

A multi-disciplinary, multi-method approach to leader assessment at a distance: The case of Bashar al-Assad

A Quick Look Assessment by the Strategic Multilayer
Assessment (SMA)¹

Part II: Analytical Approaches²

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¹ SMA provides planning support to Combatant Commands (CCMD) with complex operational imperatives requiring multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions that are not within core Service/Agency competency. SMA is accepted and synchronized by Joint Staff, J3, DDSAO and executed by OSD/ASD (R&E)/RSD/RRTO.

² This is a document submitted to provide timely support to ongoing concerns as of February 2014.

1 ABSTRACT

This report suggests potential types of actions and messages most likely to influence and deter Bashar al-Assad from using force in the ongoing Syrian civil war. This study is based on multidisciplinary analyses of Bashar al-Assad's speeches, and how he reacts to real events and verbal messages from external sources.

The results are summarized in a two-part report. Part I provides a summary, comparison of results, and recommendations. Part II (this document) describes each analytical approach in detail.³

Data: The speeches used in the study were delivered by al-Assad from Jan 2000 to Sept 2013; the past six years was sampled most densely. Additional Twitter feeds were analyzed to gauge his influence in the region.

Analytical Approaches: Five separate methods were used to analyze the speeches:

1. **Approach 1: Integrative Complexity (IC) analysis** as developed by Dr. Peter Suedfeld (University of British Columbia) is a measure of the degree to which a source recognizes more than one aspect of an issue or more than one legitimate viewpoint on it (differentiation), and recognizes relationships among those aspects or viewpoints (integration).
2. **Approach 2: Thematic Analysis** based on methodologies developed by National Security Innovations, Inc. (NSI) and conducted by Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne (IPFW). It provides general predictions of which themes will precede conflict and which will emerge as a reaction to conflict, an assessment of the major narratives al-Assad draws on to persuade his audiences, and analyses of themes that emerge around specific events.
3. **Approach 3: Automated Leadership Trait Analysis** using ProfilerPlus and the Language Inventory and Word Count (LIWC) software (JHU-APL). The primary objectives were to examine (1) the cognitive complexity through means independent from the UBC method in Approach 1; and (2) al-Assad's leadership traits using Hermann's (2002) method of political profiling. Selections of English translations of al-Assad's speeches were analyzed using two pieces of software: ProfilerPlus; and Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC). Automated text analyses ingest and analyze the whole speech not simply randomly selected sections.
4. **Approach 4: Geopolitical Discourse Development Analysis.** CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies) analyzed the common corpus of 124 speeches by Bashir al-Assad from 2000 to present. They provided qualitative interpretations of major themes that emerged in al-Assad's discourse over the course of the 13-year period studied

³ Part II contains detailed analyses of each study that contributed to this effort, supporting appendices and summary chapters.

5. **Approach 5:** Analysis of **Influential Arab Twitter Feeds**. A team of analysts from Texas A&M University analyzed the twitter feeds of 195 influential Arabs in the Middle East, in each 24 hour period before and after al-Assad delivered a speech for the months of August and September, 2013. They also examined the relative influence of al-Assad and other regional players in the Arabic Twittersphere to determine the extent the regime is able to influence public opinion.

Major Findings: The major findings of these studies include:

- al-Assad is **capable of recognizing other viewpoints** and evaluates them in a nuanced and context-dependent manner
- al-Assad **values logical argumentation and empirical evidence**
- al-Assad's **integrative complexity is relatively high**, but might be lower before he takes decisive action or when under intense threat
- al-Assad's reasoning is **consistent with his Arab nationalist Ba'athist political ideology**, and with a consistent opposition to Israel and Western domination; al-Assad sees Arab resistance and his leadership, or at least that of the Ba'ath party, as essential.

Key Recommendations: We used the doctrinal 7-Step MISO process to characterize al-Assad as a target audience of one, and we absorbed the relevant components of our multi-method analyses into the Target Audience Analysis format. The main practical recommendations are:

- **Avoid direct threats** to the Syrian Ba'athist regime's hold on power;
- **Appeal to al-Assad's relatively high baseline level of Cognitive Complexity** (ability to see different sides of an issue, flexible decision-making, openness to information), pragmatism, and respect for Arab nationalism to broker a negotiated settlement; and
- **Identify and exploit al-Assad's dynamic levels of Integrative Complexity** to assess his relative susceptibility, develop arguments and recommended psychological actions and/or refine assessment criteria at a specific point in time.

Table 1: Summary of Key Recommendations, Supporting Analyses, Part II Location, and Confidence Level.

Recommendation	Supporting Analyses	Part II Location	Confidence
Avoid direct threats to Syrian Ba'athist regime's hold on power	Approach 2: al-Assad frequently appeals to conspiracies against Syria and the Syrian Ba'athist regime; direct threats to this power reinforce this narrative to his constituents. al-Assad expresses a sense of duty to lead Syria and defend its heritage against outside threats; his removal from power, if desired, is a position to which one would have to build. Immediate demands for his removal will fail, since they appear non-negotiable at this point.	4.3.1, 4.3.3, 4.3.4, 4.3.6, 4.4.4,	High
	Approach 3: al-Assad's task orientation (or motivation for seeking/retaining office) is 0.79 where 0.71 is considered high. He is therefore likely to resist any notions of him relinquishing power, particularly as he views his responsibility (much like that of his father) as seeing Syria through the current crisis.	5.3.2	High

<p>Appeal to al-Assad's relatively high baseline level of Cognitive Complexity (ability to see different sides of an issue, flexible decision-making, openness to information), pragmatism, and respect for Arab nationalism to broker a negotiated settlement.</p>	<p>Approach 1: al-Assad's baseline IC (from 2000-2007) was 2.4, relatively high but within the range of Middle Eastern leaders during politically calm periods: e.g., prior to the Gulf War, when the range was from 1.1 for King Hussein of Jordan to 2.9 for Iranian President A. Rafsanjani. al-Assad's average IC from Jan 2008 – Sept 2013 was 1.9, and his yearly averages after the onset of the Arab Spring were within 1.7 and 1.9. These scores are somewhat high relative to other political leaders of the region, but within the range for Middle Eastern leaders during a crisis, such as Saddam Hussein's IC during the Gulf Crisis, which ranged from 1.2 to 2.2.</p>	3.1	High
	<p>Approach 2: al- al-Assad makes frequent appeals to Arab nationalism and Syrian Heritage, which are key values, consistent with his Ba'athist political ideology.</p>	4.3.1, 4.3.3, 4.3.4, 4.3.6, 4.4.4	High
	<p>Approach 3: This used three measures of cognitive complexity: Firstly, Conceptual Complexity (a component of ProfilerPlus Leadership Trait Analysis). al-Assad's PP_LTA_CC score was 0.66, where above 0.62 is considered high. His high conceptual complexity score coupled with his low self-confidence suggest openness to contextual information. Secondly, ProfilerPlus Cognitive Complexity (PPCC score, calculated separately by ProfilerPlus), al-Assad's mean PPCC Score of 5.8 (on a scale of 1-7) suggests a level approaching the transition from moderate to high differentiation and high differentiation. Thirdly, al-Assad's use of "thinking" words (Cognitive Mechanism score calculated by LIWC) in his speeches showed relative stability over time (mean of 18.08 and a standard deviation of 2.61). In summary, al-Assad exhibited moderate to high cognitive complexity and did so throughout the period analyzed, supporting the baseline findings of Approach 1.</p>	5.3.1.1 5.3.1.2 5.3.1.3	Mode rate
	<p>Approach 4: al-Assad has historically portrayed Syria as essential in the region, and currently depicts the US as a malicious force.</p>	6.2.1, 6.2.5	High
<p>Identify and exploit al-Assad's dynamic levels of Integrative Complexity to assess his relative susceptibility, develop arguments and recommended psychological actions and/or refine assessment criteria at a specific point in time.</p>	<p>Approach 1: The pattern of IC rising or remaining stable when a problem first occurs and develops, and then declining with continued stress, has been observed in previous studies. In this particular case, the decline in al-Assad's IC could be associated with a high enough level of stress to have affected his problem solving resources, or with al-Assad committing cognitively to a decision (i.e., to use violent repression). In either case, al-Assad was able to return to a more complex cognitive structure in some of the following months.</p>	3.3	High

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2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 Main Findings

Basic findings from studies of al-Assad's speeches, 2000 – 2013

1. **Various Measures of Cognitive Complexity:** Multiple measures converge to show that al-Assad is capable of appreciating different viewpoints and the nuances between them. al-Assad's baseline integrative complexity (his ability to differentiate different perspectives and integrate them) is relatively high compared to other leaders in the region. al-Assad furthermore demonstrates an ability to be logically consistent in how he evaluates situations, and is responsive to credible (in his view) empirical evidence.
2. **Deterrence:** Traditional deterrence theory should apply to al-Assad generally, although during periods of intense stress he may deviate more from such a model.
3. **Integrative Complexity (IC):** In general his IC has not changed over the course of the conflict. But analysis of specific events suggests his IC tends to be lower when he is under intense threat, or before taking decisive and violent action, compared to afterwards.
4. **Arab Nationalism:** al-Assad wants to lead Arab interests; he is a staunch Arab nationalist.
5. **Opposition to the West and Israel:** al-Assad wishes to oppose Western and Israeli influence in the Arab world; the history of Middle Eastern peace talks makes al-Assad cynical about Israel-Palestine negotiations, despite his cognitive inclination for negotiation.
6. **Secular Ba'athist Political Ideology:** al-Assad's reasoning and values are consistent with a more secular, Ba'athist, political ideology.

2.2 Main Recommendations

We used the doctrinal 7-Step MISO process to characterize al-Assad as a target audience of one, and we absorbed the relevant components of our multi-method analyses into the Target Audience Analysis format. The main practical recommendations are:

- **Avoid direct threats** to the Syrian Ba'athist regime's hold on power;
- **Appeal to al-Assad's relatively high baseline level of Cognitive Complexity** (ability to see different sides of an issue, flexible decision-making, openness to information), pragmatism, and respect for Arab nationalism to broker a negotiated settlement; and
- **Identify and exploit al-Assad's dynamic levels of Integrative Complexity** to assess his relative susceptibility, develop arguments and recommended psychological actions and/or refine assessment criteria at a specific point in time.

2.3 Summary of key insights from the various analytical approaches

Cognitive and behavioral profile

- al-Assad appears to deal reasonably well with challenge and stress. He demonstrates relatively high integrative complexity (refers to an individual's ability to recognize multiple dimensions and perspectives and make flexible and nuanced plans and decisions) compared to other leaders in the region. His integrative complexity, however, tends to decline when the threat from the Syrian rebellion intensifies.
- Although he demonstrates reasonably high integrative complexity, al-Assad does not exhibit a broad conceptual framework for understanding specific interactions among differentiated dimensions.
- His conceptual complexity is high and considerably greater than his self-confidence which is in the low range; suggesting an openness to contextual information.
- His In-group Bias and Distrust of Others are low and therefore he does not perceive the world as either inherently threatening or himself as persecuted. He likely views conflicts as context-specific and does not necessarily have a generalized preference for resolving disputes. He is also likely to recognize that neither he nor others have an unlimited scope of action, despite their political power. These aspects suggest that he can be open to negotiations with members of other groups, whether in the opposition or acting as intermediaries.

Decision Making

- al-Assad's characteristic decision-making is relatively flexible and nuanced. He is capable of considering a variety of information sources and policy options. Under stress, these abilities are temporarily impaired; however, they do recover as he searches for more strategies to solve, ameliorate, or escape the stressful situation.
- al-Assad is measured, logical, and empirical in comparison to other regional leaders, but is prone to increasingly emotional responses before and after conflict. Therefore, in the absence of crises traditional "rational actor" deterrence theory should be generally effective, although al-Assad may take some decision shortcuts (use heuristics) when in a more emotive state before and after conflict.
- al-Assad's conceptual complexity is high and considerably greater than his self-confidence, which is in the low range; therefore he is rated as open to contextual information. Leaders with this combination of traits are more pragmatic on average and receptive to the interests, needs, and desires of others. They may seek to

maximize the contextual information available and rely more on weighing pros and cons than on employing heuristics to make a decision.

- His belief in control over events is slightly below the mean and thus he is unlikely to be overly proactive or reactive in policy-making.

Leadership characteristics

- His need for power is in the low range and therefore he has less of a need to be in charge and may be more amenable to subordinates assuming more prominent roles.
- His belief in control over events is slightly below the mean and thus he is unlikely to be overly proactive or reactive in policy-making.
- His task orientation (or motivation for seeking/retaining office) is high and thus he is likely to resist any notions of him relinquishing power, particularly as he views his role (much like that of his father) as seeing Syria through the current crisis.

Thematic Analyses:

- Themes in al-Assad's speeches that most strongly predict material conflict and violent events in Syria: Domestic reform, Figurative Language (symbolism, metaphor), Intensifiers (hyperbole, superlatives)
- Themes that are most obviously salient to al-Assad regime and its Constituents after conflict with rebels and/or United States, as judged by al-Assad's reactions: Domestic reform, Conspiracy, Figurative Language (symbolism, metaphor), Intensifiers (hyperbole, superlatives), Hostile Media, and Security.

Major Narratives and Theme Associations

- Syrian Arab Nationalism and Resistance is a cornerstone narrative in Ba'athist political ideology. It is the notion that Syrian Arabs constitute a distinct nationality, and that they have to struggle against foreign intervention in order to claim an identity, a homeland and an economy and way of life. Themes that loaded highly on this factor include: Arab Identity, Courage, Duty, Honor, kinship, Sacrifice, Strength, Syrian Nationalism, Victimization, Resistance, Syrian Military, Intimacy, and Figurative Language.
- Logic and Rebellion is an association of mutually reinforcing themes that al-Assad employs to argue, on rational grounds, why the rebellion is politically and morally unjustified.
- Resistance against Israel and Western Domination is another important narrative of Ba'athist political ideology.
- Heritage and Kinship are themes associated to stress the importance of one's cultural heritage and the need to protect it from foreign threats.
- Peace and Negotiation narrative argues that peace in the Middle East, especially between Israel and its Arab neighbors, is an illusion and that Western calls for peace are disingenuous because Arab lands are unfairly occupied and that formal negotiations are largely futile.
- The Threat to Syrian Heritage narrative, the notion that there is a specific threat to Syrian civilization, is also a core component of Syrian Ba'athist political ideology.

Geopolitical perspectives

- In spite of numerous challenges to his regime, al-Assad has consistently viewed himself as geopolitically indispensable
- Until the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, al-Assad's geopolitical discourse promoted himself, and by association his regime, as the key strategic link between regional economic partnerships. Once Syria plunged into civil war, this strategic geopolitical discourse vanished from al-Assad's public rhetoric.
- From the beginning of his rule until today, al-Assad has grown increasingly outspoken about his ties with Russia, China, and Iran. In particular, al-Assad has remained most consistent regarding how he portrays his relations with Russia. Meanwhile, he does not refer to China frequently in his public statements and interviews.
- During the Syrian crisis, he has periodically underscored his country's bonds with Iran and Hezbollah, but he has downplayed any Iranian intervention in the crisis. His reluctance to admit significant geopolitical ties with Iran and Hezbollah may be part of his strategy to preserve his rule.
- As early as November 2011, al-Assad began to paint himself as the direct target and victim of U.S. action. While he repeatedly depicted Syria as the indirect victim of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, as well as of "conspiracies" against Syria in Lebanon, his language significantly shifted as the Syrian crisis intensified. In November 2012, he stated that the United States was "against" him, and that it was supporting "terrorists" through its conduits in Turkey.

al-Assad and the Social Media (Primarily Twitter)

- al-Assad terms his relations with nations in the West and in other regions of the Middle East a "media war," and the regime has attempted to engage this media war through social media
- al-Assad's public speeches and comments gained very little traction or response on the social networking platform Twitter
- While there was much discourse on the platform *about* al-Assad, there was very little redistributed content *from* al-Assad to Arab social media space, thus the regime's social media feed has been largely ineffective...
- Among influential Arabic language users on Twitter, few engage with the content surrounding press events, nor do they redistributing materials from al-Assad's speeches and interviews
- al-Assad's attempts to engage in digital diplomacy (i.e., use a social media campaign to bypass foreign leaders and engage directly with the global community) to advance the regime's narrative have been largely ineffective.

2.4 Data:

The speeches used by approach 1, the IC analysis, and approach 2, the thematic analysis were delivered by al-Assad between Jan. 2000 and Sept. 2013, with the period of the past six years being sampled most. The analyzed text was from open-source translations of 124 speeches, which comprise the totality of English translations available for the study. A random number generator was used to randomly sample up to 16 paragraphs per month out of all of the speeches for that month, subject to the condition that at least one paragraph be selected per speech. In cases where more speeches were found after the initial sampling, then enough paragraphs were randomly sampled from these to bring the count of selected paragraphs up to the desired number (i.e., 16). If the desired number of paragraphs was already reached, then up to 4 paragraphs were randomly selected from the recently found speeches. This procedure randomly samples paragraphs, while ensuring a broad representation of speeches and a distribution of paragraphs over time that is as even as possible.

Approach 3, the leadership trait analysis, used entire speeches from a subset of the speeches used by the IC and thematic analyses (mentioned above). Approach 4 used an independent selection of speeches. For approach 5, the analysis of the reactions in Arabic social media, Twitter feeds were analyzed to gauge al-Assad's influence in the region.

3 Approach 1: Integrative Complexity **(Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Mr. Bradford H. Morrison, and Mr. Ryan W. Cross ⁴)**

(University of British Columbia)

Summary: al-Assad's baseline IC (from 2000-2007) was 2.4, which is on the high side within the range for Middle Eastern leaders in the absence of a crisis. For example, prior to the Gulf War, that range was from 1.1 for King Hussein of Jordan to 2.9 for Iranian President A. Rafsanjani. al-Assad's average IC from Jan 2008 – Sept 2013 was 1.9, a major decrease, and his yearly averages after the onset of the Arab Spring stayed between 1.7 and 1.9. This range for IC during a crisis is comparable to, but on the high end of, Saddam Hussein's IC during the Gulf Crisis, which ranged from 1.2 to 2.2 (Suedfeld, Wallace, & Thachuk, 1993).

Interpretation:

- Across the years prior to the Arab Spring, al-Assad's IC was relatively high.
- There were IC increases in association with moderate challenges such as external criticism or a need to think flexibly (e.g., respectively, in responding to opposition to the Syrian occupation of Lebanon and in negotiating a closer relationship with Russia, both in 2005).
- There was a noticeable decrease in IC between 2005 and 2008. This change coincided with the Lebanese Civil War (2006), al-Assad's growing expressions of hostility toward the U.S. (beginning in 2006; see section on Thematic Analyses in this report), and the Israeli bombing of a Syrian nuclear facility (2007).
- Following Bouazizi's self-immolation (the trigger to the Arab Spring), but prior to the outbreak of violence in Syria, al-Assad's IC increased. This is consistent with his earlier pattern of increased IC in association with moderate challenges, and suggests flexible and open-minded problem solving.
- Following the outbreak of violence in Syria, al-Assad's IC decreased as the violence escalated (e.g., as the regime put sieges on Daraa, Homs, and Hama). The decline did not precede the outbreak of violence, suggesting that al-Assad did not plan the escalation in advance.
- Once a pattern of violence had set in, al-Assad's IC decreased in association with rebel offensives and prior to Syrian Government offensives, and increased during and following Syrian Government offensives and successes (perhaps particularly in the region around Damascus).

⁴ We thank Lisa Shiozaki and Frances Zhou for their contributions to the IC scoring, and Dr. Larry Kuznar for help in selecting key events.

- al-Assad's IC decreased prior to the Ghouta chemical weapons attack, suggesting that he may have been involved in planning it in advance.
- Although his IC decreased in association with certain events, he has not exhibited a trend of decreasing IC throughout the conflict, suggesting that his level of stress has not, in the long run, impeded his ability to process and respond to information.

3.1 Introduction

The underlying theoretical assumption of IC analysis is that IC is negatively affected by excessive cognitive load; when an individual is preoccupied with multiple concerns or has impaired information processing capacity, the individual has fewer cognitive resources to devote to an issue. Consequently, the person's IC decreases, resulting in less attention to multiple factors and perspectives and the relationships between those (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992). IC also drops when the leader or the leadership group has decided to move from negotiating to a simpler policy, such as resorting to violence.

A large body of literature has demonstrated that the IC of key leaders decreases prior to engaging in conflict and rises as their states pursue more cooperative or peaceful policies (reviewed in Suedfeld, 2010). This study uses a well-established methodology that produces an ordinal 7-scale measure of IC to explore patterns in the integrative complexity represented in the public speeches of Bashar al-Assad.

Method

IC scoring is designed to convert qualitative material (running text, whether spoken, written, or electronically recorded) into quantitative data. The standard scoring unit is the paragraph, although under some circumstances a paragraph may be divided or several short paragraphs combined.

From the appropriate database, a randomly selected sample of paragraphs is extracted.⁵ All possible identifying material is removed, and when necessary, aliases are inserted so that

⁵ The speeches used in this study were delivered by al-Assad between Jan. 2000 and Sept. 2013, with the period of the last six years being sampled most. They were open-source translations of 124 speeches, which comprise the totality of English translations available for the study. A random number generator was used to randomly sample up to 16 paragraphs per month out of all of the speeches for that month, subject to the condition that at least one paragraph be selected per speech. If more speeches were found after the initial sampling, then enough paragraphs were randomly sampled from these to bring the count of selected paragraphs up to the desired number (i.e., 16). If the desired number of paragraphs was already reached, then up to 4 paragraphs were randomly selected from the recently found speeches. This procedure randomly samples paragraphs while ensuring a broad representation of speeches and an as even as possible distribution of paragraphs over time. Approach 2 also used the paragraphs sampled by the above procedure, while approach 3 used a subset of the same speeches.

the passage makes sense (e.g., for personal names, nations, historical events, etc.). The extracts are arranged in random order, sometimes in combination with extracts from other databases and without identifying the source, to minimize the possibility of coder bias.

The extracts are scored by trained coders, all of whom have taken a training workshop (in-person or on-line) and passed a test by achieving reliability of $r=0.85$ on a set of paragraphs scored by experts. For research purposes, the relevant extracts are scored by at least one main coder, and at least 10% are scored by another for reliability. A reliability and/or absolute agreement of 0.85 must be achieved before scores are considered final.

IC's two components, differentiation and integration, are the basis of a 7-point scale (Table 2).

Table 2: Scoring IC.

Score	Definition	Illustrative Example	Explanation of Score
1	No differentiation No integration	Throughout the peace process, we the Arabs, have adopted the only choice for peace and abandoned all the other choices.	A single rule for decision-making, and an explicit rejection of other perspectives.
3	Differentiation No integration	Military force, no matter how great, produces defeat when it does not have faith and morals, and when it is not based on legitimate rights and principled policy.	Recognition of several different dimensions within the topic: faith, morals, legitimacy and principles.
5	Differentiation and Integration	Peace gives work opportunities, realizes prosperity. Development also helps the realization of peace alleviating tensions and causes of wars contributing to the combating of extremism. Let us employ the economy for the policy, realization of the peace, and for the fostering of the dialogue. The Economy is a dialogue; he who makes dialogue is the one reaching to the awareness enabling the capabilities to be translated into opportunities	Recognition of interactive effects of peace and economic development to produce dialogue and reduce motivations for war and extremism.

7	Differentiation and integration within a superordinate schema	Today our common interests are even greater and our priority should be to strengthen our bonds. As the world continues to develop and Information Communication Technology takes a larger and more significant role in our day today lives, we are increasingly able to expand our economic reach to faraway lands. However the likelihood of being affected by troubles in other countries is also much higher. As we cannot hope for prosperity without a sound economy, we cannot expect a sound economy without ensuring stability, not only internally or even regionally but globally. Here lies the importance of replacing reckless policies with rational policies to establish appropriate conditions to achieve peace which is not elusive, but real and enduring. This will increase investment opportunities and economic growth for all people. Thus we are unable to achieve sustainable economic growth without implementing good policies, and we cannot separate the politics of a country from its larger economic interests, that go even beyond its borders.	Differentiated effects of technology and the economy, integration (mutual interaction) of prosperity and politics, within a global system.
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Scores of 2, 4, or 6 are assigned when an extract shows some features of the next highest score, but not clearly enough to warrant assigning that score.

The scores are then paired with the appropriate extracts. The resulting data can be analyzed by standard statistical methods to calculate probability levels and effect sizes, graphed, tabled, etc.

3.2 Findings: Baseline and Yearly Averages

al-Assad's baseline IC (from 2000-2007) was 2.4, relatively high but within the range of Middle Eastern leaders during politically calm periods: e.g., prior to the Gulf War, when the range was from 1.1 for King Hussein of Jordan to 2.9 for Iranian President A. Rafsanjani. This may be his "normal" level of cognitive functioning when faced with only moderate challenges, such as criticism over Syria's occupation of Lebanon or his improving relationship with Russia, both occurring in 2005. The changes between 2005 and 2008 (see the Summary, above) were associated with negotiations resulting in the re-orientation of Syria's foreign relations away from the West and toward Russia, and increasing tension between Syria on the one hand and the United States and Israel on the other hand.

al-Assad's average IC from Jan 2008 – Sept 2013 was 1.9, and his yearly averages after the onset of the Arab Spring were within 1.7 and 1.9. These scores tend to the high end of the range for Middle Eastern leaders during a crisis, such as Saddam Hussein's IC during the Gulf Crisis, which ranged from 1.2 to 2.2 (Suedfeld et al., 1993).

Year	No. of Paragraphs⁶	Mean IC
2000	7	2.50
2001	7	2.00
2002	7	2.67
2003	7	3.00
2004	8	1.88
2005	7	3.14
2006	8	2.71
2007	7	1.40
2008	78	2.09
2009	83	1.84
2010	107	1.73

⁶ These are paragraphs scored, while the table in the appendix gives the number of paragraphs randomly selected. These numbers differ because for a small number of paragraphs in the process of scoring for IC it was necessary to split a paragraph in two.

2011	105	1.86
2012	83	1.93
2013	133	1.88
Total	647	1.93

Table 3: al-Assad's Average IC by Year, 2000-2013.

al-Assad does not exhibit a trend of decreasing IC during the Arab Spring or the narrower conflict in Syria. This suggests that al-Assad could maintain his ability to process and respond to information over the five-year period, although short-term changes could be found during that period in response to specific events.

3.3 Findings: Changes in IC Over Time During the Arab Spring

Aggregated to the two-month level (see Figure 1 below), IC increased in early 2011, following Bouazizi's self-immolation and around the same time as the President of Tunisia was removed from office. Put another way, once it was apparent that the Arab Spring posed a potential challenge -- but not yet a direct threat -- to his regime, al-Assad's IC increased. His IC decreased when (but not prior to) violence was first reported in March 2011, and decreased as the conflict escalated and the Syrian Government began the sieges of Daraa, Homs, and Hama (in Figure 1 this is the early violence). So at the beginning of the crisis al-Assad's IC rose (or remained high), and declined as the conflict escalated and dragged on. This suggests that al-Assad may not have planned to escalate the conflict in advance.

The pattern of IC rising or remaining stable when a problem first occurs and develops, and then declining with continued stress, has been observed in previous studies. In this particular case, the decline in al-Assad's IC could be associated with a high enough level of stress to have affected his problem solving resources, or with al-Assad committing cognitively to a decision (i.e., to use violent repression). In either case, al-Assad was able to return to a more complex cognitive structure in some of the following months.

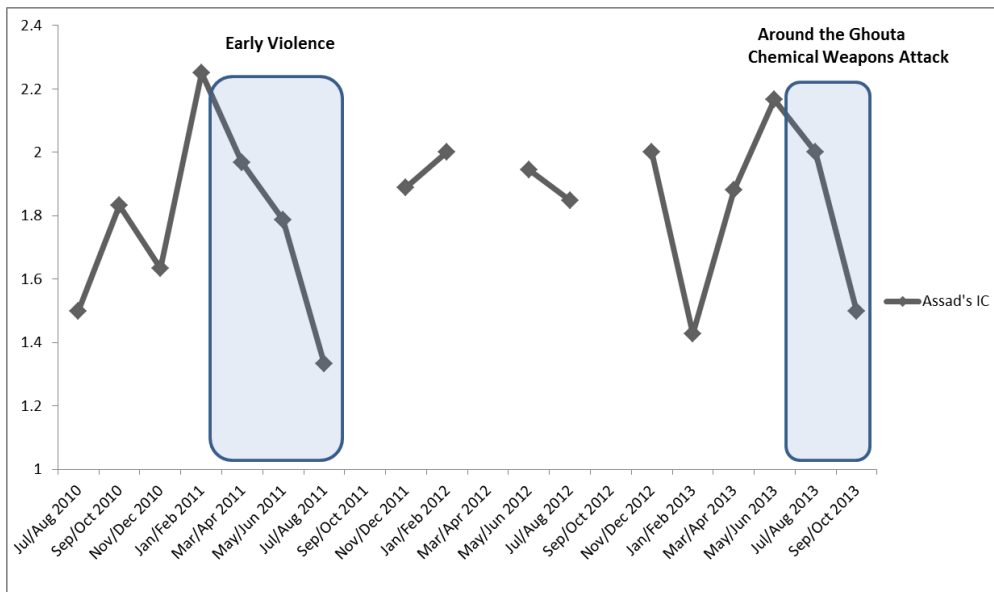


Figure 1: al-Assad's IC, aggregated to the two-month level, from Jul 2010 to Sep 2013.

From Figure 1, we see that in Jan/Feb of 2013, al-Assad's IC was well below his average. This *coincided with* a rebel offensive in the region around Damascus. It also *preceded* a Syrian Government offensive, which began in late March of 2013. Following the Syrian Government offensive, al-Assad's IC increased. Thus, low IC was associated with the stress of the rebel offensive around Damascus, and occurred before a government offensive. Following the government offensive and amelioration of the threat, al-Assad's IC increased (we analyze this further under key events, below). These changes were in accordance with IC theory.

After this peak in al-Assad's IC, the decrease in August and September of 2013 was not associated with a rebel offensive, and began prior to the Ghouta chemical weapons attack of Aug 21, 2013 (see Figure 1). We elaborate on the timing of this decline, relative to the Ghouta chemical weapons attack, in the following discussion of selected key events.

3.4 Findings: Changes in IC Associated with Selected Key Events

In order to show the sequence of changes in IC vis-à-vis key events, below we graph al-Assad's IC before and after various events. These events are: (A) Bouazizi's self-immolation, and the first violence in Syria; (B) The Battle of Damascus, July 15 2012; (C) The Syrian Government offensive around Damascus, late March 2013; and (D) The Ghouta chemical weapons attack, Aug 21, 2013.

