**Do ‘They’ Frame it Differently?: Examining the Coverage of the U.S./Al Qaeda Conflict in the English-and Arabic-Language Al-Jazeera Websites**

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DO ‘THEY’ FRAME IT DIFFERENTLY?: Examining the Coverage of the U.S./Al Qaeda Conflict in the English-and Arabic-Language Al-Jazeera Websites

Abstract / This study explored the online coverage of the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict in the English- and Arabic-language Al-Jazeera websites. Utilizing prominence, use of sources, and agency as framing devices, it looked at how Al-Jazeera caters the news to different users online. By and large, results showed limited differences in coverage between the two websites. The overwhelming majority of attributed sources were from the United States and its allies. Furthermore, results revealed a trend of negative coverage regarding all of those involved in the conflict.
Do ‘They’ Frame it Differently?: Examining the Coverage of U.S./Al Qaeda Conflict in the English-and Arabic-Language Al-Jazeera Websites

The United States has engaged in a long-term conflict with Al Qaeda and all individuals, organizations, and groups it believes may be connected to that organization. Less than one month after the 9/11 terrorist attack, the United States struck against the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan, where Al Qaeda was headquartered. Many terrorist attacks by different cells and groups connected with Al Qaeda, have since taken place against the United States and its allies in the conflict, such as Britain and Spain. In response, the United States has put tremendous effort to arrest, kill, or disrupt the Al Qaeda organization and those perceived to be connected to it. For example, less than two years after the start of the Afghan War, the United States invaded Iraq as part of its global “war on terror,” claiming that Saddam’s regime had connections with Al Qaeda organization (Tuathail, 2003).

Thus for good reasons, the devastating consequences of this U.S./Al Qaeda conflict caught the attention of the media worldwide. One of these media that closely covered this conflict is Al-Jazeera network. Specifically, the Qatar-based network was the only news outlet covering the Afghan War from the frontlines (Jasper & El-Kikhia, 2003).

Al-Jazeera TV network, the first twenty-four-hour all-news network in the Arab world, although launched slightly more than a decade ago, has already established a reputation of being a leading independent news source in the Arab world. It is considered the region’s most-viewed and most credible news network (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003; Johnson & Fahmy, In Press).

The network has English-and Arabic-language news websites. Al-Jazeera launched its Arabic site on Jan. 1 2001 (Salem, 2003). In an attempt to globalize the network and reach English-language users worldwide, the network officially launched its English-language site on
As the Arabic-language site has experienced incredible development, the English-language version has also rapidly improved, attracting more users (About Al-Jazeera, 2003).

Current literature indicates that users of the two websites differ. Many users of the English-language website indicate they come from the United States and other Western countries. In a survey posted on the English-language Al-Jazeera website, almost half of the respondents (47 percent) listed the United States as their country of origin, 20 percent listed Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom and only 14.4 percent of the respondents indicated backgrounds from 20 Arab countries and five Muslim countries (Johnson & Fahmy, 2006). Users of the Arabic-language website, on the other hand, tend to be primarily from the Arab World. In a survey posted on the Arabic-language Al-Jazeera website, 98 percent of the respondents indicated backgrounds from 20 Arab countries and 2 Muslim countries (Afghanistan and Pakistan) (Fahmy & Johnson, 2007a).

However, views toward Al-Jazeera vary. Critics have accused the network of providing a forum for Israelis, supporters of Saddam Hussein and supporters of Osama Bin Laden to express their views (Hanley, 2004). Some Arab regimes have criticized the network for being an avenue for dissident voices and a conspirator of anti-government movements, while others acknowledged it as the sole voice of journalistic objectivity in the Arab region (Negus, 2001; Zednik, 2002). Furthermore, Al-Jazeera has been repeatedly accused by the Bush administration of being biased in reporting the Middle East. These officials further complained that Al-Jazeera provides airtime to experts hostile to U.S. policy (Mekay, 2004). More recently, accusations against Al-Jazeera have been laden with claims that the satellite network’s framing of Middle Eastern and world events, have ignited Muslim and Arab anger against the United States, its military campaigns, and its foreign policies. (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003; Zednik, 2002; Salem, 2003). Meanwhile, many Arab officials have been accused of expressing different views in Arabic, while sending an entirely
different message to the media in English (Marcus & Crook, 2004). There have been claims that Arab news sites sanitize Arabic hate terminology in their English counterparts. As one critic noted, "The Arabic version included the language of the terror organizations, while the English was cleansed with changes and omissions, including changes to the language of direct quotes" (HaLevi, 2007).

