the people constituting each association claim is good. His argument is then that the most sovereign of associations – *ie* the association that is able to rally other associations to its cause or take them under its protection - will represent the most sovereign of all good intentions. This view can be applied to both states, federal governments and even major international organisations, but regardless of this the observation is that *people form associations with good intentions; associations assume power from the people, who in turn expect the association to pursue (more or less) the same good intentions.* The assumption that all men, whether as part of an association or not, aim at good is a premise readily accepted by large swathes of the population when it comes to the intelligence community and the structures of governance they abide by. This may vary from state to state, for example due to low trust in public officials and other factors – but a common denominator when it comes to state business in the field of international relations, warfare, intelligence and diplomacy, is secrecy. The people must trust in its association's good intentions, or in other words: The public must trust in their state.

2.4.2. The sociological tradition of discourse analysis
Language, the way it is constructed, the way it is received, and the structure within which it gives meaning can all be said to be social constructs. Various sociological theorists have attempted to link these factors together into a coherent framework, and it would be reckless to proceed without acknowledging their efforts. Chilton (2004) remarks on the importance of the Frankfurt school in establishing a connection between language, politics and culture. Other sociologists, such as Bourdieu and Habermas have carried out research in the same field. White's (1988) assessment of the latter's theories has been of notable help during the work on this thesis, especially concerning the themes of language, reason and rational choice. Today, the dominant conception of practical reason in social sciences is generally accepted to be the concept of strategic reason. White (1988: p. 10) explains it this way:

"Action is conceptualized as the intentional, self-interested behaviour of individuals in an objectivated world, that is, one in which objects and other individuals are related to in terms of their possible manipulation. The rationality of action is correspondingly conceptualized as the efficient linking of actions-seen-as-means to the attainment of goals."

It is evident that White believes most rational choice theorists work under the assumption that rational agents are motivated by self-interest and little else.

"Rational choice theory simply aims at predicting how individuals will aim act in a given situation, if they do in fact act rationally in the strategic sense." (White, 1988: p. 11.)

He appears unconvinced that this self-interest is transferable to an association such as a state system or similar, and asks whether it is possible for "individuals who share nothing more than strategic rationality to agree upon a set of collective arrangements, the result of which will be in the public interest or good for all?" (1988, p. 11). This is a problem he claims to share with Habermas, who according to White thought that an exclusively strategic understanding of rationality is incompatible with the social and political world we live in today. In short, Habermas questions overt rationalism, and is eager to evolve the concept of reason (White, 1988: pp. 25 - 26). Rather than focus on this absolute form of rationalism, Habermas sought to examine the relationship between language, interaction and rationality. Paul Chilton, whose work on linguistics will feature later in this part of the paper, draws on the Habermasian framework which "holds that knowledge is not a neutral representation of an objective world 'out there', but is realised through what we are calling here

language" (Chilton, 2004: p. 42). As such, Chilton indicates that the Habermasian perspective is to perceive linguistic behaviour as a vehicle for rationality. "Rationality is not a faculty of the mind, but an abstract goal of human coordination achieved through the exchange of utterances" (Chilton, 2004: p. 42). White (1988, pp. 27 - 28) attempts to explain Habermas' thinking on this area:

"When a speaker orients himself toward understanding – that is, engages in communicative action – his speech acts must raise, and he must be accountable for, three rationality or 'validity claims': truth, normative legitimacy and truthfulness/authenticity. Only if a speaker is able to convince his hearers that his claims are rational and thus worthy of recognition can there develop a 'rationally motivated agreement' or consensus on how to coordinate future actions."

Thus, Habermas' understanding is that it is the validity of the communicator's claims (communicative action) that deem them rational or irrational. This is rather a far step from the strategic rationalist point of view – and implies that the communicator is expected to provide a certain burden of proof in order to rationalize his or her actions, rather than simply justify them from a self-interest perspective. So, rather than using rational choice as a vehicle to explain action, Habermas' focus is that of language as a medium for co-ordinating action. But how does one trigger action? White argues that action, or the co-ordination of action, appears when actors are inclined to reach an understanding. This is what White (1988: p. 28) labels "communicative action":

"From the perspective of communicative action, utterances can be assessed as rational or irrational because they raise criticisable validity claims, that is, ones which are fallible and open to objective judgment."

This ties in with Aristotle's views of speech as the necessity for mankind's political capabilities; speech (or communicative action, as it is called here) has to have validity in order to be rational. Herein lies the assumption that the target of the communicative action is able to contest validity and act according to what is rational to him or her – which according to White is intrinsic to us as human beings:

"In developing the ability to speak and act, each individual acquires the know-how required both to differentiate the three dimensions of validity and to employ the standards appropriate to each dimension for the purpose of assessing particular claims. For a given agent this know-how may be more or less conscious, but it is always intuitively accessible." (White, 1988: p. 29.)

The issue of the three dimensions of validity, or *validity claims*, and how to contest them is raised by Fairclough & Fairclough (2012) and will be revisited somewhat later in this methodology chapter.

2.4.3.   Chilton – politics as language?

"Rhetorical practice, in the form of public relations and 'spin', is now more centre stage than ever." (From the preface of Analysing Political Discourse, Chilton, 2004.)

In terms of linking language to political action, Paul Chilton draws heavily on Habermas' sociological theories. However, as will become evident, he is also much more of a linguist, concerned with the construction of discourse as well as the structure within which it resonates. Both of these aspects will be addressed here. Chilton acknowledges Aristotle's basic contention that speech, or language, is the fundament for our species' status as social, economical and political animals:

"What is clear is that political activity does not exist without the use of language. It is true [...] that other behaviours are involved and, in particular, physical coercion. But the doing of politics is predominantly constituted in language." (Chilton, 2004: p. 6.)

Most people would concede that politics, if anything, consists of mostly (too much) language – such as speeches, debates, committee hearings, and interpellations. But Chilton has an important point regarding political language; it resonates because it carries force. A state's penal code is nothing but a political text, constructed over years by politicians, lawyers, judges and bureaucrats – yet if you do not abide by it, the state will sanction you, for example by imprisonment. It is in this way, Chilton argues, that political communication, although driven by language, in fact has much more *power* than one assumes at first notice.

"If the verbal business of political authority is characterised by the ultimate sanction of force, it needs to be also pointed out that such force can itself only be operationalized by means of communicative acts, usually going down links in a chain of command. However politics is defined, there is a linguistic, discursive and communicative dimension, generally only partially acknowledged, if at all, by practitioners and theorists." (Chilton, 2004: p. 4.)

This raises a few questions; is political language, in the form of *communicative action*, in itself a

form of power? If Chilton's contention is that the power of an association can only be operationalized by communicative acts, then the answer is surely yes? However, how does this apply to for example diplomacy? If political authority is communicated, is a threat of force a necessity? How does an association forward a threat of force to another association with, bearing in mind the Habermasian view on rationality, any degree of validity? Validity is, in fact, actually a key component of both Chilton's and Habermas' thinking, defined here by the former's four so-called *validity claims* (not to be confused with Habermas' claims, the three dimensions). These are presented in Chilton (2004: p. 43) and are as follows:

- The *claim to understandability, ie* that the communicator is presenting a message intelligible to the receiver, both in terms of language, shared perceptions, knowledge, etc.
- The *claim to truth*, "*ie* to assert a proportional truth, or (...) to be truthfully asserting a representation of a state of affairs".
- The *claim to be telling the truth*, which differs from the above in that it relates to the communicator's presentation of his or her intended meanings.
- The *claim to rightness*, which is the right to communicate the message as well as the authority behind it. Perhaps more easily described by Chilton as *legitimacy*.

According to Chilton (2004, pp. 43 - 44), using the Habermasian framework to procure a rational truth is only possible if a communicator's message can be freely challenged and tested by using the aforementioned validity claims. Attempting a critical approach to these claims is an important part of the discourse analysis in this thesis, as much of it will deal with claims from various authorities (in the form of actors in the international system). As a linguist, Chilton also provides insight into several other phenomena that are relevant. Among the most important are:

- *Representation*: This is a difficult concept, and Chilton highlights various approaches to interpreting it. In discourse, it is essentially about a precise communication with regards to a specific referent. Some challenges regarding representation is, for example:
  ◦ Non-existing entities (for example deities, symbols).
  ◦ Vague concepts (contested terms such as communism, democracy, sovereignty).
  ◦ Same referents, but different meanings (*eg* the president of the United States and the US commander-in-chief refers to the same person, but has different meanings).
- *Meaning*: This concept is in its essence subjective. The meaning of *war*, for example, is only

in the communicator's head. *War* is not an objective term and cannot be communicated objectively. Instead, it must be presented using *representation*. However, *representation* in conjunction with *frames* can also give *shared meanings, ie* that a concept resonates thoroughly and with some level of precision throughout a polity.

- *Frames*: Chilton (2004, p. 51) describes frames as "structures related to the conceptualisation of situation types and their expression in language". Essentially they are the structure or framework in which a *representation* gives *meaning*. Frames may differ from person to person – but could also be interpreted collectively.

To summarize briefly, the three-headed beast works like this: A communicator's message is constructed using the communicator's own *meanings*. The message delivers a *representation* – which is received in the subjective or collective *frames* of the audience – which in turn create *meaning* for the members of said audience. This meaning is not necessarily the same meaning that is in the communicator's mind. As should be obvious by now, Chilton's focus is very much on language and how reality is communicated through it. Attempting a discourse analysis in the field of international politics concentrating only on language, however, would be a mistake. Chilton will be revisited in the section dealing with the application of methods, but his approach will need to be combined with other elements in order to perform a solid and coherent analysis of the source material.