Where a cut-off date for a period is not determined by the dates of the key events under analysis, we explain our choice of this date further in a footnote (e.g., that it is informed by the date of another key event, that our findings are not sensitive to changing the precise date of this cut-off for the period, etc.).

(A) Bouazizi's Self-Immolation (Dec 17, 2010) and the Early Violence in Syria

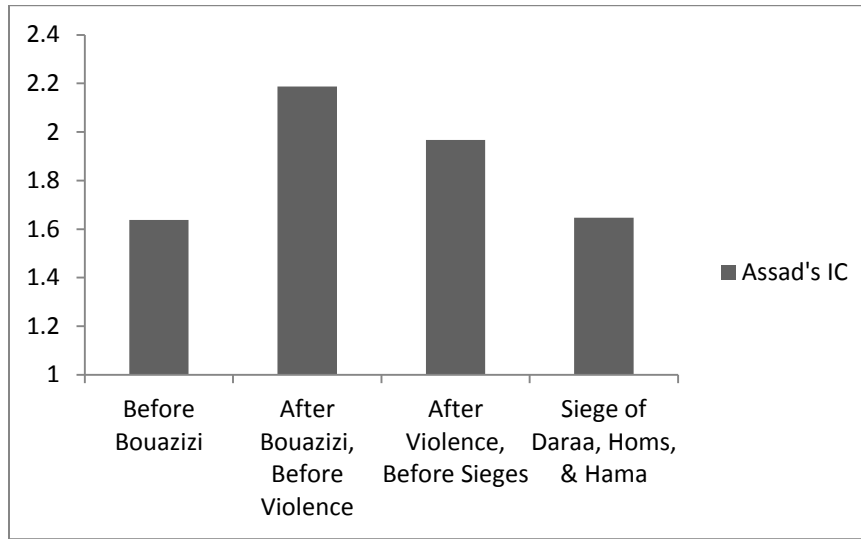


Figure 2: al-Assad's IC Before and After Bouazizi's Self-Immolation (Dec 17, 2010) and the Early Escalations of Violence in Syria.

Figure 2 confirms that, as described above, al-Assad's IC increased after Bouazizi's self-immolation (December 17, 2010)⁷, decreased after the first reports of political violence (March 18, 2011), and then decreased further in the period encompassing the sieges of Daraa, Homs, and Hama (April 22, 2011; May 05, 2011; July 08, 2011; respectively).

The increase in al-Assad's IC after Bouazizi's self-immolation (and the related unrest throughout the Arab world) is consistent with previous IC research, which finds that leaders' IC often increases in association with moderate challenges (Suedfeld, 2010).⁸ The decreases in his IC, in association with the escalation of violence, are consistent with great stress and/or with deciding to take decisive and one-dimensional action (such as violence). However, because the decrease in al-Assad's IC did not occur prior to the first reported violence, this does not provide evidence that he planned the escalation in advance.

⁷ For the purposes of this analysis, before Bouazizi's self-immolation is defined as the period from July 01, 2010 to Dec 16, 2010. The first cut-off date can be changed by a few months in either direction without changing the finding that al-Assad's IC increased after Bouazizi, so our findings do not depend on choosing this precise date. The period of the siege of Daraa, Homs, & Hama is from April 22, 2011 to August 17, 2011. The latter cut-off is the date immediately before several western countries demanded that al-Assad resign. al-Assad's IC decreased further in the days following that demand, so our findings do not depend on the precise choice of that cut-off date either.

⁸ In the period after Bouazizi but before violence (in Syria), protests in Tunisia resulted in the removal of the president of Tunisia from office, so al-Assad had indications that the situation would be challenging.

(B) The Battle of Damascus (Jul 15, 2012)

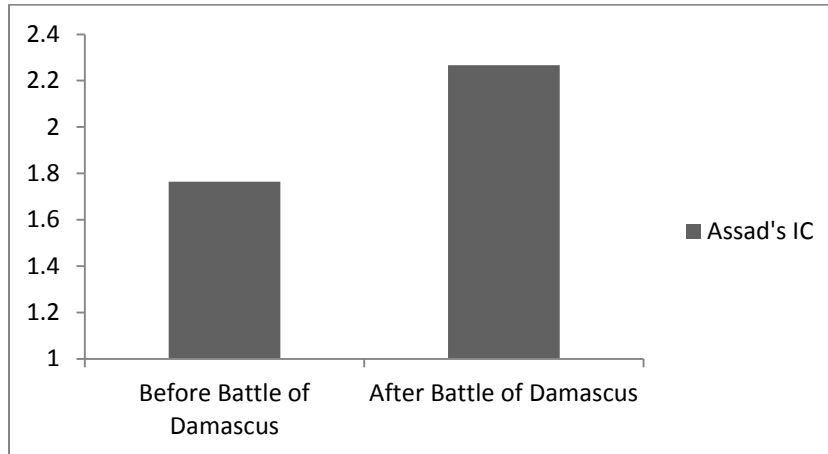


Figure 3: al-Assad's IC Before and After the Battle of Damascus (Jul 15, 2012).

The changes in IC associated with the Battle of Damascus are hidden in the two-month level aggregation (of Figure 1), as the cut-off for that aggregation groups before the battle with after the battle. However, as we see in Figure 3, al-Assad's IC was below average prior to the battle,⁹ and higher than average after the Syrian Government had regained control of the city (around Aug 04, 2012).¹⁰

al-Assad's IC was lower than usual when his control over Damascus was under threat, and prior to the regime taking military action, and higher than usual after his regime had successfully defended or regained that control. This is consistent with al-Assad exhibiting low IC when under severe stress – from the threat to the regime's control of Damascus. It is also consistent with al-Assad exhibiting low IC when planning decisive action – the regime's military action to regain/defend control of Damascus. In this instance we cannot disentangle the presence of great stress from the planning of decisive action, as they co-occurred, but it is likely that both were present.

(C) The Syrian Government Offensive in the Region of Damascus (Mar 26, 2013)

⁹ For the purposes of this analysis, before the Battle of Damascus is defined as from June 01, 2012 to July 14, 2012. The first cut-off is the earliest date for which we have speeches by al-Assad following the de-facto breakdown of the UN mediated cease-fire. After the Battle of Damascus is defined as from Aug 04, 2012 to Aug 31, 2012. The date of the latter cut-off is due to the unavailability of speeches by al-Assad following that date.

¹⁰ During the Battle of Damascus al-Assad's IC was 1, the lowest possible score. However, we did not include a bar for this period because we obtained only two scorable paragraphs dated during the battle. This is an insufficient data base for deriving reliable scores.

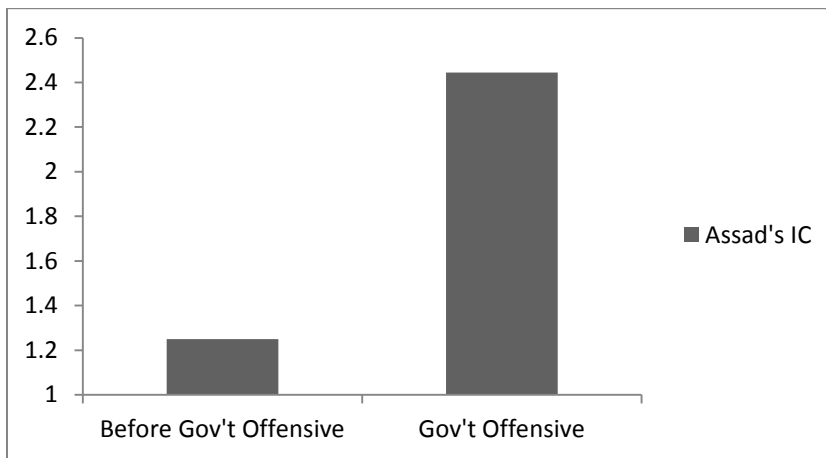


Figure 4: al-Assad's IC Before and After the Government Offensive in the Region of Damascus (Mar 26, 2013).

In the months before the Syrian Government offensive (which started in late March 2013), there was heightened rebel activity in the region around Damascus.¹¹ During this period of heightened rebel activity, and prior to regime military action, al-Assad's IC was well below average, at 1.25. As in the Jul 15, 2013 Battle of Damascus (discussed above) his IC was low when regime control of Damascus was under threat, and when the regime was planning decisive action. This is consistent with the perception of an extreme threat from rebel activities in the region around Damascus, and cognitive closure associated with planning decisive and violent action, namely the subsequent offensive.

After the regime offensive, which succeeded in gaining ground from the rebels, al-Assad's IC increased to well above average, at 2.44. Predictably, this change shows his return to a more flexible and opens cognitive structure following the perception of the amelioration of the extreme threat.

(D) The Ghouta Chemical Weapons Attack (Aug 21, 2013)

¹¹ For the purposes of this analysis, before the government offensive in the region of Damascus is defined as the period from Feb 06, 2013 to March 25, 2013. The first cut-off date coincides with reports of a rebel offensive in the region of Damascus, so the "before" period represents a time when the rebels had inertia around Damascus. After the government offensive is defined as the period from Mar 26, 2013 to May 04, 2013. The latter date is immediately prior to an Israeli air-strike on a Syrian military facility, and was chosen so that any IC association with this event would be excluded from the analysis of IC in relation to the events around Damascus.

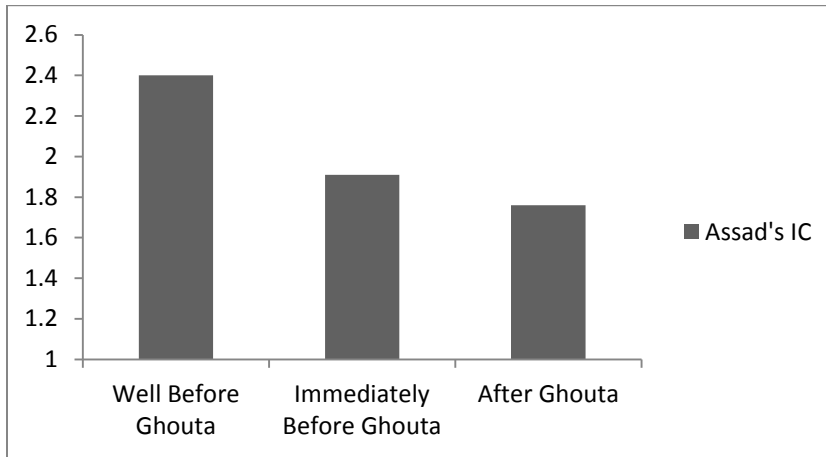


Figure 5: al-Assad's IC Before and After the Ghouta Chemical Weapons Attack (Aug 21, 2013).

al-Assad's IC decreases from the period well before the Ghouta chemical weapons attack ("well before" meaning June 01 to June 30, 2013) to immediately before the Ghouta attack.¹² That the decline in IC preceded Ghouta suggests that al-Assad may have played a role in, or at least been aware of, the planning of this attack. His IC continued to drop following the chemical weapons attack, which is consistent with the international repercussions of this event causing him intense stress.

3.5 Conclusion

al-Assad's IC, averaging 1.9 during the Arab Spring and Syrian conflict, was somewhat high relative to other political leaders of the region, but within the range of scores recorded for them in crisis situations in other studies (Suedfeld et al., 1993). His IC increased when he was first presented with the moderate challenge of unrest throughout the Arab world, following Bouazizi's self-immolation. It decreased in association with the escalation of violence early in the Syrian conflict, suggesting that he was under high stress that reduced his ability to recognize multiple perspectives and dimensions, and to engage in flexible problem solving. It may also suggest that he made a decisive choice, such as ordering a crackdown, but as his IC did not precede the escalation of violence, it does not provide evidence that he planned the escalation in advance.

His IC was low when heightened rebel activity in or around Damascus threatened regime control of that city, and prior to the regime taking decisive military action to respond to this threat. This is consistent with him planning, or being aware of the planning, of this military

¹² For the purposes of this analysis, well before the Ghouta attack is defined as the period from June 01, 2013 to June 30, 2013. Before is defined as the period from July 01, 2013 to Aug 20, 2013. After is defined as the period from Aug 21, 2013 to September 13, 2013. The final cut-off is the last date for which we have data.

action, but this cannot be disentangled from great stress and perception of an extreme threat. al-Assad's IC rapidly increased once regime military action removed or ameliorated the rebel threat to regime control of Damascus, suggesting that his IC can rapidly increase following the removal of a perceived threat.

al-Assad's IC decreased prior to the Ghouta chemical weapons attack. This suggests that he may have planned, or been aware of the planning, of the attack. His IC continued to decrease following the attack, which is consistent with high stress (for instance from widespread international and domestic criticism) following this event.

Applying our findings to influencing al-Assad, his relatively high IC suggests that he can be responsive to high IC messages. High IC messages may induce him to increase his own IC and to be more willing to consider a variety of policies and responses. This is given further support by how his IC increased in response to the moderate challenge associated with Bouazizi's self-immolation. However, if he perceives a threat (e.g. to the regime's survival) his IC is likely to decrease, and he is likely to adopt less flexible and more one-sided and absolutistic positions.

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4 Approach 2: Thematic Analyses of Bashir al-Assad's Speeches (Dr. Lawrence A. Kuznar)

(Department of Anthropology, Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne)

4.1 Basic Findings

A decision calculus is based on what a decision maker values and how that decision maker processes information. Thematic analysis helps to identify what a decision maker values and to what extent, and can even provide insights into how an individual processes information.

Themes are concepts that refer to meaningful entities, emotions, and ideas. The significance of a theme is often dependent on the particular cultural perspective held by a population with a shared history and values. Themes identify values, issues, grievances and historical referents important to a people.

Several different approaches were used to analyze themes significant to the al-Assad regime and its constituents occurring in a sample of 124 speeches delivered by Bashir al-Assad from 2000 to 2013. Several themes either consistently occurred before escalations in conflict or after escalations in conflict across these different analyses.

Predictive Themes

Themes in al-Assad's speeches that most strongly predict material conflict within Syria

- **Domestic reform, Figurative Language (symbolism, metaphor), Intensifiers (hyperbole, superlatives)**

Reactive Themes

Themes that are most obviously salient to the al-Assad regime and its Constituents after conflict with rebels and/or after contentious events in the region, as judged by al-Assad's reactions

- **Domestic reform, Conspiracy, Figurative Language (symbolism, metaphor), Intensifiers (hyperbole, superlatives), Hostile Media, Security**

Implications for al-Assad's Decision Making

In general, al-Assad exhibits measured and rigorously logical and empirical argumentation in comparison to other regional leaders. However, as conflict escalates, and after conflict occurs, he is prone to increasing emotional response before and after conflict.

Therefore, traditional rational actor deterrence theory should be generally effective, although al-Assad may take some decision shortcuts (use heuristics) when in a more emotive state before and after conflict.

Data and Methodological Considerations

The textual data constituted 642 paragraphs randomly selected from 124 speeches and interviews (from here on read speech to mean speeches and interviews) delivered by Bashir al-Assad from June 2000 to Sept 2013, compiled by the University of British Columbia (UBC) team.

Three different approaches to analyzing themes in al-Assad's speeches were employed.

- 1. Identification of Narratives and Theme Associations**

Principle components analysis was conducted on themes to identify which themes are associated with one another. Some associated themes connect in narratives, or storylines, that form an explanation and/or justification for al-Assad's point of view.

- 2. Temporal Analysis of Themes**

The correlation of themes with time identifies the rise or fall of important issues to the al-Assad regime.

- 3. Analysis of Specific Events**

Detailed analysis of themes that occur before and after 11 key events that impacted the al-Assad regime since 2000 provides detailed analysis of political context of themes and their causal relationship to conflict events.

1. Narrative / Theme Association Analysis

Narratives are storylines used by members of a group that state core values and reasons for being, and provide justifications for the group's existence and grievances. The primary value of narratives for intelligence and information operations is that they identify what a target population (or leader) values and why it (he) values it.

Principal Components Analysis was performed on transformed theme probabilities to identify associated themes. Some of these themes are associated in a storyline that constituted a narrative; others lack a storyline and are referred to as theme associations. The following Identifiable factors identify key narratives or theme associations and accounted for 35.9% of variance:

- Syrian Arab Nationalism and Resistance**

Syrian Arab Nationalism and Resistance is a cornerstone narrative in Ba'athist political ideology. It is the notion that Syrian Arabs constitute a distinct nationality, and that they have to struggle against foreign intervention in order to claim an identity, a homeland and an economy and way of life. Militarism is an important part of this narrative because of his assumption that it is only through the build-up of a strong military that

the foreign powers arrayed against Syrians can be opposed. Themes that loaded highly on this factor include:

- Positive Mention: Arab Identity, Courage, Duty, Honor, kinship, Sacrifice, Strength, Syrian Nationalism, Victimization, Resistance, Syrian Military, Intimacy, Figurative Language
- Negative Mention: Britain, Corruption, Hostile Media, Colonialism, Conspiracy, Rebellion, Terrorism
- Negative Correlation (Notably absent from mention): Israel, Palestine, Cooperation, Negotiations, Peace

- **Logic and the Rebellion**

Logic and Rebellion is an association of mutually reinforcing themes that al-Assad employs to argue, on rational grounds, why the rebellion is politically and morally unjustified. He also often mentions Russia as a key-supporting ally who supports his point of view.

- Positive Mentions: Logos (logic and empirical evidence), Russia
- Negative Mention: Lying, Britain, Rebel Organizations, Terrorism

- **Resistance against Israel and Western Domination**

Resistance against Israel and Western Domination is another important narrative of Ba'athist political ideology. This narrative more specifically recounts an unjust invasion and occupation of Arab lands by Israel and the importance of Arab resistance against this incursion.

- Positive Mentions: Resistance, Palestine
- Negative Mentions: Israel, Invasion_Occupation

- **Heritage and Kinship**

Heritage and Kinship are themes associated to stress the importance of one's cultural heritage and the need to protect it from foreign threats. The Saudi's are used as an example of Arab rulers who have been co-opted by foreign influence. al-Assad frequently uses kin terms to express the closeness people who share a common heritage should be.

- Positive Mention: Heritage, Kinship, Intimacy
- Negative Mention: Britain, Saudi Arabia, Threat

- **Peace and Negotiation**

The Peace and Negotiation narrative argues that peace in the Middle East, especially between Israel and surrounding Arab entities, is false because Arab lands are unfairly occupied and therefore formal negotiations are largely futile.

- Positive Mention: Arab cooperation, courage
- Negative Mention: Invasion_Occupation

- **Threat to Syrian Heritage**

The Threat to Syrian Heritage narrative more specifically recounts that there is a systematic threat to a specifically Syrian heritage. This notion is also a core component of Ba'athist political ideology.

- Positive Mention: Heritage, Syrian Media
- Negative Mention: Threat, Security

2. Temporal Analysis

The occurrence of themes through time was examined in order to identify shifts in al-Assad's use of language. A number of themes increased or decreased through time in a statistically significant manner.

Israel and **Palestine** themes decrease through time. In particular, they constitute a relatively constant baseline of al-Assad's rhetoric and are associated with the **Resistance against Israel and Western Domination** narrative. This narrative and its associated themes all but vanishes after March of 2011 when the internal Syrian rebellion begins. As a proposal, should al-Assad resurrect the Resistance against Israel and Western Domination narrative again, it would indicate that from his perspective, there is a return to normalcy in the politics of the region.

Logos, **Intensifiers** and **Russia** themes also increase through time, but this increase is really driven by increases in conflict, especially the rebellion. These three themes are interesting from a communication theoretic perspective, since they represent each of Aristotle's pillars of persuasive argumentation. **Logos** is the appeal to logic and empirical evidence; **Ethos** is the appeal for credibility and in al-Assad's view mentioning Russia is a way of reminding the world that another world power agrees with him; **Pathos** is the appeal to emotion and al-Assad's increased use of intensifying language increases the emotive impact of his speech. These themes and their associated effects in his speech increase through time, but once again are really driven by increasing internal Syrian conflict. In short, al-Assad increases his use of classic persuasive techniques as his internal strife increases.

3. Analysis of Specific Events

The occurrence of themes three months before and three months after 11 specific events relevant to the al-Assad regime was examined. This provided an opportunity to examine how the particular context of events influenced al-Assad's use of themes.¹³ Some events al-Assad planned (for example, the Siege of Daraa), and his use of themes before these events indicates which themes may be predictive of his actions. Other events he could not have

¹³ These analyses were conducted on a monthly basis, and due to the fact that two months each contained two of the relevant events, an analysis of the occurrence of themes in nine months was done in detail.

planned (for example, Bouazizi's self-immolation and the Arab Spring) and his use of themes after these events indicates how he reacts to challenges.

The events analyzed were:

- 2003 Mar 20 Invasion of Iraq Bombing Begins
 - Reactive: Invasion_Occupation, Sovereignty
- 2010 Dec 17 Bouazizi Self-immolation / 2011 Jan 14 President of Tunisia removed from office
 - Reactive: Conspiracy, Reform, Figurative Language, Intensifiers
- 2011 Feb 11 President of Egypt removed from office
 - Reactive: Conspiracy, Reform, Figurative Language, Intensifiers, Security
- 2011 Aug 18 USA, France, UK, Germany, & EU demanded that al-Assad resign / 2011 Aug 28 Libyan rebels captured Tripoli, effectively overthrowing Gaddafi
 - Reactive: Hostile_Media, Rebellion, Russia
- 2011 Nov 12 Arab League voted to suspend Syria's membership / 2011 Nov 27 Arab League voted to approve sanctions on Syria
 - Fairness, Heritage, Logos, Democracy, Trade
- 2011 Mar 18 First violence in rebellion Syrian forces first open fire on protesters in Daraa, protests become increasingly violent afterward
 - Reactive: Reform, Figurative_Language, Intensifiers
- 2011 Apr 22 Siege of Daraa
 - Predictive: Reform, Figurative_Language, Intensifiers
- 2011 May 5 Siege of Homs
 - Predictive: Conspiracy, Reform, Intensifiers
 - Reactive: Hostile_Media, Conspiracy, Rebellion
- 2013 Aug 21 Ghouta Gas Attack

Predictive: Honor_Shame, Reform_Domestic, Figurative_Language

Across these events, the following themes were **predictive** of conflict:

Figurative language, use of **Intensifiers**, **Conspiracy**

Across these events, the following themes were **reactive** to conflict:

Figurative language, use of **Intensifiers**, **Conspiracy**, **Reform**, **Hostile Media**

4.2 Introduction

Analysis of the themes occurring in Bashar al-Assad's speeches was conducted with the following goals in mind.

- Identify themes that predict conflict between the Syrian regime and others
- Identify themes to which the Syrian regime is particularly sensitive when conflict occurs
- Identify larger narratives that inform Bashir al-Assad's use of language
- Provide an alternate methodology to Integrative Cognitive Complexity analysis in order to triangulate trends in al-Assad's use of language and conflict

The corpus upon which the thematic analysis was conducted was assembled by the University of British Columbia team, and is composed of 642 randomly selected paragraphs selected from 124 speeches delivered by Bashir al-Assad from January 2000 to September of 2013. They included all of his speeches over the relevant years that were available in English, as well as two Arabic speeches from months in which no other speeches or interviews were available, which were translated by BBN Raytheon. Using a random number generator, UBC randomly selected paragraphs from the speeches. Before being coded, the paragraphs were reproduced in a different random order and with the dates masked. In order to establish a baseline of al-Assad's use of themes, while focusing on the dynamics of the Arab Spring and Syrian conflict, UBC selected paragraphs at a decreasing frequency in the years before the Arab Spring. The frequency of paragraph selection is as follows: prior to 2008, 7 paragraphs per year; 2008 to June 2010, 8 paragraphs per month; July 2010 to Sept 2013, 16 paragraphs per month.¹⁴ The random selection was out of all paragraphs in the month (or year prior to 2008) in question, and subject to the constraint that at least one paragraph must be selected per speech.

Using a thematic analysis methodology developed in earlier studies of political discourse (see below),¹⁵ relevant entities (countries and organizations), political factors, cultural

¹⁴ UBC found some speeches after they had already carried out the main selection of speeches. If these speeches were given in months in which the aimed-for paragraph loading (i.e., 8 or 16 paragraphs) was not yet achieved, enough paragraphs were randomly selected from them in order to reach this number of paragraphs. If it had already been achieved, then an extra 25% of the aimed-for paragraph loading was randomly selected from this speech. The goal of this procedure being to randomly sample paragraphs from all speeches available.

¹⁵ Baker, Tessa, Larry Kuznar, Pamela Toman and April Hartman (2010). *Analysis of Discourse Accent and Discursive Practices I&W: Cognitive Complexity Analysis*. Unpublished manuscript, Report prepared for Air Force Research Laboratory HSCB Modeling Project (FA8650-07-C-6837), Dayton, OH; Kuznar, L. A., Yager, M., Clair, C. S., & Stephenson, A. (2012). *Cognitive Complexity Assessment of Pakistan – India Regional Narratives*. Unpublished manuscript, Unpublished manuscript, Report prepared for Air Force Research Laboratory SAMOA Project (FA8650-10-C-6106), Dayton, OH; Kuznar, L. A., & Yager, M. C. (2012). *Analysis of Pashtun narratives: Report on results. What cues do Pashto speakers use in understanding how to draw in- and out-group distinctions?* Unpublished manuscript, Report prepared for Air Force Research Lab (AFRL), Contract FA8650-10-C-6106, Wright-Patterson Air force Base, Dayton, OH; Toman, P., Kuznar, L.

values and rhetorical devices were identified in the corpus. A total of 82 codes were defined for this corpus.¹⁶ A segment of text that corresponded to a theme was scored only once per paragraph if it occurred at all. A total of 1757 segments of text were assigned to one or more codes.

In order to reduce bias, all paragraphs were coded blind to knowledge of the specific speech from which the paragraph was drawn, date given, or purpose of the speech.

The probability that a theme would occur in a given month was calculated as the number of times a theme occurred during that month, divided by the number of paragraphs analyzed for that month.

Three types of analyses were conducted upon the data in order to answer the basic research questions:

- 1. Identification of Narrative and Theme Associations**

Principle components analysis was conducted on themes to identify which themes are associated with one another. Some associated themes are actually tied together in narratives, or storylines, that form an explanation and/or justification for al-Assad and the Syrian Ba'athist regime's point of view.

- 2. Temporal Analysis of Themes**

The correlation of themes with time identifies the rise or fall of important issues to the al-Assad regime.

- 3. Analysis of Specific Events**

A., Baker, T., & Hartman, A. (2010). *Analysis of Discourse Accent and Discursive Practices I&W: Report on Final Phase Results What cues do Arabic speakers use in understanding how news authors position themselves with regard to those they discuss?* Unpublished manuscript, Report prepared for Air Force Research Laboratory HSCB Modeling Project (FA8650-07-C-6837), Dayton, OH. Kuznar, Lawrence A., and Mariah Yager, 2013 *The Expression of Trust in the Persian Language (Farsi)*. Air Force Research Lab (AFRL) Contract # FA8650-10-C-6106, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, OH

¹⁶ The fact that 82 codes are tested for statistical significance within each of these approaches raises the problem of multiple comparisons. For instance, if one were to use a statistical significance threshold of $p < .05$ to reject a null hypothesis of no relationship, then one would expect about 4 false positive rejections of the null hypothesis (4 false positive relationships) per 82 comparisons. Standard corrections for this effect (Bonferroni corrections and their derivatives) tend to be very conservative and decrease the statistical power of the original comparisons, which actually increases the number of false negative findings. Given the practical application of this study, and the premium on finding potentially useful patterns in al-Assad's use of language that can be triangulated with other approaches, no corrections will be made to the statistical comparisons for multiple comparisons. This may actually explain why there are a few less intelligible associations between time and events.

Detailed analysis of themes that occur before and after 11 key events that impacted the al-Assad regime since 2000 provides detailed analysis of the political context of themes and their causal relationship to conflict events.

Each of these analyses is described in turn.

As an additional methodological note, inclusion of probabilities in classical statistical operations that assume linear relationships and unbounded variables is problematic, since probabilities strictly vary only between 0 and 1, and because they are, in turn, really expressions of either the presence or absence of a phenomenon. Transforming probabilities into Logits, which are simply the natural log of the probability, divided by 1-the probability, resolves these issues.

$$Logit = Ln \frac{p}{1-p}$$

Logits potentially vary from negative to positive infinity, and are a linear mapping of probabilities appropriate for standard statistical analysis.¹⁷

4.3 Bashir al-Assad's Narratives and Theme Associations

The larger narratives in which al-Assad embeds his rhetoric provide insight into his values, and therefore on alternate outcomes and driving goals that impact his decision calculus. Furthermore, since the leader is usually addressing particular audiences, understanding the broader narratives that resonate with those populations provides further insight into the cultural environment in which the leader is operating.

The term, **narrative**, implies a more or less structured storyline whose elements can be used to invoke emotions and associated themes.¹⁸ Some themes may be associated, but lack this narrative coherence. In cases where associated themes appear to have a structured storyline, they are referred to as a narrative; in other cases where certain themes are systematically related but lack a coherent narrative structure, they are referred to as theme associations.

Narratives and theme associations were not proposed a priori, but rather were identified through the statistical analysis of which themes were closely associated. This was accomplished by conducting a Principle Components analysis on the logits of the themes.

Principle components analysis identifies 27 different components (associations of themes) that explained 83.9% of the variance in the data. The top six components appear to be the most relevant and collectively explain 35.9% of the variance. Some themes were positively

¹⁷ Hanushek, Eric A., and John E. Jackson 1977 *Statistical Methods for Social Scientists*. Academic Press: Orlando, Florida, p. 188.

¹⁸ Halverson, J.R., H.L. Goodall, Jr., and S.R. Corman 2011 *Master Narratives of Islamic Extremism*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York., p. 14.

related within a factor (i.e. were positively correlated with one another) and others were negatively related (i.e. negatively related, that is, noticeably did not co-occur). The themes associated in each factor imply the following larger factors, or narratives/association of themes (Table 4Table 3).

- **Syrian Nationalism and Resistance**
- **Logic and the Rebellion**
- **Resistance against Israel and Western Domination**
- **Heritage and Kinship**
- **Peace and Negotiation**
- **Threat to Syrian Heritage**

4.3.1 Syrian Nationalism and Resistance

The fact that this is the most influential factor is not surprising, since it is the cornerstone of Ba'athist political ideology, Syrian Arab National Socialism, validating the underlying methodology (the thematic analysis accurately identified what should have been a key narrative element for al-Assad), and providing evidence of al-Assad's intellectual consistency with his political ideology.