The present study will, thus, explore whether the English-and Arabic-language news Al-Jazeera websites, targeting different users online, differed in their coverage of the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict. It will examine the use of framing devices in these two news websites. Specifically, it will examine the prominence of online stories covering the conflict, the use of sources in these stories, and the overall tone of coverage.

**Theoretical Framework: News Framing**

Framing has become a popular method in media research; particularly in studies examining the ways media producers construct the news. As defined by Entman (1993), “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). Tankard et al. (1991) describe a media frame as “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (p.277).

Framing can have powerful influences on audiences as it affects their recognition and understanding of social problems and political issues (Entman, 1993). The concept of framing has been used to understand mass communication content and its relation to media effects (Entman, 1993). Framings of news stories are suggested by particular devices such as headlines and kickers, subheads, photographs, photo captions, leads, pull quotes, selection of sources or affiliations,
selection of quotes, nut graphs, and logos (Severin & Tankard, 2001). Researchers using the framing approach looked for these framing devices and mechanisms to identify frames (i.e. Wall, 1997; Norris, 1995; Reese & Buckalew, 1995; Liebler & Bendix, 1996).

To assess the prominence of the coverage of specific topics, researcher looked at the number of units about these topics, their placement and their length in order to assess their visibility, emphasis, and importance. For example, Norris (1995) assessed the prominence of international network news in the pre-and-post-Cold War periods, by content analyzing the number and the length of stories and the story order.

Other framing studies examined the sources used in the coverage of the topic (Fahmy, 2005; Tankard et al., 1991; Severin & Tankard, 2001). For example, Fahmy (2005) examined the news sources used to visually portray 9/11 and the Afghan War in English-and Arabic-language newspapers. Shoemaker & Reese (1996) asserted that “Attributing statements is a key element of the objective ritual. It protects against accusations that they [journalists] have been manipulated” (p.113). Source selection is, thus, one of the framing devices because relying on specific sources means framing the news from those sources’ perspectives.

Some framing research employed the “agency” variable in order to determine the tone of the coverage toward the combatants of a conflict. The term agent was defined as a particular reference to an actor in the events who is perceived to have done something negative, positive, or neutral and therefore is an agent of action (Wall, 1997). Daradanova (2002) used the agency concept to measure the construct of two newspapers’ framing of the 1999 Kosovo crisis.

This study will use framing as a theoretical foundation to analyze the news content of the English-and Arabic-language Al-Jazeera websites. The researchers will look for evidence of framing in several devices. As suggested by previous studies (e.g. Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Wall,
the researchers will examine the prominence of U.S./Al Qaeda conflict by examining the frequency and placement of these stories. Framing devices suggested by Tankard et al. (1991) and Severin & Tankard (2001), such as the selection of sources will also be analyzed. Beyond this, Wall’s (1997) concept of agency will be used to assess who was identified as causing or solving the problems of the conflict under study.

**Al-Jazeera Network**

*Al-Jazeera*, established in 1996, grew out of the termination of a contract between Saudi-owned Orbit Radio and TV Service and the Arabic TV division of the BBC news Service. The BBC’s Arabic TV network collapsed, leaving twenty media-professionals without a job. In the process of structuring the new news network, founders of *Al-Jazeera* decided to recruit the majority of the BBC’s Arabic TV Service editorial staff. By 2001, *Al-Jazeera* housed a staff of about 350 journalists and 50 foreign correspondents working in 31 countries, including the United States. These *Al-Jazeera* editors, reporters, and producers of various Arab nationalities, were trained in the Western journalistic tradition, wielding the expert knowledge and understanding of Arab politics and audience (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003). Many of them simultaneously covered all events in the English- and Arabic-language *Al-Jazeera* websites.

From their inception, *Al-Jazeera* websites have been important news sources about conflicts involving the United States and the Arab World. During the month of March 2003 (the beginning of the Iraq War) a wide range of online news sources, including *Al-Jazeera* website, experienced surges in traffic.