2.4.4. Fairclough – the power of action
In Wodak & Chilton (2005), Norman Fairclough summarises some of his thoughts on the current application of critical discourse analysis (CDA) in research on governance, and explains the differing approaches to such analysis and how it can be improved. Fairclough's *Language and Power* (2013, first published in 1989) is considered one of the key texts for this method of research, which he builds on in *Political Discourse Analysis* (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). The aim of CDA is, in Fairclough's words, not only to describe the social mechanisms that we adhere to but also to evaluate them and attempt to find improvements:

"Evaluation is linked to a concern to understand possibilities for, as well as obstacles to, changing societies to make them better in such respects." (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012: p. 79.)

In terms of international relations, we must assume that the aim for every state would be to make the world better – at least from a sovereign and rational point of view. What that view is may vary

greatly from state to state, of course – but as a state is an *association of man* in the eyes of Aristotle, one must assume that the state's intentions is progress towards a 'better world' – it could be argued that the most basic of security requirements is peace (or absence of conflict) within the sovereignty and peace with and within neighbouring countries. However, as globalization makes the world smaller it becomes clear that conflicts that appear far away can suddenly come very close, so a more expansive concept of security would involve trade, democratization, peace-building and various other elements. Evaluation as such is an interesting tool, as it will allow for looking at the *effect* of intelligence in international politics, and not only at its *function*. Fairclough highlights two modes of evaluation: normative critique and explanatory critique. According to Fairclough & Fairclough (2012, p. 79), "normative critique evaluates social realities against the standard of values taken as necessary to a 'good society', which raises the question of what a good society is". In layman's terms, it is a question of whether such realities hold up to an ethos of truth, benevolence – or if it is in fact the other way around. This poses many questions if applied to a thesis concerning international politics, such as this one. Values differ greatly from state to state and population to population – and there are many different views in the international arena on what would constitute a 'good society'. However, the point is that to perform a normative critique on a set of what is labelled 'social realities' (more on this later), one must consider the most relevant set of values – this is a potential pitfall and care must be taken in order to perform a coherent normative critique. Explanatory critique is described by Fairclough & Fairclough (2012, p. 79) as an attempt "to explain why and how existing social realities endure despite their damaging effects", or in other words – why is there no change?

"Explanatory critique seeks understanding of what makes a given social order work, which is clearly necessary if it is to be changed to enhance human well-being: another aim of critical science is to identify what might facilitate such change as well as obstruct it." (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012: p. 79.)

So what are these 'social realities' that should be so sternly criticized? Fairclough (2012) suggests these three concepts:

- *Social structures*
- *Social practices*
- *Events*

Events are concrete happenings, *eg* individual actions, behaviour, incidents, etc. *Structures* are more

abstract, and include systems, mechanisms and institutions. The mediation between events and structures is done by *social practices.* Fairclough & Fairclough (2012, p. 82) put it like this – and claim that the order can also be turned on its head:

"We can say that structures directly shape practices, and practices directly shape events, but structures do not directly shape events."

By Fairclough & Fairclough's definition, this means that it is *social practice* that forces action. If structure is the framework for practice, and events are either *a)* an incident forcing a reaction, or *b)* an incident as a result of a social practice, then it becomes clear that *structure* and *events* are the poles in Fairclough's system of social realities – and that *practice* is the active element between the two. The *reality of doing*, so to speak. Fairclough & Fairclough (2012) claim Chilton's *Analysing Political Discourse* (2004) is an important text in the area of discourse analysis, but argues he focuses too much on the cognitive aspects of political discourse and fails to address politics as action. The action element in CDA, as illustrated by the example of *social realities*, is more prominent, and as such allows for an analysis that can focus more on what is happening rather than concentrating on textual and linguistic approaches. That is not to say Chilton's work will not be of any help. Fairclough & Fairclough (2012, p. 21) summarise their ambition for their CDA framework like this:

"We need to move away from political theory, from an understanding of how democratic deliberation can be at once cooperative and conflictual, to ways of analyzing and evaluating it which allow us to take these characteristics into account. The way we attempt to do this (...) is by developing an account of the genre of political deliberation which emphasizes its adversarial character, but also shows how it feeds into the cooperative decision-making within institutional practices that are designed for this purpose."

2.5.   Method in practice

In this section the methods for data collection, the application of scientific method, and the analysis of data will be detailed.

2.5.1. Scope

Source material will be gathered from the media and non-media sources presented earlier in this thesis. In order to narrow the scope of analysis, four key time periods have been identified, and all source materials published within these dates will be subject to analysis. There is a considerable time difference between Moscow and New York, so ample time will be allowed in order for all sources to be able to publish relevant material. These time periods are:

- 21st August – 23rd August: The Ghouta attacks occurred early in the morning of the 21st august, and reports of what had happened appeared frequently over the next 48 hours. Therefore, this is the natural time at which to start the analysis.
- 26th August - 29th August: Weapons inspectors from the UN work in Ghouta, while there is widespread confusion and disagreement in the international community.
- 14th September – 15th September: Syria agrees to join the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).
- 16th September - 17th September: The UN weapons inspectors' report is published.
- 26th September - 28th September: The UN Security Council adopts resolution 2118.

In terms of selection, only hard news articles – that is, news stories published by a journalist/agency and following editorial and journalistic standards – will be analyzed. The exception here is statements from the US State Department and the Russian Foreign Ministry – more on that later. That excludes for example op eds, digital elements, interactive maps, timelines, etc unless they should be part of a hard news story. The reason for this is because it is in the communicated messages relevant discourse can be found – and by journalistic standards these messages will more often than not be supplied by a rebuttal as well as facts concerning the *when*, *where*, *how* and *why*. As mentioned earlier all research material will also be taken from the source's website and online archives. The main reason for this is to allow all sources a similar platform, and because the nature of multimediality suggests that the articles will be up to date. Also, only relevant articles from each time period will be analyzed. That is, for an article to be included as a research source, it must be linked to the key event of its time period. With regards to source material from the non-media

sources, all statements issued with regards to the key event in question will be analyzed. All transcripts of quotes and speeches from the US government will also be included.

All source material consulted will be referenced and listed in a separate appendix in the bibliography (p. 75).

2.5.2. Application

The system of critical discourse analysis (CDA) put forward by Fairclough & Fairclough (2012) will be the main method using in this thesis. Thus, the analysis of an article of source material will be performed like this[1]:

- *Deconstruction of argument* (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012: pp. 88 – 89)[2]: Here the aim is to analyze the political communication through a specified media. That means this method will be applied in order to differentiate American and Russian communication through three separate media sources – and to analyse the American and Russian official statements in their own right.
  - Claim (solution): What is the claim or the potential solution to an event?
  - Circumstantial premises (problems): Within what structure does the event occur? Which practices are relevant?
  - Goal premises: What is the aim?
  - Value premises: Why should the aim be achieved?
  - Means-goal premise: How should the aim be achieved?
  - Alternative options: What are the alternatives?
  - Addressing alternative options: Rejecting negatives or unreasonable alternatives.

It should be noted that it will not be possible at all times to deconstruct all the various claims and premises of an argument, due to the lack of relevant discourse. Should this be the case, only the relevant claims and premises will be included.

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[1] As this thesis is based on an analysis of textual media sources, there is a possibility that not all
[2] If Fairclough & Fairclough's arrangement is proving hard to apply in some instances, it is possible to draw on Chilton's textual analysis on global matters (2004, pp. 154 – 172) in order to pinpoint the correct argument, agent, recipient, etc. This should be only be done if necessary to comply with Fairclough's approach. Chilton's conceptualizations of *representation*, *meaning* and *frames* in communication will also be applied if necessary.

- *Application of social structure (applied for each period)*
  - Designate *structure*, *practice,* and *event.*
  - Identify order [structure -> practice -> event] *or* [event -> practice -> structure].

- *Designation of intelligence (will be summarized in the Findings part)*
  - During the above steps, any reference to *intelligence* within the discourse should be noted. For a clarification over the concept of intelligence, see p. 18 for details.

- *Apply research questions and critiques (will be summarized in the Findings part)*
  - Ask the relevant research questions and see to what extent, if any, they can be answered.
  - Perform normative and explanatory critiques of the social realities applying the relevant point of view in terms of values.

2.5.3. Presentation

The data analysis will be performed on a source-by-source basis (sorted, if applicable, by time of publication) gradually advancing from the first key time period to the last. Interesting findings will be highlighted underway, and a summary of key findings and trends will be presented in the *findings* part (p. 67) of this thesis.

2.5.4. Potential problems

As this thesis' data sources are by and large secondary sources there are very few obvious ethical snags. The information is available for anyone to access, and has been published with the intention for people to access and read it. The situation would have been different if the source material was secret military intelligence that had somehow become available. Then there could potentially be ethical dilemmas to consider with regards to the safety of other people, etc. However, there is an element of the source material that could prove a potential pitfall, especially with regards to the media sources. That is the concept of *neutrality*, specifically in terms of representation in the media. Chilton (2004, p. 77) argues that neutrality is a flawed element when it comes to news reporting, especially when addressing controversial actors. "Interviewers addressing 'extremist' political actors will express, directly or indirectly, their disapproval." This, he argues, is to be understood as presumption – *ie* the notion that they are "speaking on behalf of the common values of the democratic polity within which their news institution is sanctioned. Interviewers, then, are not so much neutral as representative of an institution that is representative of a political consensus"

(2004, p. 78). This is something that could potentially cause difficulties when assessing the various sources used in the work with this thesis, as they represent totally different 'democratic polities' so to speak. What resonates true with the average Russian is most likely to be met with a different attitude from the average American.

3. Data analysis[3]

3.1.   21st August - 23rd August: The Ghouta attacks and their immediate aftermath

It took less than a day following the Ghouta attacks before the clamouring for action began. Reports emanated early that the rebel-controlled Damascus suburb of Ghouta had been attacked with chemical weapons, allegedly the largest chemical attack of the Syrian Civil War so far. The casualties that were reported mean the international community had little option but to address the situation with urgency and diligence. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) quickly scheduled an emergency meeting, and several nations wanted UN weapons inspectors in place as soon as possible. Much of the initial news coverage of the situation was spent trying to elaborate on what had actually happened, and several open sources were consulted in order to accomplish this:

- Syrian opposition claimed that hundreds of people were killed in Ghouta in chemical attacks by Syrian government forces.
- Sham, a Syrian opposition news network, claimed the nerve agent sarin was used.
- The death toll was hard to ascertain, and varied from source to source. It ranged from 'in the hundreds' to 1,300 deaths.
- Syrian state TV stated that there was 'no truth' in the allegations that they were behind the attacks.
- Experts reviewing available footage said it 'appears to show' poisonous gas being used.