The key political themes associated in this factor are: **Syrian National Identity**, **Syrian Military**, and what al-Assad refers to as **Resistance**. These themes are tied together in a coherent narrative that is a cornerstone of Ba'athist political ideology. The importance of the Syrian military falls in line with the Ba'ath Party's decidedly military character since its takeover by military leaders in the 8th of March Revolution of 1963. Resistance refers to opposition in all ways to imperial and colonial domination, particularly by the West and Israel; the notion of resistance is in keeping with the anti-colonial cornerstone of Ba'athist ideology.

However, this narrative also draws on deeper cultural values highly regarded in the region such as **courage**, **duty** and **obligation**, **sacrifice** for one's own kind, **kinship**, the need to uphold **honor** and avoid **shame**, and **victimization** at the hands of outsiders.

Finally, this factor is the only one that has a high association with rhetorical devices. **Rhetorical devices** are ways of saying things, and therefore provide insight into al-Assad's discursive practices. When discussing related Syrian Nationalistic themes, al-Assad has a tendency to use **figurative language** (metaphors, metonyms, symbolic language) in order to embellish his message. Interestingly, many of his metaphors are biological and physiological, reflecting his medical training. al-Assad also uses **intensifiers**, language that emphasizes a message, such as hyperbole and superlatives, when discussing Syrian nationalistic themes. Figurative language and intensifiers evoke emotion, indicating that for al-Assad and his audiences, Syrian nationalism is a particularly emotional topic. For al-Assad in particular, this contrasts with his otherwise extremely logical, matter-of-fact, bureaucratic discursive style. Clearly, Syrian nationalism is both an intellectual and emotional touch point for al-Assad and his constituents.

The specific themes most associated with the Syrian Nationalism and Resistance factor include:

Positive Connotation:

- **Arab_Identity**
- **Courage**
- **Duty**
- **Honor_Shame** – this include appeals to one's or one's group's honor or shaming at the hand of others
- **Kinship** – the use of kin terms to indicate social closeness
- **Sacrifice** – the value of sacrifice to one's own group
- **Strength** - The strength theme is generally associated with conflict in al-Assad's speeches. This same pattern has been noticed in studies of Arab media, Taliban insurgent literature, Conflict between India and Pakistan, and North Korean threats.¹⁹
- **Syrian_National_Identity**
- **Victimization** – appeals to being unfairly victimized by others
- **Resistance** – This term has special relevance to al-Assad. It is a catch-phrase for a systematic and programmatic opposition to Western, and especially Israeli domination with respect to all forms of power, military, economic, political and social.
- **Syrian_Military** – appeals to the honor and strength of the Syrian military as a key social establishment. This is especially important, since the 1963 takeover of the Ba'athist movement by its military wing.

Negative Connotation:

- **Corruption** – This term generally has an especially negative connotation in terms of total moral turpitude, but in al-Assad's use of the term, his connotation is more Western; it more refers to taking of graft, etc.
- **Criminal** – al-Assad seems to use this term in a highly contextual manner, implying not only the breaking of rules, but the transgression of fundamental moral boundaries.
- **Lying**
- **Britain** – an often-cited colonial bugaboo, given Britain's colonial history in the region.
- **Hostile_Media**
- **Rebel_Orgs**
- **Saudi_Arabia** – Saudi Arabia, in this corpus, often is seen as a regime of puppet rulers doing the bidding of Western powers
- **Colonialism**

¹⁹ See Kuznar and Yager 2013, Kuznar 2013, Popp 2013, Kuznar, Yager, St. Clair and Stephenson 2012, Toman, Baker, Kuznar and Hartman 2010 cited above

- **Conspiracy**
- **Rebellion**
- **Terrorism** – al-Assad uses the term terrorism in three different ways; pre-9/11, it referred to Israeli aggression, 9/11 to Arab Spring, it mostly referred to Islamist terrorists (i.e. al Qaeda), and after 2010, it refers to violent opposition groups in Syria.

Rhetoric:

- **Figurative Language** – use of symbolic language and metaphor.
- **Intensifiers** – hyperbolic language and language that increases the emotive effect of other language.

4.3.2 Logic and the Rebellion

Compared to other Middle Eastern and Central Asian leaders we have studied, al-Assad is notably and consistently logical and un-emotional in his rhetoric. When making a point, he often goes to great pains to point out logical connections and to cite evidence that has some degree of international acceptance. His reliance on logical and empirical evidence represents what Aristotle called Logos in persuasive argumentation, and al-Assad uses this rhetorical strategy so much that it forms the core of the second most influential association of themes. Other themes often connected to Logos included themes associated with the rebellion; al-Assad uses his logical line of argumentation most often when characterizing the rebellion and arguing against it.

Interestingly, two of his key allies, Hezbollah and Russia are often mentioned in conjunction with logical arguments against the rebellion. It is important to note that the terms, terrorism and terrorists, are used as euphemisms for Syrian rebels after 2010, and it is this sense of the term that applies to this factor.

These themes are not connected to a coherent narrative, but are clearly associated in the context of the specific arguments al-Assad makes.

The specific themes most associated with this factor include:

Positive Connotation:

- **Logos** – This code refers to appeals to logic and empirical evidence.
- **Hezbollah**
- **Russia** – the al-Assad regime's most powerful ally

Negative Connotation:

- **Lying**
- **Britain** – an often-cited bugaboo, given Britain's colonial history in the region.
- **Rebel_Orgs**

- **Saudi_Arabia** – Saudi Arabia, in our corpus, often is seen as a regime of puppet rulers doing the bidding of Western powers.
- **Terrorism** – al-Assad uses the term terrorism is used in three different ways; pre-9/11, it referred to Israeli aggression, 9/11 to Arab Spring, it referred to Islamist terrorist (i.e. al Qaeda), and after 2010, it refers to violent opposition groups in Syria.

4.3.3 Resistance against Israel and Western Domination

The third most influential association of themes is consistent with the general Ba'athist concept of resistance against foreign domination, but more explicitly calls out protagonists in his perceived struggle. These themes form a coherent, and critical narrative, in Ba'athist political ideology. This is the one narrative in which al-Assad makes reference to martyrdom, which in general is a rare theme for him.

One especially salient and emotive theme in this narrative is that of **invasion and occupation**. On the one hand, this refers to the physical occupation of the Golan Heights and Palestinian territories by Israel, but more generally is related to the notion of foreign, non-Arab intrusion into Arab territories, and has a connotation of violation and rape in the region.

The specific themes most associated with this factor include:

Positive Connotation:

- **Shaheed** - Martyrs
- **Palestine**
- **Resistance** – This term has special relevance to al-Assad. It is a catch-phrase for a systematic and programmatic opposition to Western, and especially Israeli domination with respect to all forms of power, military, economic, political and social.

Negative Connotation:

- **Israel**
- **Instability**
- **Invasion_Occupation** – The notion of being invaded and then occupied is especially offensive in this region of the world. It implies that one is helpless against being raped. This carries a highly negative sentiment.

4.3.4 Heritage and Kinship

This association of themes evokes culturally salient notions that heritage and cultural history are important legacies, and uses kinship terms and other terms to express the social closeness of Arabs. The notion that an ancient heritage is threatened is both explicit and

implicit and most often Britain is used as the example of the foreign threat and Saudi Arabia the example of the enslaved puppets that do the outsider's bidding.

The specific themes most associated with this factor include:

Positive Connotation:

- **Heritage**
- **Kinship** – the use of kin terms to indicate social closeness
- **Motherhood**
- **Intimacy** – statements that imply social closeness

Negative Connotation:

- **Britain** – an often-cited bugaboo, given Britain's colonial history in the region.
- **Saudi Arabia** – Saudi Arabia, in our corpus, often is seen as a regime of puppet rulers doing the bidding of Western powers.
- **Threat**

Ambivalent Connotation:

- **Education**
- **Negotiations** – Negotiation is often ambivalent, since it implies weakness (having to negotiate vs. Impose one's will), and because negotiations are perceived as generally failing in the Middle East.
- **Security**

Negative Association (Notable Lack of Mention):

- **Islam** – interestingly not associated with these themes

4.3.5 Peace and Negotiation

This narrative expresses the failure of peace and the futility of negotiation. al-Assad often reminds his audience that, despite talk of peace and various attempts at negotiation, Arab lands continue to be occupied.

The specific themes most associated with this factor include:

Positive Connotation:

- **Courage** – al-Assad often praises the courage of Arabs in the face of colonial domination
- **Manhood**
- **Sacrifice** – the value of sacrifice to one's own group

- **Cooperation** – This refers to cooperation among Arabs in the face of colonial domination

Negative Connotation:

- **EU** – EU refers to the European Union or Europe in general
- **Invasion_Occupation** – The notion of being invaded and then occupied is especially offensive in this region of the world. It implies that one is helpless against being raped. This carries a highly negative sentiment.

Ambivalent Connotation:

- **Negotiations** – Negotiation is often ambivalent, since it implies weakness (having to negotiate vs. Impose one's will), and because negotiations are perceived as generally failing in the Middle East.
- **Nuclear** – al-Assad rarely mentions nuclear issues, but it does occur in this narrative.
- **Peace** – Peace often cited in terms of the lack of peace.

4.3.6 Threat to Syrian Heritage

This theme association is similar to Heritage and Kinship. However, it more specifically identifies actions that threaten Syrian heritage. al-Assad praises Syrian Media for its revelation of the truth of Israeli actions, as he sees them. Justice is a key cultural value, but it is referred to ambivalently, since al-Assad mostly refers to how unjust threats to Syrian heritage are. Likewise, reference to security is generally the lack of security in the region.

The specific themes most associated with this factor include:

Positive Connotation:

- **Heritage**
- **Islam**
- **Syrian_Media**

Negative Connotation:

- **Raid** – this refers to Israeli raids; raids are short, episodic, and fall short of al-Assad's connotation of war, which is protracted.
- **Threat**

Ambivalent Connotation:

- **Justice** – This is ambivalent because of frequent citations of the lack of justice as well as the need or existence of justice.
- **Security**

Table 4: Principal Components Analysis of Top Six factors of Associated Themes.

	Components					
	Syrian Nationalism Resistance	Logic and the Rebellion	Resistance against Israel	Heritage Kinship	Peace & Negotiation	Threat to Syrian / Islamic Heritage
Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6
Arab_Identity	0.319	-0.505	0.236	0.184	-0.031	0.019
Corruption	0.363	-0.147	0.215	-0.125	0.04	0.294
Courage	0.37	-0.376	-0.248	-0.239	0.409	-0.338
Criminal	0.364	0.077	0.206	-0.183	0.071	-0.189
Determination	0.242	-0.47	-0.403	-0.029	0.076	-0.138
Duty	0.348	-0.324	0.171	-0.233	0.161	-0.052
Ethos	0.041	0.145	0.122	-0.058	-0.172	-0.035
Fairness	0.101	-0.041	-0.284	-0.445	-0.015	0.282
Heritage	0.123	-0.47	0.216	0.342	0.135	0.379
Honor_Shame	0.336	-0.239	0.273	0.049	-0.252	-0.063
Independence	0.35	0.054	0.148	-0.025	0.359	0.064
Justice	0.082	-0.064	0.113	-0.425	0.17	0.457
Kinship	0.383	-0.5	-0.135	0.328	0.107	-0.123
Logos	0.267	0.438	0.099	0.151	0.145	-0.063
Lying	0.326	0.306	0.086	-0.048	-0.192	-0.197
Manhood	0.178	-0.346	-0.451	-0.096	0.382	-0.406
Motherhood	-0.006	-0.25	0.032	0.3	0.184	-0.06
Outrage	0.032	0.11	0.157	-0.014	-0.152	0.036
Pride	0.245	-0.532	-0.043	0.165	0.013	0.018

Religion	0.264	-0.286	-0.178	-0.429	0.513	0.122
Islam	0.242	-0.085	-0.076	-0.413	0.221	0.48
Sacrifice	0.442	-0.533	-0.175	-0.198	0.342	-0.354
Shaheed	0.372	-0.073	0.451	-0.226	-0.103	-0.234
Strength	0.485	-0.087	0.038	0.117	-0.123	0.207
Syrian National Identity	0.585	0.003	-0.029	0.177	0.024	0.121
Tolerance	0.135	0.207	0.2	0.26	0.002	0.038
Trust	0.033	-0.167	-0.143	0.122	-0.004	0.039
Victimization	0.481	0.11	0.155	-0.022	-0.264	-0.109
Arab_Nations	0.083	0.114	0.501	-0.047	-0.031	-0.189
Britain	0.334	0.355	-0.325	0.382	0.173	-0.02
EU	-0.128	0.207	0.05	0.317	0.338	0.186
France	0.091	0.28	-0.307	0.179	0.261	-0.174
Hariri	0.143	-0.009	0.359	-0.257	0.251	-0.041
Hezbollah	0.278	0.498	-0.048	0.143	-0.036	0.1
Hostile_Media	0.348	0.208	-0.315	-0.384	0.277	0.083
Iran	0.025	0.15	0.213	-0.071	0.54	-0.047
Iraq	-0.07	0.126	0.271	0.046	0.243	0.067
Israel	-0.275	0.085	0.598	0.111	0.225	0.094
Jordan	-0.016	0.114	-0.107	-0.028	-0.043	-0.105
Lebanon	-0.238	0.132	0.249	-0.229	-0.045	-0.019
Palestine	-0.215	-0.148	0.466	-0.011	0.191	-0.023
PKK	0.005	0.188	0.341	-0.119	-0.005	-0.113
Rebel_Orgs	0.376	0.509	-0.194	0.216	0.139	0.261
Russia	0.234	0.314	-0.133	0.106	0.155	-0.273
Saudi_Arabia	0.355	0.502	-0.289	0.328	0.113	0.075
Turkey	-0.024	0.457	0.286	-0.038	0.292	-0.131
US	0.073	0.351	0.087	0.12	0.174	-0.051
World_Powers	0.275	0.185	0.048	-0.035	-0.098	0.077
Colonialism	0.528	0.119	0.146	-0.011	-0.182	0.033
Conspiracy	0.669	0.027	0.304	-0.061	-0.143	0.144
Raid	-0.011	-0.161	0.112	-0.135	0.125	0.462
Rebellion	0.767	0.35	-0.057	-0.015	-0.087	-0.041

Terrorism	0.721	0.312	0.217	-0.031	-0.065	-0.067
War	0.329	0.251	0.081	-0.194	0.068	-0.188
Cooperation	-0.297	-0.185	0.396	0.278	0.375	0.024
Democracy	0.219	0.151	0.008	-0.033	-0.301	-0.11
Development	0.03	-0.276	0.263	0.17	0.01	-0.348
Economics	-0.095	-0.121	0.281	0.188	-0.095	-0.429
Education	-0.038	-0.107	-0.215	0.396	-0.095	0.053
Enemy	0.62	-0.127	0.22	0.01	-0.201	0.005
Extremism	0.228	0.222	-0.349	-0.211	0.203	0.301
Farengi	0.16	0.281	0.134	-0.183	0.151	0.183
Instability	0.232	0.034	0.302	0.06	0.148	-0.082
Invasion_Occupation	-0.099	0.031	0.481	-0.059	0.348	0.099
Negotiations	-0.159	0.146	0.225	0.352	0.405	-0.035
Nuclear	-0.079	-0.031	-0.119	0.004	0.373	-0.181
Peace	-0.401	-0.057	0.294	0.141	0.363	0.061
Puppet_rulers	0.51	0.256	-0.094	0.22	0.012	-0.115
Reform_Domestic	0.201	-0.264	-0.004	0.042	-0.245	-0.2
Resistance	0.307	-0.239	0.376	-0.131	-0.163	0.102
Security	0.275	-0.111	-0.019	0.608	-0.112	0.383
Soverignty	0.11	0.239	0.147	-0.124	0.124	-0.078
Stability	0.077	0.24	-0.085	0.445	0.214	0.145
Syrian_Media	0.237	-0.306	0.145	-0.09	0.025	0.396
Syrian_Military	0.502	0.126	-0.1	-0.008	0.291	-0.108
Threat	0.167	-0.26	0.032	0.377	0.063	0.522
Trade	0.061	0.153	0.224	0.18	0.183	-0.328
Figurative_Language	0.355	-0.318	0.041	0.211	-0.143	0.093
Intensifiers	0.484	-0.403	0.189	0.07	-0.093	-0.119
Intimacy	0.226	-0.481	-0.104	0.404	0.273	-0.109
Poetry	-0.1	-0.057	-0.001	0.174	0.04	-0.048

4.4 Temporal Trends in al-Assad's Use of Themes

Temporal trends in al-Assad's use of themes establishes baseline rhetoric for different periods of time, and reveals shifts in his use of rhetoric that signal key changes in his perspective and decision making.

Temporal trends are identified as statistically significant ($p < .05$) correlations between themes and time. Key statistically significant themes are then examined in detail.

Twenty-seven themes co-vary with time (Table 5). All but one theme (Lebanon) increases through time. Since material conflict in Syria increases dramatically after 2010, much of the increase is due to the correlation of these themes and conflict.

A closer look at several of these themes provides more in-depth insight into how al-Assad uses language and its relationship to conflict.

Two themes focus on entities especially important to al-Assad, the **rebels** he is fighting and his most powerful ally, **Russia**. Five themes are political issues of great importance to al-Assad: **Syrian National Identity**, **Conspiracy**, **Rebellion**, **Terrorism** and **Enemy**. Finally, one rhetorical device, **Intensifiers**, and one value, **Logos**, demonstrate a statistically significant increase through time that might provide insight into al-Assad's decision calculus. The variation in the occurrence of each of these themes through time is examined more closely.

Table 5: Themes Exhibiting Statistically Significant Correlations with Time.

Correlation between Time and Theme Occurrence		
	r	p
Turkey	.422**	<.0001
Conspiracy	.525**	<.0001
Rebellion	.641**	<.0001
Terrorism	.448**	<.0001
Syrian_National_Identity	.378**	0.001
Enemy	.389**	0.001
Syrian_Military	.402**	0.001
Russia	.362**	0.002
US	.354**	0.003
Logos	.342**	0.004
Colonialism	.337**	0.005
Puppet_rulers	.330**	0.006
Criminal	.314**	0.009
Rebel_Orgs	.306*	0.011
Trade	.288*	0.017

Intensifiers	.287*	0.017
Negotiations	.276*	0.022
Saudi_Arabia	.274*	0.023
Independence	.258*	0.032
Instability	.256*	0.034
Tolerance	.253*	0.036
Lebanon	-.253*	0.036
Iran	.249*	0.039
Strength	.248*	0.04
Kinship	.240*	0.047
Corruption	.239*	0.048
Honor_Shame	.237*	0.049

4.4.1 Logos and Intensifiers

al-Assad often uses logic and appeals to empirical evidence in his persuasive speech, and as noted before, his use of Logos increases with conflict levels. al-Assad's use of Logos increases through time as well. Likewise, al-Assad's use of intensifiers increases through time.

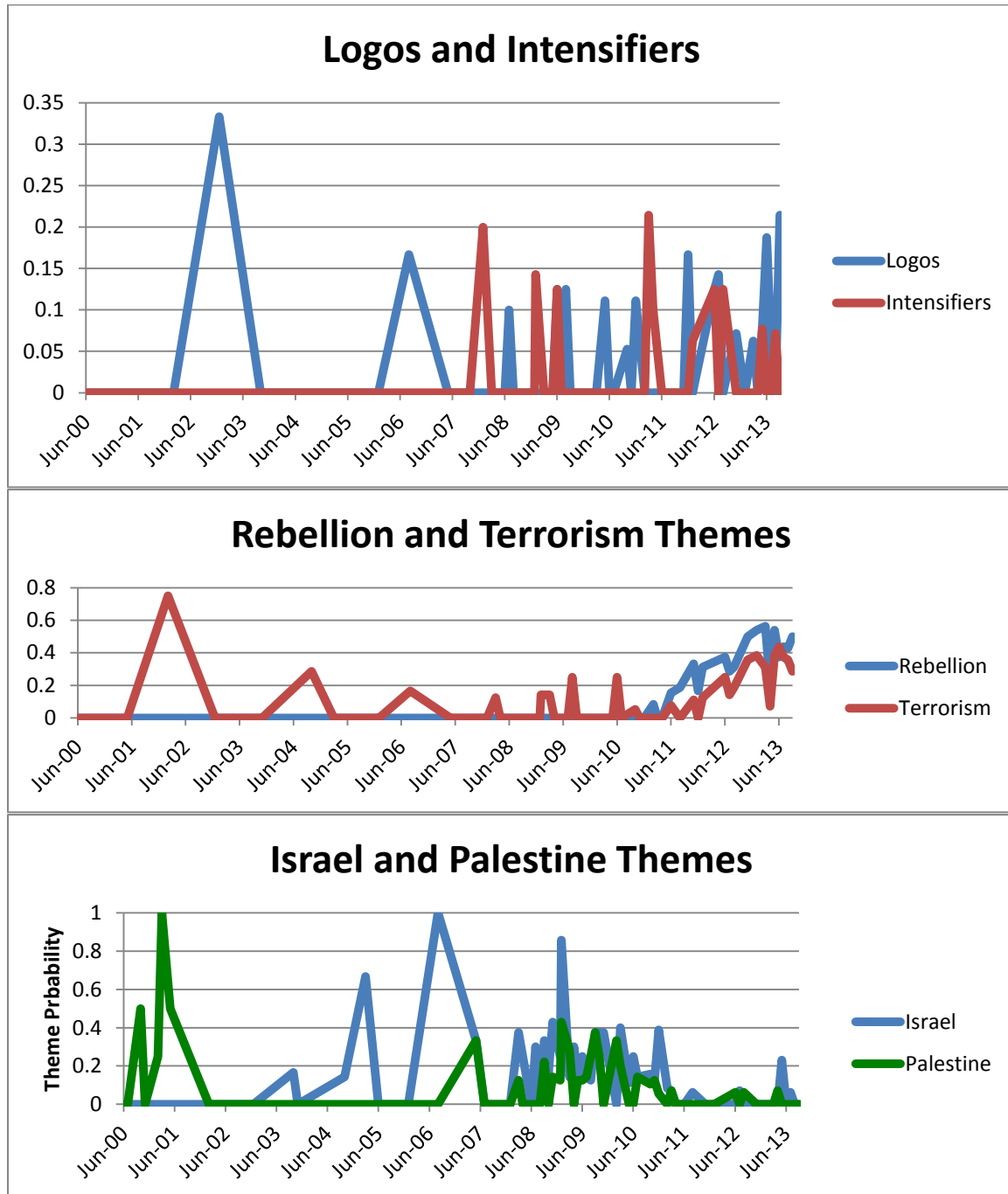
4.4.2 Israel and Palestine

These two themes are correlated ($r = .224$, $p = .032$) and associated in the larger narrative of Resistance against Israel and Western Domination identified in the narratives section. al-Assad's use of these themes exhibits an interesting temporal trend that may have some predictive value. The Resistance against Israel and Western Domination narrative is an important baseline narrative upon which al-Assad historically draws. As such, it serves as a default setting for al-Assad's rhetoric when conditions and the balance of power are "normal" in the Middle East. Immediately following the outbreak of domestic conflict in Syria, al-Assad abruptly stops using these themes, and is entirely focused on internal issues. Ironically, the absence of these themes indicates crisis for the al-Assad regime. If and when al-Assad returns to emphasizing these themes would indicate that from his perspective, the internal Syrian crisis is de-escalating.

4.4.3 Rebellion and Terrorism

Rebellion and terrorism themes are highly correlated ($r = .626$, $p < .0001$), since al-Assad uses terrorism and terrorist as euphemisms for the rebellion and rebels respectively. Predictably, both themes increase dramatically as the internal conflict in Syria worsens. However, it is worth noting that al-Assad uses the terrorism theme in three different ways that vary through time. Before 9/11, he uses the term terrorism to refer to Israeli military

actions. After 9/11, he shifts his usage of the term to include Islamic extremists, which are a traditional enemy of his Alawite constituency and its related Christian, Druze and moderate Sunni allies. After March 2011 and the beginning of conflict within Syria, his usage of the term abruptly shifts as a euphemism for internal Syrian rebels and foreign elements who have joined the fight.



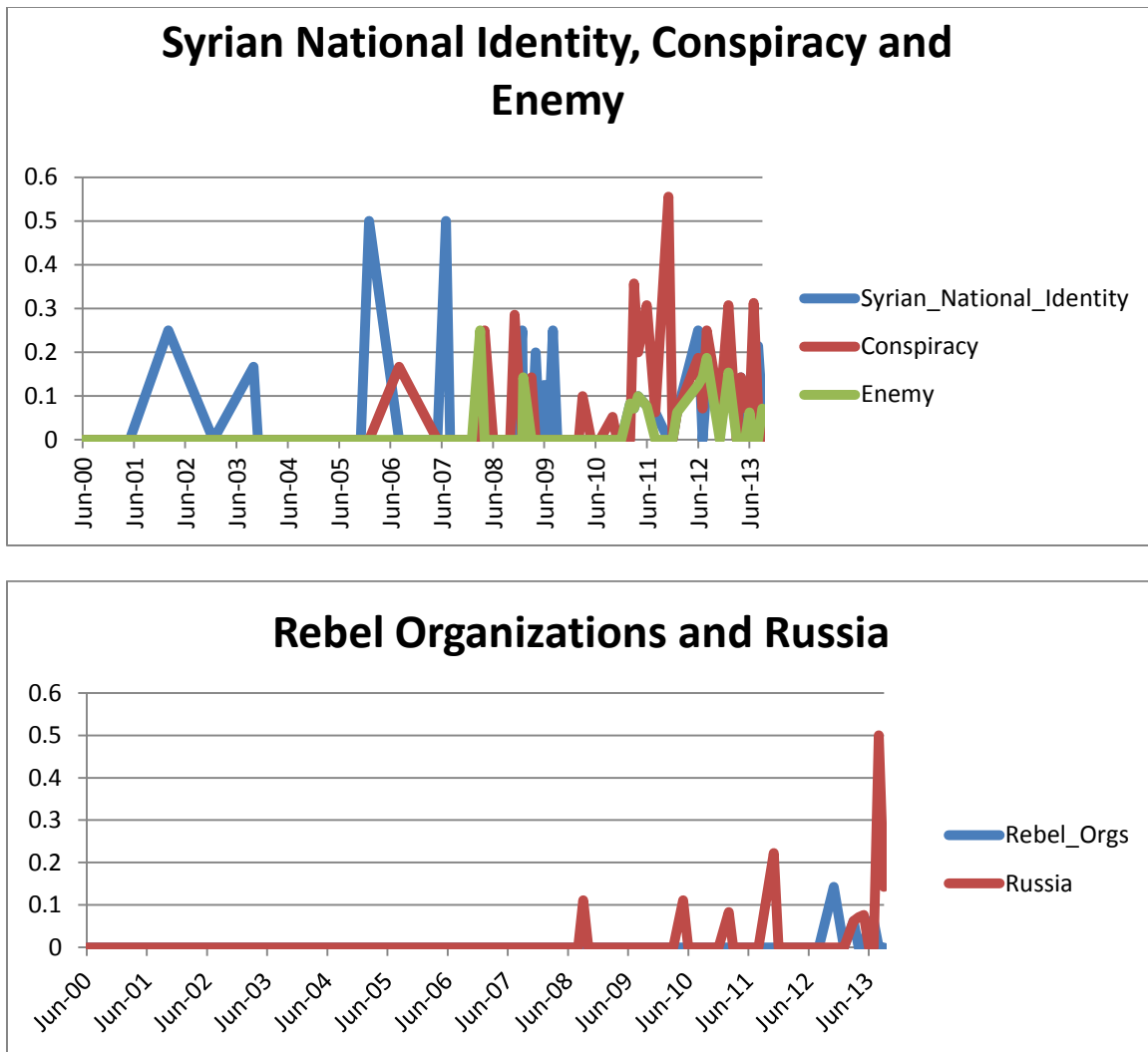


Figure 6: Probability of Occurrence themes through Time.

4.4.4 Syrian National Identity, Conspiracy and Enemy Themes

Each of these themes increases through time and with internal conflict in Syria. As the conflict worsens, al-Assad appeals to the ideal of Syrian Arab identity as a means to find unity in his balkanizing society, he increasingly appeals to the threat of external enemies, and his normally frequent warnings of a global conspiracy against Syria increase even more.

4.4.5 Rebel Organizations and Russia Themes

Expectedly, al-Assad's mention of rebel organizations increases after the rebellion begins. A more insightful note concerns his appeals to and mentions of Russia. al-Assad appears to appeal to Russia to remind opponents and critics that he has a powerful global ally. His appeals to Russia increase as conflict within Syria increases and he is increasingly isolated by the global community.

4.5 Analysis of al-Assad's Use of Themes in Relation to Key Events

More detailed analyses of the occurrence of themes in relation to specific events allows the consideration of how specific social and political contexts influence the occurrence of themes, and provides for more exacting analysis of when themes may be genuinely predictive or reactive.

In conjunction with the University of British Columbia team, nine months during which eleven key events that impacted the al-Assad regime in the past 14 years were identified. These events include:

- 2003 Mar 20 Invasion of Iraq Bombing Begins
- 2010 Dec 17 Bouazizi Self-immolation / 2011 Jan 14 President of Tunisia removed from office
- 2011 Feb 11 President of Egypt removed from office
- 2011 Mar 18 First violence in rebellion Syrian forces first open fire on protesters in Daraa, protests become increasingly violent afterward
- 2011 Apr 22 Siege of Daraa
- 2011 May 5 Siege of Homs
- 2011 Aug 18 USA, France, UK, Germany, & EU demanded that al-Assad resign / 2011 Aug 28 Libyan rebels captured Tripoli, effectively overthrowing Gaddafi
- 2011 Nov 12 Arab League voted to suspend Syria's membership / 2011 Nov 27 Arab League voted to approve sanctions on Syria
- 2013 Aug 21 Ghouta Gas Attack

Some events the Syrian regime was either known or suspected of initiating. In those cases, predictive themes are expected to emerge one to three months before the event occurred based on earlier studies.²⁰ Other events appear to have been out of control of the Syrian regime, and would therefore create reactions that indicate key issues upon which regime and its constituents felt vulnerable. In order to identify leading indicator themes and reactive themes, the three previous and three following months for which there were data were compared between pre- and post-events. This does not necessarily correspond to the previous or post three months, since gaps in the data existed. Instead, the three months for which there were data are taken as an indicator of trends before and after events. As an additional consideration, events for which pre- and post-themes did not differ significantly from the overall probability of a theme were not considered for analysis, even if pre- and post- probabilities differed significantly. This was done to isolate only those themes that could be detected as more or less common above the normal variation in theme use.

