

Murder in the Consulate: The Khashoggi Affair and the Turkish-Saudi War of Narratives

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Abstract

The murder of Saudi journalist and *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi took place inside the Saudi Arabian Consulate, Istanbul, in October 2018. This brutal political assassination, whose strategic, political and legal ramifications are still ongoing, provoked an international outcry, and remained prominent in the global news agenda for several months. This article will compare and contrast the information and analysis conveyed by Turkey's state news agency, the Anadolu Agency, with the Saudi Press Agency. The framing, rhetoric and discursive structures used by both sides while covering this incident will be thoroughly evaluated.

The research purpose is threefold: First, this article seeks to examine the political and social dynamics underpinning the ensuing contest of media narratives in the region. Second, it aims to analyse the communication strategies employed by the two states, namely Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Not only are these two countries diametrically opposed in regard to the Khashoggi killing, they are also on a collision course concerning several geo-strategic matters throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Third, the article explores the use of news framing (in the words of Robert Entman) and the role of state news agencies as they publicise particular events and convey the vantage point of their respective ruling establishments. Beyond these objectives, this article will also offer some clues about the mediated geo-political space(s) in which the opposed framings proceed, bearing in mind that these battles of frames take place in English and involve several public spheres, ranging from the Eastern Mediterranean, to the Middle East, to the Anglophone global public arena.

Using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including keyword analysis, which encompasses framing research and critical discourse analysis, the article will examine large amounts of text produced from October 3 to December 3, 2018. A month-by-month comparative analysis of language used by both agencies will be provided. The case study will shed light on how numerous factors, including culture, ideology, values and bureaucratic norms shape international perceptions in an increasingly competitive media space.

Washington Post Columnist Jamal Khashoggi was known for his moderate voice. He occasionally criticised Riyadh's foreign policy decisions concerning the blockade of Qatar and the political tensions with Lebanon and Canada. He also called on Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to end the war in Yemen, curtail repression against intellectuals and journalists, and to discontinue the escalating attacks upon free speech and media liberty. Nevertheless, the Saudi journalist retained some connections within the upper level of the Saudi regime and, as such, did not consider himself a dissident (Haltiwanger, 2018).

Therefore, on October 2, 2018, when Khashoggi visited the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul to process paperwork for his new marriage, he had no idea of what was waiting for him inside the building. However, not entirely trusting of the Saudi establishment, Khashoggi instructed his fiancée waiting outside the consulate to call an advisor to the Turkish President if he did not emerge within a reasonable amount of time. After waiting several hours, his fiancée, Hatice Cengiz, notified the Turkish authorities (Mekhennet and Morris, 2018).

In the beginning, Saudi Arabia categorically denied that anything had happened to the journalist, claiming that the latter had left the premises from a back entrance. It later emerged, based on surveillance material, that a 'body double', having the same height and build as Khashoggi, wearing a fake beard, glasses, and Khashoggi's clothes, had left the building. The impersonation was exposed after the Turkish police dissected the footage, discovering that the impostor was not wearing the same type of shoes as Khashoggi wore (Wintour and McKernan, 2018).

Having initially claimed that Khashoggi had left the consulate, the Saudi narrative then acknowledged that some form of interrogation had been intended to persuade him to return to Saudi Arabia. Then, the report was that the situation had gotten out of control, and Khashoggi was said to have lost his life in the course of a 'brawl' with the interrogators. Turkish investigators retorted that the presence of a look-alike and a forensic expert among the hit squad had revealed that the murder was premeditated.

The Saudi narrative was met with widespread international scepticism due to its inconsistencies. In addition, new evidence continued to emerge, raising question marks about the case despite Saudi attempts to put the matter to rest. Available information indicates that this was a deliberate plot to kill the Saudi journalist. Evidence has been revealed that a squad of 15 Saudi men, including security and intelligence operatives, conducted the operation. Their identities were disclosed by Turkish authorities.

The mounting evidence, combined with the international outcry, obliged the Saudi authorities to take several measures. They announced that 18 Saudi nationals had been arrested for their association with the case. Additionally, two top advisors of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), as well as three Saudi intelligence agents, were discharged of their duties. However, because of the Saudi justice system's lack of credibility, these measures have done little to quash the continuing outrage over Khashoggi's killing.

Media framing

The Jamal Khashoggi affair underscores, once more, the power of the media in shaping the global information space. The pivotal role that media play in society is a feature of modernity. In modern times, authorities and other societal powers have endeavoured to ensure that they participate, partly or entirely, in the shaping of media discourse. Moreover, because the news coverage of the killing involved contesting narratives and significant framing and counter-framing at the geo-political level, it is essential to examine this process. This study will, therefore, delve into the content produced by opposing national news organisations and determine the extent to which they provided divergent frames of representation.

Bateson (1955) originally put forward the concept of framing. He did so by examining the processes through which people thought and behaved during situations of cooperation or conflict. Goffman further developed the concept and termed it as a “schemata of interpretation” (Goffman, 1974: 24). Subsequently, a significant multidisciplinary body of literature was produced about this concept. According to Entman, media framing consists of “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (Entman, 2004: 5). Other academics argued that the essence of the framing process is “to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilise antagonists” (Snow and Benford, 1988: 198). Hence, the strategic purpose of framing is to orient the mass public towards a particular set of political objectives.

It is, therefore, not surprising that media scholars have observed the strong link between framing and the mobilisation of media bias (McLeod and Detenber, 1999). Similarly, American political scientist and cultural critic Michael Parenti (2000) argued that if spin-doctors are involved in a campaign of public opinion manipulation, they often resort to framing. In any case, media frames demonstrate that news is a manufactured cultural reality, not an objective reflection of reality (Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). For this reason, framing analysis is a powerful tool when it comes to examining the contours of the media’s role in the service of structural and institutional power. It provides a solid platform for analysing the orchestration of discourse, and allows scrutiny of the sources of communication.

However, one also has to distinguish the different ‘levels’ and ‘packages’ of framing. As German academic Silke Schmidt argues, “in order to arrive at a more structured understanding of *frames* as opposed to mere *topics*, an additional conceptual classification between *frame levels* and *issue frames* is essential” (Schmidt, 2014: 115) (original emphasis) [1]. In alignment with Schmidt’s approach, our study concurs that the highest level of framing, namely the meta-level, contains major ideological themes (117). Some academics have looked at the intricacies of such higher-level schemata and distinguished major meta-frames, including – but not limited to - the “morality frame” and the “conflict frame.” The latter usually focuses on constructions of “us” versus “them” (116). Here, issues of power and hierarchy are invoked (Scheufele 1999: 113).

The meta-level of framing combined with the political economy of news media (which is equally affected by relations of power in regard to the primacy of elites’ news sources) makes the power-media nexus a key determinant of news reportage. There is a solid body of political communication scholarship, which has sought to elucidate the importance of news media vis-à-vis war and international politics. In this context, studies undertaken in the United States by media scholars Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky are foundational. In *Manufacturing Consent: The*

Political Economy of the Mass Media (1988), they contend that instead of looking at journalistic conduct and public opinion as the main determining variables for US media behaviour and performance, researchers should examine the uncritical dependence upon elite information sources. Therefore, the news media tend to act in the interests of ruling powers. In their paradigm, Herman and Chomsky identify five filters that contribute to this state of affairs, namely ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology.

The first filter stems from the fact that large business conglomerates own a majority of news outlets. As a result, these businesses have a significant say in the strategies of the news organisations and their general editorial orientations. The second filter is related to advertising. As advertisers pay huge amounts to place their commercials, they want them to feature in a friendly environment that does not disturb their business activities. Hence, if there are stories that are detrimental to particular corporate advertising interests, they may exert pressure on news organisations to marginalise or exclude such content. The third filter, namely the reliance upon elite sources, has been long established, as authorities and major corporations routinely feed information to reporters in the form of press releases, speeches, reports and press conferences. The fourth filter is what Chomsky and Herman refer to as 'flak', namely the negative public response to certain media stories or programs. Reporters, editors and media owners can be vilified when they cross certain red lines (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 28). The fifth and final filter is ideology. When the model was first produced (1988), the main ideology was anti-communism. Since then, the 'war on terror' (Klaehn, 2009) and prejudice against Islam (Sciolino, 1996) have filled the *otherness* spot.

The indexing model (Hallin, 1986; Bennett, 1990) overlaps with the Herman and Chomsky model. Its main proposition is that the spectrum of debate in the news derives from the official discourse in Washington. For that reason, critical news coverage of governmental actions will only appear in the occasional moments when officials in Washington are publicly and vocally divided about core issues. According to this model, the news media have the greatest impact on the policy process when policy is actually uncertain (Hallin, 1986).