3.1.1. Political discourse in the Guardian's coverage
- The United States' position
  - Deconstruction of argument
    - Claim (solution): The Syrian government must provide immediate access to UN investigators in order to uncover the facts about the Ghouta attacks.
    - Circumstantial premises (problems): Inspectors may not enter Ghouta, as it was not part of their mandate. Syrian government needs to give permission.
    - Goal premises: Collect facts and intelligence, interrogate witnesses and discover the truth.

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[3] Note: In this part of the thesis, all references point to the sources listed in the relevant timeframe of the appendix part of the bibliography unless otherwise specified.

- ▪ Value premises: The use of chemical weapons is illegal and represents, to the US, a "red line" that must not be crossed (Black & Siddique, 2013). The White House was "deeply concerned" by what had happened in Ghouta (Roberts & Borger, 2013a).

- ▪ Means-goals premise: UN inspectors must have "immediate and unfettered access to the site". This means a compromise must be reached in the UNSC and that Syria must agree to further investigations by UN inspectors.

- ▪ Alternative options: "If these [new] reports are true it would be an outrageous escalation in the use of chemical weapons by the regime, and there would be a range of further options for us to take," said State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki (Roberts & Borger, 2013a). There is no clear suggestion as to what action the US could take, but it should be obvious that they possess the resources to do more than most states are able to. Chilton (2004) underlines that political communication must be believable and with a clear or unspoken threat of power. Recent history has shown that the US has no qualms about neither diplomatic nor military intervention in the Middle East should it serve their agenda.

- ▪ Addressing alternative options: "The president has ordered the intelligence community to urgently gather information. We are unable to determine conclusively chemical weapons use but we are doing everything possible to nail down the facts," said Psaki.

- • <u>Russia's position</u>
  - ◦ Deconstruction of argument
    - ▪ Claim (solution): Roberts & Borger (2013a) wrote: "Moscow has called for an independent investigation by UN experts into allegations that the Syrian government carried out a deadly chemical weapons attack on the outskirts of Damascus."

    - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): Like the other actors, Russia appeared uncertain as to what exactly has transpired in Ghouta. This means that establishing the facts was the priority, and the preferred structure for accomplishing this was by addressing the UN.

    - ▪ Goal premises: According to Roberts & Borger (2013a), Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated: "How can we object [to UN inspectors investigating the Ghouta attacks]? We, quite the opposite, have an interest that the investigation into what happened happen objectively." Judging by the Russian discourse, their aim was

therefore a fair investigation.

- Value premises: Interpreting the Russian statements, the Russians appeared confident that the investigation would show that the Ghouta attacks were the work of Syrian rebels. Roberts & Borger (2013a) wrote that "Russia had called for President Bashar al-Assad's embattled government to co-operate with an investigation, but questions remained about the willingness of the opposition, 'which must secure safe access of the mission to the location of the incident'". The Ghouta suburb was under rebel control at the time of the attacks. As the Russians had consistently backed the Assad regime up to this point, a 'successful' investigation laying the blame at the rebels' door would provide solid political capital for the Russian government. It is important to note here that the Russian government at this point laid claim to information that no other actor seems to possess. "Moscow has asserted that the attack was 'a homemade rocket loaded with an unidentified chemical agent' and that it was probably a provocation by opposition forces intended to implicate the Syrian president," read the statement that appeared in Roberts & Borger (2013a).

- Alternative options: There was little in the way of alternatives offered in the Russian statements. If anything there appears to be an acceptance that a UN investigation was the only way to go forward, although a Russian spokesperson acknowledged that Syria must give its permission: "They [The United Nations and Syria] have agreed on co-operation in three areas [not including Ghouta] If there is a need to achieve clarification in this case – and judging by everything, there is – then they need to agree." (Roberts & Borger, 2013a.)

3.1.2. Political discourse in the NY Times' coverage

- The United States' position
  - Deconstruction of argument
    - Claim (solution): Due to Obama's "red line" on chemical weapons, the Ghouta attacks had the potential to force the US into action.
    - Circumstantial premises (problems): The lack of reliable media reports coming out of Syria made it difficult to identify facts. "Like so much in Syria, where the government bars most reporters from working and the opposition heavily filters the information it lets out, the truth remains elusive." (Hubbard & Saad, 2013.)
    - Goal premises: "The White House said that Syria should provide access to the

United Nations, and that those found to have used chemical weapons should be held accountable." (Hubbard & Saad, 2013.)

- Value premises: The NY Times referred to a CNN interview with president Obama where he said that when chemical weapons were used, "that starts getting to some core national interests that the United States has" (Landler *et al*, 2013). This refers to the aspect of *values* – to Obama and the people of the United States, the use of chemical weapons is intolerable.

- Means-goals premises: One expected the US, being a UNSC member, would address the issue through the proper channels first – *ie* by going through the motions in the UN. This course of action is also referred to in an indirect quote from the Obama administration in Landler *et al* (2013). There were, however, signs that the US was conducting its own investigations as well. Landler & Gordon (2013) wrote: "On Friday CBS News, citing administration officials, reported that American intelligence agencies detected activity at locations known to be chemical weapons sites before Wednesday's attack. The activity, these officials believe, may have been preparations for the [Ghouta] assault."

- Alternative options: According to Landler *et al* (2013), "American officials spoke in strikingly tougher terms about what might happen if president Obama determined that chemical weapons were used". A statement from the State department read: "The president, of course, has a range of options that we've talked about before that he can certainly consider."

- Addressing alternative options: The options considered ranged from cruise missile strikes to a sustained aerial campaign, according to senior officials from various parts of the government (Landler *et al*, 2013). Landler & Gordon (2013) also claimed – based on sources from the US defence and intelligence community – that the US government considered using the NATO campaign in Kosovo as a blueprint for engaging without a UN mandate.

- Russia's position
  - Deconstruction of argument
    - Claim (solution): According to the Russian government, the Ghouta attacks were a "pre-planned provocation" by the rebels. The Russian Foreign Ministry demanded a "professional and fair investigation" by the UNSC (Hubbard & Saad, 2013).

- Circumstantial premises (problems): The Russians appeared unconcerned with most matters and seemed to be, as the only international actors *at this point*, certain of the identity of the Ghouta perpetrators. However, they acknowledged concern for the future process which, in their opinion, could end up a miscarriage of justice: "All of this looks like an attempt at all costs to create a pretext for demanding that the UNSC side with opponents of the regime and undermine the chances of convening the Geneva conference", read a statement by Aleksandr Lukashevich, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson (Hubbard & Saad, 2013).

- Goal premises: This report appeared in Jolly (2013): "Russia urged the government of president Bashar al-Assad of Syria on Friday to allow UN investigators to examine evidence of a suspected chemical weapons attack this week, joining the US in seeking a full accounting of what happened early Wednesday in the eastern suburbs of Damascus." It is obvious that the Russians considered it important that the Assad regime was seen to cooperate, which is further underlined in the next paragraph.

- Value premises: As was argued in the analysis of the *Guardian's* coverage of the political discourse between the 21st and 23rd of August, Russia appeared the only actor to possess more concrete information than the others. More space was offered for these claims in the *NY Times*. In Jolly (2013), Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Lukashevich stated: "More and more evidence emerges indicating that this criminal act had an openly provocative character." Lukashevich also praised the Syrian government for their professional relationship with the UN whilst accusing the rebels of unwillingness to cooperate. All of this suggests that the Russians were certain that the rebels were to blame – or that they wanted them to be to blame.

- Means-goals premises: The Russian government maintained that the only way to complete a thorough investigation was for the parts in the Syrian Civil War to stand aside and let the weapons inspectors do their job. Having vouched for their ally, Russia also left the ball in the Syrian opposition's court: "It is now up to the opposition, which should guarantee safe access for the mission to the alleged place of the incident," read a Russian Foreign Ministry statement as cited by Jolly (2013).

3.1.3. Political discourse in Al-Jazeera's coverage

- The United States' position
  - ◦ Deconstruction of argument
    - ▪ Claim (solution): The US demanded that the UN weapons inspectors already present in Syria at the time be given "immediate access to witnesses and affected individuals" (Al-Jazeera, 2013c).
    - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): The US wanted an official investigation, which must be seen as the correct procedure. However, that they were one of the countries (Al-Jazeera, 2013b) that petitioned the UN Secretary General to let the team of weapons inspectors (headed by Åke Sellstrøm) that were already present in Syria complete the assignment – even though it was not part the agreement the UN had with the Syrian government – may have signalled that the Americans were eager to speed up the official procedure if it should become possible.
    - ▪ Goal premises: According to White House spokesperson Josh Earnest the key aim for the US government was for the UN investigators to have "the ability to examine and collect physical evidence without any interference or manipulation" (Al-Jazeera, 2013c).
    - ▪ Value premises: The Obama administration had throughout the Syrian Civil War described the use of chemical weapons as a «red line» that might prompt military intervention. The Ghouta attacks were of such a scale that it was impossible to ignore – even though the US allegedly knew of earlier offences conducted by the Assad regime (Al-Jazeera, 2013b).

- Russia's position
  - ◦ Deconstruction of argument
    - ▪ Claim (solution): Russia's claim that this was a "pre-planned provocation" from the Syrian opposition was given ample coverage by *Al-Jazeera* as well, who ran with extended quotes from Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lukashevich: "This [provocation from the rebels] is supported by the fact that the criminal act was committed near Damascus at the very moment when a mission of UN experts had successfully started their work of investigating allegations of the possible use of chemical weapons there." (Al-Jazeera, 2013b.)
    - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): The circumstantial premises to Russia's claim

were not communicated or not included in *Al-Jazeera*'s coverage.