²⁰ See Kuznar and Yager 2013, Kuznar 2013, Popp 2013, Kuznar, Yager, St. Clair and Stephenson 2012, Toman, Baker, Kuznar and Hartman 2010 cited above

Probabilities that pre- and post-themes differed were tested for statistical significance with an unpooled z-test for differences between proportions. For the most part, only differences statistically significant at less than the .1 level are reported, although a few suggestive differences that are not statistically significant are also reported. While the standard for much social science research is a significance level less than .05, the threshold is arbitrary and subject to the purpose of the research question posed. Given the premium on identifying potentially important trends in this study that can be compared with other approaches, a more liberal threshold of 0.1 is used. Statistically significant probabilities are solid and outlined in the bar chart figures, and suggestive but not statistically significant probabilities are unlined and the fill is gradient.

Note that seven of the nine analyses occurred during 2011, which means that the data for some events overlaps. The impact of this overlap is noted when applicable. Another issue concerning 2011 is that, while it is a pivotal year in terms of politically significant events, the corpus contains only 8 speeches for this year. More data would have been desirable, but in the absence of more speeches, the findings reported here at least provide some gauge of sentiment and themes relevant during this critical time.

4.5.1 Invasion of Iraq 20 Mar 2003

Since Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) was a U.S. led initiative, this event would have been one to which al-Assad would have reacted.

Three themes occur statistically significantly more often after the event, **Justice** ($p = .06$), **Invasion_Occupation** ($p = .06$), and **Negotiations** ($p = .05$) (Figure 7: Prominent Themes after US Invasion of Iraq 20 Mar 2003). Other themes that occur more often, although not in a statistically significant degree, are **Victimization** and **Sovereignty**. It is possible that al-Assad's mention of Invasion_Occupation and Sovereignty themes were stimulated by the U.S. led invasion of Iraq.

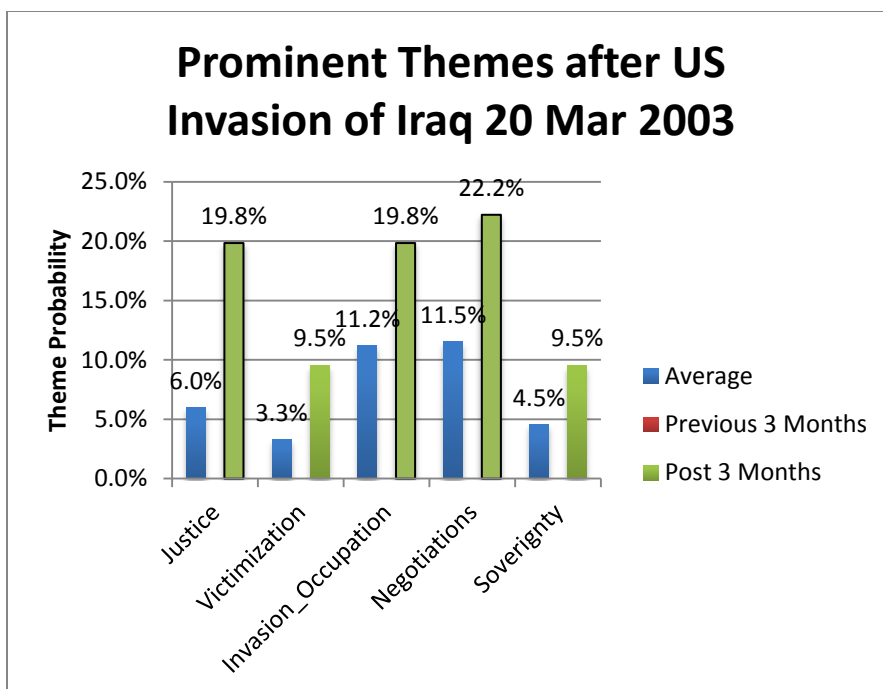


Figure 7: Prominent Themes after US Invasion of Iraq 20 Mar 2003.

4.5.2 2010 Dec 17 Bouazizi Self-immolation

As with the Operation Iraqi Freedom, al-Assad would not have been able to anticipate or cause Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation in Tunisia on 17 December, 2010, and the subsequent removal of the President of Tunisia 14 January, 2011. Therefore, any effect on his use of language would have been a reaction to these events.

Five themes occur statistically significantly more often after these events, including: **Conspiracy** ($p = .012$), **Enemy** ($p = .07$), **Reform_Domestic** ($p = .001$), **Figurative_Language** ($p = .03$) and **Intensifiers** ($p = .04$) (Figure 8).

Conspiracy is a theme prominent in al-Assad's rhetorical arsenal, and it is no surprise that it increases after the signature event that began the "Arab Spring." It is also likely that this event sparked al-Assad to consider the need for reform (at least in word) in Syria. Finally, al-Assad reacted with increased emotional speech, including figurative language and the use of intensifiers after January 2011.

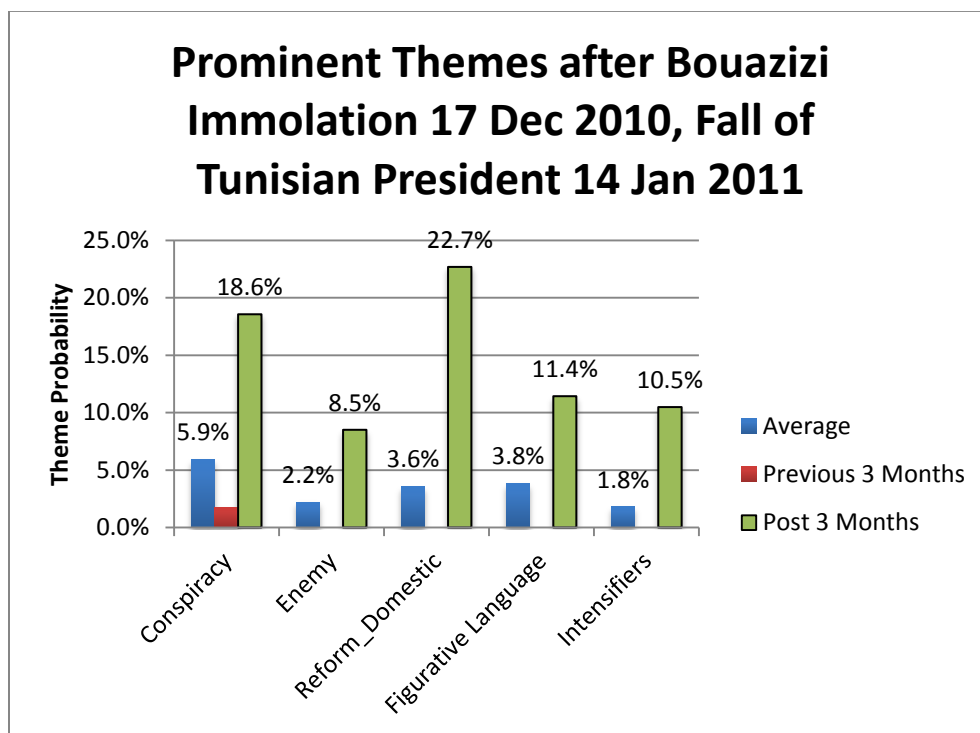


Figure 8: Prominent Themes after Bouazizi Self-Immolation 17 Dec 2010 and the Fall of the Tunisian President 14 Jan 2011.

4.5.3 2011 Feb 11 President of Egypt Removed from Office

Presumably, al-Assad had nothing to do with Mubarak's removal, and therefore any effect on his use of language would have been a reaction to these events.

Six themes occur statistically significantly more often after Mubarak's removal. These include: **Duty** ($p = .09$), **Conspiracy** ($p = .001$), **Reform_Domestic** ($p = .10$), **Security** ($p = .064$), **Figurative_Language** ($p = .014$) and **Intensifiers** ($p = .04$) (Figure 9).

There is a strong spike in conspiracy themes, and domestic reform once again emerges as a more frequent theme after this destabilizing event. Not surprisingly, security merges as a theme as the Arab Spring progresses. Emotive language use, such as figurative language and the use of intensifiers also increases.

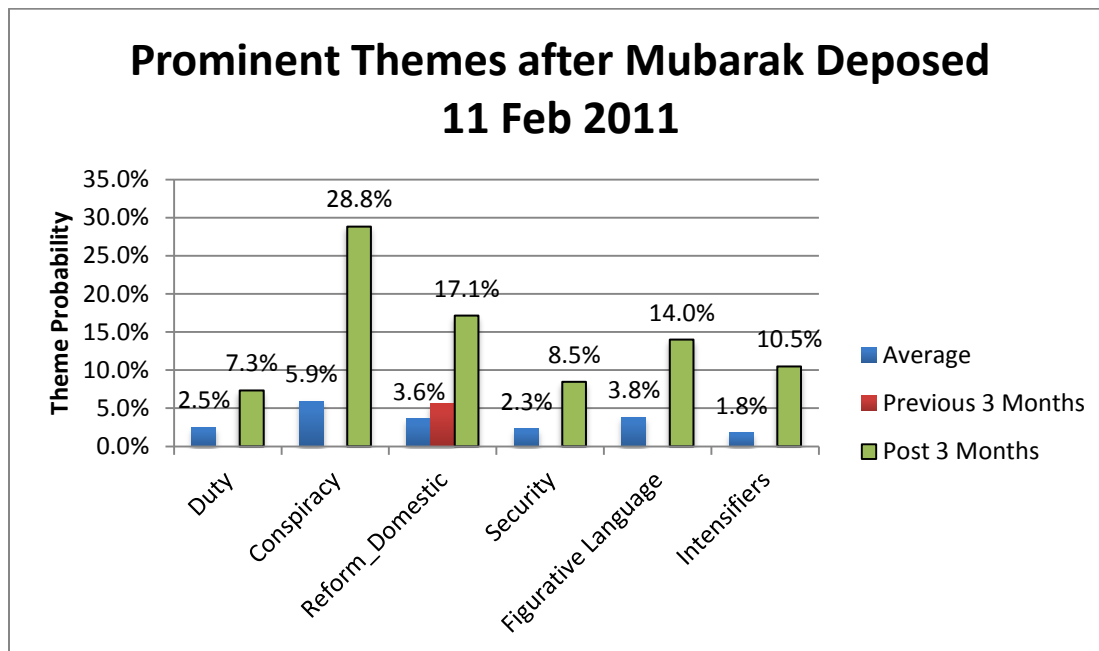


Figure 9: Prominent Themes after Egyptian President Removed from Power 11 Feb 2011.

4.5.4 2011 Mar 18 Syrian forces Open fire on protesters in Daraa

It is unclear exactly the extent to which the al-Assad regime could have anticipated the escalation of protest and police reaction in Daraa in mid-March, 2011. Therefore, both themes that may predict the Syrian crackdown and those that indicate the al-Assad regime's reaction are considered.

Two themes occur statistically significantly more often before the Syrian government crackdown in Daraa on 18 March, 2011. These are **Peace** ($p = .001$) and **Trade** ($p = .025$) (Figure 10). Despite the strong relationships, the reasons these would be predictive of this violent attack are unclear.

Four themes occur statistically significantly more often after the Syrian government crackdown in Daraa on 18 March, 2011. These are **Duty** ($p = .08$), **Strength** ($p = .03$), **Reform_Domestic** ($p = .10$), **Figurative_Language** ($p = .014$) and **Intensifiers** ($p = .04$). These themes indicate that violence within Syria increased al-Assad's consideration of the necessity of reform, as well as his overall emotive state.

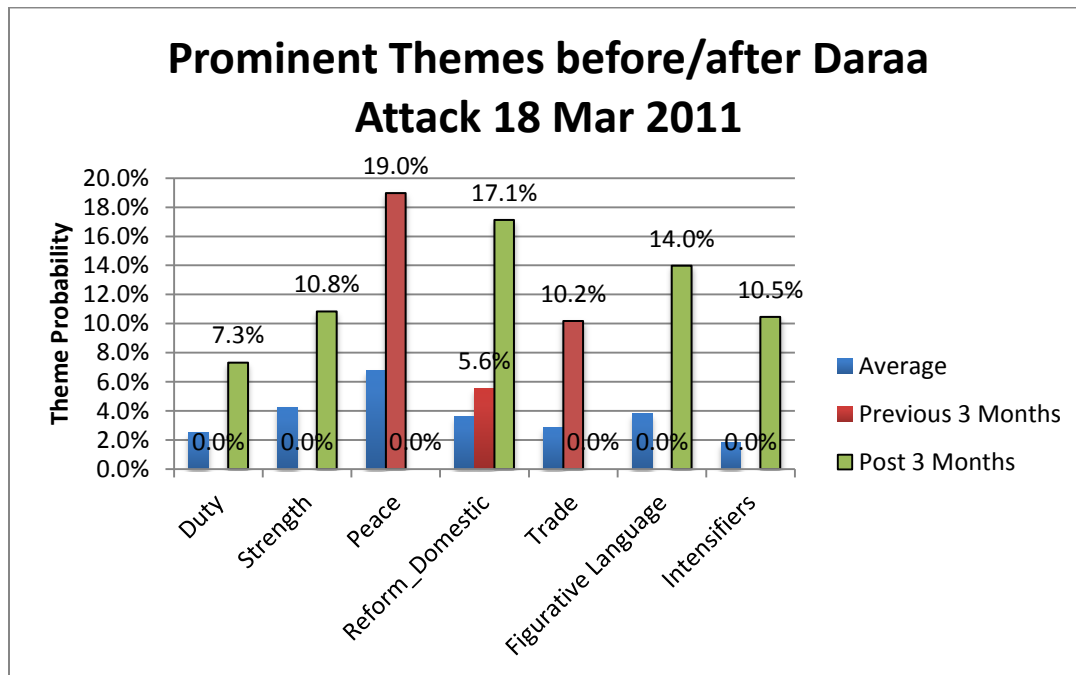


Figure 10: Prominent Themes before/after Daraa Attack 18 Mar 2011.

4.5.5 2011 Apr 22 Siege of Daraa

The siege of Daraa was clearly a Syrian government planned operation, and so themes that occur before the operation should be considered for their potential predictive quality.

Three themes occur before the Siege of Daraa, including **Reform_Domestic** ($p = .0003$), **Figurative_Language** ($p = .102$) and **Intensifiers** ($p = .023$) (Figure 11). Each of these is expected to increase, based on the previous analyses. Domestic reform, when it precedes conflict, may be a feint to lure rebels into a false sense of security or alternatively may be seen as a sign of weakness by the rebels, prompting their action. Emotive language is expected before planned conflict as a leader attempts to motivate his constituents for upcoming conflict, and perhaps as his own cognitive resources are taxed, causing him to rely more on emotive processes in decision making.

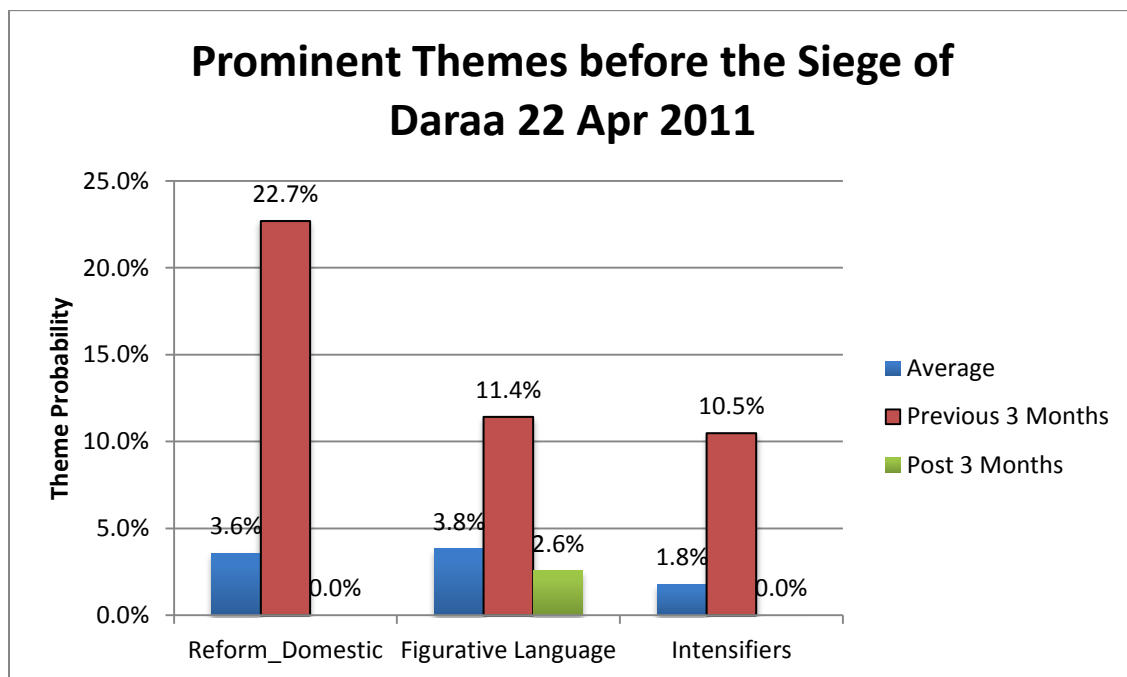


Figure 11: Prominent Themes before the Siege of Daraa 22 Apr 2011.

4.5.6 2011 May 5 Siege of Homs

The siege of Homs was clearly a Syrian government planned operation, and so themes that occurred before the operation should be considered for their potential predictive quality. Some themes also appear to experience a significant increase after the event, and they will also be analyzed.

Three themes occur statistically significantly before as opposed to after the Siege of Homs, and were also significantly more common than average. These were **Conspiracy**, **Reform_Domestic**, and **Intensifiers**, all statistically significant at $<.05$ level (Figure 12). These patterns are consistent with other domestic attacks carried out by the Syrian government.

Four themes are more common after the siege began, including **Strength** ($p = .10$), **Hostile_Media** ($p = .005$), **Conspiracy** ($p = .025$) and **Rebellion** ($p = .003$). None of these is surprising. al-Assad speaks against hostile media, following media reports of Syrian government action in Homs, and his rhetoric concerning a conspiracy against his regime increases.

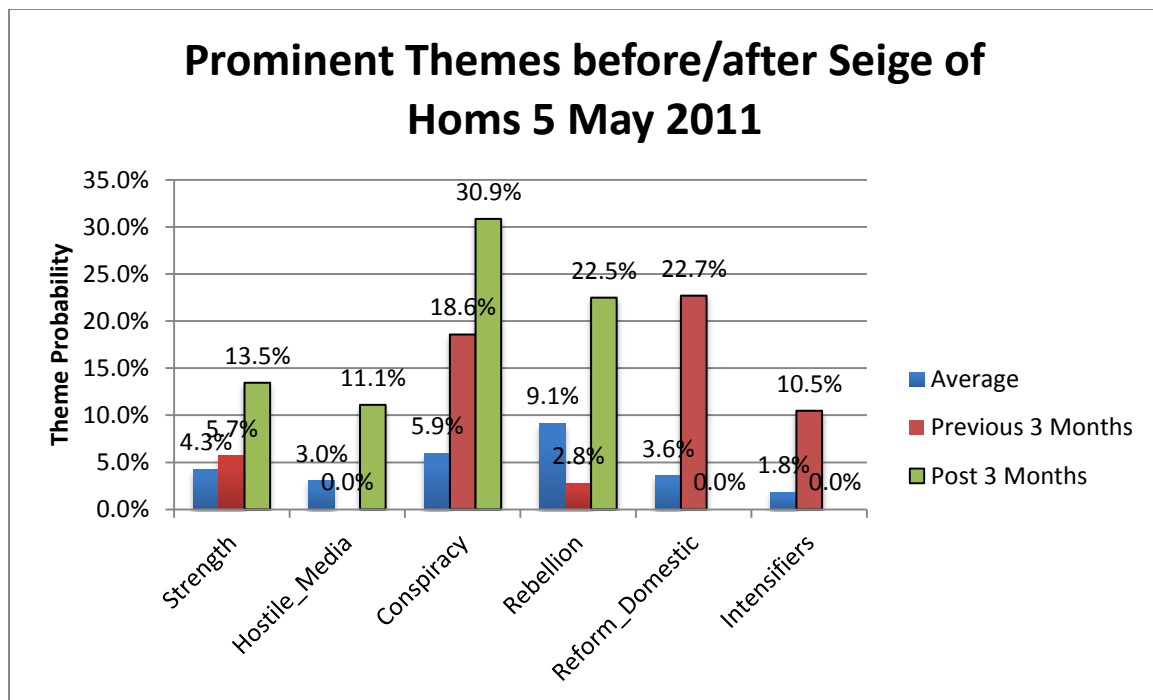


Figure 12: Prominent Themes before/after Siege of Homs, 5 May 2011.

4.5.7 2011 Aug 18 USA, France, UK, Germany, & EU demanded that al-Assad resign / 2011 Aug 28 Libyan rebels captured Tripoli, effectively overthrowing Gaddafi

Both the demands by Western powers that al-Assad resign and Gaddafi's fall from power were outside of al-Assad's control, and therefore his reactions to these events indicate how these threats to the Middle Eastern order and Syrian power affect al-Assad and his constituents.

Three themes occur statistically significantly more often after demands for al-Assad's resignation and Gaddafi's fall, including **Hostile_Media** ($p = .05$), **Russia** ($p = .12$) and **Rebellion** ($p = .10$) (Figure 13). Hostile media and rebellion themes make sense, given the increasingly threatened and criticized situation the al-Assad regime faced at that time. al-Assad's mention of Russia, although barely statistically significant, is interesting, since it corresponds to the appearance of mentions of Syria's most powerful ally as international pressure is brought upon his regime.

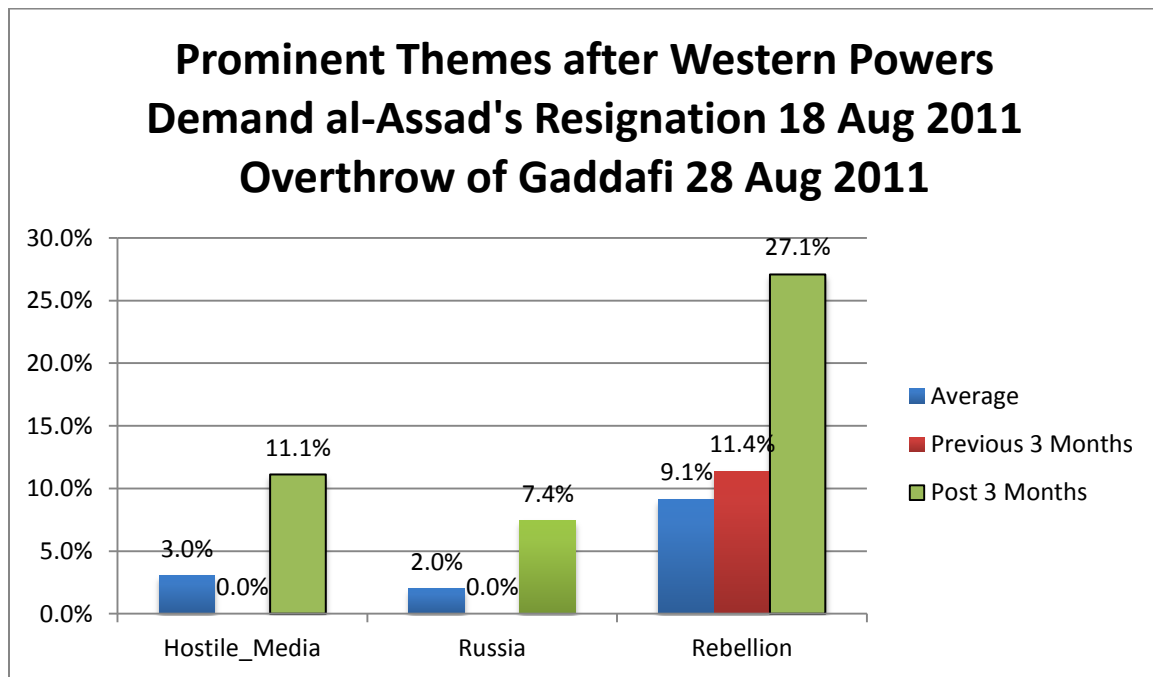


Figure 13: Prominent Themes after Demands for al-Assad's Resignation by Western Powers 18 Aug 2011, and the Fall of Gaddafi 28 Aug 2011.

4.5.8 2011 Nov 12 Arab League Sanctions

The Arab League sanctions of November 2011 were also something imposed upon the al-Assad regime, and therefore, provide a measure of how the regime reacts to threats rhetorically.

Five themes occur statistically significantly more often after the Arab League sanctions of November 2011, including **Fairness** ($p = .08$), **Heritage** ($p = .06$), **Logos** ($p = .04$), **Democracy** ($p = .08$) and **Trade** ($p = .04$) (Figure 14).

Fairness themes appear related to al-Assad's sense of unfairness at the Arab League's sanctions. Heritage themes appear to be an appeal to a greater Assyrian heritage that transcends the politics of the day. Logos themes are related to al-Assad's presentation of logical arguments against the Arab League's sanctions and other criticisms of his regime. Democracy themes are related to al-Assad's argument that he is defending the only legitimate democracy in the Middle East from ultimately undemocratic Islamist extremists. Finally, al-Assad's mention of trade may be aimed at reminding his critics that there are larger economic issues at risk in the Middle East that are jeopardized by weakening or eliminating his regime.

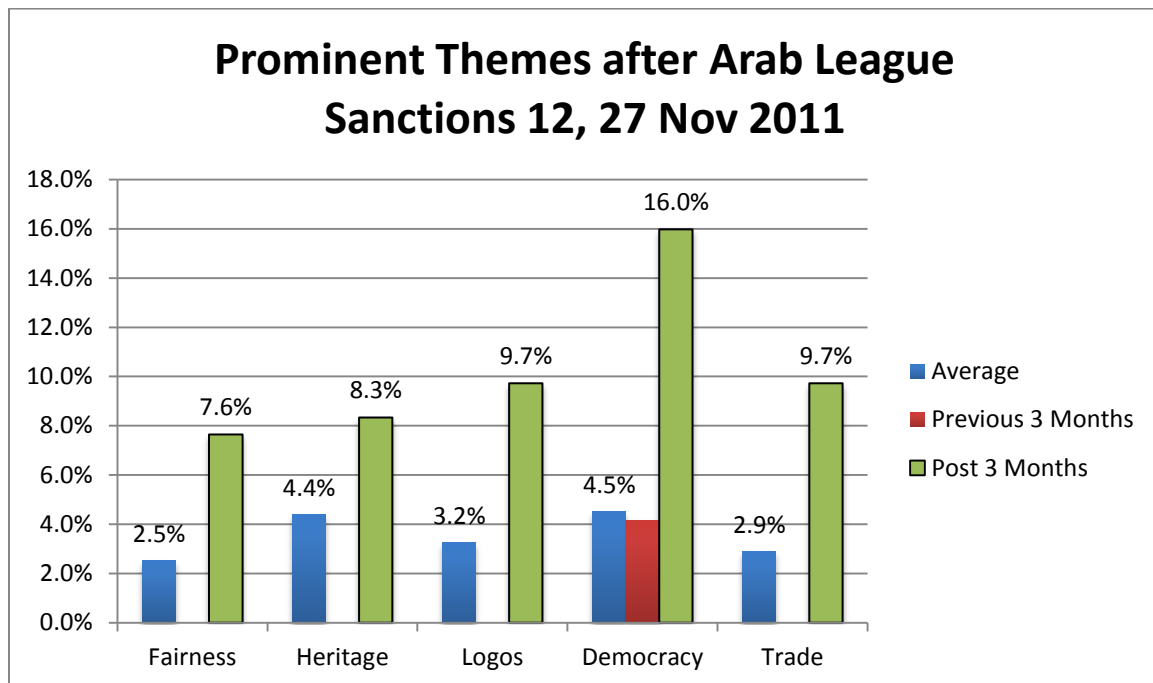


Figure 14: Prominent Themes after Arab League Sanctions, 12 and 27 Nov 2011.

4.5.9 2013 Aug 21 Ghouta Gas Attack

While the al-Assad regime blames rebels for the Ghouta gas attack, most Western nations and the Arab league concluded that the Syrian government fired the missiles armed with sarin gas that killed 1400 people in Ghouta. Therefore, themes that appear to predict this attack are examined.²¹

Three themes occur statistically significantly more often before the Ghouta gas attack than after, including **Honor_Shame** ($p = .07$), **Reform_Domestic** ($p = .08$) and **Figurative_Language** ($p = .02$) (Figure 15).

Honor/shame themes have been shown to anticipate conflict in other studies of Middle Eastern and central Asian societies²². As above, domestic reform both preceded and often follows conflict, indicating it is both predictive and reactive value. Finally, al-Assad used more emotive language before the attack, either indicating his more emotive state and/or his attempt to prepare his constituents for justification of what was certainly going to be viewed as a controversial act.

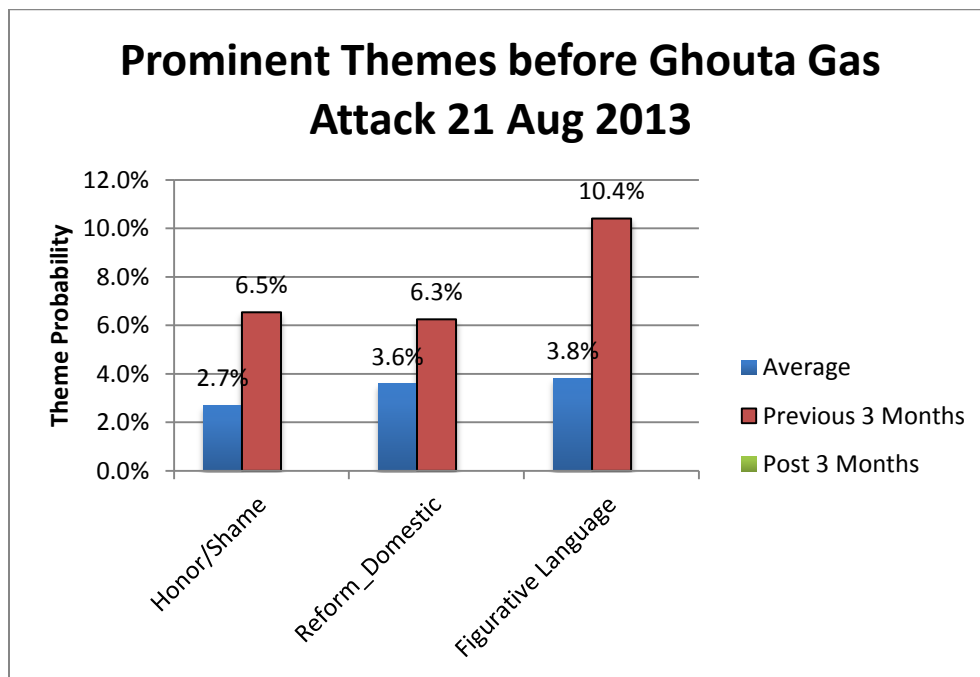


Figure 15: Prominent Themes before Ghouta Gas Attack, 21 Aug 2013.