In *Projections of Power* (2004), Robert Entman proposed an enhancement of the indexing model. His cascading model is a complex system, in which agendas and story angles start at the top with the executive (the White House), then flow downward, to the network of non-administration elites, then on to news organisations, before finally reaching the public. The way the public reacts to those frames generates feedback from lower to higher levels, and this may sometimes lead to a frame adjustment. For Entman, US presidents enjoy enormous power in framing public debate, while the media disseminate the dominant discourse. This means that non-elites have little chance to contest the dominant frames.

Entman's work, along with other framing analyses, was produced before the era of social media, as exemplified by Facebook, Google and Twitter. It is evident that internet and social media networks have a profound effect on communication ranging from public relations to diplomacy. For example, WikiLeaks, a grouping of hacktivists established in 2006, discloses vital confidential information to the public via the internet in an effort to expose certain states' practices (CBS, 2011). Hence, oppositional and alternative outlets manage to get certain frames across, and can influence the tone of coverage on certain issues. However, as we will indicate, authorities have consolidated their power over the internet in recent few years. Therefore, in the ensuing paragraphs, it will be suggested that Entman's model retains significant purchase (despite the emergence of an internet-based media environment).

The general perception following the post-2011 Arab uprisings, also popularly known as the ‘Arab Spring’, was that social media had empowered subjugated societies to mobilise against authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. This perception has since been undermined by counter evidence. In authoritarian political environments (e.g., China, Vietnam, Iran, Singapore), regimes have combined the use of technological innovation, co-optation of internet providers, high levels of regulation, and censorship to keep a strong grip on cyberspace (Hung, 2010; Morozov, 2011). Other governments resort to astroturfing and computational propaganda to impose certain frames of representation over populations. A recent study conducted by the University of Oxford documented how computational info-warriors, working for several states around the world (including democratic ones), saturate cyberspace with biased news, while promoting individuals’ worldviews and interpretations that are aligned with their states’ agendas (Bradshaw and Howard, 2017: 9).

At the same time, researchers also have addressed framing in social media. Five years ago, author Piers Robinson reviewed the previous 30 years of academic scholarship concerning what he termed “the orthodox view amongst political communication scholars.” According to him, this perspective considers that the media “remain largely deferential of, and supportive toward, political elites during times of war and crisis” (Robinson, 2014: 462). For him, the rise of new communication technology and organised persuasive communication compounded the problem, especially in the field of news (still the central arena in which information about war and conflict is disseminated). Against the decline in viewership/readership experienced by traditional mainstream news media outlets, Robinson referred to a 2012 Pew State of the Media study, which stated that “social networks at this point are mostly an additional way to get the news, rather than a replacement source” (471). Moreover, in his view, “platforms such as Twitter and Facebook merely echo the established media, or otherwise simply lead users to established media sites” (472).

Robinson’s observations are echoed by several other studies in political communication, which found that social media did not affect the frames conveyed by traditional media. For instance, Woolley et al.’s (2010) framing study of Facebook groups during the U.S. 2008 election revealed strong similarities between Facebook posts and mainstream media coverage. Other studies show that social media posts tend to duplicate the output of mainstream media, thus repeating similar frames and reiterating the same news agenda (Meraz, 2011; Ragas and Kioussis, 2010). Hence, Entman’s model is still relevant because it can accommodate digital and social media as part of the media ecosystem, and does not deny the possibility of counter-framing efforts. Figure 1, which featured in one of Entman’s articles about the White House’s framing issue following 9/11, exemplifies the cascading stream of persuasive arguments.

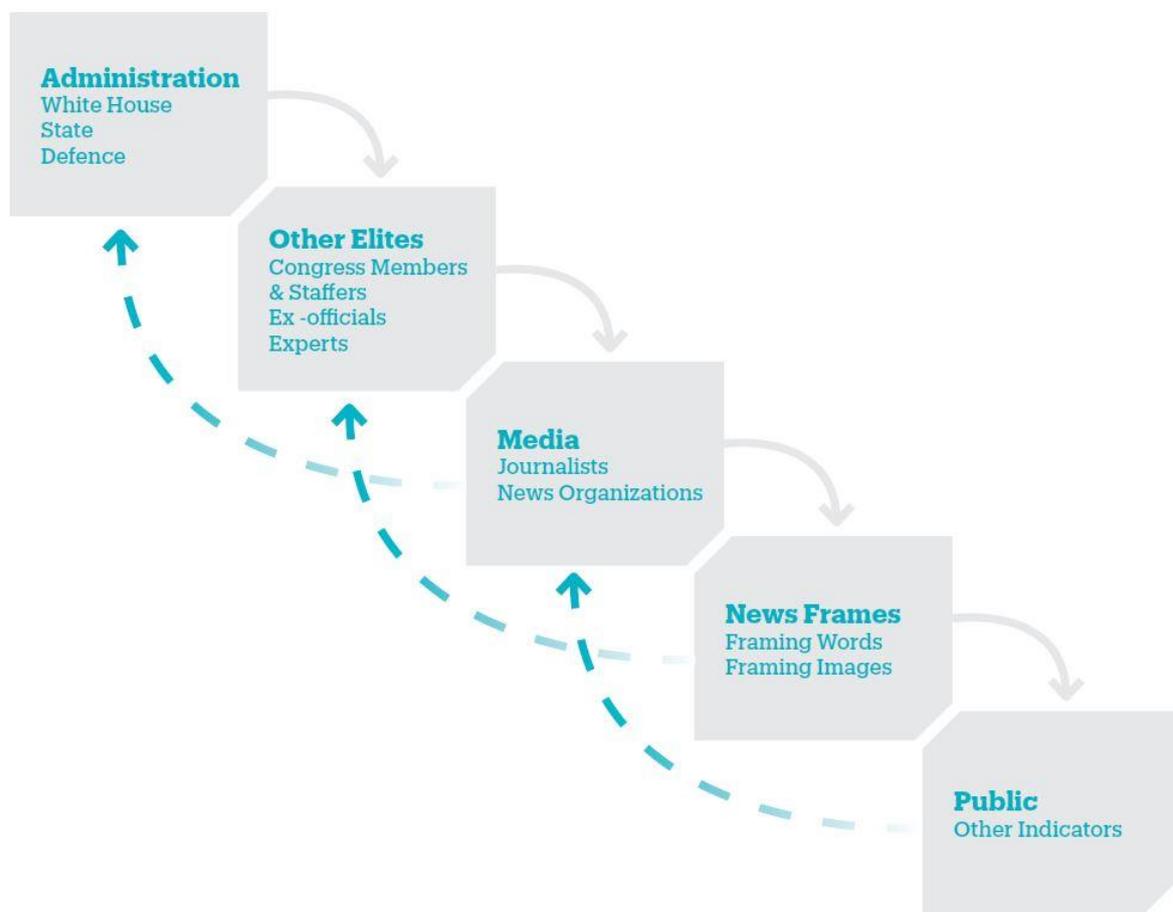


Figure 1. Cascading Network Activation (Entman, 2003)

In sum, Entman's model acts like a waterfall, which connects each level of the system: administrative elites; non-administrative elites; news organisations; the texts they produce; and the public (Entman, 2003: 419). The imagery of a waterfall is revealing, as each layer has some input until it reaches the level of the public. The extent of the involvement of every layer depends upon the power that the public holds. Sometimes, certain frames of representation prevail more than others. Entman makes this clear by observing that "the words and images that make up the frame can be distinguished from the rest of the news by their capacity to stimulate support of or opposition to the sides in a political conflict" (Entman, 2003: 417). Using the American model as a reference, Entman differentiates between the dominant frames, which dictate the contours of the debate and are carried through the various layers unchallenged and other frames, which are contested and incapable of diffusing their narratives.

In his explanation of how certain frames can become more dominant than others, Entman attributes such potency (or lack thereof) to three variables: motivations; power and strategy; and cultural congruence (Entman, 2003: 421). For this study, which looks at the contestation of frames between state institutions in the Middle East, and most particularly news agencies in rival countries, it is worth noting that state news agencies have the ability to shape news frames. These organisations have access to elite networks and their feeding services to newspapers and digital media outlets in their respective countries. Besides, given that such news agencies are under the

auspices of state structures, they are part of the state media strategy. They may even offer support in the process of the “deliberate, planned activation of mental associations”. In this context, cultural congruence is about word choice, information dissemination (or lack thereof), in addition to timing (Entman, 2003: 422).

On media warfare

The aforementioned theorists and others have made essential contributions to media studies by outlining the contours of the complex relationship between the public, the news media and political elites. This theoretical aspect is important in understanding the concept of media warfare. Media warfare is not easily discernible, especially since it is often embedded within a larger paradigm and comes under different appellations. These include propaganda, perception management, strategic communication, or Information Warfare (IW). In the latter, information becomes a “separate realm, potent weapon, and lucrative target” (Whitehead, 1997).

Information warfare (IW) is indeed a vast field and includes actions ranging from media wars to cyber operations, and from economic warfare to political pressure waged against civilian populations (Der Derian, 2001). It has also been asserted that IW represents a grand strategy, which comprises a panoply of operational and possible tactical measures: undermining of the enemy’s information; prevention of the enemy’s access to information; and the spread of propaganda and disinformation to demoralise or manipulate the opponent and the public (Reisman and Antoniou, 1994).