- ▪ Goal premises: The Russian goal premises were not specified, although Al-Jazeera (notably as the only one of the sampled media outlets), citing UN sources, claimed China and Russia "opposed language that would have demanded a UN probe" in the UNSC (*Al-Jazeera*, 2013b).

3.1.4. Application of structure

For this first period of research material, the logical step is to allow for the Ghouta attacks to be the defining *event*. The attacks were of a large enough scale to scramble the international community into action, and forced the social practice of diplomatic conventions – most notably represented here through the various UN bodies. The *social practice* in this situation, judging by the discourse of the involved actors, is concerned largely with establishing facts and finding out what had happened. While the US aired its early suspicions towards the Assad regime, it was first and foremost concerned with getting an independent investigation going as soon as possible. Russia agreed to this, but also appeared certain that this was a rebel provocation (and communicated as much to the public) before any official investigation could begin. By adopting this stance, Russia communicated that they possessed intelligence on the situation and had made a judgment based on that intelligence – as such their social practice set up the *structure* in which the situation was dealt with.

3.2.   26th - 29th August: Confusion and disagreement

Following the Ghouta attacks, news coverage and the political discourse centred mostly on the identity of the perpetrator, as well as the UN's attempts to clarify the situation as soon as possible. Russian authorities still communicated that the attacks were of an underhand nature, and leaks in the press suggested the United States were painting an intelligence picture with severe holes in it. The US also suffered a blow to its wish for military action when the British parliament prevented UK Prime Minister David Cameron from declaring his support for the American cause. All actors in the Syrian conflict still denied wrongdoing.

3.2.1. Political discourse in the Guardian's coverage

<u>The United States' position</u>

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - ▪ Claim (solution): The US clearly communicated that it had a fair idea of the identity of the perpetrator behind the attacks (Borger, 2013): "The fact that chemical weapons were used on a widespread basis, against innocent civilians, with tragic results is undeniable," said White House spokesman Jay Carney. "And there is very little doubt in our minds that the Syrian regime is culpable."
  - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): In Lewis *et al* (2013), an extended transcript of Carney's quotes was published: "Pressed on whether the US would take military action, Carney said the last time the administration determined chemical weapons had been used, 'on a smaller scale', it had decided to provide opposition fighters with assistance." Carney added: "The incident we're talking about now is of a much more grave and broader scale, and merits a response accordingly." What had previously been a "red line" for the Obama regime by now appeared to be a much more nuanced issue.
  - ▪ Goal premises: "President Obama believes there must be accountability for those who would use the world's most heinous weapon against the world's most vulnerable people. Nothing today is more serious, and nothing is receiving more serious scrutiny," said US Secretary of State John Kerry (Borger, 2013). The intention to hold someone accountable was the US' primary focus at this point.
  - ▪ Value premises: "In the strongest signal yet that the US intends to take military action against the Assad regime, Kerry said President Bashar al-

Assad's forces had committed a 'moral obscenity' against his own people."
(Lewis *et al*, 2013.)

- Means-goals premises: US authorities do not communicate how they would hold the perpetrator to account, although "the White House made clear that the action would not be designed to widen the Syrian conflict or overthrow the regime" (Watt *et al*, 2013). Spokesman Jay Carney said: "The options we are considering are not about regime change." This may indicate that the US was considering other options than a military intervention.

Russia's position
- o Deconstruction of argument
    - Claim (solution): The Russian discourse from this period appeared as indirect communication in most of the Guardian's coverage. The main claim appeared to be that "Russia […] denounced the gathering momentum towards western armed intervention, predicting it would have disastrous consequences across the region" (Watt *et al*, 2013).
    - Circumstantial premises (problems): It was clear that Russia understood its position as an outlier to the western powers, but its veto position in the UNSC, where China also opposed any military action towards Syria, at least gave them the opportunity to avoid the scenario they feared the most (Sparrow, 2013).
    - Goal premises: Not directly communicated, but it is fair to assume their position remained largely unchanged. At this point it can also be argued that their main aim is to avoid any use of force against Syria.
    - Value premises: "The deputy prime minister, Dmitry Rogozin, tweeted that the west was behaving towards the Islamic world 'like a monkey with a grenade'." (Watt *et al*, 2013). Here, Russia frames itself as a supporter of sovereignty for Middle Eastern regimes and paints the western powers as a patronising influence of sorts.

3.2.2. Political discourse in the NY Times' coverage

<u>The United States' position</u>

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - ▪ Claim (solution): "In some of the most aggressive language used yet by the administration, [US Secretary of State] Kerry accused the Syrian government of the 'indiscriminate slaughter of civilians' and of cynical efforts to cover up its responsibility for a 'cowardly crime'." (Landler & Gordon, 2013.) Kerry's stance towards the Assad regime and his desire to hold it accountable were, unsurprisingly, the focal points of the US discourse that appears in the New York Times.

  - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): In Castle *et al* (2013), US State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf acknowledged two main problems for further action: the failure of UK Prime Minister David Cameron to secure parliamentary support for a military coalition with the Americans, and Russia's consistent vetoing of any UNSC resolution involving the use of force against Syria.

  - ▪ Goal premises: It was not communicated clearly what the US considers to be its best way forward at this point, though the State Department again distanced itself from the possibility of instigating a regime change in Syria (Shanker *et al*, 2013). Harf stated: "We're going to make our own decisions on our own timelines about our response." (Castle *et al*, 2013).

  - ▪ Value premises: The US communicated at this point their frustration over the lack of options open to them, something which is further underlined by Harf's denigration of the UN weapons inspectors – who at this point were working in Ghouta. This is reproduced indirectly in Castle et al (2013): "Asked if the US would await the findings of the UN inspectors, ms Harf repeated the administration's assertions that their work was too late to be credible because Syrian government forces had repeatedly shelled the attack sites, compromising evidence-gathering efforts."

  - ▪ Means-goals premises: In any way, the US authorities were clear that they would soon possess the relevant intelligence that would help them achieve their aims. Landler & Gordon (2013) wrote: "The nation's intelligence agencies will disclose information to bolster their case that chemical weapons

were used by mr Assad's forces. The information could include so-called signals intelligence – intercepted radio or telephone calls between Syrian military commanders." This is considered a means-goals premise because it must be considered a crucial element for the US to possess before it can consider any further policy alternatives.

- Alternative options: The US appeared to realize at this point that it would not be able to secure enough support for a limited coalition, yet seemingly did not distance itself completely from the notion of attacking Syria. In Landler et al (2013), various government officials were indirectly quoted: "…although president Obama had not made a final decision on military action, he was likely to order a limited military operation – cruise missiles launched from American destroyers in the Mediterranean Sea at military targets in Syria, for example – and not a sustained air campaign intended to topple Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian president, or to fundamentally alter the nature of the conflict on the ground."

Russia's position

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - Claim (solution): Russia's main claim, as it appeared in the New York Times, was the notion that any talk of a UNSC resolution is premature and unnecessary all the while the UN weapons inspectors remained on the ground in Ghouta (Castle *et al*, 2013). This was underlined by the Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, warning that armed intervention in Syria would "only lead to the further destabilization of the situation in the country and the region".
  - Goal premises: Avoiding any hostile, military action towards Syria remained Russia's main aim at this point.

3.2.3. Political discourse in Al-Jazeera's coverage

<u>The United States' position</u>

- o Deconstruction of argument

    - Claim (solution): Transcripts from an interview with the American president, Barack Obama, formed the focal point of Al-Jazeera's coverage of this period (Al-Jazeera, 2013a): "[Obama] says the US has 'concluded' that the Syrian government has used chemical weapons against civilians." There can be little doubt of the fact that the US at this point had decided what their position is.

    - Circumstantial premises (problems): It was communicated that the US were keen to avoid repeating previous mistakes. "Arguing for measured intervention after long resisting deeper involvement in Syria, Obama insisted that while president Bashar al-Assad's government must be punished, he intended to avoid repeating the errors made in the 2003 Iraq War."

    - Goal premises: Obama was quoted in Al-Jazeera (2013a): "[…] We do have to make sure that when countries break international norms on weapons like chemical weapons that could threaten us, that they are held accountable."

    - Value premises: It is clear from the Obama's statements that his views on chemical weapons use were, unsurprisingly, in line with those of his Secretary of State. John Kerry (Al-Jazeera, 2013c) called the use of such weapons a "moral obscenity", underlining why the US felt the need to intervene.

    - Means-goals premises: "[Obama] advocated the use of a 'tailored, limited' military strike in response." (Al-Jazeera, 2013a.) The possibilities of such a strike were not great, as authorities were bound to know. However, it appears clear that this was the preferred option for the US.

Russia's position

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - ▪ Claim (solution): The "destabilization" claim was repeated in Al-Jazeera's coverage (2013a), the main argument being that any foreign, armed intervention in Syria would have negative ramifications for the country and the region as a whole.
  - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): Foreign minister Sergey Lavrov implored the US authorities to "refrain from falling for 'provocations'" (Al-Jazeera, 2013e). Russia's main concern appeared to be that any US action would have consequences for the Assad regime, when Russia's position indicated that the regime was not to blame.
  - ▪ Goal premises: Unequivocally, the Russian aim was to avoid any military intervention in Syria (Al-Jazeera, 2013c).
  - ▪ Value premises: "On Monday, the Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov said that the West had no proof to back claims that the Syria regime used chemical weapons." (Al-Jazeera, 2013c). The rationale being that it would be immoral to act without proof, as well as illegal to act without support from the UNSC: "He [Lavrov] warned: 'Using force without the approval of the UNSC is a very grave violation of international law'." (Al-Jazeera, 2013c.)
  - ▪ Means-goals premises: Russia communicated that it would oppose any motion in the UNSC involving the use of force against Syria, while also communicating that nothing could be done without the support of the UNSC: "Attempts to bypass the UNSC, once again to create artificial groundless excuses for a military intervention in the region are fraught with new suffering in Syria and catastrophic consequences for other countries of the Middle East and North Africa", the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement (Al-Jazeera, 2013c).