²¹ Note that there are no statistically significant themes that emerge after the Ghouta attack. Therefore, they do not appear in Figure 15.

²² See Kuznar and Yager 2013, Kuznar 2013, Popp 2013, Kuznar, Yager, St. Clair and Stephenson 2012, Toman, Baker, Kuznar and Hartman 2010 cited above

4.6 Thematic Analysis Methodology

This section is a methodological appendix to support the above sections. Thematic analysis is a qualitative approach used across multiple fields and disciplines, most often in the social and health sciences. Thematic analysis can be described as “foundational method for qualitative analysis” in that it exists as its own analytic method as well as the basis for other qualitative methodologies. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a “method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79).²³ The identification of themes appears across disciplines and is not limited to particular methodologies. Themes, or something similar, can also referred to as, “concepts,” “categories,” “instances,” “thematic units,” or “expressions” to name a few.

Thematic analysis can be refined to these basic steps:

1. Read all texts
2. Mark relevant (or interesting or recurring or poignant) features within the texts.
3. Create an initial collection of codes called codebook
4. Organize and classify codes into themes.

Braun and Clarke (2006) write that “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82)²⁴. Themes can be broad and inclusive or specific and focused. As Ryan and Bernard (2003) explain, a theme can answer the question, “What is this expression an example of?”²⁵

Depending on the research question, themes are either identified inductively, from the data, or *a priori*, based on previous study and preparation. In this study, analysts applied both approaches. Patterns in the data—the themes—were noted as they appeared to the analysts during the reading of the texts. However, based on

Useful Definitions

Data the textual representation of a conversation, speech, observation, or interaction

Theme a unit of meaning that is noted in the data by the reader/analyst

Code a textual description of the semantic boundaries of a theme or a component of a theme.

Codebook a structured collection of the codes

Coding the process by which an analyst links specific codes to specific data segments

(Adapted Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p. 50)

Call-Out Box 1: Useful Definitions.

²³ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.

²⁴ Braun & Clarke 2006

²⁵ Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85-109

previous work identifying rhetorical devices and intensifiers used in Pashto and Arabic language, analysts also coded these as they were identified (Kuznar & Yager, 2012).²⁶

There are several benefits to using a thematic approach. Following a thematic analysis methodology, themes can be traced back to actual text and thus supported by evidence. Other qualitative analyses can sometimes be guilty of not being able to show the data that lead to assertions. Thematic analysis allows for flexibility in that the analysis can be applied in various ways to fit the data and the research question or hypothesis. Multiple researchers can identify themes within a dataset which also facilitates the analysis of larger datasets. Finally, quantitative and interpretive analysis can be employed on the data.

As for identifying themes, Ryan and Bernard (2003) succinctly review what researchers tend to look for in the text:

1. **Repetition:** Repetition is one of the most obvious and straightforward means to identify themes.
2. **Indigenous Typologies or Categories:** Indigenous categories refer to phrases or words used that are unknown to the researcher or used differently from how the researcher is familiar.
3. **Metaphors and Analogies:** The uses of metaphors and analogies can often be seen in themes. The form or underlying substance of the metaphors and analogies could lead to new ways of identifying themes.
4. **Transitions:** The change from one topic to another may be a shift in theme. Addressing change in topic could also lead to themes.
5. **Similarities and Differences:** A researcher can also examine similarities and differences within a text or from across texts. These similarities and differences could be themes (often used in grounded theory).
6. **Linguistic Connectors:** Specific language indicating definitions, relationships between conditions, and implying meaning or cause/effect can be used to recognize themes that explain something. Language such as “before,” “because,” and “instead of,” to name a few, could be indicators of an explanation of a relationship.
7. **Missing Data:** Also, salient concepts not mentioned within a text could also point to a theme. Additionally, some themes could be missing because the original author or speaker would expect his or her audience to understand the meaning without the actual language. However, not all missing data would necessarily be identified as a theme.

Metaphors, transitions, and connectors are all employed by native speakers to add meaning in a text (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 92). This is important from both perspectives: the original author/speaker and the researcher. Native speakers/ authors apply their own cultural perspectives to the text; hopefully connecting with others of similar understanding, perspective, background, or language. The researcher is also applying his or her own native lens to the texts and must identify and analyze themes through this as well as the original speaker's.

²⁶ Kuznar, L. A., & Yager, M. C. (2012).

<i>Basic Procedure for Thematic Analysis</i>	
Data Immersion	Intense study and reading of data for familiarization. Reading is active requiring note-taking on content, potential themes and patterns.
Initial Coding	Code features relevant to the research question. In other words, identify and organize data into meaningful groups which creates a list of codes and its associated data. At this point, code as much as possible and highlight and keep track of context.
Search for Themes	Codes are examined to form <i>candidate themes</i> , the initial, potential themes. What codes combine or go together to form overarching themes. What themes are main themes and what themes are sub-themes? Any codes that should be discarded or deemed miscellaneous (as in not fitting into any larger themes)?
Review Themes	Candidate themes are reviewed and refined. Candidate themes can be discarded, combined with others, reclassified as sub-themes or main themes, etc. Themes should have internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 1990).
Finalize Themes	Themes are defined and named and data within each theme is analyzed further. Themes should have an individual (mini) write-ups including definition, description, examples, and analysis.
Report Writing	

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

Call-Out Box 2: Basic Procedure for Thematic Analysis.

5 Approach 3: Leadership Trait Analysis (Maj Jason Spitaletta)

(Joint Staff J7 & JHU/APL)

Executive Summary

The primary objectives of this section were to (1) examine al-Assad's cognitive complexity through means independent from the UBC method described earlier; and (2) examine al-Assad's leadership traits using Hermann's (2002) method of political profiling.²⁷

Method: A selection of English translations of al-Assad's speeches (n=101, a subset of the speeches used by the other approaches in this document) from 1 January 2000 to 13 September 2013, total of 256,240 words (mean words per speech=2537, SD=2224) were analyzed using two pieces of software: ProfilerPlus; and Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC). Unlike the manual scoring methods described earlier in this document, the automated text analyses ingest and analyze the whole speech not simply randomly selected sections.

Results: al-Assad's cognitive complexity was assessed by three separate, and independent, measures:

- (1) Conceptual Complexity (a component of ProfilerPlus Leadership Trait Analysis). al-Assad's PP_LTA_CC score was 0.66, where any score above 0.62 is considered high. His high conceptual complexity score coupled with his low self-confidence suggest openness to contextual information.
- (2) ProfilerPlus Cognitive Complexity (PPCC score, calculated separately by ProfilerPlus), al-Assad's mean PPCC Score of 5.8 (on a scale of 1-7) suggests a level approaching the transition from moderate to high differentiation and high differentiation
- (3) al-Assad's use of "thinking" words (Cognitive Mechanism score calculated by LIWC) in his speeches showed relative stability over time (mean of 18.08 and a standard deviation of 2.61).

The second objective was to analyze al-Assad's leadership traits. This identified that al-Assad's need for power is in the low range and; therefore he has less of a need to be in charge and may be more amenable to subordinates assuming more prominent roles. His belief in control over events is slightly below the mean and thus he is unlikely to be overly proactive or reactive in policy-making. al-Assad's task orientation is high and thus is likely to resist any notions of him relinquishing power, particularly as he views his role as seeing Syria through the current crisis. Both al-Assad's in-group bias and distrust of others are low and therefore he does not perceive the world as either inherently threatening or himself as persecuted. He likely views conflicts as context-specific and does not necessarily have a

²⁷ The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Nathan Bos, PhD for his help in preparation of this component of the study as well as Michael Young, PhD, President and Co-Founder of Social Science Automation (SSA) for his assistance in providing access to ProfilerPlus and processing the data

preferred strategy for resolving disputes.

Conclusion: Using analyses conducted separately and independently from those described in Approach 1, al-Assad exhibited moderate to high cognitive complexity and did so throughout the period analyzed, a finding that supports the conclusion of the UBC team. Furthermore, trait analysis identifies al-Assad not to be ideologically driven, yet reluctant to relinquish power.

5.1 Introduction:

Methods of remote personality assessment have been employed with success since WWII (Bos et al, 2013) and are a valuable resource to the intelligence community. Profiles are useful in foreign policy planning and decision-making, negotiation preparation, and strategic communications (Post, 2005). The primary objectives of this section were to (1) examine the cognitive complexity through means independent from the UBC method described earlier; and (2) examine al-Assad's leadership traits using Hermann's (2002) method of political profiling.

The purpose of this approach was to provide empirical support using methodological triangulation from proven social scientific research to lines of persuasion that may be employed to influence and/or deter the target. Regardless of the analytical methods, leadership analysis can be considered a form of Target Audience Analysis, with the unit of analysis the individual vice the group. This application can be found in Part I of this study.

5.1.1 Cognitive complexity

We examined al-Assad's cognitive complexity, which may be broadly described as the individual's tendency to perceive and articulate nuances and subtle differences. Three measures of cognitive complexity were employed

(1) Conceptual Complexity (PP_LTA_CC): Conceptual Complexity is the degree to which a target employs differentiation when describing or discussing external people, places, or objects (Hermann, 2002). Conceptual Complexity analyzes a target's perspective on and interactions with his or her environment. It is essentially a ratio of high complexity words (approximately, tendency, possibly) to low complexity words (definitively, absolutely, assuredly). This calculation is a component of Hermann's (2002) Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) described later. It is calculated here by the ProfilerPlus software.

(2) ProfilerPlus Cognitive Complexity (PPCC): The ProfilerPlus Cognitive Complexity score measures the structure of a target's thoughts and/or intellectual style. PPCC is inspired by the integrative complexity of Dr. Suedfeld, but uses a weighted count of content flags (unlike IC, which is based on structure, not content) to attempt to approximate an IC score. However, there are important differences in the scoring of the automated

approaches of which the reader should be aware. Integrative complexity consists of two separate cognitive components: differentiation and integration (Suedfeld et al, 1992). Differentiation is the recognition of two or more legitimate dimensions or perspectives with respect to an issue, while integration is the recognition that these dimensions or perspectives could interact (Suedfeld et al, 1992). PPCC attempts to measure differentiation, albeit differently, than the UBC method employed in Approach 1, but does not incorporate integration into the calculation. There is domain specificity to integrative complexity (Liht & Savage, 2013) and thus one must caution against drawing too general an inference from PPCC absent thematic content analyses. PPCC is calculated here by the ProfilerPlus software.

(3) LIWC Stability of Cognitive Complexity: Spoken and/or written words provide insight on the differences in depth of thinking within and between individuals. Another approach to remote psychological assessment is classifying and counting the types of words used in a selection of texts and comparing to set of control data. LIWC produces a set of 80 categories of speech and the percentage of the selected text occupies by such categories (Pennebaker et al, 2007). Cognitive complexity, as described by Tauscik & Pennebaker (2010) includes two components of reasoning: differentiation between concepts and integration of said concepts. Two LIWC categories—exclusion words and conjunctions, capture these two processes. Exclusion words (e.g., but, without, exclude) are employed to make distinctions and/or increase the specificity of speech (Tauscik & Pennebaker, 2010). Exclusion words require the speaker to make categorical distinctions and are thus used at higher rates when telling the truth than when being deceptive (Pennebaker et al, 2003). Deception may require the use of less complex speech as a result of the cognitive load placed on the deceiver by the requirement to maintain a narrative contrary to experienced reality (Tauscik & Pennebaker, 2010). Conjunctions (e.g., and, also, although) integrate thoughts together are necessary to formulate a coherent narrative (Tauscik & Pennebaker, 2010). Prepositions (e.g., to, with, above), cognitive mechanisms (e.g., cause, know, ought), and words greater than six letters are all also indicative of more complex language (Tauscik & Pennebaker, 2010). The use of causal words (e.g., because, effect, hence) and insight words (e.g., think, know, consider), also load on LIWC CogMech scores (Tauscik & Pennebaker, 2010). Finally, measures of emotion were examined as another proxy for openness those more open to information generally employ more positive emotion and less negative emotion in their language (Tauscik & Pennebaker, 2010). In all; CogMech, Excl, Conj, Affect, PosEmo, and NegEmo were the LIWC variables that contributed to assessing the stability of al-Assad's Cognitive Complexity. None of the LIWC variables listed are direct measures of Cognitive Complexity. Further limiting the confidence in the inferences drawn from the LIWC results is the fact that unlike Hermann's work, the normative values available were not based on other heads of state. However, when the LIWC results are considered along with the other available data they provide a reasonable means of corroborating findings reached through other methods. It is calculated here by the LIWC software.

5.1.2 **Leadership traits**

Hermann (2002) identified seven traits in assessing leadership style: (1) the belief that one can influence or control what happens, (2) the need for power and influence, (3) conceptual complexity (the ability to differentiate things and people in one's environment), (4) self-confidence, (5) the tendency to focus on problem solving and accomplishing something versus maintenance of the group and dealing with others' ideas and sensitivities, (6) an individual's general distrust or suspiciousness of others, and (7) the intensity with which a person holds an in-group bias.

Hermann's work has been integrated to an automated software tool called ProfilerPlus that has been developed and maintained by Social Science Automation. A thorough description of ProfilerPlus is beyond the scope of this section, but it is a recognized valid instrument (Suedfeld, 2010) in helping craft remote profiles of foreign leaders. Perhaps most useful is the set of normative values included by Hermann (2002) that serve as a useful comparison for the subject (or target) of an assessment. In this case, Bashar al-Assad's scores were compared to those of 87 other heads of states (including his father, Hafez) to determine the relative impact of his leadership traits on the current crisis in Syria. The latter recommendations are based on a more generalized set of interpretations on individuals with similar attributes then applied to the case of al-Assad. For more information about the LTA approach, including the scoring logic, visit: <http://socialscience.net/tech/Languages.aspx>.

5.2 **Methods**

ProfilerPlus software and LIWC software were both used to analyze a selection of English translations of al-Assad's speeches ($n=101^{28}$; total of 256,240 words; mean number of words per speech=2537; $SD=2224$; 1 January 2000 to 13 September 2013) collected by the UBC team as described in Approach 1.

ProfilerPlus analyses: The text found from that list of websites were copied and pasted into text files then analyzed using Social Science Automation's online ProfilerPlus software (<http://profilerplus.org>). The methods detailed by SSA (<http://profilerplus.org/user/HelpOutput.aspx>) were followed to generate the results detailed in the subsequent section. This looks at seven traits, which are described in detail below (Table 6). One of these is a measure of cognitive complexity, called conceptual complexity (PP_LTA_CC; i.e. ProfilerPlus Leadership Traits Analysis Conceptual Complexity).

²⁸ The 101 speeches included in these analyses represent a subset of the total included in the UBC analysis.

Table 6: ProfilerPlus Leadership Traits and their SSA calculations (source: <https://profilerplus.org>).

<i>Trait</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Calculation</i>
Conceptual Complexity (PP_LTA_CC)	Degree of differentiation that the target demonstrates in describing or discussing other people, places, policies, ideas, or things.	$PP_LTA_CC = HC / (HC + LC)$ <p>Where HC=high complexity, LC=low complexity</p>
Belief in Control Over Events (BACE)	Degree of control the target perceives over the environment, akin to self-efficacy.	$BACE = IC / (IC + EC)$ <p>Where IC=internal control, EC=external control</p>
Self-Confidence (SC)	The target's sense of self-importance, or image of his or her ability to cope adequately with objects and persons in the environment.	$SC = SC+ / (SC+ + SC-)$ <p>Where SC+=high self – confidence, SC-=low self-confidence</p>
Task Orientation (TO)	The target's relative emphasis on interactions with others when dealing problems as opposed to focusing on the feelings and needs of relevant and important constituents.	$TO = T+ / (T+ + T-)$ <p>Where T+ = high task orientation, T-= low task orientation</p>
Distrust (D)	Wariness about others or the degree of the target's suspicion of the motives and actions of others.	$D = D+ / (\text{word count})$ <p>Where D+=high distrust</p>

In-Group Bias (IGB)	A worldview in which one's own group (social, political, ethnic, etc.) holds prominence, is perceived as superior, and/or there are strong emotional attachments to this in-group.	$IGB = IGB / IGBREF$ Where IGB=in-group bias, IGBREF=in-group reference
Need for Power (NFP)	Degree of target's concern for establishing, maintaining, or restoring one's power and/or control, influence, or have an impact on other persons or groups.	$NFP = P+ / (P+ + P-)$ Where, P+=high need for power, P-=low need for power

ProfilerPlus also produces a separate measure of cognitive complexity for each speech, referred to as the ProfilerPlus Cognitive Complexity score (PPCC score) in this chapter. This is inspired by Suedfeld's construct used by the UBC team in this project (Approach 1). PPCC scoring proceeds on a 1–7 scale with 7 indicating the highest degree of complexity in a selection of text. PPCC employs a different coding schema than Dr. Suedfeld does using hand scoring. The software uses a weighted count of content flags to approximate IC and assigns a PPCC score to each selection of text. Furthermore, it counts each flagged word as another differentiation; IC scoring assigns a score of three to a differentiated passage, no matter how many specific differentiations it contains. Because ProfilerPlus assigns scores based on a count of content flags, higher scores may be assigned to longer texts. This may account for why the PPCC scores in this section are higher than the IC scores of the UBC team (Approach 1), as the unit of text scored by this section was the entire speech, while the unit of text hand scored by the UBC team was the paragraph.

Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) analyses: The text from the aforementioned list of websites were copied and pasted into text files per Pennebaker et al (2007) and analyzed using text analysis software called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC). LIWC searches for over 2300 words or word stems within a given sample of text, counts the words within 70 plus dimensions and produce the percentage each dimension within the body text (Pennebaker et al, 2003).

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Cognitive complexity

al-Assad exhibited moderate/high to high cognitive complexity and did so throughout the period analyzed. Each of the measures employed are described in succession.

5.3.1.1 Conceptual complexity (PP_LTA_CC)

Conceptual Complexity is a component of ProfilerPlus Leadership Trait Analysis; al-Assad's was 0.66 where any score above 0.62 is considered high. Figure 15 illustrates that al-Assad's Conceptual Complexity of 0.66 was high relative to the Hermann (2002) normative values. Conceptual complexity is the degree to which an individual prefers distinction when describing particularly entities, be they tangible (people, events) or esoteric (ideas, concepts) (Hermann, 2002). The greater conceptual complexity with which an individual communicates, the greater the willingness to entertain, understand, and respect the perspectives of others (Hermann, 2002). Leaders who elevate on conceptual complexity process a broader set of stimuli than those who suppress on the same scale; high complexity individuals are far less likely to oversimplify complex problems (Hermann, 2002). High complexity leaders may appear somewhat indecisive as they tend to distrust their initial judgments and instead seek out additional information (Hermann, 2002). High complexity leaders also have greater information demands than lower complexity leaders and may tax their staffs with additional intelligence requirements. Those individuals are also generally more tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty; which suggests a generalized ability to make decision in novel circumstances (Lipshitz & Strauss, 1997)

al-Assad's conceptual complexity (0.66) is high and considerably greater than his self-confidence (0.27), which is in the low range; therefore he is rated as open to contextual information. Leaders with this combination of traits are more pragmatic on average and receptive to the interests, needs, and desires of others (Hermann, 2002). They may seek to maximize the contextual information available and rely more on weighing pros and cons than on employing heuristics to make a decision (Lipshitz & Strauss, 1997).

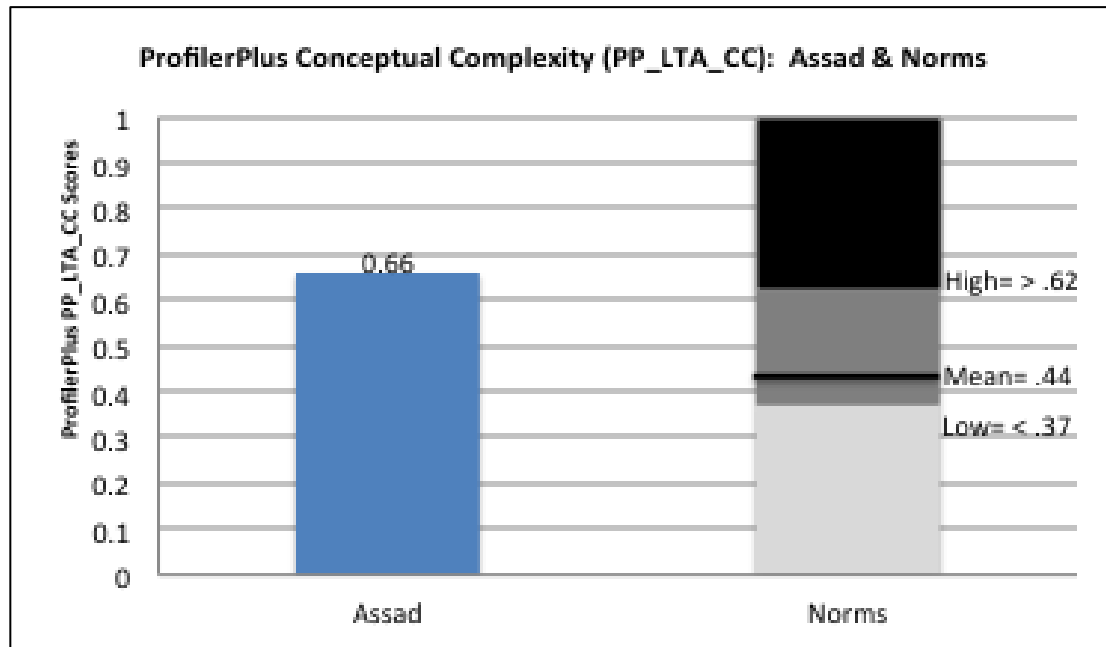


Figure 16: ProfilerPlus Conceptual Complexity Scores (PP_LTA_CC scores) for al-Assad and the Hermann (2002) Norms for 87 Heads of State.

5.3.1.2 ProfilerPlus Cognitive Complexity (PPCC)

This measure of Cognitive Complexity is calculated separately by ProfilerPlus from the LTA Conceptual Complexity described in the previous section. al-Assad's mean PPCC Score of 5.8 (on a scale of 1-7) with a standard deviation of 0.62 suggests a level approaching a transitional score between moderate to high differentiation and high differentiation. Of the 101 speeches analyzed, 48 (47.5%) were greater than or equal to 6 and therefore at the transition level.

The corpus of al-Assad's speeches exhibit conceptual connections between differentiated dimensions of judgment suggesting a moderate to high degree of complexity but with limited generalizability. While al-Assad's academic record and diplomatic interactions (Post & Pertis, 2011) demonstrate his intellect and thus potential for high cognitive complexity, this measure analysis does not suggest a broadly applied conceptual framework for understanding specific interactions among differentiated dimensions (Baker-Brown, 2004).

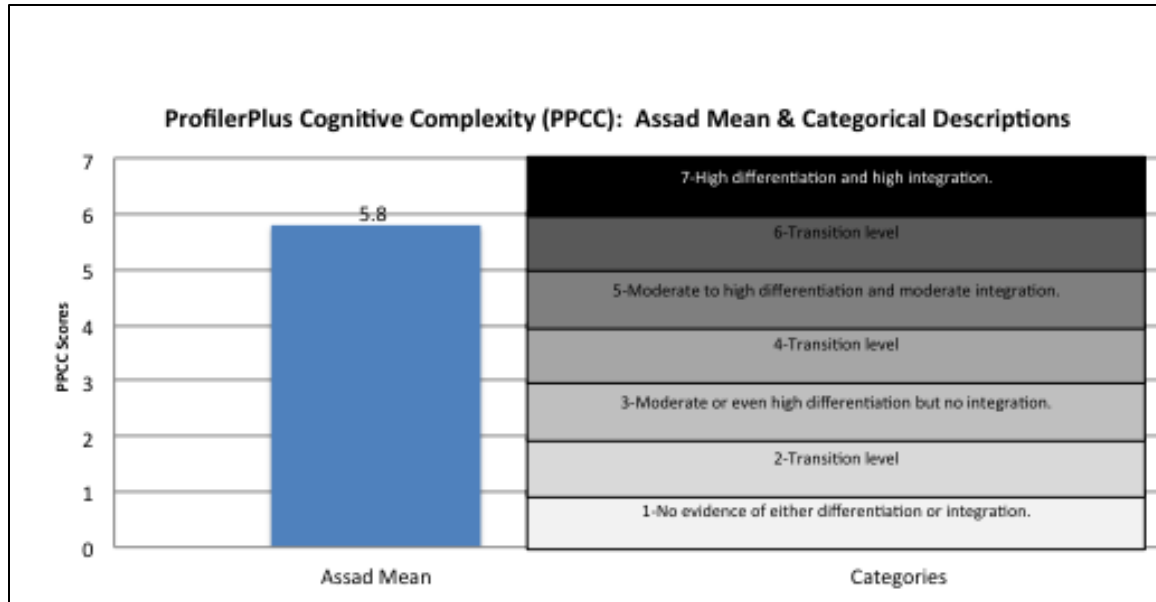


Figure 17: ProfilerPlus Cognitive Complexity Scores for al-Assad along with the categorical descriptions.

Figure 18 is a frequency distribution of PPCC scores for the set of speeches (n=101) analyzed. The modal set of scores (67) was within one standard deviation above the mean (between 5.8 and 6.42) followed by 26 within one standard deviation below the mean. No speeches had a PPCC score greater than 6.25 (within 1 SD above mean) and only 8 of 101 speeches were lower than one standard deviation below the mean with 4 of those 8 more than two standard deviations below the mean. The PPCC frequency distribution reinforces the conclusion of stability of cognitive complexity drawn from the LIWC variables described in the following section.

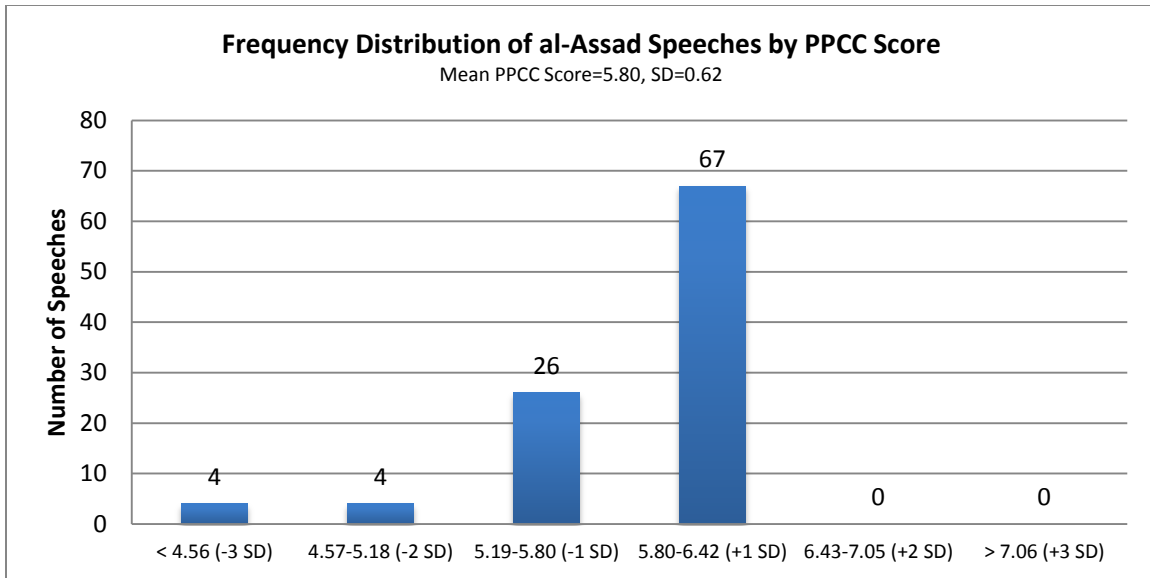


Figure 18: Frequency Distribution of al-Assad Speeches by PPCC Score.

5.3.1.3 Stability of Cognitive Complexity

al-Assad's CogMech score (calculated by LIWC and the third measure of cognitive complexity used here) was 18.08 (st. dev.=2.61), indicating a consistent usage of "thinking words" in his speeches. This measure of al-Assad's cognitive complexity (CogMech) was stable over time, as also was the PPCC scores (both shown in Figure 18). Figure 18 displays the mean UBC IC (described in Approach 1) PPCC and CogMech scores aggregated by year. The PPCC scores were fairly consistent when aggregated by year. The aggregate CogMech showed somewhat more variability, but is still fairly consistent over time.

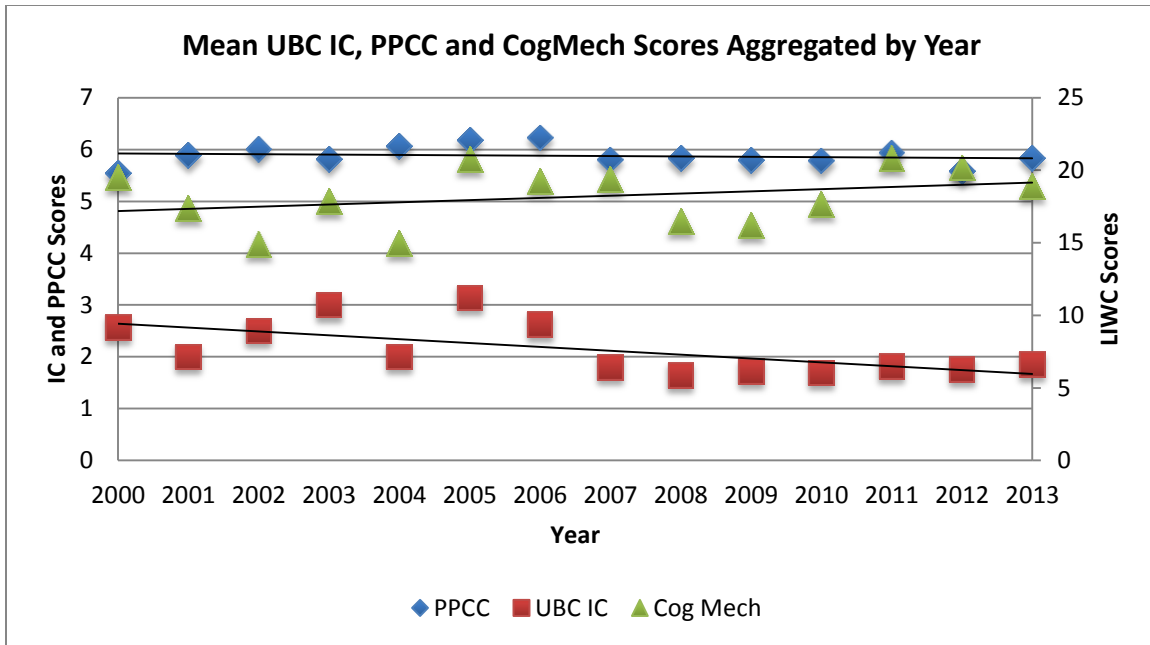


Figure 19: Scatter plot with best fitting regression lines indicating the Mean PPCC and CogMech Scores aggregated by year.