Asserting control over narratives is a hallmark of media warfare because they have a powerful effect on perception and imagination. It has often been highlighted that the media is an arena of struggle over meanings, which in turn reflect the sets of values, beliefs and norms within society (Stevenson, 2002: 150). As such, the news media play a big role in circulating the dominant values and beliefs, which shape the ‘collective representations of society’, in the words of Durkheim. By acting in this way, the media are conveying the political agendas and worldviews of elites. On the other hand, the media tend to downplay other competing discourses, effectively constructing a binary mode of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Kellner, 1995).

Media warfare has been applied ever since the press became important in shaping public opinion during modern times. For example, during World War I, Britain’s first Ministry of Information (MOI) was established, and its media warfare measures were initiated and led by Lord Northcliffe, the founder of modern popular journalism and the owner of *The Daily Mail* and *The Times*. On the other side of the Atlantic, George Creel’s Committee on Public Information played a significant role in persuading a sceptical public to support America’s entrance into World War I. During World War II, media warfare was essentially undertaken by the Office of War Information (OWI), which played an active role in spreading ‘the value of democracy’ narrative. The OWI used this frame repeatedly to win the hearts and minds of all audiences (Melosi, 1978).

In contemporary times, some of the most vivid examples of media warfare have taken place during the George W. Bush era. The Bush Administration went to great lengths to spread the ‘War on Terror’ narrative via the media. The US administration implemented a vast communications programme aimed at winning public opinion for their Middle Eastern policies while attempting to allay any negative perceptions nationally and internationally. To this end, the public relations firm Rendon Group was hired. The latter established the Coalition Information Center (CIC), with offices in Washington, London and Islamabad, to provide global, 24/7 control over media

narratives. The CIC prepared daily press releases and responses, undertaking a wide panoply of opinion polls across the Middle East. They also arranged interviews with major Middle Eastern networks for key American officials (DeYoung, 2001).

Subsequently, the Rendon Group was also tasked with selling the war in Iraq. The firm is thought to have advised Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to establish a link between terror and nation-states, rather than focusing on Al Qaeda. The buy-in for the war was concocted by “the spin doctors and PR flacks who stage-managed the countdown to war from the murky corridors of Washington where politics, corporate spin and psy-ops spooks cohabit” (St-Clair, 2007). In the meantime, as *The New York Times* reported on February 19, 2002, the Pentagon used the Rendon Group to develop the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI). The latter became the Pentagon’s platform for mixing conventional news releases, foreign advertising campaigns and covert disinformation programmes. Private firms were sometimes used to achieve these objectives (Campbell, 2003). The OSI was shut down after a huge PR blowback when civil society organisations denounced the undemocratic and possibly illegal nature of the programme (Allen, 2002). However, the then Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, insisted that the same programmes and practices would proceed under different names (FAIR, 2002).

Journalist William Arkin explained in an op-ed for the *Los Angeles Times* why Rumsfeld continued on the same path, regardless of any considerations. According to Arkin, Rumsfeld was redesigning the US military to make “information warfare” central to its functions. This new policy, argued Arkin, increasingly “blurs or even erases the boundaries between factual information and news, on the one hand, and public relations, propaganda and psychological warfare, on the other” (Arkin, 2002). This was arguably best exemplified by the establishment of the United States Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), which launched *Television Al Hurra* (The Free One) and *Radio Sawa* (Together), an Arabic entertainment and news station, which combined Western pop music and entertainment with newscasts. This approach aimed to influence the perceptions of younger people in the Middle East about the ‘American way of life’.

At the same time, the Bush administration manoeuvred extensively to keep tight control over its ‘War on Terror’ narrative. Condoleezza Rice requested that American news outlets be “very careful about what they say” (Schechter, 2002). Consequently, media anchors who failed to comply with the ‘new’ guidelines were sanctioned, and dissenting views were marginalised. For instance, the US State Department prevented the Voice of America (VOA) from airing an interview with the Taliban leader Mullah Omar (Koppel and Labott, 2001). VOA is a public broadcaster and answers to the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), a government agency. Acts of censorship such as these became more common in the aftermath of 9/11, and journalistic criticism, which was generally accepted in the past, became off limits. Peter Arnett, a seasoned journalist known for his coverage of the Vietnam War and the Gulf War, was fired from NBC after being interviewed by Iraqi National television. Lesser known journalists also faced the wrath of the establishment. Dan Guthrie, a columnist for the *Daily Courier* in Oregon, was immediately dismissed for criticising President Bush. Tom Gutting of the *Texas City Sun* was fired for similar reasons. Even Bill Maher’s satirical program *Politically Incorrect* was boycotted by advertisers after he made a joke about the September 11 attacks. Similarly, KOMU TV, which is affiliated with the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri, faced considerable pressure when its news director prohibited the use of US flag ribbons in the newsroom. This prompted legislators to cut the funding for the school (Dadge, 2004: 106, 109, 112).

Along with the US, other global actors have used media warfare extensively and have increasingly gained a competitive edge. For example, it has been reported that Russian-sponsored agencies and television networks, such as Sputnik and RT (formerly known as Russia Today), have waged a media war as part of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Chee, 2017). Even outside conflict zones, Russian authorities, while keeping their involvement at a low profile, have managed to create difficulties for Western politicians. These public figures have become entangled in media controversies, which ultimately had considerable bearing on domestic politics. A case in point involved the bogus story about the rape of a Russian-German 13-year-old girl from Berlin, who was allegedly raped by North African immigrants. Official Russian media spread the story, and Germany's far-right National Democratic Party used it to mobilise demonstrators against Chancellor Angela Merkel (Rutenberg, 2017).

A commonly used tactic in this context is to overwhelm politicians affiliated with the political centre with discursive attacks from either far-left or far-right populist activists. As such, RT and Sputnik have given considerable airtime to Brexiters such as Nigel Farage, who has been criticised for playing a divisive role in British politics. Such a strategy has been so potent that when French President Emmanuel Macron hosted Russian President Vladimir Putin in May 2017, Macron complained that "Russia Today and Sputnik were agents of influence which on several occasions spread fake news about [him] personally and [his] campaign" (Rutenberg, 2017).

Chinese authorities have also stepped up their efforts in this field. In the past decade they have reformulated their military and security doctrine to focus on the concept of 'Three Warfares': psychological; legal; and media. The last aspect is "aimed at influencing domestic and international public opinion to build support for China's military actions and dissuade an adversary from pursuing actions contrary to China's interests" (DOD, 2011: 6). In the past, Chinese decision makers were known for being defensive and reactive. For decades, critical stories in foreign magazines were blanked or ripped out. Television programmes were taken off the air when they aired stories on sensitive issues such as Tibet, Taiwan or Tiananmen (Lim and Bergin, 2018). During the last decade, however, Chinese leaders have become more assertive. They now aim to propagate the desired news and views that shape local public opinion, allowing the elites, party members and ordinary people to be on the same page. Additionally, Chinese authorities have gone the extra mile to prepare for international media warfare. The 2016 rebranding of the international arm of China Central Television (CCTV) under China Global Television Network (CGTN) is the cornerstone of this media warfare strategy, as it represents a high-profile facet of China's venture into global news media expansion. The goal, as per President Xi Jinping's words, is to "tell China's story well" (Lim and Bergen, 2018).

In the Middle East, broadly defined, media warfare has proliferated. As an example of this inclination is the Gulf crisis, which began in May 2017 when four countries (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt) imposed a blockade on Qatar in July 2017. As a result, diplomatic ties with Doha were cut. The only land passage linking Qatar to the Arabian Peninsula was stopped, while airspaces over the four countries were denied, forcing flights to travel by prolonged routes. This led to the disruption of existing supply chains. In the meantime, Qatari nationals were expelled from quartet countries (Falk, 2018:3).

Unidentified hackers engineered a cyber-attack on the night of 19 April 2017, which started the crisis. They planted fake news in the website of Qatar News Agency (QNA), attributing false quotes to Qatar's Emir, which praised Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas and criticised the Trump administration. Although these false quotes were aired just before midnight, television stations belonging to the

blockading countries already had guests present in their studio sets, launching what was clearly a prearranged media blitzkrieg against Qatar (Cherkaoui, 2018: 13). The vitriolic media attacks were particularly outlandish, ranging from the claim that Qatar was conniving with Al Qaeda and Iran, to the denigration of Qatar-owned London department store Harrods for allegedly collecting the credit card details of shoppers from the four blockading countries (Freer, 2017). As the blockade stalled and Qatar managed to get the upper hand in the ensuing PR battle, Saudi Arabia found itself losing the battle for international public opinion. Subsequently, *the Financial Times* revealed in September 2017 that the Saudi regime planned to establish public relations hubs in Europe and Asia as part of a new offensive to counter negative media coverage of the kingdom (Financial Times, 2017).