*Al-Jazeera* attracted over a million unique online visitors during that month. According to Nielson/Net Ratings, it was the fastest growing online news source. By the end of March 2003, the Arabic-language *Al-Jazeera* website ranked 45th among the list of most visited websites.
worldwide. The average number of pages visited by each visitor increased to 4.2 pages, which is higher than the most famous news websites, such as CNN, that only reached 3.3 pages per visitor (Salem, 2003).

In terms of the network’s credibility, a recent study found Al-Jazeera viewers rated the network as highly credible on all measures. Respondents rated CNN and BBC high on expertise, but ranked it low on trustworthiness. Consequently, BBC and CNN were also rated low on other credibility measures. Local Arab media were judged lowest on all credibility measures (Johnson & Fahmy, 2005). The literature further indicates the network provides a unique source of visual information. Al-Jazeera viewers contend it provides truer pictures of wars and military conflicts in the Middle East than the Western media who sanitize coverage (Fahmy & Johnson, 2007 a). Moreover, the emergence of Al-Jazeera is said to have acted as a possible contributor towards freedom of the press in the Arab world, one that has encouraged a more independent role of the media by supporting lifting government controls on the press (Fahmy & Johnson, 2007 b). The literature indicates Al-Jazeera has played a major role in ushering in a period of increased press freedom in the Arab world (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003; Hanley, 2004; Nisbet et. al, 2004; Cherribi, 2006).

However, U.S. officials and the Bush administration have criticized Al-Jazeera coverage of recent conflicts. One of the main reasons Al-Jazeera was deemed so controversial was airing an interview with Osama bin Laden post 9/11 and the overall journalistic hospitality it has extended to leaders of Al Qaeda; Al-Jazeera aired several interviews and warnings by Al Qaeda leaders (Macleod, 2004). As a result, Al-Jazeera offices have been attacked by words and sometimes by bombs; its Arabic website has been hacked several times.³
Several studies have explored *Al-Jazeera’s* coverage (Media Tenor, 2004; Wicks & Wicks, 2004; Andy, Livingston & Hebert, 2005). Wicks and Wicks (2004), for instance, compared the content of *Al-Jazeera*, *CNN* and *Fox News* during the days after the fall of Baghdad. They found that *Al-Jazeera* and *CNN* employed action and normative frames to communicate information, while *Fox* relied most heavily on dichotomizing strategies that pitted American forces against as the evil enemy. In another comparative study, Andy, Livingston and Hebert (2005) found that the majority of stories covering the Iraq War on ABC, CBS, ABC, CNN, and *Al-Jazeera* were balanced and objective. On the other hand, they found the coverage of the war on Fox News Channel was strongly biased in support of the American-led war effort.

**War in Cyberspace**

The World Wide Web has grown rapidly since the technology was introduced in 1991. Some compared the explosion of news sites to the growth of cable networks in the 1980s or television stations during the 1950s (Stempel & Stewart, 2000.) Many traditional media now have their own websites from which they dispense the news (Severin & Tankard, 2001.) The 9/11 terrorist attack and what followed, as part of the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict, was the first conflict in which online media played a significant role.

As more people relied on the Internet as a main source of information, several researchers examined how the Internet is used as a medium to cover war and military conflicts. Some studies explored the dynamics, structures, and effects of war coverage on cyberspace. Al-Saggaf (2006) for example, explored the potential of online media to foster civic engagement in the Arab World, by examining the official website for the *Al-Arabiya* TV. Results showed the users not only challenged the views of the site about the Iraq War, but they also offered their own versions of the truth.
Current literature indicates that online news reports, similar to their traditional counterparts, correspond with the accepted norms of every culture. A study that examined how CNN and Al-Jazeera news sites propagandized their audience through the reporting of casualties in Iraq civilian population when US invaded Iraq, revealed that both news outlets disseminated propagandistic messages (Youssef, 2004). Further, in examining the visual coverage of the Iraq War in 26 U.S. mainstream news sites, five frames emerged to reinforce the patriotic, government-friendly war narrative: conflict, conquest, rescue, victory, and control (Schwalbe, 2006).