Figure 19 illustrates the PPCC Scores on the primary y-axis along with the LIWC variables typically associated with cognitive complexity (Conj, CogMech, and Excl) on the secondary y-axis for each of the al-Assad speeches (n=101) analyzed. The selected LIWC variables included exclusion words (Excl) (mean= 1.93, SD=1.24) conjunctions (Conj) (mean=7.18, SD=1.54) and cognitive mechanisms (CogMech) (mean=18.08, SD=2.61). al-Assad's mean CogMech and Conj were both above the grand mean for different sources of writing and the respective standard deviations were smaller than those for the control sources.²⁹ The opposite trend held true for Excl words. CogMech was positively correlated with both Conj ($r=.242$, $p < .015$) and Excl ($r=.367$, $p < .000$). The correlation between Conj and Excl was slightly positive but not statistically significant. al-Assad's use of emotive terminology was also analyzed using LIWC as a potential proxy for openness to new information (Tauscik & Pennebaker, 2010); however, no substantive conclusion can be drawn between those variables and the other measures of cognitive complexity. Of the LIWC variables associated with cognitive complexity, only conjunctions were significantly correlated with PPCC ($r=-.252$, $p < .011$). Each of the LIWC variables associated with Cognitive Complexity (Excl, Conj, and CogMech) indicated relatively stable trends over time. While the variability of each increases somewhat after 2007, that could be a function of sampling bias given that the entire corpus of al-Assad's speeches during the time period was not available. While caution must be used when interpreting these data since there is no normative data for other heads of state and/or speeches of public figures, the general trend suggest an above-average and more consistent use of terms that indicate cognitive complexity.

²⁹ Based on the data presented at <http://www.liwc.net/descriptiontable3.php>

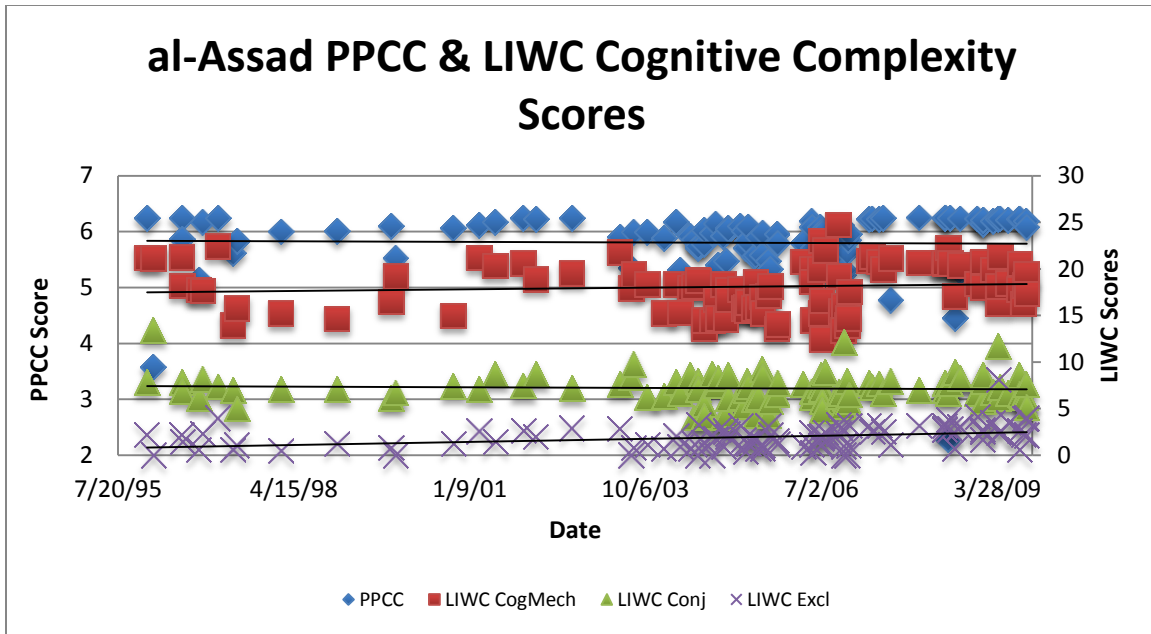


Figure 20: Scatter plot with best fitting regression lines indicating the PPCC scores as well as LIWC CogMech, Conj, & Excl scores for each of the 101 al-Assad speeches analyzed.

5.3.2 Leadership traits

The Leadership Trait Analysis of al-Assad also lent insight into a number of operationally relevant attributes. Table 7 includes the seven traits in Hermann's (2002) typology along with a brief explanation, the normative values from a study of 87 heads of state and the values for al-Assad's speeches. The analysis of al-Assad's Conceptual Complexity can be found earlier in this section, while the other six LTA variables are discussed after Table 7.

Table 7: Brief description of Hermann's (2002) Leadership Traits along with a comparison of al-Assad using ProfilerPlus with 87 Heads of State.

<i>Trait</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>87 Heads of State (Hermann, 2002)</i>	<i>Bashar al-Assad (1/1/00-9/13/13)</i>
Conceptual Complexity (PP_LTA_CC)	Degree of differentiation that the target demonstrates in describing or discussing other people, places, policies, ideas, or things.	Mean=0.44 Low < 0.37 High > 0.62	0.66 (High)
Belief in Control Over Events (BACE)	Degree of control the target perceives over the environment, akin to self-efficacy.	Mean=0.44 Low < 0.30 High > 0.58	0.42 (Normal, slightly below mean)
Self-Confidence (SC)	The target's sense of self-importance, or image of his or her ability to cope adequately with objects and persons in the environment.	Mean=0.62 Low < 0.44 High > 0.81	0.27 (Low)
Task Orientation (TO)	The target's relative emphasis on interactions with others when dealing problems as opposed to focusing on the feelings and needs of relevant and important constituents.	Mean=0.59 Low < 0.46 High > 0.71	0.79 (High)
Distrust (D)	Wariness about others or the degree of the target's suspicion of the motives and actions of others.	Mean=0.41 Low < 0.25 High > 0.56	0.024 (Low)
In-Group Bias (IGB)	A worldview in which one's own group (social, political, ethnic, etc.) holds prominence, is perceived as superior, and/or there are strong emotional attachments to this in-group.	Mean=0.42 Low < 0.32 High > 0.63	0.14 (Low)
Need for Power (NFP)	Degree of target's concern for establishing, maintaining, or restoring one's power and/or control, influence, or have an impact on other persons or groups.	Mean=0.50 Low < 0.37 High > 0.62	0.29 (Low)

al-Assad's need for power (0.29) is in the low range and; therefore he has less of a need to be in charge and may be more amenable to subordinates assuming more prominent roles. His belief in control over events or BACE (0.42) is slightly below the mean and thus he is unlikely to be overly proactive or reactive in policy-making. This may shift somewhat as circumstances unfold. Leaders with an elevated BACE but a low need for power, tend to challenge constraint and may take charge of a situation yet fail to assess and/or exploit the nuanced approaches to interpersonal influence (Hermann, 2002). They may often be too overt or direct in their exercise of authority and risk sending the wrong message to subordinates (Hermann, 2002). Leaders with a low BACE and a low NFP generally don't challenge institutional constraints attempt to build consensus, and are open to compromise (Hermann 2002). While al-Assad's BACE is below the mean, it is not considered low and thus there is insufficient support in these data to suggest his openness to compromise

Task focus is a continuum of the rationale for gaining or maintaining a leadership position ranging from problem solving to consensus building (Hermann, 2002). For problem-solving leaders, group progress toward a goal is their desire to acquire and maintain power (Hermann, 2002). al-Assad's task orientation (or motivation for seeking/retaining office) is high at 0.79 and thus is likely to resist any notions of him relinquishing power, particularly as he views his role (much like that of his father) as seeing Syria through the current crisis (Post & Pertsis, 2011).

Both al-Assad's In-group Bias (0.14) and Distrust of Others (0.024) are low and therefore he does not perceive the world as either inherently threatening or himself as persecuted. He likely views conflicts as context-specific and does not necessarily have a generalized preference from resolving disputes. There is also likely a recognition that both himself and others do not necessarily have unlimited agency, despite their political power. These aspects suggest an openness to dialogue from out-group members, be they of an opposition or an intermediary.

5.4 Discussion

These analyses show that al-Assad's Conceptual Complexity (as a component of ProfilerPlus Leadership Trait Analysis), his Cognitive Complexity (as calculated separately by ProfilerPlus), and the use of "thinking" words in his speech (as calculated by LIWC) suggest high or moderate/high cognitive complexity that is stable over time. Both the absolute value of his conceptual complexity and the fact that it is considerably greater than his self-confidence suggests openness to contextual information.

Additional trait analyses identified that al-Assad's need for power is in the low range and; therefore he has less of a need to be in charge and may be more amenable to subordinates assuming more prominent roles. His belief in control over events is slightly below the mean and thus he is unlikely to be overly proactive or reactive in policy-making. al-Assad's task orientation is high and thus is likely to resist any notions of him

relinquishing power, particularly as he views his role (much like that of his father) as seeing Syria through the current crisis. Both al-Assad's in-group bias and distrust of others are low and therefore he does not perceive the world as either inherently threatening or himself as persecuted. He likely views conflicts as context-specific and does not necessarily have a preferred strategy for resolving disputes.

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6 Approach 4: Geopolitical Perspective **(Mr. Dana Rafter)**

(CSIS)

6.1 Introduction

On October 22nd, 2013, UK Foreign Secretary William Hague stressed that Bashar al-Assad should have “no role” in Syria’s future.³⁰ al-Assad, however, has a different view. In a televised interview on October 21st, 2013, the Syrian leader stated he saw “no obstacle” to running in the upcoming 2014 elections.³¹ In spite of numerous challenges to his regime, al-Assad has consistently viewed himself as geopolitically indispensable. Meanwhile, analysis of the Syrian leader’s rhetoric reveals that he has maintained a generally coherent and increasingly outspoken geopolitical discourse throughout his rule. Within this framework, al-Assad continues to see himself as essential to the regional order.

This study provides a qualitative interpretation of al-Assad’s speeches, interviews, and public statements from his assumption of power in June 2000 until today. When possible, these texts are analyzed in original Arabic (Note: CSIS selection of speeches was independent of that of the UBC team). In other cases, English translations are used. Many of these texts have been paraphrased or edited by the Syrian government or media outlets, so one must exercise caution in drawing broader conclusions from this analysis. However, the records available nevertheless provide significant insight into al-Assad’s geopolitical perspective.³²

First, this analysis will address the Syrian leader’s rhetoric regarding strategic economic cooperative blocs in the Middle East and Caucasus region. Afterwards, the article will discuss al-Assad’s geopolitical shift towards Turkey and the Gulf states during his rule, as well as his language concerning Russia, China, and Iran. Finally, the study will examine the leader’s approach towards United States, Europe, and the United Nations and look at significant political events to which al-Assad has referred since becoming president.

³⁰ Laura Smith-Park, “UK Foreign Secretary Hague: No role for Bashar al-Assad in future Syria,” *CNN World*, October 23, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/22/world/syria-civil-war/>

³¹ “al-Assad to al-Mayadeen: No obstacle to running in elections, and Saudi Arabia is now waging war against Syria,” Al-Mayadeen TV, October 21, 2013, Translated by Author, http://www.almayadeen.net/ar/news/syria-7n8CK6i_r0KusqleATJeQQ/

³² For more information, see “Methodological Note” below.

6.2 **Geopolitical Discourse Development**

6.2.1 **Syria as Essential**

Until the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, al-Assad's geopolitical discourse promoted himself, and by association his regime, as the key strategic link between two distinct regional economic partnerships. On one hand, the Syrian leader aimed to solidify his country's relationships with Turkey, Iran, Iraq, as well as with some countries in the Caucasus. This network of strengthened relations, al-Assad hoped, would form a strategic bloc of nations that could facilitate energy and transportation among the Mediterranean, Black, and Caspian Seas, as well as the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, he strived to promote Syria as the key link between this cooperative bloc and a future Arab economic union.

al-Assad's speeches from February 2001 to June 2011 reveal the Syrian leader's friendly geopolitical approach towards Turkey during this period. He talked of ever-expanding political and economic relations and repeatedly praised Turkish mediation in the Middle East Peace Process. Furthermore, al-Assad continually highlighted cultural commonalities, trust, and "mutual interests" between the two countries.³³

Meanwhile, al-Assad wanted to build upon Turkish relations to branch out in the region. Starting in May 2009, he hinted at establishing a cooperative bloc of countries that would include Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran.³⁴ al-Assad implied this group of nations would facilitate energy investment and transport among the Black, Mediterranean, and Caspian Seas, as well as the Persian Gulf.³⁵ In particular, he mentioned importing gas and oil through Turkey and increased transport and energy investment between Azerbaijan and Syria.³⁶

³³ "Bashar al-Assad's Talk with the Qatar Al-Jazeera Channel," President al-Assad Net, April 26, 2004, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=971:26-2004&catid=296&Itemid=469; "Presidents al-Assad/Ahmadinejad Press Conference," President al-Assad Net, May 5, 2009, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=389:presidents-al-Assad-ahmadinejad-press-conference-may-5-2009&catid=115&Itemid=496

³⁴ "Presidents al-Assad/Gul Press Conference," President al-Assad Net, May 15, 2009, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=390:presidents-al-Assad-gul-press-conference-may-15-2009&catid=115&Itemid=496

³⁵ "Presidents al-Assad/Gul Press Conference," President al-Assad Net, May 15, 2009, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=390:presidents-al-Assad-gul-press-conference-may-15-2009&catid=115&Itemid=496; "Presidents al-Assad/Azerbaijan Visit," July 8-9, 2009, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=394:presidents-al-Assad-azerbaijan-visit-july-8-9-2009&catid=115&Itemid=496

³⁶ "Presidents al-Assad/Azerbaijan Visit," President al-Assad Net, July 8-9, 2009, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, <http://www.presidential->

Additionally, the leader expressed interest in revamping the Higher Syrian Azerbaijani Committee to encourage transport, oil, and gas cooperation.³⁷ Such comments reveal the Syrian leader's desire to economically integrate his country with immediate regional neighbors.

Throughout 2009 and 2010, al-Assad also talked of groundbreaking economic relations between a cohort of nations consisting of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Iran, and Syria.³⁸ He additionally hinted at Iraq's membership in this group, saying he was optimistic that the Iraqi government would be able to strengthen its relations with neighbors in the region.³⁹ Furthermore, the relationship between Syria and Turkey at this time was, in al-Assad's view, a model for other countries to follow.⁴⁰ He implied that Syria's increasingly strong relationship with Turkey would enable expanded oil and gas infrastructure that could bring energy exports to Europe through Syria.⁴¹

While the Syrian leader endeavored to build an economic cooperative bloc of nations to the north of his country, he also strove to form a larger, yet less concrete economic union based

Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=394:presidents-al-Assad-azerbaijan-visit-july-8-9-2009&catid=115&Itemid=496

³⁷ "Presidents al-Assad/Azerbaijan Visit," President al-Assad Net, July 8-9, 2009, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=394:presidents-al-Assad-azerbaijan-visit-july-8-9-2009&catid=115&Itemid=496

³⁸ "Istanbul Joint Press Conference with President Bashar al-Assad and his Turkish Counterpart Abdullah Gul," President al-Assad Net, May 8, 2010, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1079:8-2010&catid=302&Itemid=469

³⁹ "Istanbul Joint Press Conference with President Bashar al-Assad and his Turkish Counterpart Abdullah Gul," President al-Assad Net, May 8, 2010, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1079:8-2010&catid=302&Itemid=469; "Presidents al-Assad/Armenia Visit," President al-Assad Net, June 17, 2009, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=392:presidents-al-Assad-armenia-visit-june-17-2009&catid=115:2009&Itemid=496

⁴⁰ "Istanbul Joint Press Conference with President Bashar al-Assad and his Turkish Counterpart Abdullah Gul," President al-Assad Net, May 8, 2010, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1079:8-2010&catid=302&Itemid=469; "President Bashar al-Assad's Statements during his Participation in a Special Arab Summit Session in Sirte, Libya," President al-Assad Net, October 9, 2010, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1065:9&catid=302&Itemid=469

⁴¹ "President al-Assad Austria Visit Statements," President al-Assad Net, April 27, 2009, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=387:president-al-Assad-austria-visit-statements-april-27-2009&catid=115&Itemid=496

upon his ideological Arab nationalist convictions. From the beginning of his rule until the onset of the Syrian crisis, al-Assad expressed the desire to establish a common Arab market. In July 2000, he suggested he would like to cooperate with the Arab League to create a joint Arab market, and his statements until 2010 reflected al-Assad's enduring desire to do so.⁴² However, the Syrian president consistently left out details for such a proposal. Unlike al-Assad's statements regarding a potential economic bloc with Syria's northern neighbors, he did not detail which industries would bring a possible Arab common market together, or which institutions could be strengthened to establish such a market.

Within a broader geopolitical context, al-Assad's aim to create two geographically intersecting economic unions pointed to his desire to promote his country, and thereby his regime, as an increasingly important trading partner in the region. A potential common Arab market would have included most of the Arabic-speaking world, while al-Assad's desired northern economic bloc would have encompassed much of the Islamic world's Shiite population, as well as partners such as Turkey and Armenia. Meanwhile, this arrangement would have placed Syria and Iraq in an economically advantageous position—these countries would have presumably held membership in both blocs. Therefore, by endorsing the formation of these two economic groupings, al-Assad promoted his country, as well as Iraq, as a gateway between the two alignments. Considering Iraqi instability that the Syrian leader was likely to expect throughout the next decade, Syria would be the primary link.

6.2.2 Geopolitical Shift

Once Syria plunged into civil war, this strategic geopolitical discourse vanished from al-Assad's public rhetoric. As stated above, the Syrian leader depicted Turkey as an increasingly important partner before his country's crisis. In particular, he portrayed strengthened Syrian-Turkish relations as the backbone of his regional economic approach. After protesters began challenging al-Assad's rule, the leader became more cautious in his language towards Turkey. At the onset of conflict, the Syrian president refrained from directly blaming his northern neighbor, and throughout 2011, al-Assad did not tie Turkey to the opposition movements with which his government was struggling.

⁴² "President al-Assad 2000 Inauguration Speech," President al-Assad Net, July 17, 2000, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=438:president-al-Assad-2000-inauguration-speech-july-17-2000-3&catid=106&Itemid=496; "President Bashar al-Assad's Statements during his Participation in a Special Arab Summit Session in Sirte, Libya," President al-Assad Net, October 9, 2010, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1065:9&catid=302&Itemid=469; "Bashar al-Assad's Speech at the Arab Parliament," President al-Assad Net, November 11, 2008, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1022:11-2008&catid=300&Itemid=469; "Bashar al-Assad's Speech at the Economic Summit in Kuwait," January 20, 2009, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1049:20-2009&catid=301&Itemid=469

However, by August 2012 the president stated that Turkey had some responsibility for the “bloodshed” that his country was experiencing.⁴³ In late 2012, al-Assad depicted the full extent of Turkish aggression. He said that the Turkish government was “against” him, and that Erdogan hopes to establish an Islamist government in his stead.⁴⁴ Throughout 2012 and 2013, al-Assad only mentioned Turkey in reference to its interference in Syrian affairs, particularly regarding Turkish logistical and financial support for “terrorists.”⁴⁵ Perhaps most indicative of al-Assad’s dashed hopes for a strategic partnership with Turkey is an excerpt from the leader’s interview with Russian media in August 2013:

It is pitiful that a great country such as Turkey, which bears a strategic location and a liberal society, is being manipulated by a meagre [*sic*] amount of dollars through a Gulf state harboring a regressive mentality.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, al-Assad’s references to large economic cooperative blocs no longer appear in his public speeches and statements after the onset of the Syrian crisis. Throughout 2012 and 2013, the Syrian leader made no mention of a strategic trade partnership with northern countries in the region, nor with fellow Arab nations. When referencing international economic relations in general, al-Assad only portrayed them in a negative light. During the past two years, he has lamented Syrian weakness due to a heavy reliance on imports and has underscored the detrimental effect of international embargoes.⁴⁷ Additionally, he has expressed regret regarding Syrian financial ties with nations who previously “colonized” his country.⁴⁸ The primary country with which he now expressed a desire to strengthen economic ties is Russia.⁴⁹

⁴³ “Bashar al-Assad interview,” al-Bab, August 29, 2012, http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/syria/bashar_al-Assad_interview_120829.htm

⁴⁴ “al-Assad: Erdogan thinks he’s Caliph, new sultan of the Ottoman,” TV-Novosti, November 9, 2012, <http://rt.com/news/al-Assad-interview-exclusive-syria-265/>

⁴⁵ “Bashar Al al-Assad Interview on 29 August 2012,” *Syrian Free Press Network*, August 29, 2012, <http://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2012/08/29/president-bashar-al-Assad-interview-on-29-august-2012-2-video/>; Syria: President Bashar al-Assad: Full Interview and Transcript,” *Global Research*, May 31, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/president-bashar-al-Assad-full-interview/5337030>

⁴⁶ “President al-Assad: ‘Syria will Never become a Western Puppet State,’” *Global Research*, August 26, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/president-al-Assad-syria-will-never-become-a-western-puppet-state/5346955>

⁴⁷ “‘Syria will remain free’ – President Bashar al-Assad speech on January 10, 2012,” *Syrian Free Press Network*, January 15, 2012, <http://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2012/01/15/syria-will-remain-free-president-bashar-al-Assad-speech-on-january-10-2012-full-english-text-2/>; “President al-Assad’s 2012 Damascus University Speech,” *President al-Assad Net*, 2012, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=274:president-al-Assad-s-2012-damascus-university-speech&catid=118&Itemid=496; “Speech Delivered by H.E. President Bashar al-Assad At the People’s Assembly,” *President al-Assad Net*, June 4, 2012, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=276:speech-delivered&catid=118&Itemid=496;

⁴⁸ “President al-Assad’s Directions to Government,” *President al-Assad Network*, June 26, 2012, <http://www.presidential->

6.2.3 Change towards Gulf States

al-Assad's language towards Persian Gulf states also shifted during the time period under discussion. His speeches from 2001 until 2011 revealed a generally positive tone towards GCC states. He applauded Gulf states' support for the Syrian position regarding negotiations with Israel over the Golan heights, and he emphasized the need for Arab solidarity between Syria and Gulf states.⁵⁰ In 2007, al-Assad warned of Gulf influence in Lebanon.⁵¹ However, he later declared his pleasure with Qatari negotiation during the Doha Agreement, specifically giving credit to Emir of Qatar.⁵²

In March 2011, the Syrian leader started to hint at the dangerous influence of satellite channels on the country's domestic situation, most likely in reference to Gulf stations such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya.⁵³ Beginning in August 2012, al-Assad linked Syria's opposition movement to Gulf states, but did not clearly state that these states were actively seeking to destabilize the current situation.⁵⁴ By November 2012, his language grew bolder. al-Assad accused Gulf states of using "petrodollars" to further their interests at the expense of the Syrian state, and in May 2013 he clearly accused these countries of bankrolling terrorists in his country.⁵⁵

Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=303:president-al-Assad-s-directions&catid=118&Itemid=496; "President Bashar al-Assad interview with Barbara Walters," *Syrian Free Press Network*, July 12, 2011, <http://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2011/12/10/president-bashar-al-Assad-interview-with-barbara-walters-abc-news-7122011/>

⁴⁹ "President al-Assad: "Syria will Never become a Western Puppet State," *Global Research*, August 26, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/president-al-Assad-syria-will-never-become-a-western-puppet-state/5346955>

⁵⁰ "Interview with Bashar al-Assad," Al-Bab, February 8, 2001, <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/countries/syria/bashar0102a.htm#ARAB>

⁵¹ [President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with Tunisian Shorouk Newspaper](http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1006:11-2007&catid=299&Itemid=469), "President al-Assad Net, November 11, 2007, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1006:11-2007&catid=299&Itemid=469

⁵² "President al-Assad France Visit Statements," President al-Assad Net, July 12-14, 2008, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=406:president-al-Assad-france-visit-statements-july-12-14-2008&catid=114&Itemid=496

⁵³ "Syria: Speech by Bashar al-Assad," al-Bab, June 20, 2011, http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/syria/bashar_al-Assad_speech_110330.htm

⁵⁴ "Syria: Speech by Bashar al-Assad," al-Bab, June 20, 2011, http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/syria/bashar_al-Assad_speech_110620.htm; "Bashar al-Assad interview," al-Bab, August 29, 2012, http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/syria/bashar_al-Assad_interview_120829.htm

⁵⁵ "al-Assad: Erdogan thinks he's Caliph, new sultan of the Ottoman," TV-Novosti, November 9, 2012, <http://rt.com/news/al-Assad-interview-exclusive-syria-265/>; <http://www.globalresearch.ca/president-bashar-al-Assad-full-interview/5337030>

6.2.4 **Base of Supporters**

From the beginning of his rule until today, al-Assad has grown increasingly outspoken about his ties with Russia, China, and Iran. In particular, al-Assad has remained most consistent regarding how he portrays his relations with Russia. From 2001 until today, the Syrian leader has continually encouraged and praised the Russian role in the Middle East peace process.⁵⁶ While consistently tying his country's economic security to that of Russia, he has also drawn parallels between Syria's struggle with violent fundamentalism on one hand, and Russia's confrontation with terrorism in Chechnya on the other.⁵⁷ Moreover, after the Syrian uprising Russia is the only country with which al-Assad underscores his significant financial ties.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, al-Assad does not refer to China frequently in his public statements and interviews. However, in December 2005 the Syrian leader portrayed his close relationship with China, as well as Russia, as part of a "bloc" that is concerned about the uneven international balance of power.⁵⁹

al-Assad has seemed most reluctant to openly acknowledge his ties with Iran. In the early years of his rule, he rarely noted Iran as a significant international partner for Syria. In December 2005, the Syrian leader shied away from saying that Iran is an "ally."⁶⁰ However, by May 2009 al-Assad acknowledged his country's "strategic" alliance with Iran based upon "principles."⁶¹ Throughout 2009 and 2010, he grew slightly warmer. He noted the "special relationship" his country enjoys with Iran, describing Syrian ties with the country as deep

⁵⁶ "President al-Assad/Amman Summit Speech," President al-Assad Net, March 27, 2001, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=434:president-al-Assad-amman-summit-speech-march-27-2001&catid=107&Itemid=496; "President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with Russia's Channel 2," General Organization of Radio and TV- Syria, December 11, 2005, <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623&id=f1134254054>; "al-Assad: Erdogan thinks he's Caliph, new sultan of the Ottoman," TV-Novosti, November 9, 2012, <http://rt.com/news/al-Assad-interview-exclusive-syria-265/>

⁵⁷ "President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with Russia's Channel 2," General Organization of Radio and TV- Syria, December 11, 2005, <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623&id=f1134254054>; "President Bashar al-Assad's Dinner Speech in Honor of Russian President Dimitri Medvedev," President al-Assad Net, May 10, 2010, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1078:10&catid=302&Itemid=469; "al-Assad: Erdogan thinks he's Caliph, new sultan of the Ottoman," TV-Novosti, November 9, 2012, <http://rt.com/news/al-Assad-interview-exclusive-syria-265/>

⁵⁸ <http://www.globalresearch.ca/president-al-Assad-syria-will-never-become-a-western-puppet-state/5346955>

⁵⁹ "President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with Sky News, Turkey," General Organization of Radio and TV- Syria, December 27, 2005, <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623&id=f1135656313>

⁶⁰ <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623&id=f1131124660>

⁶¹ "President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with France 3 Television Station," President al-Assad Net, December 5, 2005, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=389:presidents-al-Assad-ahmadinejad-press-conference-may-5-2009&catid=115&Itemid=496

and strong.⁶² During the Syrian crisis, the Syrian leader has periodically underscored his country's bonds with Iran and Hezbollah, but he has downplayed any Iranian intervention in the crisis.⁶³

al-Assad's reluctance to admit significant geopolitical ties with Iran and Hezbollah may be part of the leader's strategy to preserve his rule. In a dominantly Sunni country, the majority of Syria's population is likely to view the regime's financial and political ties with Iran in a negative light. Sunni-Shiite antagonism has a long and at times violent history in the Levant, and polarization has strengthened since the onset of the Syria crisis. Indicative of this turn is a rhetorical shift among influential Sunni preachers in the Middle East. Prominent Qatar-based Sunni sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who praised Hezbollah in previous years, has intensified his fiery rhetoric against Iran and Shia community since 2011.⁶⁴ al-Assad is probably aware of well-known Sunni sheikhs' influence, even among Syrian middle class Sunnis who support the Ba'athist regime. While attempting to maintain his rule, al-Assad likely realizes that openly speaking of strong Iranian-Hezbollah ties could jeopardize Sunni elements of his country that are still loyal.