The media environment in Saudi Arabia and Turkey

Saudi Arabia

The history of the Saudi print media began in 1924, when Umm Al Qura was first published during the rule of King Abdul Aziz. A century later, print media is still the most significant conduit of official information, even if newspapers are no longer the most followed sources of news in Saudi Arabia. However, many Saudis are reluctant to believe what is circulated by electronic media unless it is produced by a newspaper (Alghasha'ami, 2007).

It is no secret that the Saudi media industry operates under tight state monitoring. In 2019, the Kingdom's ranking on the 'Reporters without Borders' (RSF) Press Freedom Index ranked 172 out of 180. Print media face extremely strict printing laws that prohibit the publication of any criticism of the royal family or the government. Thus, print journalists are prevented from discussing most relevant issues (Alghasha'ami, 2007). Moreover, the selection of the newspapers' senior management is decided upon by the Ministry of Information with the approval of the Ministry of the Interior. This speaks volumes about the oppressive and staunchly controlled media environment in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the establishment of a print newspaper must be approved by royal decree and is subject to many conditions. For example, the paper must be produced by a company having no fewer than 40 Saudi shareholders, none of whom may have a previous conviction. These restrictive conditions have a direct effect upon the number of print newspapers established in Saudi Arabia, as well as their content.

According to recent studies (Awad, 2010), there are only eight companies publishing newspapers in Saudi Arabia. They are listed as follows:

- Makkah for Printing and Information (est. in 1964). It used to publish *Al-Nadwa*
- Al Madina Press (est. in 1964), which publishes the daily *Al-Madina*
- Al Yamama Press (est. in 1964), which publishes the daily *Al-Riyadh*
- Okaz for Press and Publishing (est. in 1965), which publishes the daily *Okaz*
- Al Jazirah Press, Printing and Publishing (est. in 1964), which publishes the daily *Al Jazirah*
- Al-Bilad Press and Publishing (est. in 1964), which publishes the daily newspaper *Al-Bilad* and the weekly *Aqra'a* magazine

- Dar Al-Yawm Press and Publishing (est. in 1965), which publishes the daily newspaper *Al-Yawm*
- Assir Press and Publishing (est. in 2000), which publishes the daily newspaper *Alwatan*

According to the 2019 Saudi media profile put forward by the BBC, there are nine important newspapers in the country, namely *Al-Watan*, *Al-Riyadh*, *Okaz*, *Al-Jazirah*, *Al-Sharq*, *Al-Hayat*, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, *Arab News* (in English) and *Saudi Gazette* (in English) (BBC News, 2019b). These newspapers regularly source their news from major international newswires, such as Associated Press and Reuters, but also from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA). The latter is a major local news provider, which has retained its significance by providing the state's perspective, especially in moments of turmoil and political tensions.

On the other hand, while they imposed heavy media restrictions at home, the Saudi monarchy increased its media influence footprint in the Arab world. They have opted to establish their media empire overseas (e.g., London, Dubai). They did so in order to circumvent the unbearable limitations they created at home. At the same time, Saudi-owned media outlets were a reaction from the government to the growing popularity of foreign programmes (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1998). The international expansion occurred first in the mid-1980s, and then accelerated after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (1991). It was a means to address the increase in public antagonism among Arabs after the Saudi decision to host US troops to counter Iraqi moves in the region.

Thus, the Saudis took over the London-based pan-Arab daily newspaper *Al Hayat* (Abu Fadil, 2018), as well as *Al Hayat's* competitor, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*. In the same spirit, the Saudi leadership decided to establish transnational, primarily entertainment-oriented satellite broadcasters, such as the Middle East Broadcast Corporation (MBC, founded in 1991), and the Arab Radio and Television Network (ART, founded in 1994). A decade later, the Saudis decided to launch, *Al Arabiya*, a 24/7 television news satellite channel. This move took place barely two weeks before the start of the Iraq War (3 March 2003). The Saudis wanted to circulate their narratives and be able to influence pan-Arab audiences. In fact, the Saudi monarchy was alarmed at the rise of anti-Saudi sentiment, both in the West and in the Middle East (Hammond, 2007).

It is worth noting, though, that even if the majority of Saudi news media outlets invest in international, particularly pan-Arab, media, domestic media, even when privately owned are subject to a tight control. The Saudi monarchy maintains dominance over these private news organisations via a rigid system of monitoring, subventions, and sectoral regulations (BBC, 2019). Consequently, the press freedoms in Saudi Arabia are extremely limited (Freedom House, 2016).

Turkey

Given its 19th-century Ottoman roots, the Turkish press has long been connected to politics in the country (R. Kaya and Çakmur, 2010 cited in Işeri, Şekercioğlu and Panayırıcı, 2019). Beginning in the 1950s, the Turkish press rapidly industrialised to “become a relatively rich media environment by the 1980s” (Adakli, 2009; A. Kaya, 1999 in Işeri, Şekercioğlu and Panayırıcı, 2019: 1465). By the late 1990s, the country had undergone an economic transformation, including the adoption of free market economics rather than the more protectionist policies of the past. This was accompanied by shifts in media ownership (Kejanlıoğlu, 2004 cited in Işeri, Şekercioğlu and Panayırıcı, 2019).

During this period of liberalisation, media outlets were bought by business leaders as the government privatised state monopolies (Tuncel, 2011).

One of the largest, Doğan Media Group, owns *Hurriyet*, *Posta*, *Fanatik*, *Radikal* and the English-language daily *Hürriyet Daily News*, along with multiple radio and television stations (Oxford Business Group, 2012). It maintains an international audience through the Türksat satellite system (a digital television subscription service) and has several other business ventures, both domestic and in collaboration with international stakeholders (Oxford Business Group, 2012). Other competitors include the following: Albayrak Group (owning *Yeni Şafak* newspaper and TNVET television channel); the Turkuvaz Group, part of Çalık Holding (owning *Yeni Asir* newspaper and the ATV television channel); Çukurova Holding (owning multiple newspapers and television channels, as well as Digiturk, a digital satellite network provider, and Turkcell, the largest mobile service provider); and Ciner Holding, among others (Oxford Business Group, 2012). Prominent news agencies in Turkey include the state-owned Anadolu Agency (AA), Doğan Haber Ajansı (owned by the Doğan Media Group) and Ajans HaberTürk (owned by Ciner Holding).

More than two thirds of Turkish media, including newspapers, radio and television channels are owned by a handful of cross-media groups that are also involved in other economic sectors (Tuncel, 2011). Consequently, these media conglomerates are reliant on the political and bureaucratic elites to sustain their business (Tuncel, 2011). Allegedly, the Turkish government “contributed to the creation of a hybrid media oligopoly that includes...private media which are subsidised through the revenue coming from state-run advertisers” (Irak, 2015). Similar enmeshment of government, industry and media is observable across the globe. An example is the United States where media conglomerates can directly benefit from political advertising on their platforms funded by corporations (who cannot legally pay politicians directly) in support of or against certain political candidates who, if and when elected, would support those corporations through preferential policymaking (Tedford, 2010).

A 2016 report presented to the EU parliament stated that EU member states ‘are not in the position to ensure media pluralism and media freedom, because they too, are captured by the network of...political actors’ (Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, 2016). Similarly in Turkey, the Feza Media Group was associated with the Gülenist movement (Oxford Business Group, 2012). The Feza Media Group became recently known in Turkey as the Fethullah Terrorist Organisation (FETO). FETO was named as a terrorist organisation by the Turkish government (Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe, 2019) after having been linked to the July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. Subsequently, the Turkish government shut down all media channels and newspapers associated with the Gülenist movement. This led to some international concerns about press freedom in Turkey (Toksabay and Kucukgocme, 2018). The government, however, has considered this to be a protective measure to shield the country’s public sphere from terrorist endeavours (Al Jazeera, 2019b) [2] [3].

Case study: The Khashoggi murder and the battle of frames

Following what effectively amounted to a palace coup, which allowed Mohamed bin Salman to jump the line of succession, the young Crown Prince, known as MBS, tried to gain internal legitimacy by achieving ‘victories’ abroad. However, after venturing into a disastrous war in Yemen, he engaged in a series of gross miscalculations: the kidnapping of Lebanon’s Prime

Minister, Saad Hariri, and the blockade of Qatar. Consequently, the credibility of Saudi Arabia on the international scene was weakened (Oktay, 2018).

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis had in turn led to the establishment of stronger ties between Qatar and Turkey, much to the dismay of Saudi Arabia. Turkey had established its importance as a counterbalancing force in the region (Oktay, 2018). The Saudis were slow to denounce the July 16 coup attempt in Turkey, and the GCC-Qatar blockade was still in place. The already damaged Saudi-Turkey relationship soured further with the disappearance and murder of Jamal Khashoggi (Oktay, 2018).