While online newspapers have moved beyond the “shovelware” stage of online journalism and have begun to incorporate hyperlinks and pictures regularly in their news reporting (Dimitrova & Neznanski, 2006), one of the paradoxes of war coverage in cyberspace is that whereas cyber-technologies should democratize the politics of war by liberating access to information about war, the state has co-opted information and communication technologies to facilitate new forms of mass mobilization for war itself (Walsh & Barbara, 2006).

**Media Coverage of the U.S./Al Qaeda Conflict**

Because frames “define problems” (Entman, 1993) and because any conflict can be looked at from more than one perspective, framing the media coverage of the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict is crucial in understanding how the events were portrayed through one of the leading Arab news network, *Al-Jazeera*.

The U.S./Al Qaeda conflict has caught the attention of some researchers, who examined the coverage using different approaches.

Jasperson and El-Kikhia (2003), for example, compared the framing of the Afghan War in *CNN* and *Al-Jazeera*. Results showed that *CNN* used frames of consensus and focused on the strategy of technological precision, giving a euphemistic description of events. On the other hand,
most of *Al-Jazeera* coverage framed the war in terms of the human toll and the personal suffering of Afghans. Although *Al-Jazeera* was the only source of news providing an alternative viewpoint that was not present in the Persian Gulf War, Western media frames of that war contextualized the humanistic approach of pictures and reports that were provided by *Al-Jazeera*.

From a visual perspective, photographs most often offered prompts for prevailing government versions of events and rarely contributed independent visual information. Griffin, (2004) for example, analyzed the nature of the U.S. news-magazine coverage of the Afghan and Iraq Wars. Results showed that the photographs primarily established narrative themes within official discourse. In a comparative study, Fahmy (2007) examined the visual coverage of 9/11 and the Afghan War and found the Arabic-language newspaper *Al-Hayat*, emphasized the feeling of guilt in covering the war in Afghanistan by showing visuals that humanized the victims. The coverage also de-emphasized 9/11 by showing visuals that focused less on the victims and more on material destruction and planes crashing into the buildings. On a similar level, the English-language newspaper, *The International Herald Tribune* emphasized the emotion of guilt in 9/11 by showing visual messages that humanized the victims. It de-emphasized the bombing of Afghanistan by showing visual messages that focused less on the victims and more on aid, patriotism, arsenals and weaponry, thus framing the Afghan War story in a technical frame.

**Research Questions**

Based on the past literature, a content analysis of the English-and Arabic-language *Al-Jazeera* news websites was administered to explore four research questions:

**RQ1:** In terms of prominence of online stories covering the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict, did the emphasis significantly differ in the English-and Arabic-language *Al-Jazeera* websites?
RQ2: Did the attributed sources in these online stories significantly differ in the English-and Arabic-language *Al-Jazeera* websites?

RQ3: Did the tone of reporting the conflict significantly differ in the English-and Arabic-language *Al-Jazeera* websites?

RQ4: Overall, did the tone of coverage regarding those involved in the conflict (the United States, U.S. allies and Al Qaeda) significantly differ?

**Method**

Two data sets were collected during the month of March 2004. The first data set is from the Arabic-language *Al-Jazeera* website. The second data set is from the English-language *Al-Jazeera* website. The whole month of March 2004 was selected for a couple of reasons: First, it represented the first anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq -- as part of the U.S. global war on terrorism. Second, the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict worsened over time. More attacks by groups related to Al Qaeda started taking place against the United States and its allies.

All U.S./Al Qaeda conflict news stories, including linked headlines that led to stories, appearing on the homepages of both English-and Arabic-language *Al-Jazeera* websites were analyzed. Since the online content continuously changes and as Massey and Levy (1999) suggested online news sites need to be visited twice within 24 hours. Therefore, taking into consideration the 8-to 11-hour time-zone difference between the United States and the Middle East, the initial visit was between 12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. in New York (which was between 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. in the Middle East). The second visit was 12 hours later between 12:00 a.m. and 2:00 a.m. in New York (which was between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. in the Middle East). Because sometimes the same news stories were updated, a news story was considered a new different story and was analyzed only if the headline and the lead stories changed.
For the purpose of this study, all content was analyzed based on the following three variables:

Prominence: To assess the relative emphasis of the U.S.-Al Qaeda conflict on the two websites, the frequency and placement of the conflict stories on the homepage of the two websites were coded. The placement coding was based on three categories: a) Lead story, which is considered to be the most important news item, b) Top news story, which is the next most important story, c) Other homepage story, which is least important.