3.2.4. Communication from the US State Department

- Deconstruction of argument
  - Claim (solution): As this (Kerry, 2013) was a longer text with more communication than what is normal by the 'news standard', there were several angles that needed to be considered. It appears reasonable to identify two key claims: the first is that chemical weapons, without a doubt, were used in Syria. The second is that the Assad regime had not acted like it had nothing to hide. "I Spoke on Thursday with Syrian Foreign Minister Mualim, and I made it very clear to him that if the regime, as he argued, had nothing to hide, then their response should be immediate – immediate transparency, immediate access – not shelling. Their response needed to be unrestricted and immediate access. Failure to permit that, I told him, would tell its own story."
  - Circumstantial premises (problems): This also appeared to be Kerry's main issue with the situation – the Syrian regime's steadfast reluctance to discontinue the bombing of the Ghouta attack site (which was controlled by rebel groups at the time).
  - Goal premises: Kerry's communiqué didn't elaborate on any concrete objectives at this point, other than that the US were consulting with their allies, keen to establish the best way forward in order to hold the perpetrators of the Ghouta attacks to account.
  - Value premises: "What we saw in Syria last week should shock the conscience of the world. It defies any code of morality. Let me be clear: The indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, the killing of women and children and innocent bystanders, by chemical weapons is a moral obscenity. By any standard it is inexcusable, and despite the excuses and equivocations that some have manufactured, it is undeniable." (Kerry, 2013.)
  - Means-goals premises: There were several of these as well, the frustrations over 'excuses and equivocations' being prominent, but the main one was arguably Kerry's urging of the Syrian regime to cooperate.

3.2.5. Communication from the Russian Foreign Ministry

- o Deconstruction of argument
    - ▪ Claim (solution): The Russian MFA (2013) communicated concern over the US' attempts at a 'non-peaceful' solution to the situation, adding that they were "puzzled by the references of individual representatives of the [US] administration to the allegedly 'proven' involvement of the Syrian government in last week's incident".
    - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): The main concern was "anxiety" over factors within the US who wanted to bypass the UN and stage an armed intervention in Syria.
    - ▪ Goal premise: The Russian MFA (2013) communicated that they wanted a "thorough, objective and unprejudiced" investigation on the site of the Ghouta attacks.
    - ▪ Value premises: Such an investigation was highlighted as important to the Russians "in light of the increasing evidence that the accident in Eastern Ghouta was a result of staging by the inexorable opposition for the purposes of accusing officials in Damascus".
    - ▪ Means-goals premises: In order for such an investigation to go through, Russian authorities "appealed [to Secretary of State John Kerry] to refrain from a line of forceful pressure on Damascus, to remain unprovoked and to try to contribute to the creation of normal conditions for the UN mission of chemical experts".

3.2.6. Application of structure

At this point in the situation the position of Russia remained unchanged, although they also began communicating their aversion to any armed intervention in Syria. The US however, had by now concluded that the Assad regime was in fact behind the attacks, meaning the two (Russia and the US) now based their communication on two differing perceptions of reality. This dynamic created the *structure* for the states' social interaction in this case, which means that the *social practice* entails all the diplomatic efforts made both in public and behind the scenes in order to reach an agreement or, in any case, an outcome. After the first period, when the *social practice* following the *event* created a *structure*, the *structure* was now in motion waiting for the *social practices* of Russia and the US to trigger another *event*.

3.3.   14th - 15th September: Syria joins the CWC

Following intense negotiations, Russia and the US agreed on a deal over Syria's chemical weapons stockpile, a remarkable feat considering they had been vehemently opposed on the matter only days earlier. The Geneva agreement was based on Syria's chemical weapons to be destroyed by mid-2014, but Russia and the US did not agree on the finer points should this goal not be achieved. Other elements of the deal included a requirement for Syria to provide a comprehensive list of its chemical weapons within a week, and to allow inspectors into the country by autumn. At this point US intelligence officials had claimed that president Assad's regime was to blame for the Ghouta attacks that killed more than 1,400 people.

3.3.1. Political discourse in the Guardian's coverage

The United States' position

- o Deconstruction of argument:
    - Claim (solution): The agreement to relieve Syria of its chemical weapons stockpile was an "important, concrete" step (Lewis, 2013), which would prevent the weapons from being used elsewhere.
    - Circumstantial premises (problems): It didn't appear as though the US government were overly convinced of the durability of the agreement, as president Obama maintained that "punitive force might still be used against Syria in the future, saying there should be 'consequences' for Bashar al-Assad's government if it did not comply with the deal" (Lewis, 2013).
    - Goal premises: "The world will now wait for the Assad regime to honour its commitments," said US Secretary of State John Kerry, a claim that was echoed by his president: "The international community expects the Assad regime to live up to its public commitments." (Lewis, 2013.)
    - Value premises: "This framework provides the opportunity for the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons in a transparent, expeditious, and verifiable manner, which could end the threat these weapons pose not only to the Syrian people but to the region and the world," the US president said, highlighting again the international community's attitude towards chemical weapons.
    - Means-goals premises: The united face of Russia and the US was presented by Kerry as an argument for Syria's full cooperation (Urquhart, 2013): "There is no room for anything other than full compliance." President Obama

communicated this façade a bit more reluctantly, but underlined that the agreement between the US and Russia was critical: "[…] What I've also said to him [Putin] directly is that we both have an interest in preventing chaos, we both have an interest in preventing terrorism. The situation in Syria right now is untenable – as long as Mr Assad's in power, there is going to be some sort of conflict there – and we should work together to try to find a way in which the interests of all the parties inside of Syria, the Alawites, the Sunnis, the Christians, that everybody is represented and that there is a way of bringing the temperature down." (Roberts, 2013.)

- Alternative options: As the US authorities communicated doubts with regards to the deal, they also signalled that the alternative remained military strikes – with or without UN support (Lewis, 2013). John Kerry said such action could be taken "with a decision by the president of the United States and likeminded allies if they thought that was what it came to".

Russia's position

- o Deconstruction of argument:
  - Claim (solution): As it was US Secretary of State John Kerry that communicated the joint statement on behalf of the US and Russia, much of the coverage of Russian discourse in the Guardian centres on the alternatives to full compliance. Lewis (2013) writes: Russia has said it will not allow the use of force to be considered, even in the event that Syria fails to properly comply with the conditions."
  - Circumstantial premises (problems): The highlighted disagreement between Russia and the US shone through here, as "Kerry said any violations would result in 'measures' from the UNSC; Lavrov said violations would have to be sent to the UNSC from the board of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) before sanctions, short of the use of force, would be considered" (Lewis, 2013).
  - Goal premises: To achieve a peaceful disarmament of Syria's chemical weapons without the need for armed intervention.
  - Value premises: The agreement was labelled by Sergey Lavrov as a "decision based on consensus and compromise and professionalism", indicating that

this was not the preferred route for the Russian government, but rather the only one that both Russia and the US could walk together.

- Means-goals premise: Russia communicated, through Foreign Minister Lavrov, that it would oppose or delay any sanctions as far as possible (Lewis, 2013): "'Any violations of procedures would be looked at by the security council and if they are approved, the security council would take the required measures, concrete measures,' he said. 'Nothing is said about the use of force or about any automatic sanctions. All violations should be approved by the Security Council.'"

3.3.2. Political discourse in the NY Times' coverage

<u>The United States' position</u>

o Deconstruction of argument

- Claim (solution): Gordon (2013) writes: "Speaking at a joint news conference with his Russian counterpart, Secretary of State John Kerry said that 'if fully implemented, this framework can provide greater protection and security to the world'."

- Circumstantial premises (problems): The compliance of Syria and, to a lesser extent, Russia, remained a concern for the US government, but according to Obama administration officials (Gordon, 2013) "the American assumption is that much, if not all, of the accord has mr Assad's assent".

- Goal premises: The goal is for the Assad regime to live up to its obligations, as stated in the agreement between Russia and the US.

- Value premises: "We have a duty to preserve a world free from the fear of chemical weapons for our children," said president Obama (Gordon, 2013). "Today marks an important step towards achieving this goal." An additional value premise could also be interpreted, as the US administration underlined that although diplomacy had succeeded at this point, it was still very much a case of the ends justifying the means: "The credible threat of military force has been key to driving diplomatic progress," said Secretary of state John Kerry.

- Means-goals premises: There is little in the way of strategy communicated through to the New York Times, apart from exerting pressure on the Assad regime: "'The real final responsibility here is Syrian,' a senior Obama administration official said of the deal." (Gordon, 2013.)

Russia's position

- o Deconstruction of argument
    - Claim (solution): Russia clearly communicated that it still opposes any military action against Syria, even though the agreement with the US clearly stipulates that the UNSC should be a part of determining any future action.
    - Circumstantial premise (problems): The agreement contained American intelligence data on Syria's chemical weapons sites and its stockpile. Russia had not specifically approved this data, but faced a problem if agreeing on it – as it would by and large be an admission of guilt on behalf of the Assad regime.
    - Goal premise: The Russians main aim remained to avoid military intervention in Syria.
    - Value premise: The foundations for Russia's position were from the outset based in the Syrian rebels' 'provocative attack' in Ghouta. Russia never backtracked from these claims, and it must be concluded that they remain true to this position. Therefore, to Russian authorities, an intervention against the Assad regime is an intervention against an innocent party.
    - Means-goals premises: Gordon (2013) writes: Foreign Minister Sergy Lavrov of Russia made clear that his country, which wields a veto in the UNSC, had not withdrawn its objections to the use of force." Therefore, as long as proceedings went through the UNSC, the Russians still felt they had control of the situation.