Jamal Khashoggi was a Saudi columnist for *The Washington Post*, and former general manager and editor-in-chief of Al-Arab News Channel. Khashoggi had been close to the Saudi regime, but he fled the kingdom in September 2017, soon after the new Crown Prince came into power. He “subsequently became an outspoken critic of some aspects of the country’s reform program, especially the clampdown on political freedoms, and intolerance of dissent” (*Tehran Times*, 2018). Additionally, in December 2016, “*The Independent*, citing a report from *Middle East Eye*, said Khashoggi had been banned by the Saudi regime authorities from publishing or appearing on television for criticising U.S. President-elect Donald Trump” (*Tehran Times*, 2018). Jamal Khashoggi disappeared after visiting the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018.

After weeks of denying any involvement, Saudi authorities admitted that he had died inside its Istanbul consulate (Rythoven, 2019). While Saudi officials originally blamed the death on an altercation inside the consulate, this explanation was contradicted by evidence from Turkish investigators. They suggested that there had been a premeditated murder, which could not have taken place without higher-level, decision-making knowledge (BBC News, 2018). President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared the death a premeditated murder on October 23, 2018.

This study focuses on the contest of narratives. Turkish and Saudi state news agencies were specifically selected to see how both parties respectively depicted the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) was established in 1971 as the first national Saudi news agency. In 2012, SPA was converted to a public body and linked to the Saudi Ministry of Culture and Information, with a board of directors headed by the Minister of Culture and Information. Thus, SPA media coverage can be considered a reflection of the Saudi government’s stance on key issues. Similarly, the Anadolu Agency was established in 1920 during the Turkish War of Independence and is a state-run news agency, which tends to convey official Turkish news and views [4].

Considering that this study examines Turkish-Saudi narratives surrounding the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, it is reasonable to presume that the actions of state-run or state-influenced news agencies in each country offer a direct comparison of two similar media in terms of validity and results (Mohajan, 2017). News agencies are “frequently, if not typically, among the first sources of news of regional and national relevance and importance” (Boyd-Barrette, 2011). Aligned with Entman’s ‘cascading model’ (2003), news agencies contribute to the formation of informational networks and to an informational environment that has a relation to territory and to units of political configuration, as well as, sometimes, to national, ethnic, linguistic and other markers of identity formation. In this sense, it may be that news agencies are components of an enabling communications infrastructure that has both top-down as well as bottom-up capabilities (Boyd-Barrette, 2011: 87) [5].

The Lexis Nexis search engine was used to locate all news articles using the keywords ‘Jamal Khashoggi’, ‘Jamal’ and ‘Khashoggi’, from 3 October to 3 December 2018. Jamal Khashoggi was assassinated on October 2. From the next day onwards, both Turkish and Saudi media produced

articles as new information emerged and the story evolved during the period of study. Saudi Arabia belatedly admitted that Jamal Khashoggi was murdered in a Saudi consulate in Istanbul (October 19), and that the murder was premeditated (25 October). In light of these admissions, the media coverage for both October and November was differentiated to reflect differences of reportage between the Anadolu Agency and the Saudi Press Agency. A total of 487 articles from the AA and 106 articles from SPA were included.

The purpose of the study is threefold. First, it seeks to examine the political and social dynamics underpinning the ensuing contest of media narratives in the region. Second, it aims to analyse the communication strategies employed by the two states, namely Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Not only are these two countries diametrically opposed in regard to the Khashoggi killing, but they are also on a collision course concerning several geo-strategic matters throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Third, the article explores the use of news framing and the role of state news agencies as they publicise particular events and convey the vantage point of their respective ruling establishments, bearing in mind that these battles of frames occurred in English and involved several public spheres, including the Middle East and the Anglophone global public arena. In order to do this, the study employs a sequential multimethod approach (Dreissneck, Sousa and Mendes, 2007). Beyond these objectives, this article will also offer some clues about the mediated geo-political space(s) in which the opposed framings proceed.

The first phase of the study concurrently applied both inductive (Klauer and Phye, 2008) and deductive reasoning (Ratolo and Sator, 2018) to qualitatively explore and select themes that eventually led to news frame discovery. By “detecting generalisations, rules, or regularities” (Klauer and Phye, 2008: 86) that were connected to both the current issue as well as multiple premises about the Turkish-Saudi relationship believed to be true as confirmed by past engagement (Ratolo and Sator, 2018), we were able to develop theme-based frames. This method of data collection allowed for an analysis of communication strategies employed by Turkey and Saudi Arabia as part of a contest of media narratives in the case of Jamal Khashoggi’s murder, against the backdrop of political and social dynamics underpinning the Turkish-Saudi relationship. For example, the ‘Conspiracy’ frame, a frame utilised by SPA, included references to states and actors such as Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood intending to harm the Saudi royal family – known to be flashpoints in the Turkish-Saudi relationship. On the other hand, ‘Alliance’, another frame utilised by the SPA, referred to international support for Saudi Arabia during the predicament the country then found itself in. The second phase used quantitative analysis to compare the selected theme-based frames in the contest of information warfare. This allowed exploration and confirmation of the use of news framing by state news agencies as they publicised particular events and conveyed official stances.

Media framing involves both inclusion (emphasis) and exclusion (de-emphasis) concerning the critical aspects of an event. Just as importantly, one event may be prioritised over another, either intentionally or unconsciously, to promote a particular interpretation of that event (Abdullah and Elareshi, 2015). According to Entman:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (1993: 52).

The framing of news in the media steers public opinion and deliberation in a certain way (Zhang and Fahmy, 2009: 519). In respect to the construction of frames, the determinants of foreign policy

coverage need to be taken into account, and this is where media framing and state foreign policy become intertwined. According to Gans (1979), journalists select stories based on availability, as well as suitability. Particularly with respect to foreign policy, journalists tend to rely on government sources, and thus the way the media frame foreign policy coverage is influenced primarily by how the government frames an issue. Additionally, current and future geopolitical considerations tend to have an impact on framing, leading to a mirroring of a country's interests and priorities in their media. As discussed in the media framing section, news is a manufactured cultural reality, not an objective reflection of reality (Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). In the same spirit, Fuchs (2005) observes, mass media is not a neutral subsystem of society, without any links to political or economic realities of the state.

In this context, The Anadolu Agency had significantly more coverage of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi compared to the Saudi Press Agency. In the month of October 2018, AA produced 284 news articles pertaining to the topic, as compared to 78 from SPA. This amounted to more than triple the media coverage. In November 2018, AA produced 185 articles, while SPA produced 28. AA, therefore, produced almost seven times more media coverage related to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi than the SPA did during November 2018.

In the analysis of Anadolu Agency content, the 'Crime' frame included the following: sub-frames pertaining to the crime scene investigation; methods by which the murder was committed; Saudi Arabia's official acceptance that Jamal Khashoggi was murdered inside the Saudi Consulate; and Turkish President Erdogan's labelling of the incident as a crime. The fact that Jamal Khashoggi was missing or the implication that the Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman (MBS) had ordered the murder, were grouped together within the 'Crime' frame. The 'Crime' frame was included in 42% of the news articles in October 2018 and 37 % of the articles in November 2018.

The Anadolu Agency 'Justice' frame included the following sub-frames: references to violations of international law; Turkey's reluctance to cover up the crime; not depicting the murder as an instrument for a political vendetta against Saudi Arabia; and evidence being shared with the international community (including the United Nations, the United States, Germany, France and Britain) by the Turkish government to stress the independence of the investigation. The 'Justice' frame was included in 7% of the news articles in October 2018 and 8% of the articles in November 2018.

The Anadolu Agency 'International Opinion' frame included the following sub-frames: the Saudi Crown Prince seeking support from the Arab world; cancellation or scrutiny of aid or arms to Saudi Arabia on the part of foreign countries; foreign countries believing Turkey acted professionally; international calls for justice and support for Jamal Khashoggi; international media references to Saudi Arabia's negative role; international protests; President Donald Trump's defence of the US-Saudi relationship and the Saudi Crown Prince; President Trump's opponents wanting justice; Western countries wanting justice; Arab media's support for Saudi Arabia; Arab media's support for Turkey and evidence provided by Turkey; countries believing Saudi reforms were fake; countries believing the relationship with Saudis should not be harmed; countries believing Saudi explanations were unacceptable; and Saudi cruelty in Yemen. The 'International Opinion' frame was included in 35% of AA's news coverage pertaining to Jamal Khashoggi's murder in October 2018, and 36% in November 2018.

Two Anadolu Agency (AA) sub-frames which included references to Saudi Arabia denying knowledge of Jamal Khashoggi's whereabouts, and evidence of Khashoggi being killed inside the Saudi Consulate, were grouped within the 'Saudi Arabia in Denial' frame. This was utilised in 11 %

of AA news articles in our sample of October 2018, and in 0% for November 2018. Another two AA sub-frames included references to lack of clarity in the Saudi Arabia narrative and non-cooperation on their part; these were grouped within the ‘Saudi Arabia Cannot Be Trusted’ frame. This frame was utilised in 5% of AA articles in October 2018, and 20% in November 2018.