Attributed Sources: To measure the types of sources used in the coverage of the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict, quoted and paraphrased statements attributed to news sources were coded. The sources were coded based on five categories: a) U.S. sources, b) Allies sources -- which were the sources of countries considered U.S. allies in the conflict, c) Al Qaeda sources, e) International sources -- which were the sources of any country other than the countries considered U.S. allies in the conflict, and f) Al-Jazeera sources. If a source was quoted or paraphrased more than once, it was coded as one source.

Tone of Coverage: To assess how the combatants of the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict were presented in the news coverage, the tone of the reporting was analyzed utilizing Wall’s (1997) concept of agency. The term agent is defined as a particular reference to an actor in the events who is perceived to have done something negative, positive, or neutral and therefore is an agent of action. The particular agents chosen for coding were the combatants of the conflict (United States, Allies, and Al Qaeda), or the people, groups, organizations or actions that represented them or reported to represent them. Agents were coded as positive, negative or neutral based on the qualities and attributes assigned to them. Each news story had only one agent. Although some studies coded the identified agents appearing in only the headline (i.e. Wall, 1997), from analyzing a pilot sample of
news stories, the headline and at least the first three paragraphs of the story needed to be read in order to identify the agent. When the agent was not clear in the headline, the lead, and the first three paragraphs of the news story, the agent was coded as “no agent”.

Guidelines were used to provide a systematic way in which all content was dealt with. Intercoder reliability was checked for 30 U.S./Al Qaeda conflict stories (10.2% of total). The data reflected an intercoder reliability of 96 percent, based on Holsti's formula. Reliability estimates for each category were calculated by Scott's pi as follows: Tone of coverage 91 percent; attributed sources 92 percent; and prominence (frequency & placement) 100 percent.

RESULTS

Overall, a total of 1760 stories were content analyzed: 238 online stories covered the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict and 1522 online stories covered other topics. Out of the 238 stories that focused on the conflict, 139 were from the Arabic-language website and 99 stories were from the English-language website. The majority of the news stories examined (63.9%) did not appear in the ‘lead’ or the ‘top story’ categories. Approximately, one third of the stories were listed in the ‘top story’ category (28.2%), and only 8 percent of the news stories appeared in the ‘lead’ story category. In terms of attributed sources, 430 sources were identified in the 238 stories: 231 sources were used in the Arabic-language reports, and 199 sources were used in English-language reports. On average, each news story listed two sources. Regarding the agents analyzed, 229 agents were identified and coded: 22 agents were from the United States, 118 agents were from U.S. allies, and 48 agents represented Al Qaeda.

The first research question examined the prominence on the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict in Al-Jazeera English-and Arabic-language news websites. Table 1 shows frequencies and percentages
of topics in the two websites. A chi-square test suggests no significant difference in terms of frequency of stories covering the conflict (1.650, p>.05). In the English-language website, almost 15 percent of the news stories were about the U.S./Al Qaeda and 85.1 percent were about other topics. Similarly, 12.7 percent of the news stories in the Arabic-language website were about the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict and 87.3 percent were about other topics.

Regarding the placement of the news stories, however, a chi-square test suggests significant differences between the two websites. As shown in table 2, the English-language website placed more U.S./Al Qaeda stories as ‘lead’ stories (11.1%) and ‘top stories’ (40.4%) than its Arabic-language counterpart (5.8% & 19.4% respectively). Results indicate that most news stories about the conflict in the Arabic-language website were not prominently placed (74.8%).

Note: Tables 1 & 2 about here.

In covering the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict, research question two asked whether attributed sources significantly differed in Al-Jazeera English-and Arabic-language news websites. Table 3 shows frequencies and percentages of sources identified in these stories. As shown, a chi-square test revealed no significant differences between the two sites (8.821, p>.05).

Note: Tables 3 & 4 about here.