3.3.3. Political discourse in Al-Jazeera's coverage

The United States' position

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - Claim (solution): [The agreement between Russia and the US] "can end the threat these weapons pose not only to the Syrian people but also to their neighbours", said John Kerry (Al-Jazeera, 2013a).
  - Circumstantial premises (problems): Kerry underlined that the framework would have to be fully implemented for it to work. In addition, "President Obama welcomed the plan but said the US was 'prepared to act' if Syria failed to comply" (Al-Jazeera, 2013a), accentuating the continued misgivings about the agreement.
  - Goal premises: For Syria to adhere to the agreement and begin their disarmament process.
  - Value premises: Proliferation of chemical weapons remained a key issue for the US government as it "can provide greater protection and security to the world (Al-Jazeera, 2013a).
  - Means-goal premises: The exertion of political pressure coupled with the threat of force was evident during this period. "Obama said the accord was made possible 'in part' by what he called his credible threat to use force against Syria as punishment for its alleged use of chemical weapons against civilians last month that according to American estimates killed about 1,400 people." (Al-Jazeera, 2013b.)
  - Alternative options: In a statement (Al-Jazeera, 2013b), "Obama warned Damascus to comply with the accord and said that if the regime of Syria's president Bashar al-Assad does not live up to the deal Washington reached with Syria's ally Russia, 'the United States remains prepared to act'".

    <u>Russia's position</u>

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - ▪ Claim (solution): "Lavrov said the plan was based upon 'consensus and compromise'" (Al-Jazeera, 2013a).
  - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): The reference to 'compromise' and the overtly communicated 'differences' between the US and Russia indicate uncertainty with regards to the solidity of the framework.

3.3.4. The US State Department

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - ▪ Claim (solution): In a statement, the US communicated its joint determination with Russia "to ensure the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons program in the soonest and safest manner."
  - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems):
  - ▪ Goal premises: The clear objective is to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons program and to remove and destroy their stockpiles.
  - ▪ Value premises: John Kerry (2013) said: "For nearly 100 years, the world has embraced the international norm against the use of chemical weapons. And the principles that the United States and the Russian Federation have agreed on today can, with accountable follow-through, allow us to expedite the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons."
  - ▪ Means-goals premises: The communiqué underlined the US and Russia's commitment to work together, to agree on the details of Syria's stockpiles, chemical weapons facilities *etc*, as well as reaffirming the need for Syria to fully comply with the agreement in place.
  - ▪ Alternative options: Any disagreements or instances of non-compliance should be reported to the UNSC.

3.3.5. The Russian Foreign Ministry[4]

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - ▪ Claim (solution): Lavrov communicated clearly that the agreement said nothing about the use of force against Syria, and that "any violations of procedures that would be approved by the Executive Committee of the OPCW concerning the arsenal of chemical weapons, as well as any facts of applying these chemical weapons, would be looked in the Security Council. And if they are approved, the Security Council will take the measures – required measures, concrete measure – and we have agreed on that" (Kerry, 2013). Lavrov was keen to underline the bureaucratic and diplomatic institutions that would have to be bypassed for any motion to even reach the UNSC.
  - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): Lavrov communicated concern with regards to the forthcoming UN report – stating that UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon had attempted to "frustrate" his meetings with Kerry by claiming that Bashar al-Assad had committed crimes against humanity. Lavrov dismissed Ban's claims and said they were a result of "false information", "assessments" and various other elements.
  - ▪ Goal premises: "The aim is to resolve the situation, [and] to put under international control the arsenal of chemical weapons in Syria." (Kerry, 2013.)
  - ▪ Value premises: Lavrov clearly stated he was pleased the deal, and gave thanks to the countries that had participated in order to solve the chemical weapons situation in Syria peacefully. He also expressed his desire that the incident be investigated on "facts" and was looking forward to the UN report on the Ghouta attacks.
  - ▪ Means-goals premises: "We should – everybody should wait for the

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[4] The Russian Foreign Ministry published the framework to the disarmament deal, but no other communication in English. However, the US State Department submitted a written transcript of Kerry and Lavrov's joint statements on their website. Lavrov's statements here must be considered as relevant political discourse and as such will be analyzed. The source material is listed under the US State Department in the appendix part (September 14th - September 15th) of the bibliography.

> conclusions of the report to determine whether the chemical weapons […]
> were used or not. But all these conclusions will be considered together with
> all other facts – who could do this and why – to determine what happened."
> Lavrov wanted to wait for the official report before concluding.

3.3.6. Application of structure

The Syrian decision to join the OPCW following the Russian-American agreement was an event that occurred in spite of, as opposed to because of, the structural disagreements that had preceded the arrangements. The critical element in the deal between Russia and the US was that they settled on something to agree on; namely that chemical weapons had been used and that there were chemical weapons in Syria. Therefore, the existing reality perceptions that the two states had, *ie* the existing structure, still remained. However, the social practices also created a second structure where the US and Russia, at least on paper, committed themselves to the framework of their agreement – even though both had communicated their alternative strategies should the deal fail.

3.4.   16th - 17th September: UN report published

On Monday the 16th September, the UN report on the Ghouta attacks was published after a hasty investigation. The report was described as "damning", and confirmed beyond all doubt that there had been a large-scale chemical attack – the worst in 25 years – yet it failed to assign any blame. The US, Britain and France all claimed that the use of sarin, the type of rockets and their trajectories all pointed towards the Assad regime, yet the Russians warned of "jumping to conclusions" and the UN refused to take a stance: "It is for others to pursue this matter further to determine responsibility. We will all have our own thoughts on this", said Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

3.4.1. Political discourse in the Guardian's coverage

The United States' position

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - ▪ Claim (solution): With ample evidence from the Syrian Civil War available, there was "no indication" that the rebels had the weapons necessary to carry out an attack like the one in Ghouta (Borger, 2013). According to Samantha Power, US envoy to the UN, there weren't any evidence that the rebels possessed sarin gas either. "The technical details of the report make clear that only the regime could have carried out this chemical weapons attack," Power said.

Russia's position

- o Deconstruction of argument:
  - ▪ Claim (solution): The western powers "jumped to conclusions" when claiming the Assad regime was behind the attack, according to Russian ambassador Vitaly Churkin (Borger, 2013). "We have not even had a chance to look at the report. […] The allegations that it was the opposition cannot be simply shrugged off."

3.4.2. Political discourse in the NY Times' coverage

The United States' position

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - ▪ Claim (solution): Secretary of State John Kerry said: "We are taking a weapon away from him [Assad] that he has been using against his people." (Gordon, 2013.) Kerry made clear that Assad had used chemical weapons against the civilian population, and was now being punished for it.
  - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): The claim that Assad was the perpetrator was still not universally accepted, though the US tried their best to communicate their view: "We understand some countries did not accept on faith that the samples of blood and hair that the US received from people affected by the August 21 attack contained sarin," the American UN envoy Samantha Power said (Gladstone & Chivers, 2013). "But now Dr Sellstrom's samples show the same thing. And it's very important to note that the regime possesses sarin, and we have no evidence that the opposition posses sarin." Power noted previous US intelligence failures as a reason for struggling to convince the international community of the validity of the American claims.
  - ▪ Goal premises: Power also stated the US' ambition for the responsible to be identified and condemned (Gladstone, 2013): "For a crime of this magnitude, it is not enough to say 'chemical weapons were used,' any more than it would have been enough to say that 'machetes were used' in Rwanda in 1994. […] We must condemn the user, and here we must acknowledge what the technical details of the UN report make clear; only the regime could have carried out this large-scale chemical weapons attack, the largest attack in 25 years."
  - ▪ Alternative options: Kerry remained adamant that Assad faced potential military action regardless of what the framework of the Russian-American deal stated (Gordon, 2013).

Russia's position

- o Deconstruction of argument
    - ▪ Claim (solution): "How is it possible to fire projectiles at your opponent and miss them all?" said Russia's ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin (Gladstone & Chivers, 2013). "We need not jump to any conclusions." Russia were keen to stress that there were still unanswered questions even after the publication of the UN report, underscoring that it did not name a perpetrator.
    - ▪ Goal premises: Foreign Minister Lavrov said they would work with the US and bring the matter before the UNSC should Syria prove noncompliant in adhering to the deal.
    - ▪ Value premises: In the face of claims from among others the French Foreign Secretary, Lavrov maintained that the Assad regime was the victim of a provocation: "[My government has] serious reason to suggest that this was a provocation." (Gladstone, 2013.)

3.4.3. Political discourse in Al-Jazeera's coverage

The United States' position

- o Deconstruction of argument
    - ▪ Claim (solution): Speaking ahead of the potential UN resolution on Syria, US Secretary of State Kerry reiterated his no-nonsense stance towards the Assad regime, stressing that a resolution had to be "strong", "forceful", "transparent", and "timely" (Al-Jazeera, 2013b).
    - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): Kerry felt the need to underscore that Russia would participate in maintaining pressure towards Assad – the Russians had done little but protect the regime up to this point.
    - ▪   Goal premises: "Kerry, who agreed the terms of the weapons handover with his Russian counterpart in Geneva on Saturday, said the allies were committed to keeping up the pressure on Assad: 'If the Assad regime believes that this is not enforceable and we are not serious, they will play games.'" (Al-Jazeera, 2013b).
    - ▪ Value premises: The US communicated clearly that they were fully convinced the Assad regime was to blame for the attacks, and that Bashar al-

Assad had "lost all legitimacy to be possible to govern his country" (Al-Jazeera, 2013, b). Susan Rice, president Obama's national security adviser, "said in a written statement that the technical evidence in the UN report, including that the sarin nerve agent was high quality and that a particular rocket was used in the attack, was significant" (Al-Jazeera, 2013e).