6.2.5 Approach towards the West and International Community

6.2.5.1 United States

al-Assad's approach towards the United States remained fairly constant throughout the time period under examination. Although the Syrian leader repeatedly recognized the necessity of U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, he depicted the United States as an increasingly malicious force in the region. While he made his disapproval of the U.S. presence in Iraq clear, he acknowledged the necessity of the American role in Middle East peace process.⁶⁵ From 2000 until 2005, al-Assad repeatedly called upon the United

⁶² "President Bashar al-Assad's Joint Press Conference with the President of Finland," President al-Assad Net, November 22, 2009, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1034:22-2009&catid=301&Itemid=469

⁶³ "Syria: speech by Bashar al-Assad," Al-Bab, June 20, 2011, http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/syria/bashar_al-Assad_speech_110620.htm; "Syria: Bashar al-Assad interview," Al-Bab, August 29, 2012, http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/syria/bashar_al-Assad_interview_120829.htm; "al-Assad: Erdogan thinks he's Caliph, new sultan of the Ottoman," TV-Novosti, November 9, 2012, <http://rt.com/news/al-Assad-interview-exclusive-syria-265/>; <http://www.globalresearch.ca/syrias-president-bashar-al-Assad-power-lies-in-your-ability-to-prevent-wars-not-in-igniting-them/5347832>

⁶⁴ "Al-Qaradawi: 'The Shia deceived me, and Hezbollah is a big lie,'" *Al-Arabiya Net*, June 2, 2013, Translated by Author, <http://www.alarabiya.net/ar/arab-and-world/syria/2013/06/02/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%AE%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%83%D8%B0%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-.html>

⁶⁵ "President al-Assad 2000 Inauguration Speech," President al-Assad Net, July 17, 2000, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=438:president-al-Assad-2000-inauguration-speech-july-17-2000-3&catid=106&Itemid=496; "Bashar al-Assad's Talk with

States to mediate between Israel and the Arab world, and he even called the United States the “essential patron of the peace process.”⁶⁶ He also frequently stated that he was open to cooperating with the United States to improve relations.⁶⁷

Starting in August 2006, however, al-Assad’s language towards the United States turned progressively hostile. Throughout 2006 and 2007, al-Assad claimed that the United States used the United Nations to destroy Middle Eastern stability, and he glorified martyrdom in resisting U.S. occupation in Iraq.⁶⁸ As early as November 2011, al-Assad began to paint himself as the direct target and victim of U.S. action. While he repeatedly depicted Syria as the indirect victim of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, as well as of “conspiracies” against Syria in Lebanon, his language significantly shifted as the Syrian crisis intensified. In November 2012, he stated that the United States was “against” him, and that it was supporting “terrorists” through its conduits in Turkey.⁶⁹

6.2.5.2 Europe

During most of his rule, al-Assad remained decidedly neutral towards European countries. He repeatedly lamented the disproportionate amount of U.S. influence over European foreign policy, and he consistently called for a larger role for the European Union in the region. Within this framework, the Syrian leader saw in Europe potential to soften U.S. influence in the Middle East.

the Qatar Al-Jazeera Channel,” President al-Assad Net, April 26, 2004, Translated by Author, <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623&id=f1118749152>;

⁶⁶ “President al-Assad 2000 Inauguration Speech,” President al-Assad Net, July 17, 2000, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=438:president-al-Assad-2000-inauguration-speech-july-17-2000-3&catid=106&Itemid=496; “President Bashar al-Assad’s Interview with France 3 Television Station,” President al-Assad Net, December 5, 2005, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=982:2013-04-15-10-52-33&catid=297&Itemid=469

⁶⁷ “Interview with Bashar al-Assad,” Al-Bab, February 8, 2001, <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/countries/syria/bashar0102a.htm#ARAB>; “President al-Assad/ 2005 Parliament Speech,” President al-Assad Net, March 5, 2005, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=423:president-al-Assad-2005-parliament-speech-march-5-2005&catid=111&Itemid=496

⁶⁸ “President al-Assad, Journalist Union Speech,” President al-Assad Net, August 15, 2006, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=421:president-al-Assad-journalists-union-speech-august-15-2006&catid=112&Itemid=496; President Bashar al-Assad’s Interview with Tunisian Shorouk Newspaper,” President al-Assad Net, November 11, 2007, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1006:11-2007&catid=299&Itemid=469

⁶⁹ “al-Assad: Erdogan thinks he’s Caliph, new sultan of the Ottoman,” TV-Novosti, November 9, 2012, <http://rt.com/news/al-Assad-interview-exclusive-syria-265/>

In particular, al-Assad linked his country's economy to European well-being, saying that a strong Syrian economy could curb the flow of migrants to the EU.⁷⁰ al-Assad was also consistently friendlier in his language towards Mediterranean and Southern European countries. He often stressed cultural and social "commonalities" between these countries and Syria, and he expressed support for Mediterranean positions in the Middle East peace process.⁷¹

Regarding France, al-Assad maintained a generally positive tone until the beginning of the Syrian crisis. In 2001, the Syrian leader noted that France has an inherent political advantage in its relations with the Middle East due to its unique historical and cultural proximity to the region.⁷² In 2005, however, al-Assad criticized French involvement in UN resolution 1559, calling the development a U.S. conspiracy against Syria.⁷³ According to al-Assad during this period, France had been subjugated by American policy in the region.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, al-Assad abandoned his hostile language towards French foreign policy by 2008. In July 2008, the Syrian leader praised French "independence" from the United States, and in December 2010 he talked of rapidly improving relations and "expanding horizons" between his country and France.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ "President al-Assad Austria Visit Statements," President al-Assad Net, April 27, 2009, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=387:president-al-Assad-austria-visit-statements-april-27-2009&catid=115&Itemid=496

⁷¹ "President al-Assad's Interview with France 2 Television Channel," General Organization of Radio and TV- Syria, June 6, 2001, <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623&id=f1118749141>; "President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with Greek ETR Television Station," General Organization of Radio and TV- Syria, November 14, 2003, <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623&id=f1118749146>; "Presidents al-Assad/ President Napolitano Conference," President al-Assad Net, March 18, 2010, Edited and Translated by Mohamed Abdo Al-Ibrahim, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=361:presidents-al-Assad-president-napolitano-conference-march-18-2010&catid=116&Itemid=496

⁷² "President al-Assad's Interview with France 2 Television Channel," General Organization of Radio and TV- Syria, June 6, 2001, <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623&id=f1118749141>

⁷³ "President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with France 3 Television Station," President al-Assad Net, December 5, 2005, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=982:2013-04-15-10-52-33&catid=297&Itemid=469

⁷⁴ "President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with France 3 Television Station," President al-Assad Net, December 5, 2005, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=982:2013-04-15-10-52-33&catid=297&Itemid=469

⁷⁵ "President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with Dubai Television Channel," President al-Assad Net, July 17, 2008, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1014:17-2008&catid=300:2008&Itemid=469; "President Bashar al-Assad's Press Statements during his Visit to France," President al-Assad Net, December 9-10, 2010, Translated by Author, <http://www.presidential->

After the Syrian crisis, al-Assad ended his warm language towards France. Throughout 2011, the Syrian leader made no significant mention of French foreign policy. Beginning in 2012, he repeatedly referenced France's occupation of Syria when attempting to demonstrate foreign powers' desire to divide and destroy Syria.⁷⁶ In early 2013, al-Assad escalated his rhetoric towards the country, implying that France is either "directly or indirectly" supporting terrorism.⁷⁷ By mid-2013, the Syrian leader directly linked French foreign policy to his country's conflict, claiming that a "hostile" France is looking to further its interests in Syria through proxies in the region.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the president's denunciation of French interference has grown stronger into late-2013. al-Assad has continually referenced French attempts to "manipulate" the situation in Syria, thereby drawing parallels to Syria's struggle to maintain unity during the French rule during the beginning of the 20th century.⁷⁹

6.2.5.3 United Nations

Throughout his time as president, al-Assad has gradually become more critical of the UN. While he generally expresses his "support" for the international organization, he has increasingly criticized the UN's subservience to a small group of powerful countries.

In 2000 and 2001, the Syrian leader underscored the UN's significance in peace negotiations with Israel, implying that Israel is primarily to blame for UN inadequacies.⁸⁰ Beginning in

Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1054:9-10-2010&catid=302&Itemid=469

⁷⁶ "Bashar al-Assad: Full Speech Delivered at the People's Assembly," *Syrian Free Press Network*, June 4, 2012 <http://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2012/06/04/bashar-al-Assad-full-speech-delivered-at-the-peoples-assembly-on-june-3-2012-eng/>; "Syria: Bashar al-Assad Interview," *Al-Baba*, August 29, 2012, http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/syria/bashar_al-Assad_interview_120829.htm

⁷⁷ "Syria President al-Assad's Interview with The Sunday Times," *Global Research*, March 3, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/syria-president-al-Assads-interview-with-the-sunday-times/5325083>; "Syria: President Bashar al-Assad: Full Interview and Transcript," *Global Research*, May 31, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/president-bashar-al-Assad-full-interview/5337030>

⁷⁸ "Syria President Bashar al-Assad: Foreign Interference is a 'Red Line'. Danger of 'Domino Effect' throughout the Middle East," *Global Research*, April 6, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/syria-president-bashar-al-Assad-foreign-interference-is-a-red-line-danger-of-domino-effect-throughout-the-middle-east/5330145>; "President Bashar al-Assad: Fighting Terrorism in Syria," *Global Research*, June 17, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/president-bashar-al-Assad-fighting-terrorism-in-syria-rebuilding-in-the-wake-of-the-crisis-interview-with-the-frankfurter-allgemeine-zeitung/5339481>

⁷⁹ "Bashar Al al-Assad Interview on Political Islam, The Egyptian Crisis, and Foreign Intervention," *Global Research*, July 6, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/bashar-al-Assad-interview-on-political-islam-the-egyptian-crisis-and-foreign-intervention/5341856>; "Syria's President Bashar al-Assad: 'Power Lies in your Ability to Prevent Wars, not in Igniting Them,'" *Global Research*, September 3, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/syrias-president-bashar-al-Assad-power-lies-in-your-ability-to-prevent-wars-not-in-igniting-them/5347832>

⁸⁰ "President al-Assad 9th OIC Summit Speech," President al-Assad Net, November 13, 2000, <http://www.presidential->

2003, al-Assad increasingly called the UN's relevance into question. Until the Syrian crisis, he suggested that a small group of powerful countries, the United States in particular, exercises disproportionate influence over the international body.⁸¹ In December 2005, he goes as far as to imply that the UN promotes an anti-Islamic agenda. He therefore asserted that the OIC will gain legitimacy in the Arab world at the expense of the UN.⁸²

Although the Syrian leader has increasingly displayed his frustration with the UN in the wake of the Syrian crisis, his language has remained fairly constant. Before and after the popular uprising, al-Assad has continued his geopolitical discourse of Western control of the international community and by implication the UN.⁸³

6.2.6 Events behind the Rhetoric

Events that have likely influenced al-Assad's language throughout his rule include developments in Lebanon, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, NATO intervention in Libya, and the Syrian Crisis—he has repeatedly referred to these developments in his statements, interviews, and speeches. In particular, 2005 and 2006 mark a period of significant hardening in al-Assad's rhetoric towards the West and the international community. In August 2006, al-Assad mentioned UN resolutions 1559, 1701, and 1780, as well as the accusations of Syrian involvement in the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, when criticizing UN subservience to the United States, Israel, and other Western countries.⁸⁴ Moreover, al-Assad has increasingly underlined how Syria and the Middle East

Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=98:president-al-Assad-9th-oic-summit-speech-november-13-2000&catid=106&Itemid=496; "President al-Assad Welcome Speech to the Greek President," President al-Assad Net, February 2, 2002,

<http://www.presidential->

Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=431:president-al-Assad-welcome-speech-to-the-greek-president-february-2-2002&catid=108&Itemid=496

⁸¹ "President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with Greek ETR Television Station," General Organization of Radio and TV- Syria, November 14, 2003,

<http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623&id=f1118749146>; "President al-Assad Speech to the Syrian Expatriates Conference," President al-Assad Net, October 9, 2004,

<http://www.presidential->

Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=426:president-al-Assad-speech-to-the-syrian-expatriates-conference-october-9-2004&catid=110&Itemid=496;

⁸² "President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with Sky News, Turkey," General Organization of Radio and TV- Syria, December 27, 2005,

<http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623&id=f1135656313>

⁸³ "'Syria will remain free' – President Bashar al-Assad speech on January 10, 2012," Syrian Free Press Network, January 15, 2012,

<http://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2012/01/15/syria-will-remain-free-president-bashar-al-Assad-speech-on-january-10-2012-full-english-text-2/>; "'This Conspiracy is Spreading all over Syria,' President Bashar Al al-Assad's Speech with Translation," Center for Research on Globalization, January 6, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/this-conspiracy-is-spreading-all-over-syria-president-bashar-al-Assads-speech-with-translation/5317879>

⁸⁴ "President al-Assad/Journalists Union Speech," President al-Assad Net, August 15, 2006, <http://www.presidential->

have paid a grave price for the instability that the United States caused in Iraq during this period.⁸⁵

However, the leader's increased attention to the international stage in these years may hint at larger problems within the regime itself. Syria's former interior minister Ghazi Kanaan, as well as his brother, died in 2005 and 2006 respectively under ambiguous circumstances, which local media reports described as "suicide."⁸⁶ While many observers attributed the men's death to controversy surrounding the then-ongoing investigation into al-Hariri's assassination in Lebanon, there are other possible implications. Kanaan and his brother were prominent members of the country's Alawite sect, hailing from the same region as the al-Assad clan. It is possible that these deaths were a symptom of a power struggle within the Alawite community at the time. Perhaps Bashar al-Assad's increasingly strong rhetoric towards the West was at least partially meant to distract the Syrian public from internal regime weakness, thereby directing attention to seemingly sinister foreign powers.

Conversely, it may be possible that the Syrian leader's shift in rhetoric is partially due to his increased confidence. As al-Assad has spent more time in his position, he has likely become more comfortable and secure as Syria's head of state. This enhanced sense of situational awareness and confidence may have contributed to al-Assad's increasingly outspoken positions throughout his rule.

6.3 Methodological Note

This exploration of al-Assad's geopolitical perspective has limits. Sources for this analysis are largely from pro-al-Assad websites. Some of the speeches seem to have been edited or paraphrased. It is probable that government sensors have removed any trace of public statements or speeches that may have revealed certain geopolitical tendencies that the Baath regime does not feel comfortable admitting, such as its close relationship with Hezbollah or dependence on Iran.

Moreover, al-Assad's speeches are likely written with the help of advisers. This analysis therefore does not only gauge al-Assad's geopolitical perspective, but that of those who help him write his speeches. It is difficult to know whether the Syrian president's public

Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=421:president-al-Assad-journalists-union-speech-august-15-2006&catid=112&Itemid=496

⁸⁵"President Bashar al-Assad's Interview with CNN," President al-Assad Net, October 12, 2005, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=980:cnn-12-2005&catid=297&Itemid=469; "President Bashar al-Assad's Speech at the University of Damascus Amphitheatre," President al-Assad Net, November 10, 2005, Translated by Author, http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=981:10-2005&catid=297&Itemid=469

⁸⁶ "Syrian minister commits suicide," *CNN World*, October 13, 2005, <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/10/12/syria.minister/index.html>; Omar Raad, "Connecting the dots in Lebanon," December 2, 2006, *Ya Libnan*, http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2006/12/connecting_the.php

speeches and statements are a better reflection on his own geopolitical view, or of a group of influential individuals within the ruling Alawite clan.

Meanwhile, records of al-Assad's speeches from 2002 until 2004, as well as from 2011, are underrepresented in the sample. It is possible that the government does not wish to publicize themes that the president presents in these texts, or it may be the government's recordkeeping was less efficient during these years. It is therefore probable that this analysis reflects particular themes that the ruling regime wishes to present to the international community.

Additionally, this analysis is only indicative of geopolitical themes in al-Assad's rhetoric. His rhetoric, which is likely to contain deception and opacity, may not entirely reflect the Syrian government's actions or official policy.

Approach 5: Reactions to Bashar al-Assad's social media campaign in Arabic social media (Ms. Jacquelyn Chinn, Mr. Patrick Issa and Dr. Randy Kluver)

(Texas A&M⁸⁷)

Summary: In 2012, President Bashar al-Assad termed his relations with nations in the West and in other regions of the Middle East a “media war”⁸⁸. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which the al-Assad regime is able to impact broad public opinion, as evidenced by content and trends in social media across the region. In a very real sense, the regime has engaged in a “digital diplomacy” campaign, to use social media to bypass foreign leaders and media outlets to engage directly with foreign publics, particularly in the Arab world. Our findings lead us to conclude that al-Assad is losing the so-called media war, and thus has little ability to define and shape public opinion in the region. Content from his speeches gained very little traction or response on the social networking platform Twitter, the dominant form of social media in the region and the primary focus of this study. We found that while there was much discourse on the platform *about* al-Assad, very little redistributed content *from* al-Assad has penetrated the social media space. While al-Assad has attempted to use digital diplomacy to bypass foreign leaders and engage directly with the global community to advance the regime’s narrative, our findings indicate this effort has been largely ineffective.

Using, advanced Human Language Technologies (HLT) applications developed and integrated by Raytheon BBN and Machine Translation developed by SDL⁸⁹, this assessment analyzes the relative Twitter engagement of Arabic language tweeters with selected PR events from al-Assad’s media campaign in the months of August and September 2013. Our findings indicate that among a measure of these influential Arabic language users on Twitter, few are re-engaging with the President’s content on Twitter surrounding these press events, nor are they re-engaging and redistributing materials from the selected speeches and interviews. In a second phase of analysis, we looked at the larger engagement of the regime on Twitter as well as the larger Syrian Twitter community’s engagement with these issues

⁸⁷ The authors would like to extend our sincere appreciation to Kathleen Egan with DOD’s Technology Support Working Group for her strong support of our research initiatives with the Media Monitoring System. We would also like to thank Sean Colbath and Martha Lillie with Raytheon BBN Technologies for their support in the data collection associated with this project and technical support for the WMS2.

⁸⁷ <http://www.globalresearch.ca/video-exclusive-interview-with-president-bashar-al-Assad-the-west-s-media-war-against-syria/30908>

⁸⁸ <http://www.globalresearch.ca/video-exclusive-interview-with-president-bashar-al-Assad-the-west-s-media-war-against-syria/30908>

⁸⁹

6.4 Phase One Research Questions

We assessed response to al-Assad's PR events in the following ways:

RQ1: What is the level of engagement to al-Assad's speeches within the Arabic twittersphere (or the community of influential Arab language Twitter users?)⁹⁰

RQ2: What is the type and sentiment of the engagement with al-Assad's speeches and interviews within the Arabic Twittersphere?

RQ3: Who are the dominant drivers of conversation on Twitter responding to al-Assad's speeches and interviews within the Arabic Twittersphere?

6.5 Method

6.5.1 Selection of Users & Tweets

Our focus for the study was to identify the level of engagement and sentiment of the most influential set of users within the Arabic language Twittersphere. Research using WMS2 is aimed at identifying responses from this particular set of users to regional and global trends, as individuals who subsequently influence trends in their respective regions. Thus, in the summer of 2012, we identified 300 influential social media users in the Arabic language Twittersphere. The Twitter feeds were gathered with the intent of obtaining a normalized sample of the Middle East. Thus, the selection of 300 twitter profiles was conducted systematically by looking at 13 Arabic speaking countries in the Persian Gulf and Levant regions. Each user's profiles are written in Arabic, though some tweeted both in English and Arabic. Although the original seeding of feeds was normalized by nation, the final set of users was a more limited set of high impact social media users.

We examined each country individually and determined user influence based on a combination of numerous variables: number of tweets posted in a 24 hour period, the topics of their tweets, number of followers, occupation, and societal status (i.e. pop star, political commentator, religious figure etc.). The list also included influential news organizations and institutions such as Al Jazeera, Daily Monitor, and Aslan Media. However, each country has a very different social media usage pattern, because of differing degrees of technical, governmental and cultural limitations. For example, the technological infrastructure in

⁹⁰ *Twittersphere* is a term that refers to the internetworked relationship of Twitter users. Although the total number of Twitter users in the region is changing day by day, there is a clear and identifiable community of users who form a type of community by consistent reference to and forwarding of tweets (retweeting). Although a number of the social media users tweet in English, their presence in the region and following among Arabic-language users warrant their inclusion in this grouping.

Egypt is much more developed than that in Iraq, and far more stable. As a result, the number of profiles from any particular country is loosely based on the degree of technological saturation as well as the number of active tweeters in the Twittersphere, of which we obtained data from a list compiled in June of 2012 by the Agence France Presse⁹¹.

The initial seed list of 300 was reduced to 195 Arabic language Twitter users⁹². Their tweets were then analyzed via the WMS2 system, which included machine translation as well as social network analysis. The WMS2 system allows researchers to search non-English tweets in English, and provides a set of advanced natural language capabilities including automatic topic classification. It also provides a number of other analytical tools, including social network analysis. Search results and visualizations are capped at a limit of 1,000 tweets per day. While this limit may be insufficient during periods of high volume, it represents a reasonable tradeoff to ensure rapid and responsive visualization, and can be worked around by scoping searches across a sufficiently narrow time frame. The use of machine translation combined with search and visualization enables the rapid analysis of trends in social media, particularly across a language barrier.

6.5.2 Data Selection

We conducted searches in the archives for a 24-hour period following the al-Assad speech or interview, focusing on key events from August and September 2013.⁹³ The following speeches were included in the analysis for this study:

⁹¹ <http://ediplomacy.afp.com/#!/>

⁹² The final set of social media users came from all nations in the Arabic-speaking world. Key measures for each nation included (1) number of users from each country in the sample, (2) mean and range number of followers, (3) mean and range number of people they follow. The largest numbers were from the following nations: Egypt (Number of Users: 38; Mean Following 890.8 with 2-4,577 range; Mean Followers 189,071 with 1,505-2,415,397 range), Lebanon (Number of Users: 19; Mean Following 1,399.5 with 41-7,935 range; Mean Followers 102,764 with 2,961-1,130,342 range), Saudi Arabia (Number of Users: 18; Mean Following 1,014.3 with 3-6,004 range; Mean Followers 262,015 with 2-2,610,558 range), Jordan (Number of Users: 17; Mean Following 1,317.6 with 52-4,017 range; Mean Followers 58,531.7 with 1,086-494,172 range), and Syria (Number of Users: 15; Mean Following 1,054.2 with 59-4,015 range; Mean Followers 73,256.1 with 1,849-600,622 range). This composition largely reflects the relative social media influence of various nations across the region.

⁹³ Due to issues of data archiving, we were unable to include events or media content generated by the regime prior to August of 2013.

Table 8: Speeches selected for study.

Date	Outlet	Subject
August 1, 2013	Damascus	President Bashar al-Assad's Army Day Speech
August 4, 2013	Damascus	President al-Assad Iftar Banquet Speech (with scholars and social figures)
August 26, 2013	Interview with Russia's Izvestia & Syria's SANA News	President al-Assad: "Syria will Never become a Western Puppet State"
September 3, 2013	Interview with France's Le Figaro	"Power Lies in your Ability to Prevent Wars, not in Igniting Them".
September 9, 2013	Interview with United States' CBS	President al-Assad's Interview with CBS News.
September 13, 2013	Interview with Russia's Rossvia 24 TV & Syria's SANA News	President al-Assad's Interview on Chemical Weapons

We conducted two rounds of searches, with the first round of searches conducted assessing general response to al-Assad's speeches or interviews. The second round of searches looked for evidence of greater engagement with the specific content of each speech or interview.

The WMS2 system allows key word searches from a daily generated list of tweets that ranges from half a million to one million per day. The search results show the most recent 1000 tweets a day in which the target term is used. Search terms included standard terms ("al-Assad", "al-Assad speech", "al-Assad interview") as well as terms specific to the event in question (e.g. "al-Assad Army Day", "al-Assad iftar"). Searches also include key terms from the speech or interview to explore evidence of redistribution (or "retweeting") on twitter (e.g. "al-Assad al Qaeda", "al-Assad evidence" and "al-Assad expect everything"). One of the keys to successful social media campaigns is the use of key quotes or catch phrases that are notable and likely to be redistributed, as Twitter redistribution patterns often involve direct

quoting of key materials from the individual or event in question. Thus, we analyzed each of the speeches for notable quotes that were likely to generate social media response, and performed searches in the archive for notable quotes from al-Assad speeches and interviews.

After collecting the search results for each term, we categorized tweets as those originating from al-Assad or from others. We operationalized “originating from al-Assad” as tweets containing a direct quote or reference to the speech or interview, or tweets that came directly from al-Assad’s Twitter feed. Finally, we calculated the percentage of tweets originating from al-Assad compared to total volume of mentions of “al-Assad” for the days of data collection.

6.6 Findings

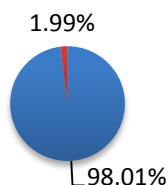
6.6.1 Research Question One: What is the level of engagement to al-Assad’s speeches and interviews within the Arabic Twittersphere?

Our results indicate that while there is a great deal of talk *about* al-Assad, there is very little talk redistributing the *words of* al-Assad, in spite of an active social media presence and extensive digital diplomacy campaign. Content from his speeches and interviews generated very little volume within the in total discourse on “al-Assad” captured in the WMS2 archive. We found not only very little redistribution of direct quotes or tweets from al-Assad, we found that when redistribution did occur within the community of tweeters, it was generally content with highly negative sentiment. At his highest level of engagement on speech or interview days, content from al-Assad only occupied 32% of the discourse, with averages typically ranging between 1% and 5% of discourse on the days of speeches or interviews (see Table 9).

Table 9: al-Assad's influence on the discourse in the Arab Twittersphere.

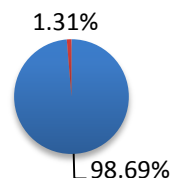
August 1, 2013 Syrian Army Day Speech

■ Total in Archive ■ Directly from Assad



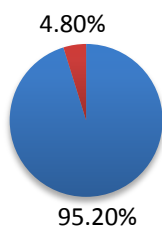
August 4, 2013 Iftar Dinner Speech

■ Total in Archive ■ Directly from Assad



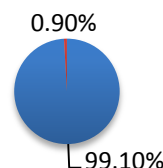
August 26, 2013 al-Assad Interview with Izvestia News

■ Total in Archive ■ Directly from Assad



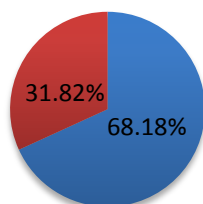
September 3, 2013 al-Assad Interview with Le Figaro News

■ Total in Archive ■ Directly from Assad



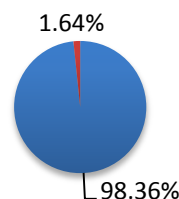
September 9, 2013 al-Assad Interview with CBS News

■ Total in Archive ■ Directly from Assad



September 13, 2013 al-Assad Interview with Rossiya News

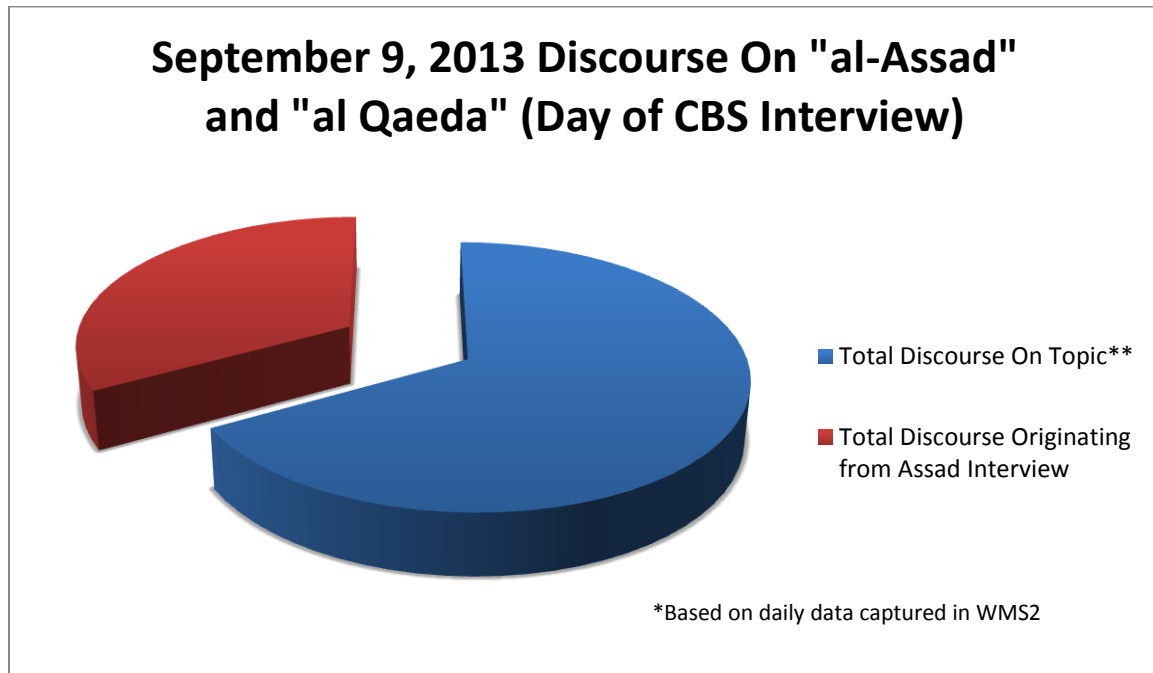
■ Total in Archive ■ Directly from Assad



Concerning key issues, such as the use of chemical weapons, the composition of opposition fighters, or other elements central to the crisis, al-Assad's perspective has gained little traction. For example, one of the primary points al-Assad tried to advance was the composition of opposition fighters in Syria, the majority of which, he argued are from al Qaeda. He made this argument in a September 9th, 2013 interview with CBS News' Charlie

Rose; the quote (or even discourse, critical or otherwise) only occupied 20% of the daily discourse concerning “al-Assad” and “al Qaeda” on Twitter.

Table 10: Discourse on al-Assad and al Qaeda September 9, 2013. Note that al-Assad’s comments about Al Qaeda from the interview generated a significantly large portion of the total twittersphere content about Al Qaeda. This suggests that in this one instance, al al-Assad’s efforts to frame the public discourse was more effective than in most other instances.



Our findings indicate that al-Assad’s influence on Twitter is marginal and limited to existing groups of support. His communication could be termed a failed echo chamber, in the sense that he is in the midst of an aggressive digital diplomacy campaign that is falling on deaf ears within the region and in the international community. Loyal followers’ redistribution typically operates on the degree of 10s, while opposition tweets and redistribution are on the order of hundreds or thousands.

The one exception to this trend is one inflammatory statement made by al-Assad that was redistributed widely on Twitter. On the September 9th interview with CBS News, Charlie Rose asked what the world could expect in response to a U.S. strike on Syria. al-Assad’s response to “expect everything” was widely redistributed, with 744 references to the quote. Large news aggregators (Al Jazeera English, Breaking News, CBS and Russia Today) pulled the statement and users redistributed it widely (see Figure 21).