In our analysis of the Saudi Press Agency content, the ‘Conspiracy’ frame included the following sub-frames: references to the Jamal Khashoggi case dividing the Muslim world; denouncement of lies and smear campaigns against Saudi Arabia; Saudi Arabia as a law-abiding state; and the perceived intent to harm the Saudi royal family. This general frame was present in 17% of SPA articles from our samples of October 2018, and 15% of articles for November 2018.

The following Saudi Press Agency sub-frames were found in the ‘Alliance’ frame: any reference to a foreign country expressing support for Saudi Arabia; support for the ‘Davos in the Desert’ investment conference; expressions of confidence in Saudi Arabia to act justly; cautioning against speculation against Saudi Arabia; and praising Saudi Arabia’s commitment to justice. Other sub-frames were that the Saudi prosecution’s statement must be considered final; cautions against using the Jamal Khashoggi story to destabilise Saudi Arabia; references to Islamic scholars praising the Saudi rulers’ fair approach; and Saudi rulers themselves reaching out in appreciation of those states that did not speculate. The ‘Alliance’ frame was found in 45% of the SPA news articles in our sample during October 2018, and in 70% for November 2018.

In the Saudi Press Agency releases, the ‘MBS/Saudi Royal Family is Innocent’ frame included the following sub-frames: references to the Saudi Crown Prince as not being implicated; Jamal Khashoggi’s family thanking the Saudi royal family for their support; the Saudi royal family regretting the death of the slain journalist; and the Saudi royal family consoling Jamal Khashoggi’s family. This general frame was included in 3% of the SPA articles in our sample for October 2018, and in 1% for November 2018.

From the Saudi Press Agency, the ‘Friendship between Saudi Arabia and Turkey’ frame included the following sub-frames: references to Saudi Arabia and Turkey conducting a joint investigation; Saudi rulers affirming strong relations with Turkey; and Turkish contributions to the Saudi investigation. This frame was included in 12% of the SPA articles in October 2018, and 3% in November 2018.

Finally, the ‘Politicisation’ frame in Saudi Press Agency releases included the following sub-frames: references to the Saudi judiciary having the final word; Saudi Arabia having nothing to hide; how the Jamal Khashoggi case was a humanitarian issue that had been politicised; that the investigation showed that a quarrel led to the journalist’s death; that Saudi rulers have always ensured citizens’ safety and justice; and that the Saudi royal family themselves initiated the investigation. This frame included 21% of the SPA articles in October 2018, and 11% in November 2018.

Table 1 summarises the above findings:

Media Agency	Major Frames in October 2018	Major Frames in November 2018
Anadolu Agency (AA)	Crime	Crime
	Justice	Justice
	International Opinion	International Opinion
	Saudi Arabia in Denial	Saudi Arabia in Denial
	Saudi Arabia Cannot Be Trusted	Saudi Arabia Cannot Be Trusted
Saudi Press Agency (SPA)	Conspiracy	Conspiracy
	Alliance	Alliance
	MBS/Royal Family is Innocent	MBS/Royal Family is Innocent
	Friendship Between Saudi Arabia and Turkey	Friendship Between Saudi Arabia and Turkey
	Politicisation	Politicisation

Table 1: A summary of major frames utilised by AA and SPA in October and November 2018.

Discussion

In the content from the Anadolu Agency and Saudi Press Agency, four factors characterised their respective coverage of the Jamal Khashoggi murder: first, the clear relationship between media framing and state foreign policy; second, a marked difference in the way governments communicated with domestic and international media; third, the ‘Conspiracy’ frame; and finally the politicisation of security and the ensuing media ‘backlash’ (Rythoven, 2019) that resulted from the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

In terms of the relationship between media framing and state foreign policy, “organised persuasive communication has always been seen by many in military and political circles as vital to winning wars” (Robinson, 2014: 475). The murder of Jamal Khashoggi was a war of perception, with Saudi Arabia and Turkey undertaking activities such as press releases, speeches by leadership and international conferences. Each of these factors has both strategic and tactical value. As

Robinson points out, “these activities seek to encourage the development of common news media frames over time. In tactical terms, they minimise coverage of damaging or hostile stories and discredit oppositional counter-narratives operations (psy-ops), psychological warfare, information operations and public affairs” (2014: 475) [6].

Both the Anadolu Agency and the Saudi Press Agency are expected to express the official perspective. Coverage of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi reflected efforts on behalf of both Turkish and Saudi government-run media organisations to construct a favourable information environment that would win hearts and minds globally (Robinson, 2014). This was done via the propagation of frames that were aligned with the governments’ narratives against rival narratives, especially counter narratives from the ‘other side’.

The exercise of media warfare can be confirmed from the analysis above. The selected Anadolu and Saudi Press Agency frames were directly opposed to each other throughout the selected date range as no single frame was shared by the Turkish and Saudi news agencies. This clearly shows that the narrative was different for both parties as they had diverging priorities. While AA coverage focused on a crime having been committed, Turkey’s insistence upon a thorough investigation and international demands for justice were also evident throughout the selected period. Saudi news coverage framed the incident as a conspiracy to destabilise the Saudi royal family and derail the reforms of the Saudi Crown Prince.

More significantly, when Jamal Khashoggi disappeared, Saudi officials at first denied knowing about his whereabouts, and then denied that he had been murdered within the Saudi consulate in Istanbul during much of October 2018. Consequently, the Anadolu Agency circulated the ‘Saudi Arabia in Denial’ frame in its coverage. The Saudi Press Agency, however, highlighted the ‘Alliance’, ‘Politicisation’ and ‘Friendship between Turkey and Saudi Arabia’ frames. Evidence was eventually revealed that Jamal Khashoggi had in fact been murdered within the Saudi consulate. On 23 October 2018, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan claimed that this had been a premeditated murder, but this was denied by Saudi Arabia. AA coverage utilised the ‘Saudi Arabia Cannot Be Trusted’ frame aggressively at this time.

The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) chose to include the ‘Friendship Between Turkey and Saudi Arabia’ frame in their coverage of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018. Interestingly, the Anadolu Agency, though they acknowledged that Turkey did not have an agenda against Saudi Arabia, and that they valued the Turkey-Saudi relationship, chose not to aggressively promote that frame. While not statistically significant, the SPA was also more likely to promote the ‘Alliance’ frame throughout this period, and with increasing regularity as time passed. Particular references were made about foreign countries who had cautioned against speculation about Jamal Khashoggi’s disappearance and murder. According to Quandt (1980), in the 1970s and 1980s, the Saudis tended to behave cautiously in foreign policy as they were aware of their own limitations and vulnerabilities. He observed that “They are not leaders. At best, they are consensus-builders” (Quandt cited in Brookings Institute, 1982: 22).

Saudi behaviour changed after the 1980s once MBS jumped the succession line and established himself as the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. As early as December 2015, the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) took the very unusual step of publishing a report about change in Saudi Arabia, describing MBS as ‘impulsive’ and warning that Riyadh would abandon past caution in favour of a destabilising regional role (Reuters, 2015). Nevertheless, the Saudi quest for consensus building, recognised by Quandt word, is still relevant. When the Saudis faced a blowback because of the Khashoggi affair, they tried to build international consensus and have as many governments

on board as possible. This was apparent in the media coverage of the Khashoggi murder, as they tried to build the impression that they were being unfairly accused (in the hope of utilising this frame to attract the support of friendly governments). Here, the following declarations are significant:

The State of Kuwait stands in opposition against all the accusations and unlawful campaigns targeting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in relation to the case of Journalist Jamal Khashoggi (Saudi Press Agency, 15 October 2018).

Tunisian Foreign Minister Khamis Al-Jehenawe cautioned against exploiting [the] Jamal Khashoggi issue to harm the security and stability of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its status in the...international arena (Saudi Press Agency, 22 October 2018).

The Anadolu Agency, on the other hand, also utilised the ‘International Opinion’ frame. This included references to international calls for justice and indications that Saudi explanations were not acceptable (in regard to the Saudi Press Agency’s framing of the incident). The AA also made references to the fact that certain countries did not want to sever ties with Saudi Arabia. This conveyed the impression that even though the international community, Turkey included, valued their relationship with Saudi Arabia, unqualified allegiance was not an acceptable position to take.

It is well documented that geopolitical considerations have an impact on framing such that the interests and concerns of a country are reflected in the media, particularly in the state media. However, it was not only in framing that an alignment between media strategy and geopolitical priorities occurred. There was a stark numerical difference in the articles produced by the Anadolu Agency and Saudi Press Agency over the study period. This disparity is startling. Certainly, geographical proximity was a news value factor in the number of articles published by the AA (Westerståhl and Johansson, 1994), although Jamal Khashoggi himself was a Saudi citizen, he had Turkic roots. It would be reasonable to assume, then, that the SPA, as the voice of the Saudi government, would publish about the same number of articles as the AA, if not more. This difference in coverage can be construed as an attempt by the SPA to dim media coverage of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, even if officially Saudi Arabia worked with Turkey to investigate his disappearance and murder (*Al-Monitor*, 2018).