Russia's position

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - Claim (solution): The UN report did not show any evidence to suggest, that the Assad regime was behind the attack. "We have very serious ground to believe that this was a provocation [by the rebels]," said Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (Al-Jazeera, 2013d).
  - Circumstantial premises (problems): Lavrov spoke out against the opposing claims, made among others by the US and France, that the report clearly indicated forces loyal to Bashar al-Assad were behind the attacks.
  - Goal premises: Lavrov highlighted the gaps in the UN report, arguably to prevent others from jumping to conclusions: "He said the UN investigators' report proved that chemical weapons had been used but that 'there is no answer to a number of questions we have asked,' including whether the weapons were produced in a factory or home-made." (Al-Jazeera, 2013d).
  - Value premises: Russia's communications were based in the fact that they portrayed a belief, at least publically, that there had been "many provocations" by the rebels over the last couple of years to trigger a foreign intervention.
  - Alternative options: Should the disarmament agreement with Syria and the US fail, Russia reiterated that force was not an option. Rather, "the security council will examine the situation", according to Lavrov (Al-Jazeera, 2013d).

3.4.4. The US State Department

- Deconstruction of argument
  - Claim (solution): "The UN report confirms unmistakably that chemical weapons were used in Syria on August 21st. [The inspectors' mandate was] not to investigate culpability, but the technical details of the UN report make clear that only the regime could have carried out this large-scale chemical attack." (Power, 2013.)
  - Circumstantial premises (problems): Psaki (2013) indicated frustration over Russia's apparent inability to see the evidence the US and the UN report produced against Assad: "He [Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov] is swimming against the tide of international public opinion, but more importantly, the facts."
  - Goal premises: The US communicated a long-term goal of replacing Bashar al-Assad, with White House spokesperson Jen Psaki (2013) saying: "Our position has not changed, […] there's no place in a future Syria for President Assad. He has brutalized his people. More than 100,000 men, women, and children have died while he's been president of the country. There is, of course, a goal we have in place, to put in place a transitional governing body."
  - Value premises: The US communicated that it was not just the technical evidence that was overwhelming, but also the logic of the situation (Power, 2013): "It defies logic to think that the opposition would have infiltrated the regime-controlled area to fire on opposition-controlled areas."
  - Alternative options: Psaki (2013) said that the potential use of force was still an option – regardless of the framework agreed with the Russians: "The president reserves, of course, the right to do this [armed intervention] on his own. […] Clearly, there is a strong signal or a strong message and also a strong – can be a strong binding commitment when there is a UN resolution. That's why we have pushed for it so strongly in the past. But you are right; the US reserves the right to take military action. Clearly, diplomacy is the preferred option."

3.4.5. Application of structure

In many ways the same structural designs applied here as in 3.3.6. As not much time had passed, and the discourse did not evolve to the same extent as it had between other periods, there wasn't much to highlight. It could be argued that the UN report provided a nail in the proverbial coffin for the Russian claim that rebels were behind the attack, but the Russians were clear that the report gave no grounds to conclude.

3.5. 26th - 28th September: UNSC adopts resolution 2118

Finally, the UNSC voted unanimously for a resolution that legally binds Bashar al-Assad's regime to the OPCW. But due to the fraught compromise between Russia and the west, the resolution (based on the earlier Russian-American agreement) did not include automatic punitive measures against the Syrian government if it fails to comply. The resolution was still lauded as a success in some quarters, however. After voting was completed, it became the first UNSC resolution passed on the Syrian conflict since it began in 2011, after Russia and China had previously vetoed three western-backed resolutions intended to put pressure on the Assad regime.

3.5.1. Political discourse in the Guardian's coverage

The United States' position

- o Deconstruction of argument
    - ▪ Claim (solution): US Secretary of State John Kerry said: "The Security Council shows diplomacy can be so powerful, it can defuse the worst weapons. If this resolution is implemented, we will have eliminated one of the biggest chemical weapons arsenals on earth, in one of the most volatile regions on earth." (Borger, 2013a).
    - ▪ Value premises: Borger (2013a) quoted a 'senior US administration official' as saying: "I think you'll see in the final language that, in fact, for the first time, we have said that the use of chemical weapons is a threat to international peace and security."

Russia's position

- o Deconstruction of argument:
    - ▪ Claim (solution): Russia would organize an "international team of weapons inspectors who would oversee the task of destroying Syria's stockpile of

poison gases and nerve agents" (Borger, 2013b).

- Goal premises: Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said: "We believe that it [the chemical weapons stockpile] should be dismantled on Syrian territory." (Borger, 2013b.)

3.5.2. Political discourse in the NY Times' coverage

The United States' position

- o Deconstruction of argument

  - Claim (solution): The UN resolution was portrayed as an important precedent by US Secretary of State John Kerry (Gladstone & Sengupta, 2013): "[Chemical weapons are] a threat to international peace and security anywhere they might be used."

  - Value premises: "We are here united tonight in support of our belief that international institutions do matter, international norms matter," said Kerry (Gladstone & Sengupta, 2013).

Russia's position

- o Deconstruction of argument

  - Claim (solution): "Mr Lavrov said the resolution had been possible partly because of what he called the West's realization that the threat of military force to solve conflicts was 'ineffective, meaningless and destructive'." (Gladstone & Sengupta, 2013.)

  - Goal premises: "The Russian Foreign Minister also said he hoped the resolution would provide momentum to convene a conference aimed at purging the Middle East of all such unconventional weapons." (Gladstone & Sengupta, 2013).

  - Value premises: The west had the wrong focus when it came to Syria. Gladstone & Sengupta (2013) writes: "[Lavrov suggested] that Western countries opposed to Mr Assad because of his repression of the democratic opposition were increasingly coming around to Russia's view that the greater danger in Syria lay in its growing attraction to jihadists."

  - Means-goal premises: Lavrov communicated that international conflict situations like these should be dealt with diplomatically and not by the threat of force: "All the recent history testifies that no state – no matter how big or powerful – can cope alone with the challenges of that scope faced by

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mankind today." (Gladstone & Sengupta, 2013).

3.5.3. Political discourse in Al-Jazeera's coverage

<u>The United States' position</u>

- o Deconstruction of argument
    - Claim (solution): "Samantha Power, US ambassador to the United Nations, confirmed on Twitter that a deal was reached with Russia 'legally obligating' Syria to give up its chemical stockpile, and the measure was going to the full Security Council on Thursday night." (Al-Jazeera, 2013b.)
    - Circumstantial premises (problems): "The Security Council has shown that when we put aside politics for the common good, we are still capable of doing big things, said US Secretary of State John Kerry (Al-Jazeera, 2013d).
    - Goal premises: "Provided this resolution is fully implemented, we will have eliminated one of the largest chemical weapons programmes on Earth from one of the most volatile places on Earth," said Kerry (Al-Jazeera, 2013d).

<u>Russia's position</u>

- o Deconstruction of argument
    - Claim (solution): Russian communications were basic: "Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Moscow had reached an understanding with Washington on a chemical weapons resolution." (Al-Jazeera, 2013b.)
    - Circumstantial premises (problems): Russia agreed to contribute, but conceded that the weapons had to be destroyed within Syria.
    - Goal premises: The destruction of Syria's chemical arsenal by the middle of next year (Al-Jazeera, 2013a).
    - Means-goals premises: Lavrov said "after the vote the UNSC would be prepared to take punitive steps in the event of confirmed violations of a resolution demanding the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal" (Al-Jazeera, 2013d).
    - Alternative options: "'The United Nations Security Council [...] will stand ready to take action under Chapter VII of the charter, quite clearly,' Lavrov said, in reference to the part of the UN charter covering the council's power to enforce its decisions with sanctions or military force." (Al-Jazeera, 2013d).

3.5.4. The US State Department

- o Deconstruction of argument
    - ▪ Claim (solution): The US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power (2013), argued that "this resolution will require the destruction of a category of weapons that the Syrian government has used ruthlessly and repeatedly against its own people. And this resolution will make clear that there are going to be consequences for noncompliance".
    - ▪ Goal premises: Power (2013) said: "Our overarching goal was and remains the rapid and total elimination of Syria's chemical weapons program. This is a class of weapons that the world has already judged must be banned because their use is simply too horrific." Kerry (2013) added, in his address, that the resolution would allow the US to hold Bashar al-Assad responsible: "Our aim was also to hold the Assad regime publicly accountable for its horrific use of chemical weapons against its own people on August 21st. And this resolution makes clear that those responsible for this heinous act must be held accountable."
    - ▪ Value premises: Kerry (2013) reiterated the international community's view on chemical weapons, and how the heinousness of the Ghouta attacks were a factor in the diplomatic resolution of the following conflict. "So tonight, we are declaring together, for the first time, that the use of chemical weapons, which the world long ago determined beyond the bounds of acceptable human behavior, are also a threat to international peace and security anywhere they might be used, anytime they might be used, under any circumstances. As a community of nations, we reaffirm our responsibility to defend the defenseless, those whose lives remain at risk every day that anyone believes they can use weapons of mass destruction with impunity. Together, the world, with a single voice for the first time, is imposing binding obligations on the Assad regime requiring it to get rid of weapons that have been used to devastating effect as tools of terror."

3.5.5. The Russian Foreign Ministry

- o Deconstruction of argument
  - ▪ Claim (solution): Lavrov (2013) argued in his speech to the UN that supporting and understanding the Syrians was far more important than threatening with armed intervention.
  - ▪ Circumstantial premises (problems): He said (2013): "The aspiration to simplify the picture of the events in the Arab world as a fight for democracy against tyranny or good against evil has blurred the problems related to the emerging wave of long-standing extremism currently seizing other regions as well."
  - ▪ Goal premises: "The development of a single approach by the global community, which would combine support for the Arab people."
  - ▪ Value premises: Lavrov argued that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable, yet so is the threat of force and the right for anyone to accuse and sentence. "The task of coordination of collective responses to key problems of the modern time is topical as never before. Only a truly universal organisation like the UN has the power to solve this."
  - ▪ Alternative options: The option to supporting Assad, Lavrov argued, was to support extremism: "It is well-known that most […] of the opposition are jihadists […]. The goals they pursue have nothing to do with democracy, they are based on intolerance, directed at the destruction of laic countries, and the creation of caliphates."