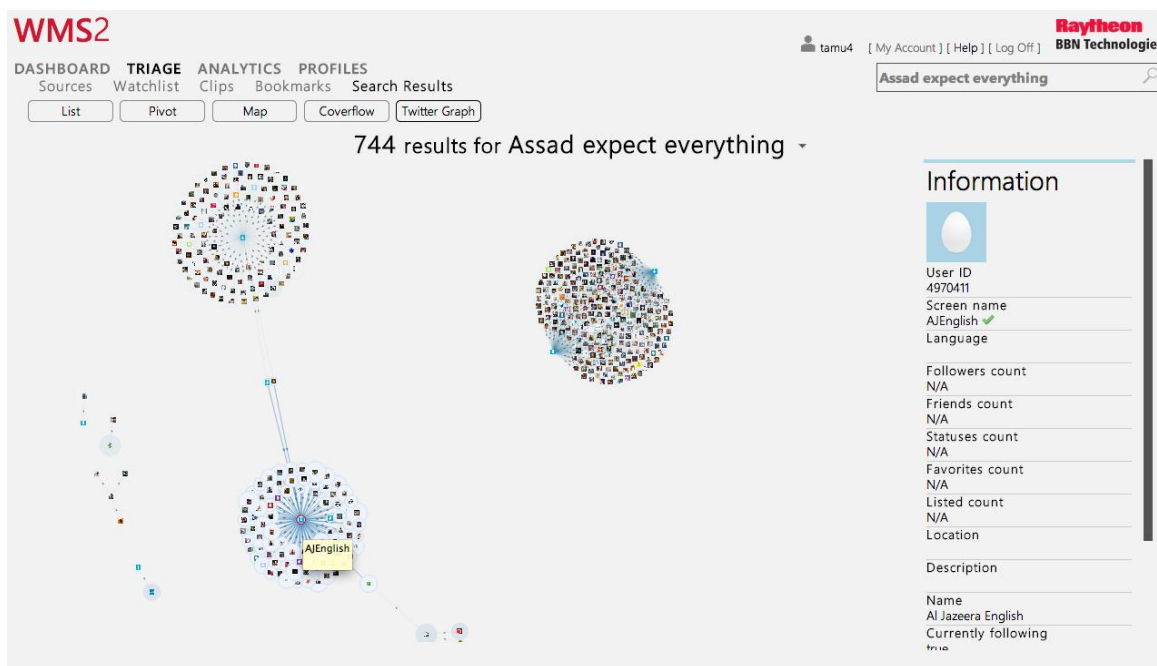


Figure 21: 744 results for al-Assad “Expect Everything” Quote. The chart shows three distinct “communities” that emerged from the quote, based upon which information source was being retweeted. The chart above demonstrates that Al Jazeera had the smallest number of retweets among the three major sources.

Save this one exception, there seems to be little information flow from the Syrian Presidency, in the sense that individuals did not want to redistribute information from al-Assad, or they paid little attention to the campaign. But there were also alleged blocks in access to the network from social media platforms themselves, such as YouTube’s prevention of the uploading of materials from al-Assad. al-Assad’s 2013 iftar dinner speech was blocked from being uploaded to YouTube, according to al-Assad’s Twitter feed and Pro al-Assad individuals on Twitter⁹⁴. The Syrian Presidency generally advanced the narrative of the regime in the following ways: 1) the US, in its support of rebel fighters, supports Al Qaeda, 2) the current conflict is not a civil war, but instead a foreign-financed attempt to overthrow the government and 3) the Syrian government is compliant with international law and has been compliant with attempts to regulate chemical weapons. This narrative has been largely ignored or critiqued within the Arabic Twittersphere.

6.6.2 Research Question Two: What is the type of sentiment and engagement with al-Assad’s speeches and interviews within Arabic Twittersphere?

The network of influential Arabic language Twitter users is largely opposed to intervention in the region, but also decidedly anti-al-Assad. When event-driven discourse on al-Assad increases, it is typically negatively oriented.

⁹⁴ RT @Souriyaa_: YouTube blocked the #Syria-n Presidency from uploading al-Assad’s speech from yesterday. Oh, but it’s ok to upload videos of FS...

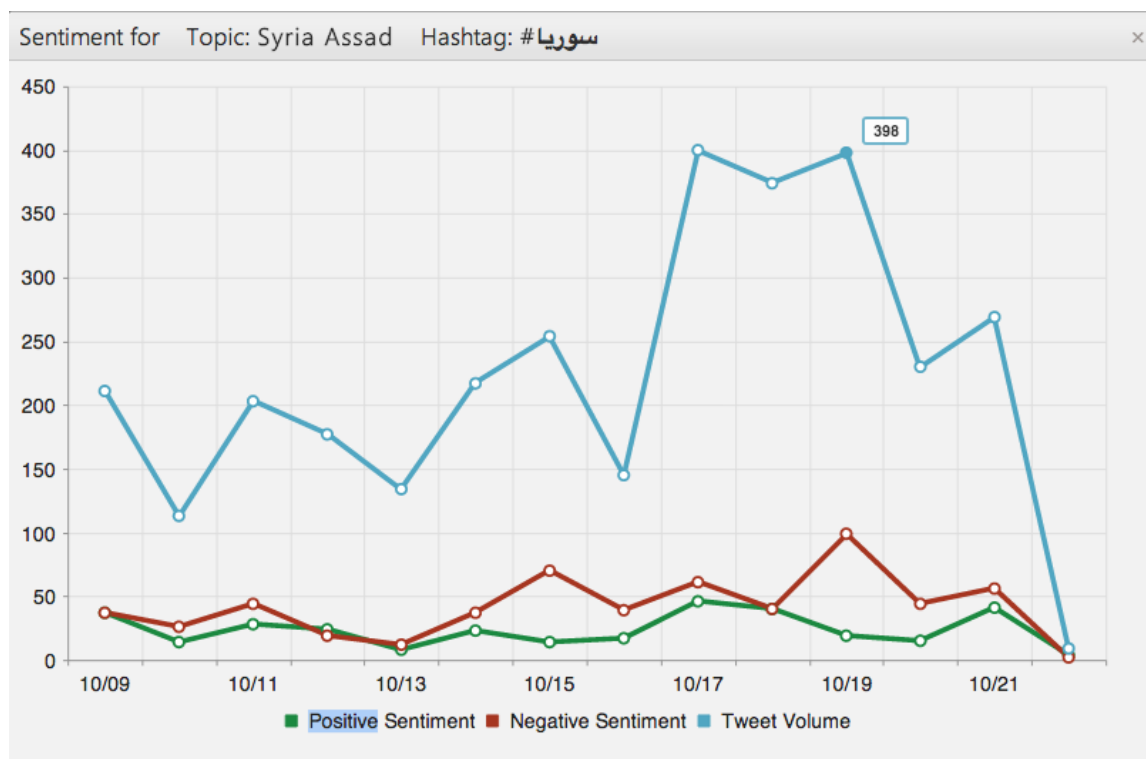


Figure 22: Sentiment for al-Assad.

In the 24 hour time period following al-Assad’s Army Day and Iftar dinner speeches, the sampled content that referenced the speech was mostly critical, critiquing al-Assad’s assertion of victory over terrorists in Syria. For example, this tweet was widely redistributed (70 retweets), following al-Assad’s speech:

Homs: al-Assad’s thugs and shabiha⁹⁵ celebrate in their own way on Army Day, news about 183 people were killed in ammunition dump blast continued

On the other hand, key talking points in the speeches that the presidency sought to redistribute were rarely picked up.

Later interviews generated more response from users in the region and in the international community. In particular, the interviews with Russia’s *Izvestia* news, France’s *Le Figaro* and the U.S. outlet CBS news, received more response within the community of influential Arabic language tweeters and those connected to them. Again, much of the response was not to content al-Assad himself had distributed, but critiquing his perspectives in the interviews, or even the outlets themselves as “propaganda machines” (*Izvestia* and *SANA* news in particular).

⁹⁵ Shabiha are armed civilians in support of al-Assad’s Ba’ath party that police opposition movements in the country. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14482968> for more information.

6.6.3 Research Question Three: Who are the dominant drivers of conversation on Twitter responding to the speeches within the Arabic twittersphere?

Syrian affiliated journalists and columnists operating outside of Syria were key nodes of information dispersal, in addition to news aggregators and large news agencies, such as Reuters and Breaking News. On the other hand, official outlets, such as al-Assad's own Twitter feed (@Presidency_Sy) and that of the Free Syrian Army (@freesyrianarmy), the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (@IkwhanSyria) and others were consistently marginal reference points during this period.

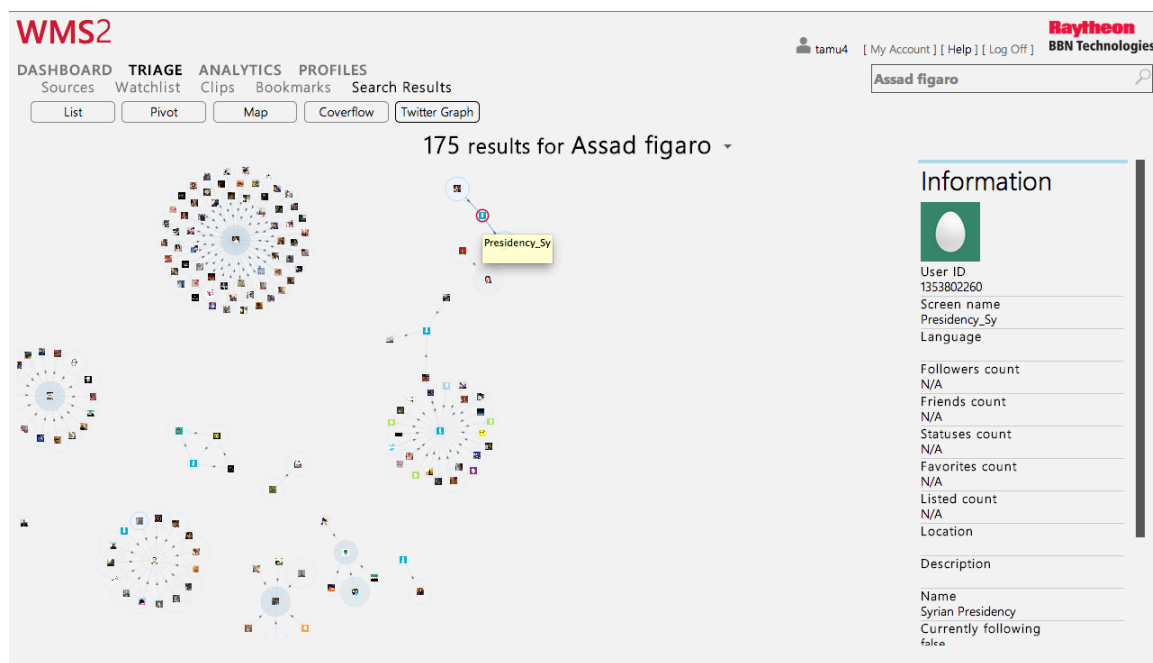


Figure 23: The small number of key retweets of the interview typically did not originate from the Syrian Presidency twitter feed.

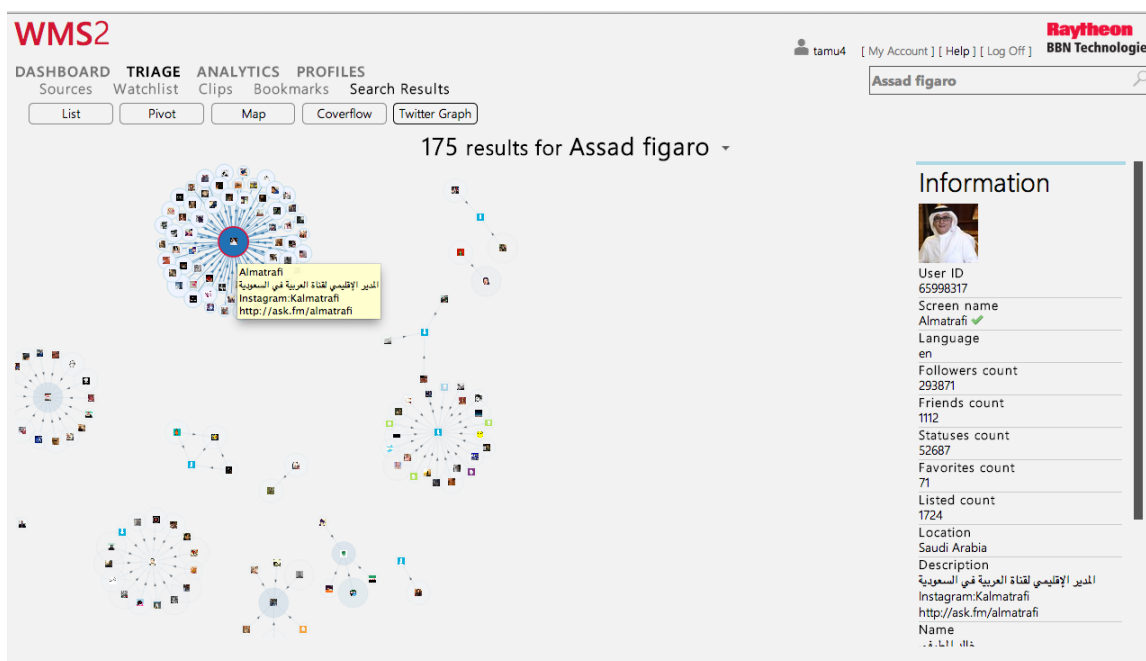


Figure 24: Instead, key information nodes outside of Syria, such as this Saudi user, were key information providers.

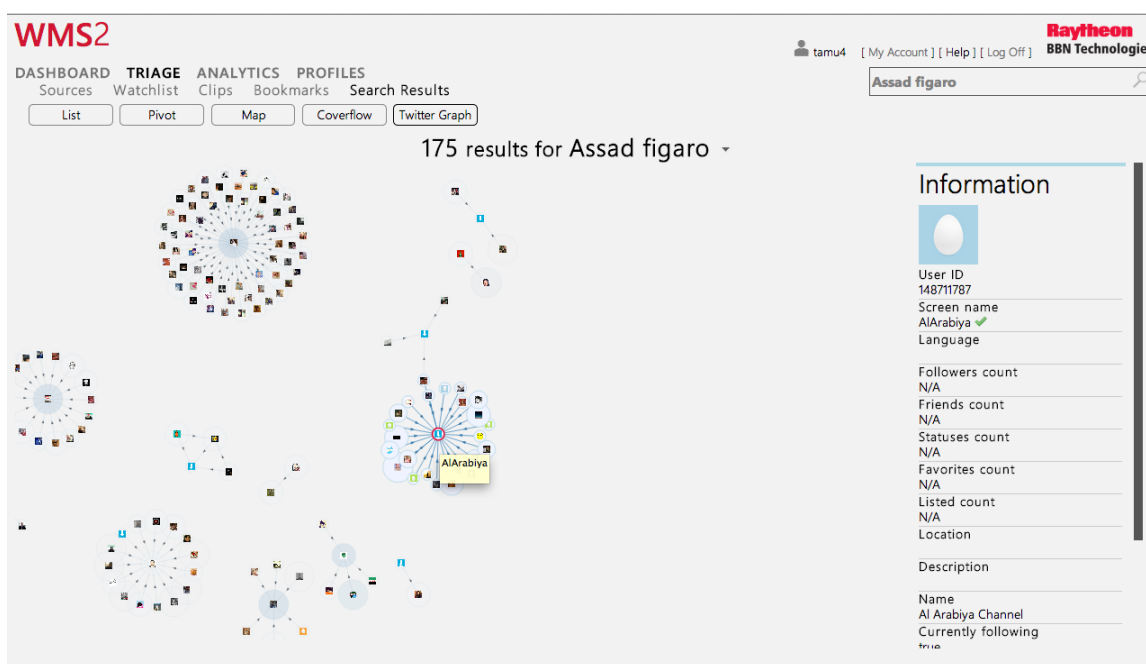


Figure 25: Saudi news outlet Al Arabiya was also a key reference point.

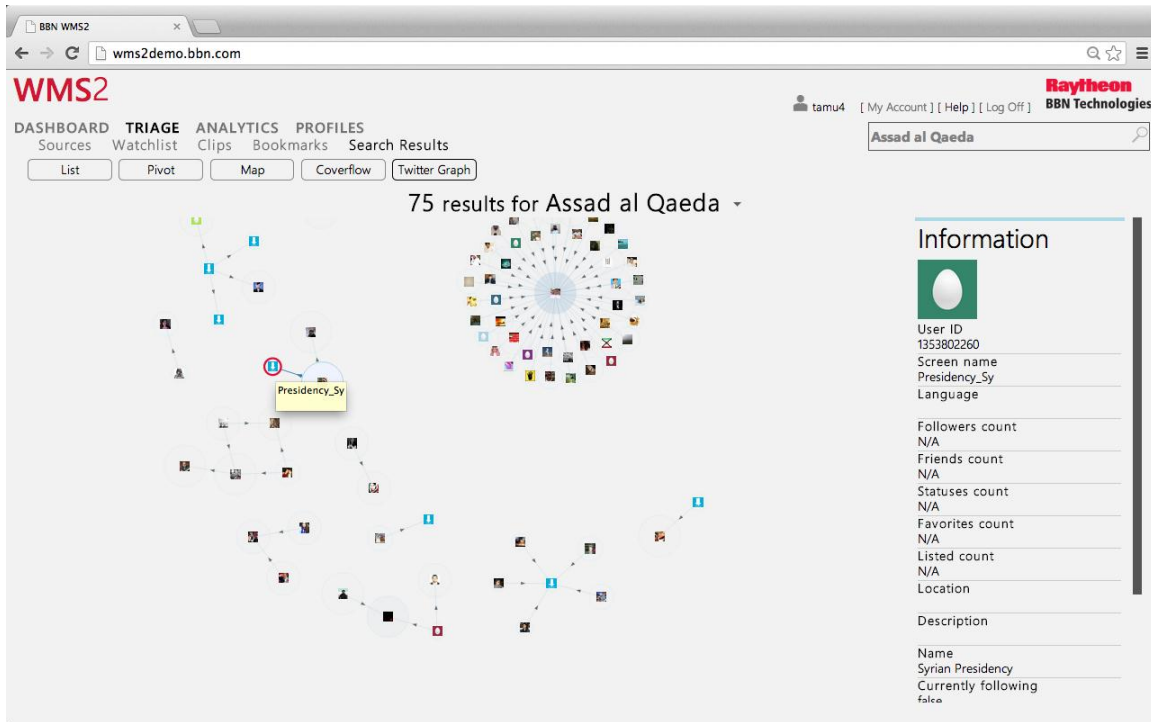


Figure 26: al-Assad's perspective on al Qaeda is marginal during time-period of CBS Interview.

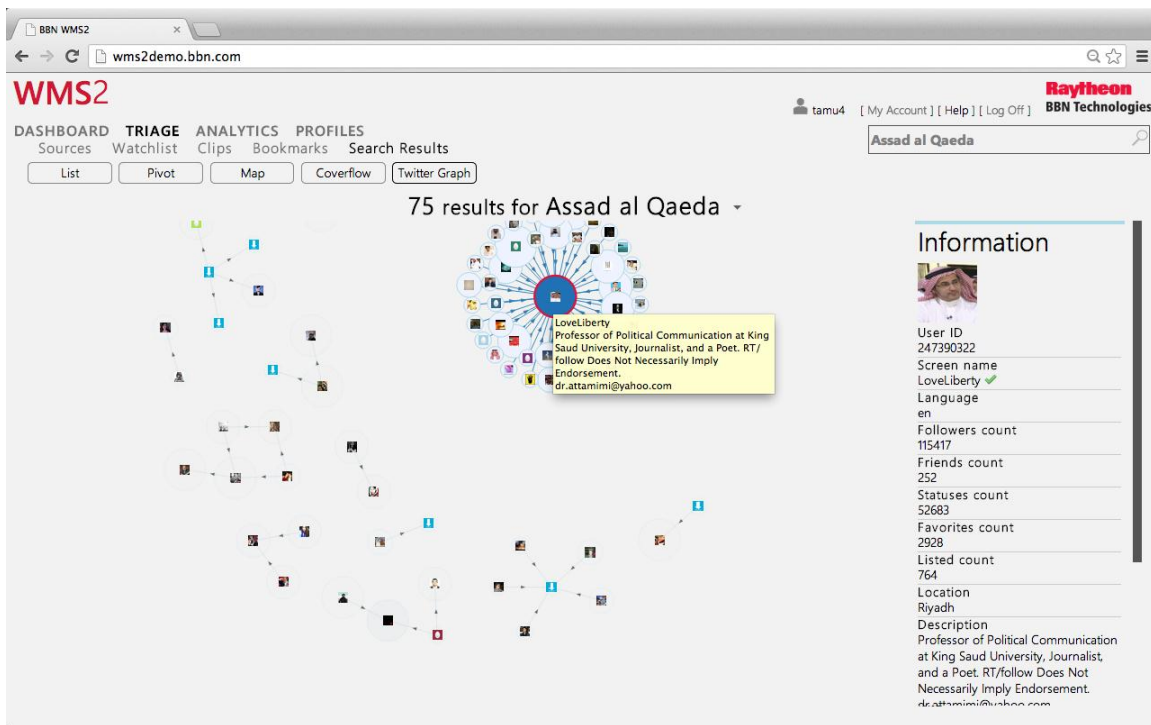


Figure 27: The narrative on al Qaeda is instead controlled by a Saudi user on day of CBS interview.

Pro regime individuals did contribute to the conversation in each of these cases, but much like al-Assad, were not central drivers of the conversation.

In the instances that al-Assad was a reference point amongst our users, he was not widely referenced, and marginalized. Take for example, activity occurring on al-Assad's interview with Russia's *Izvestia* news. One of his primary talking points was the high percentage of al Qaeda fighters in the country, and the possibility that these individuals had toxic gas. This tweet⁹⁶ was pulled from the speech, and placed numerous places, including his Twitter feed. Not only was it not widely redistributed, but in many instances, it was used by individuals to critique his perspective.

⁹⁶ RT @Presidency_Sy: #al-Assad: "We requested investigation based on substantial evidence that terrorist's rockets carried toxic gas, #Aleppo."

6.7 Syrian Twitter Engagement

We also conducted a three-pronged analysis of larger activities on Twitter of the regime, and Syrian users at large, guided by three research questions:

RQ1: What is the social media presence and activity of regime loyalists on Twitter?

In exploring the presence of members of the al-Assad regime on Twitter, we found that they lacked extensive social media presence, with none of the 36 cabinet members having a Twitter presence. al-Assad himself has a profile (Presidency_Sy) that as of October 2013, had just over 11,000 followers. The feed is used to redistribute content from his various media and political events. The feed does not follow anyone other users. Many of the 11,000 followers are news outlets and individuals who openly support the president. There were a number of pro-al-Assad users outside of the regime, but few seemed to be moving public opinion, as evidenced by lack of redistribution and attention by the international community. The reason for their lack of influence can be for a number of reasons. First, as discussed earlier, there is a large degree of anti-al-Assad sentiment within the Arab Twittersphere, second, the infrastructure of the country is severely crippled and third, the degree of social media engagement in Syria has decreased, possibly because citizens may be more concerned with daily survival. Like the Lebanese civil war from 1975-1991, Syrians are heavily invested in their political affiliations and will not waiver – including followers of al-Assad.

We found that people who were outspokenly pro-al-Assad tended to tweet about the atrocities perpetrated by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and retweeted articles about those atrocities. Their sentiments are heavily patriotic, and spoke out strongly against foreign fighters destroying Syria. Several pro-al-Assad profiles are nostalgic of the days before the war. Their nostalgia could indicate that they are not necessarily pro-al-Assad, but rather Anti-FSA (i.e. what has happened to their country after the FSA gained momentum).

RQ2: What is the comparative presence and activity of Syrian users in early 2013 v. late 2013, after the conflict intensified?

We also conducted a comparative analysis of Syrian twitter presence in February of 2013 vs. October 2013. In comparing Pro-al-Assad profiles gathered from February 2013 and those recently compiled, it is apparent that recent profiles are less active and less outspoken against the FSA. Although pro-al-Assad opinions are obvious, the content is decidedly less passionate as that gathered earlier in 2013.⁹⁷ In addition, several profiles that were outwardly pro-regime and anti-FSA have been suspended since last year and no longer exist.

⁹⁷ It is somewhat intuitive that people were more outspoken last year then they are presently as over one year has elapsed since the conflict was escalated.

RQ3: How open is the Syrian Twitter community at large to regional and global trends concerning the conflict?

Finally, we explored the openness of the Syrian Twitter community to the larger Arabic and global Twitterspheres. Analysis suggests the openness of the Syrian twitter community is divided into two groups, Pro-al-Assad and Anti-al-Assad. Each advances their respective ideologies and attempts to discredit the opponent. Both groups are doing this in the form of propaganda by official outlets and official twitter accounts, tweets by individuals, and retweets of like-minded sentiments. However, when it comes to being engaged in the larger Arab Twittersphere, the Anti-al-Assad camp is significantly more involved than the Pro-al-Assad camp. As mentioned previously, anti-al-Assad sentiment is quite high in the regional and global community, thus, anti-al-Assad users are utilizing the anti-al-Assad sentiment to their advantage. Also, it is important to understand that the two groups formed during the Arab Spring in Mid-2011. On one side, there were those protesting the regime, and on the other, there were those who were trying to stop the protesters and little has changed in terms of support since then.

In analyzing the make-up of the groups, the Pro-al-Assad group is comprised of minorities in Syria who are faced with the majority Sunni population. Minorities include, Alawites, Christians, Shi'ites, Druze, and several others.

Appendix A: Websites consulted

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/author/bashar-al-Assad>

<http://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/tag/b-al-Assad-speeches/>

<http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/docs.htm#Syria>

<http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=623>

<http://www.baathparty.sy/oration.php?det=1&type1=4¤tPage=3>

http://www.presidential-Assad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=categories&id=83&Itemid=471

sana.sy/index_eng.html

Appendix B: Table of the Number of Speeches and Selected Paragraphs Per Month

Table 11: Number of Speeches and Selected Paragraphs Per Month.

Month	No. Speeches	No. Paragraphs
Jun-00	2	2
Jul-00	1	2
Oct-00	1	2
Nov-00	1	1
Feb-01	1	4
Mar-01	1	1
May-01	1	2
Feb-02	1	4
Dec-02	1	3
Oct-03	1	6
Nov-03	1	1
Oct-04	1	7
Mar-05	1	4
Jun-05	1	2
Nov-05	1	1
Jan-06	1	2
Aug-06	2	6
May-07	1	3
Jul-07	1	2

Aug-07	1	1
Oct-07	1	1
Jan-08	1	4
Mar-08	1	10
Apr-08	2	8
Jun-08	1	8
Jul-08	3	10
Aug-08	2	6
Sep-08	3	10
Oct-08	1	6
Nov-08	1	8
Dec-08	2	8
Jan-09	3	8
Mar-09	1	8
Apr-09	3	10
May-09	3	10
Jun-09	2	8
Jul-09	1	7
Aug-09	2	8
Sep-09	2	8
Oct-09	2	8
Nov-09	3	8
Feb-10	1	4
Mar-10	4	10

May-10	3	10
Jun-10	4	10
Jul-10	3	16
Oct-10	6	20
Nov-10	4	17
Dec-10	3	20
Feb-11	1	12
Mar-11	1	16
Apr-11	1	16
Jun-11	1	16
Aug-11	2	16
Nov-11	1	13
Dec-11	1	16
Jan-12	2	16
Jun-12	3	18
Jul-12	4	16
Aug-12	2	16
Nov-12	1	16
Jan-13	1	16
Mar-13	1	16
Apr-13	3	18
May-13	1	16
Jun-13	1	16
Jul-13	1	16

Aug-13	3	16
Sep-13	3	16

Appendix C: Human Language Technology tools for dynamic access to Broadcast, Web and Twitter sources.

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(Dr. Kathleen Egan, Mr. Sean Colbath, Mr. Paul Brewer, Ms. Martha Lillie)

For over a decade, the Department of Defense Combatting Terrorism Technical Support Office (CTTSO), Technical Support Working Group (TSWG) Language Program has supported the development and deployment of Human Language Technologies based on research algorithms developed under several DARPA programs. Transition of these technologies (Speech Processing, Machine Translation, Information Retrieval and Distillation, Data Exploitation, and other Natural Language Processing and Visualization) into operational systems has enabled users with or without foreign language skills to maximize their ability to gist and analyze foreign language sources.

The Broadcast Monitoring System (BMS) and Web Monitoring System (WMS) with **social media analytics** are flagship applications developed by Raytheon BBN Technologies and deployed in various DoD and IC environments. The **BMS** creates a continuous, searchable archive of international television and radio broadcasts, automatically transcribing and translating the audio stream into English in real time. The **WMS** captures content from user-selected Web sites, extracts text from the pages, and translates them into English. The main goal of these systems is to provide operators with capabilities that allow them to spend more time on analytics and less time on finding and managing data. The tools are designed to assist the human mind in filtering, organizing, visualizing and manipulating the data for further discovery. The systems are configured to match the user's preferences and specific tasks.

SDL's Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) is an integrated component of the BBN Broadcast and Web Monitoring Systems that provides real-time translation from 40+ source languages to English. SMT is a data driven approach to translation that creates a translation model from large quantities of parallel corpora and is the approach behind modern language translation engines.

In this application, subtleties of language can be lost during machine translation but can be critical in understanding the intent and meaning of Bashar al-Assad's speeches, interviews and other written and verbal communications. In those cases, human post-editing—the process of a human translator making corrections to machine translated content—plays an important role in re-capturing the nuances of language for further analysis.

⁹⁸ Websites made it possible for the researchers to access multimedia foreign language content (audio, text and tweets) by using English searches, find the documents of interest and then request human translations for those documents that were most relevant and/or needing editing. The technology was mostly used by UBC and Texas A&M.

SDL's role in the effort is to provide initial SMT translations through the BBN Broadcast and Web monitoring applications and to provide human post-edit translation services for the subset of communications for which the most accurate content translation is deemed critical.

The SMA Working Group was given access to these systems for use in this effort. In addition to collecting and translating five target sites identified by the group, users had access to over 150 translated web sites in Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Russian, Korean, and English, as well as the translated tweets from over 500 prominent Middle Eastern Twitter users. The effort including the social media content is a recent ongoing CTTSO/TSWG effort integrating a variety of technologies to support analysis of foreign language **social media** content.

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