However, Turkish officials, namely Fahrettin Altun, President Erdoğan’s new communications director, who was installed in June 2018, “drip-fed leaks of grisly details of the killing to the international press, peeling back the lid on what happened while keeping journalists in frantic catch-up mode” (Smith, 2019). This could be interpreted as one of the key triggers for the high number of Anadolu Agency articles. According to a Turkish senior bureaucrat, they wanted to keep the issue alive and ensure that it got international attention, instead of becoming a bilateral issue between Turkey and Saudi Arabia (*Al-Monitor*, 2018).

There is reason to believe that had Turkey not utilised a “piecemeal leak strategy” (*Al-Monitor*, 2018) [7], which marked a change of style in the way the government communicated with the media, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi may not have garnered global attention. As it appears, the Saudi officials, and consequently Saudi media, were attempting to sweep the issue ‘under the carpet’ (Amnesty International UK, 2018). In fact, there is documented evidence, according to senior Turkish officials, that Saudi Arabia sent a 15-member team to Turkey after a phone call between President Erdogan and Saudi Crown Prince MBS took place. Allegations surfaced that two members of the Saudi team were tasked with ‘destroying the evidence’ (Reuters, 2018).

Along with an attempt to provide less coverage than the Anadolu Agency, the Saudi Press Agency coverage also utilised the ‘Conspiracy’ frame throughout October and November 2018. In particular, they included references to the incident as an attempt to harm Saudi rulers. The implication here was of a campaign against the Saudi rulers and state which had been orchestrated by perceived enemies, such as the Qatari state, *Al-Jazeera*, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Interestingly, SPA coverage often quoted other Saudi newspaper editorials to spread this frame. Examples of such articles include the following:

Al-Riyadh newspaper said in its editorial that a strange contradiction occurred in the media which is supposed to be professional and dealing with events in credibility as it claims, but facts have proved quite contrary, especially in dealing with news concerning [the] disappearance of Journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul, where its reports have not included facts as they were supposed to be, but it has prepared them for fabrication to conform with its directions and objectives in targeting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by any means. The Qatari *Al-Jazeera* channel, which falsely claims its professionalism and credibility in dealing with events, has proved quite contrary in professional and journalistic honesty (Saudi Press Agency, 8 October 2018).

On the same issue, the Okaz newspaper commented by saying as Arab countries and Islamic organizations have raced to express their solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia against false rumours and frenzied media campaigns, the Qatari machine is still spewing its lies against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since the first day of the disappearance of Saudi citizen Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul, as it has been for two decades. The paper pointed out that Qatar, the gangs of Muslim Brotherhood and some Turkish media are keen to fabricate lies against the Kingdom to undermine its high status at Arab, Islamic and international arenas (Saudi Press Agency, October 16, 2018).

Okaz newspaper commented on the same subject by saying: The Kingdom has resolved the controversy and demagoguery raised by the Qatari regime media and a number of media outlets that tried to employ the case of the killing of the Saudi citizen Jamal Khashoggi to achieve gains that serve their direction (Saudi Press Agency, November 16 2018).

In this context, Saudi Press Agency coverage pertaining to the possible involvement of hidden malevolent influences against the Saudi ruling family, such as the Qatari government and media network, or the Muslim Brotherhood, aligns with the general notion of conspiracy theory (in that information may be utilised to mislead the reader). Interestingly, SPA coverage often quoted other Saudi newspaper editorials to spread this frame.

It is well known that the Saudi Press Agency is tightly controlled by the Saudi royal family, as are all other Saudi state institutions (Middle East Eye, 2018). Therefore, it is no surprise that the SPA resorted to the use of such methods in a desperate defence of the Saudi monarchy. Conspiracy theories tend to “flourish in hierarchical systems of political decision-making and authority in which obligations to share, or to invite participation, are few and weak and usually focused on results instead of on steps leading up to decisions” (Anderson, 1996: 98).

Also, the ‘Arab Spring’ had a tectonic effect on Saudi affairs. The collapse of the Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Gaddafi regimes, which respectively occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, triggered a feeling of insecurity in Riyadh, which then resorted to heavy-handed measures to impede any possible democratic advance. Because the Muslim Brotherhood had contributed to the Arab Spring,

they became targets of Saudi wrath. Since then, it has been documented that “Saudi Arabia offered billions of dollars in aid to Egyptian [Army General-turned-President] Sisi who in turn labelled the Muslim Brotherhood...a terrorist organisation, and mobilised state media to launch a negative PR campaign against the very notion of political Islam” (Hamed, 2018). The Saudi Press Agency employed a sombre religious tone, referring to the Saudi King as ‘The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques’. This is known as *entextualisation*, which is defined as follows:

A process by which information which is specific to an event is recast or re-glossed in increasingly more solemn language, abstracted terms or through other linguistic-performative means that move from the particular instance toward more general, less particular categories. Entextualisation moves from speculation to institutionalization, as context is sloughed off, leaving only a purified text that can stand on its own, tell its own story or confer meaning on less exalted stories by associating them with its own. Entextualisation is how we arrive at the broader significance of things (Anderson, 1996: 97).

Both Anadolu Agency and Saudi Press Agency coverage attempted to depict the broader significance of the incident as a continuation of widely accepted narratives. This involves representations of “*at least* two real or fictive events or situations in time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other” (Prince, 1982, original emphasis). The SPA’s consistent utilisation of the ‘Conspiracy’ frame reveals a clear uneasiness towards the potentially increasing loss of credibility faced by Saudi Arabia, especially in the Islamic world. Such was evident when the Turkish President, during meetings with faith leaders after Khashoggi’s murder, stated that Turkey “is the only country that can lead the Muslim world” (*Yeni Şafak*, 2018).

On the other hand, the Anadolu Agency promoted the ‘International Opinion’ frame, which emphasised the theme of the international community condemning the Saudi Crown Prince for the Khashoggi murder as well as other policies deemed to be problematic, such as the Yemen war and the blockade of Qatar. By mirroring such a frame, AA magnified the threat that MBS represented not just to Khashoggi and other journalists or dissidents, but also to international peace and stability. This frame is potent as it draws the attention of the international community and puts its leaders at the centre of the issue.

Some analysts contended at the time that “having returned US pastor Andrew Brunson from Turkish imprisonment to US soil, Khashoggi’s death and the pressure it [was] placing on Trump [was] providing Erdogan with an opportunity to gain a closer relationship with the United States” (Due-Gundersen, 2018). They believed that these circumstances would generate assistance for Turkey’s financial difficulties, and end support for Syrian Kurdish groups considered by Ankara as terrorist organisations (Ghitis, 2018). However, these assertions have not been substantiated as the US-Turkey relationship continues to have ups and downs (Ward, 2019), and Turkey has asked for no monetary help from Saudi Arabia or any of its allies as a result of this incident (Fahim, 2018).

Thus, the notion that Turkey has benefited from the murder of Jamal Khashoggi does not hold water. It can be said, however, that the media strategy employed by Turkey, based on the premise of drip-feeding crucial information – powered by evidence provided by Turkish intelligence related to events at the Saudi consulate – was quite beneficial media-wise. This allowed the Turkish leadership to be in control of the narrative while positioning itself as media-friendly.

The Anadolu Agency coverage focused intensely on the method by which Jamal Khashoggi was murdered in the consulate, providing gory and disturbing details. The Saudi Press Agency, on the other hand, employed a sympathetic yet sanitised tone when describing the incident. The objective

was linguistic sanitisation in the hope that covering up the gory details of the assassination would not create uproar among local publics.

Conversely, as mentioned, the Anadolu Agency reporting capitalised on the ghastly particulars of the murder. The aim was seemingly to trigger an emotional response, which would feed backlash in the international arena against the assassination of a prominent journalist. This offered the prospect of strategic support for Turkey's mobilisation efforts against violence committed on its soil. While evidence that pointed toward the Saudi government emerged, AA coverage aggressively promoted the 'Saudi Arabia Cannot Be Trusted' frame in November 2018. In fact, the rhetoric managed to ignite social mobilisation, as protests and social media campaigns sprouted in support of the slain journalist (Rythoven, 2018).

According to Saudi officials, the reputational damage for Saudi Arabia and the onslaught of bad press from the Khashoggi murder were ten times worse than the 9/11 attacks (Usher, 2019). Thus, in a bid to insulate itself from the resulting PR disaster and regain the initiative, Saudi Arabia has moved to secure partnerships and licensing deals with reliable Western media outlets. A Saudi media company, known as Saudi Research and Marketing Group (SRMG), which is owned by the Saudi Press Agency (Kamalipour and Mowlana, 1994), has launched an Arabic-language version of the UK based *The Independent*, headed by an ally of the Saudi Crown Prince. This occurred after a licensing deal was signed between *The Independent* and SRMG in July 2018. They launched a Turkish edition (April 2019), and plan to introduce Persian and Urdu versions of the website.