3.5.6. Application of structure

The final period of the data analysis saw the unanimous agreement of a multilateral cooperative deal happen in spite of the contrasting perceptions of reality between the two main actors. Intelligence formed the basis of both vantage points – the American and western position, and the Russian position – and as such must be considered a part of the structure. The *social practice* forced the negotiators' hands into compromising so that a deal would not conflict with any party's perception of reality.

4. Findings

In this part the main findings of the thesis will be summarised, the use of intelligence in discourse will be identified, and the research questions will be answered.

Research question 1: How was intelligence an element in the political discourse on chemical weapons in Syria following the Ghouta attacks in august 2013?

Intelligence was communicated from both sides, and from the very outset of the situation, as facts. During the early stages there was little information available to the public for anyone to make a judgment on, other than the completely contrasting intelligence data communicated by the two actors. There were few specific details of any intelligence communicated during the first two periods.

Research question 2: How was the political discourse containing references to intelligence constructed, and how did authorities communicate their future strategies with regards to this intelligence?

Political discourse was constructed from the basis of intelligence, or at least what was communicated as intelligence. This was also true for policy alternatives. From an American perspective, there was no doubt that forces loyal to Bashar al-Assad were behind the attacks. Therefore, their main policy alternatives were said to be strikes against the regime, armed intervention as part of a coalition, removing Assad from power, etc. From a Russian perspective, their first priority was to avoid any foreign, armed intervention in Syria. This they based on two things; the first was the intelligence they communicated which clearly showed the Ghouta attacks were a rebel provocation. The second was the later argument that the removal of Assad would coincide with a jihadist power grab in the region.

In terms of critical responses to the intelligence communicated by the actors involved, the major criticism was levelled at Russia after the UN report was published. Several factors indicated that only the regime would have had the capabilities to launch an attack of such a scale, according to the US. This was brushed off by Russia, who warned of "jumping to conclusions" and preferred to highlight the fact that the report did not pass any judgment on the identity of the perpetrator.

Research question 3: How was intelligence a factor in the political discourse with regards to a potential chemical weapons deal?

In terms of reaching a deal, it must be argued that the differing positions of the US and Russia (based on their communicated intelligence) seemingly made a deal harder to achieve. However, due to their unwavering steadfastness to a few key claims, there remained enough leeway for them to agree a deal in which neither side had to compromise or renege on the version of events they had communicated. The agreement even allowed enough space for interpretation so that Russia and the US could run with the perception they wanted both domestically and internationally.

4.1.   Intelligence as a device in US political discourse

US authorities were reluctant to assign blame, at least outright, at first. Although it soon became clear that the things were pointing towards a regime attack, they waited for their intelligence briefings to come round. As opposed to Russia, the US appeared eager to communicate that it takes time to collect intelligence – although when they did receive the desired intelligence they wasted no time in stating their belief that the Assad regime was the perpetrator.

By this time they were, at least publically, so convinced of the facts that they willingly conceded that they were considering sidestepping the UNSC in order to launch strikes against Syria, and also publically derided what they deemed to be "excuses and equivocations" from Russia. Following the agreement with Russia, American misgivings about the deal were clearly communicated through all channels – and indications were a use of force was not out of the question. This could indicate a firm belief among US administration officials that they were in the right with regards to their intelligence, but that diplomacy was a better option for the moment.

Although disarmament of Syria was seen in some quarters as a victory, the US also claimed that, due to the differences in perceptions with Russia, that there was no other way than to compromise. While neither the deal nor the subsequent UN resolution concluded, Kerry was keen to stress that Assad had used a weapon against his people – and that he would no longer have access to that weapon. As such the US found a loophole to punish the perpetrator they felt was responsible, even though it seemed like a tough proposal.

4.2.   Intelligence as a device in Russian political discourse

As the analysis has shown, Russia communicated that they did in fact possess intelligence, almost from the very outset of the situation, that indicated the Ghouta attacks were a rebel provocation. By communicating this, they achieved a dual effect. The first is the effect of the uncertainty and confusion this leaves on the international community. The second, arguably more important effect, is the "power vacuum" it creates, where nothing can be done without proof (which no one but themselves possessed at the time), or without the UNSC (where Russia wield the right to veto).

When a deal was reached with the US, Russia still claimed it was down to the UNSC to define sanctions if necessary, but it ruled out any use of force. The insistence Russia had towards this point suggest this might have been the last opportunity for any sort of diplomatic agreement if they wanted to avoid military action against Syria.

At the publication of the UN report, Russia maintained their view that the Assad regime was innocent. It warned other from jumping to conclusions, and said the opposition could be responsible. The change from *was* to *could have been* was subtle, but effective. Instead of insisting that the rebels were guilty, the Russian position was now that it was *not proven* that the Assad regime was guilty.

Faced with criticism as from the US, France and other for remaining adamant, Russia argued that the presence of rebels suggested clearly that this was a provocation all along. Unlike opposing claims, like those made by the US, Russia failed to suggest any evidence supporting their theory, other than what they referred to as "known provocations" over the last two years.

4.3.   Summary

As has been shown, the situation had barely reached the headlines before Russian authorities communicated their position; the rebels were responsible for the Ghouta attacks. This was a stark contrast to their American counterparts, who were clear that while their intelligence procedures were underway, it was too soon to conclude on anything. However, the American position changed by the second period of the analysis, when it was communicated that they did indeed possess intelligence that placed the blame with the Assad regime.

When the deal came about, it could be argued that Russia and the US realized they would not be able to win the other to their cause – and that no intelligence in the world would be able to change that. The agreement, therefore, became to both actors the last option available if one wanted to avoid confrontation. What is evident from this, in the end, is that neither Russia nor the US could be said to have fulfilled the validity claims Chilton (2004) attributes to political discourse. While both claims can stand up to the checks of *understandability* and *rightness* (legitimacy), and arguably also the *claim to be telling the truth,* neither is the subject of *truth* itself. This is not surprising, and was explained at the outset of this thesis; the nature of intelligence is such that it necessarily has to be secret. However, there is also the question of corresponding intelligence. It became clear after the UN report was published that the intelligence that had been communicated by the US and its allies closely intertwined with that of the UN report. This arguably lends credibility to both claims – but can the UN be said to be independent? There are policy-makers in the UN as well, and the lack of proper opportunities to assess the validity of the claims are of course an issue. So it must be asked; does this mean that a policy-maker can communicate whatever suits his or her policy best and say it is based on intelligence? The short answer would be yes. The long answer would include caveats, and argue that the intelligence cycle is a massive machinery that includes collectors, analysts and policy-makers and that all of these at some point in the cycle make decisions that may not be right; they may be manipulated; they may just be plain wrong. The post-9/11 inquiries indicated an unhealthy relationship between policy-makers and the intelligence community – it would be naïve to suggest there is no longer any such relationship. It must be accepted as a fact that by communicating intelligence that cannot be verified or assessed with a validity claim a policy-maker creates his or her premise for action – it is the construction of one's own reality. Therefore, this also poses a conundrum in terms of political policy-making; if the checks and balances are not in place and cannot be applied, how can intelligence be used morally to decide the policy choices of a state?

4.4.   Review

Looking back at the source material, it is obvious that the communication of US and other western powers get more coverage in the media. The inclusion of Al-Jazeera and the use of "global" newspapers like the New York Times and the Guardian were supposed to alleviate this. However, this effect can have more to do with domestic policies than anything else. For western, liberal democracies, accountability is more of an issue than in Russia, where the government by and large controls many more aspects of society. The traditional view of Russia as a bit of an isolationist in terms of the west could also provide some insight, and perhaps explain the Russian reluctance to communicate. As has been shown, towards the end of the Ghouta attacks aftermath, it was the US and its partners who were able to provide the more detailed intelligence on what had occurred.

5. Conclusion

To argue that the use of intelligence in political communication drove home a deal that was multilaterally acceptable in the international community, as was the idea when the work on this thesis began, would be a stretch. Rather, the main conclusion seems to be that instead of being a utility for policy-making in the international system, intelligence is a part of the very fabric of the system itself. Looking at it through a constructivist prism, it must be argued that the domestic policies and social fabric of each state is, ultimately, what creates the structures for state interaction. Examining the results of the data analysis, it becomes quite clear that the effectuation of a UN chemical weapons deal came about in a structure where the opposing positions of the US and Russia created the premises. It could be argued the deal happened in spite of this, rather than because of it – however, the constructivist view must be that there was no structure for interaction before it was created by the two states. Ergo, the importance of intelligence cannot be overstated. The difference in communicated intelligence by the US and Russia should be seen as the result of domestic necessities and rational self-interest in the international system, thereby creating differing vantage points from which a solution had to be found. To underline this point, this thesis demonstrated one of the key problems with intelligence in international relations – validity. Seemingly it doesn't matter whether or not it is fabricated or not. The nature of intelligence suggests that either the American view or the Russian view must be wholly or at least partly wrong – but that didn't matter a jot. In the end, it was valuable political utility for both actors. This suggests that policy-makers, when communicating intelligence, are exempt from the criticisms that normally follow political discourse. They are free to create their own premises for action.

Addressing the hypotheses put forth in the introduction of this thesis, it could be argued that they have been proved. As a concrete element in the construction of state-actors' realities, it is hard to dismiss intelligence as not intrinsic to politics and diplomacy in the international system. However, it is the "secondary utility", as described on p. 9, that really hits the right note. The hypothesis argued that intelligence helps shape the realities that policy-makers relate to, as well as being a utility for the policy-makers to construct the structure they communicate to the public as reality. Examining the hypotheses with a more critical outlook, it could be said that intelligence is not a powerful tool in communication – which would at least partially disprove the first part of the hypothesis. As stated however, it cannot be denied that it is in its essence a "key cog" in the structure of the international system – simply because of its role in creating the structure itself and the arena for state-actors to interact.

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6.1.   Appendix

<u>The Guardian</u>

<u>21st August - 23rd August:</u>

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