Such developments indicate that Saudi leadership intends to conduct media warfare against Turkey and penetrate the local public sphere (which remains generally insulated from non-Turkish media influence). Despite assurances by Saudi partners that "these editions will adhere to the same standards and code of conduct as the UK version" (RT, 2019), the *Guardian* reported in October 2018 that "two journalists approached to work at the Persian language edition were unconvinced there would be editorial independence from Saudi Arabia" (RT, 2019).

In what seems as a response to the changing media landscape in the region, Turkey also stepped up its broadcasting efforts within the Arab World. Academic Joseph Nye, who coined the notion of soft power in 1990, highlighted four main channels that are used by states to enhance their capacity for persuasion and direct influence. These include "public diplomacy, broadcasting, exchanges, and assistance" (Nye, 2011: 24). The Anadolu Agency began to use social media tools such as Twitter to engage foreign audiences, with more than 25 percent of posts related to foreign news (Saka, Sayan and Görgülü, 2015). The Turkish public broadcaster launched its Arabic language satellite channel, 'TRT Arabi' in 2010. This channel was rebranded in 2018 in an effort to garner even more influence in an already saturated Arab news television market [8].

Conclusion

While Jamal Khashoggi was born in 1958 in Saudi Arabia, his family has Turkic roots. The name Khashoggi itself (Kaşıkçı) means spoon-maker in Turkish. According to the family documents, the Khashoggi family settled in the city of Medina, Saudi Arabia, about 500 years ago, specifically between 1591 and 1687. Mohammed bin Khashoggi, Jamal's grandfather, was a doctor who provided medical services to King Abdul Aziz bin al-Saud, the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Jamal Khashoggi himself worked closely with members of the Saudi establishment. He was the spokesperson for the former Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Turki bin Faisal al-Saud. While he was initially an insider within decision-making circles, he grew increasingly disillusioned with the

new regime in power, centred on MBS, as well as the repression that affected Saudi human rights activists, businessmen, and religious and community leaders.

Khashoggi's op-eds for the *Washington Post* were well received by academics and journalists, who esteemed his informed commentary. As such, he was a regular guest in television studios and at intellectual gatherings. His criticism of some Saudi policies, albeit restrained, provoked the ire of the Saudi leadership, which sought to co-opt him through different ways to no avail. The Saudi regime then decided to lure him to Istanbul, eliminate him and attempt to scapegoat Turkey.

In essence, the Khashoggi affair underlines the complexity of the historical, geo-political and other multi-layered dynamics underpinning this episode. Historically, an Ottoman-Saudi War took place between 1811 and 1818, resulting in the destruction of the First Saudi State. At present, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are diametrically opposed to each other about many issues in the region, including the Israel-Palestinian conflict, the Qatar blockade and the conflicts stemming from the Arab Spring (e.g., Yemen, Libya). Regarding the latter, Saudi Arabia has been spearheading counter-revolutionary efforts, which have become a key element in its newly emerging state identity. This, in turn, has exacerbated the tensions between both governments. From this vantage point, the Khashoggi murder is merely one episode in a long series of conflicts.

The news media have always been a central arena for political conflicts. Therefore, in recent history, media warfare strategies have often been utilised. Both world wars saw the extensive use of media warfare as a potent method through which hearts and minds could be won (in order that the public, whether global or national, comes to support official declarations about the causes and outcomes of war). Media warfare has subsequently evolved technologically with the opening up of new communication avenues, such as satellite broadcasting and cyberspace. As a grand strategy, media warfare involves a wide panoply of tactics that can harness the power to influence and propagate narratives or simply impede others.

The Saudi and Turkish media coverage of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi represents a clear case of strategic as well as tactical media warfare. Official Saudi and Turkish news media both attempted to assert control over the narratives pertaining to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. One of the major Saudi media strategies consisted of trying to sweep the whole Khashoggi episode under the carpet by dimming coverage and adopting a particular type of framing.

The Turkish media strategy appeared to seek the opposite result, namely to generate large volumes of news about the incident while also spreading international awareness. Evidence derived from this investigation reveals the Turkish approach. The subsequent piecemeal leaks to the Turkish and international media created and maintained the hype surrounding the story, in contrast to what the Saudi leadership had anticipated. As mounting evidence continued to incriminate the Saudi hit squad and its sponsors, Saudi media produced a below-par performance and showed countless signs of poor editorial judgement. After weeks of denials, obfuscation and blame deflection, Saudi media were not able to score any meaningful victories in the international battle for public opinion. Suffice to say, the UN contradicted the version of events put forward by the Saudis. Agnes Callamard, the Special UN Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, produced a 100-page investigative report into Khashoggi's murder and concluded that "Mr. Khashoggi's killing constituted an extrajudicial killing for which the state of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is responsible" (Al Jazeera, 2019a).

The grisly murder of Khashoggi will remain a stain on international common consciousness. The details of such a crime and its location contravened the standard practices and conventions of international relations even between countries with authoritarian tendencies. The subsequent resort

to lies and stonewalling only made things worse. Not only has the Saudi leadership lost this media battle, they may find it hard to convey their narratives in the future due to a decline in international credibility. In any case, it is clear that the Khashoggi affair will not represent the end of Turkey-Saudi media warfare. Both sides are processing the lessons learned from this episode and enhancing their transnational media knowhow and footprint. Seen in this light, the contest of narratives between both sides seems to have a long life ahead.

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Endnotes

- [1] Several studies offered various typologies of framing (e.g. Hallahan 1999). Our focus in this article was on the higher level frames, or meta-level. The majority of these studies focus, though, on the lower level frames, also known as micro-frames, which tend to act as vehicles for the so-called “issue” or “thematic frames.” For more on this, refer to (Sheufole, 1999: 106-112) and (Schmidt, 2014: 115-120).
- [2] According to Sagan and Leighton (2010), “the Akamai Net Usage Index for News, which monitors aggregate web traffic generated from more than a hundred global breaking-news web sites, shows that when news occurs, the internet serves as a primary means for seeking information because of its accessibility, convenience, breadth of data, and ability for the end user to control the specificity and customization of the news” (Sagan and Leighton, 2010: 120).
- [3] It should be noted that there is little tolerance for the apology of terrorism worldwide. Terrorism apologists have been regularly prevented from having airtime by Western governments. For example, in the case of the IRA and Northern Ireland, the British government decided in October 1988 to impose a broadcasting ban against several Irish organisations including the IRA, Sinn Fein, the UDA and UFF. The ban lasted until September 1994. Similarly in Spain, after the passing of the Party Law (2002), former Prime Minister José María Aznar banned media outlets seen as subversive to the state as well as organisations suspected of sympathising with the Basque separatist organisation “Euskadi Ta Askatasuna” (Basque Country and Freedom), also known as ETA.

- [4] This is not new or restricted to either Saudi Arabia or Turkey. From the Falklands conflict in 1982, when Britain placed journalists alongside combatants to foster sympathetic reporting, to the promotion of certain issues over others in ways that supported the US government's cause during the 2003 Iraq War (Robinson, 2014), the relationship between media framing and state foreign policy has been robust and well documented.
- [5] Research (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008; Chaffee and Metzger, 2001 in Aruguete and Calvo, 2018) found that new technologies, particularly those used to monitor consumption of news by readers online "allow users to signal their preferences for issues and content they want to read, may yield a new era of "minimal effects" (Aruguete and Calvo, 2018: 3). A study that looked at the #Tarifazo protests in Argentina confirmed that cognitive congruence or dissonance actually does exist even in social media networks, which leads to differences in news frame propagation between users with different political views. This finding can be applied to any polarised political environment (Aruguete and Calvo, 2018).
- [6] Ankara and Riyadh are at odds over a wide array of issues, ranging from Riyadh's exasperation with Turkey's support of the Arab Spring and Qatar, to Ankara's staunch opposition to Saudi meddling in Syria in support of the PKK-linked People's Protection Units (YPG).
- [7] The Saudis believed "the Arab Spring was a threat, especially when the Muslim Brotherhood came to power. If the Brotherhood was successful in applying a democratic regime that brought welfare to the people, then the first to be challenged to apply the same rules would be the monarchies that also acted in the name of Islam. If people were to revolt and question their rulers, the first to suffer would be the increasingly febrile monarchies of the region" (Hamed, 2018).
- [8] A multitude of foreign-owned channels compete for viewership in the Middle East (e.g., the United States' *Al-Hurra*, United Kingdom's *BBC Arabic*, France's *France 24* in Arabic, Iran's *Al-Alam*, *Russia Today RT* in Arabic).

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