The third research question examined the tone of reporting the conflict in Al-Jazeera English-and Arabic-language news websites. As Table 4 shows, the results revealed a trend of negative coverage in the two websites regarding all of the agents involved in the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict. Specifically, Al Qaeda agents were portrayed more negatively than any other group involved in this conflict.
As indicated in table 4, the tone was rarely positive or neutral for any of the groups involved. Approximately half of the reports in which the United States was an agent, the agent was framed negatively in the English-language website (66.7%) and in the Arabic-language website (48.9%). Likewise, the majority of the U.S. allies in the conflict were framed negatively in the two websites (66% and 51.5% respectively). In terms of the representation Al Qaeda, in more than eight in 10 reports in which the organization was the agent, the agent was framed negatively in the English-language website (88.5%) and the Arabic-language website (86.4%).

When the data of the two websites were combined, a chi-square test revealed significant differences in the tone of coverage (6.630, p<.05) – research question four. As shown in table 5, after removing the neutral category from the analysis, when the agent in the story was the United States or one of its allies, the agent was framed negatively in 8 out of 10 of these reports, whereas, when the agent was Al Qaeda, it was framed negatively in almost 9 out of 10 of these reports. Further, Al Qaeda agents received the least amount of positive coverage overall.

**Discussion**

There is a trend to globalize the media and to expand the reach of news consumers by making news available to various people around the world. While several studies have explored *Al-Jazeera’s* TV coverage (Media Tenor, 2004; Wicks & Wicks, 2004; Andy, Livingston & Hebert, 2005), this is one of the first studies to explore the network’s online coverage in English- and Arabic-language websites. This research, then, is one of the first studies that looked at how the news is catered in different languages to different news consumers worldwide by a single news network. It, thus, explored a new dimension to the existing scholarship on news framing and news media coverage, by examining how the English-and Arabic-language *Al-Jazeera* news websites framed the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict to different online users.
Overall, results indicate only a limited percentage of the news stories analyzed in the English-and Arabic-language Al-Jazeera websites focused on the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict. It appears that Al-Jazeera websites did not put much emphasis on the conflict. However, it is noteworthy that approximately one-third of these stories appeared as ‘lead’ or as ‘top news stories’ on the two websites. This suggests that while the two websites did not focus much on the conflict in terms of frequency, they still gave the topic moderate weight and importance by placing more than one-third of these reports in a notable format.

When comparing the frequency of stories in the Arabic-language website and its English-language counterpart, results showed no significant difference. This suggests the importance Al-Jazeera gave to the conflict was consistent in both websites. However, considering the placement of these stories, the percentage of stories posted as lead and as top stories on the English-language Al-Jazeera website was twice the percentage of the stories about the conflict that appeared as lead or as top stories in the Arabic-language website. Thus, perhaps Al-Jazeera executives perceived the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict to be more important to the English-speaking audience than the Arabic-speaking audience and therefore decided to place these English-language stories in a prominent format.

Regarding attributed sources, results showed the two websites relied mostly on sources from the United States and its allies, followed by sources from Al Qaeda, and a few international and Al-Jazeera sources. As shown, Al Qaeda sources, although present, were significantly under-represented in both Al-Jazeera websites. Framings of news stories are suggested by particular devices, such as selection of sources or affiliations, selection of quotes (Severin & Tankard, 2001). These findings, thus, do not support the accusations that Al-Jazeera has acted as a mouthpiece of Al Qaeda or a tool of propaganda against the United States (Al-Jadda, 2006). Our analysis, instead,
showed the coverage was more inclusive of sources from the United States and U.S. allies. In fact, the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict was framed primarily from the perspective of these countries. One plausible explanation is that in practical terms, while Al Qaeda sources were available to *Al-Jazeera* in forms of websites, videotapes, cassettes, or statements sent by fax, it would have been difficult to confirm the authenticity of these sources. Thus, *Al-Jazeera* having limited access to verify alternative sources -- such as sources from Al Qaeda -- chose to depend more on sources from the United States and its allies.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis examining the use of sources in the two websites revealed no significant differences. This suggests that *Al-Jazeera* overall, did not seek to use different sources to report the conflict. For example, it did not try to present a one-sided perspective of the United States and its allies to its English-speaking audience, neither did it present a predominantly Al Qaeda perspective to its Arabic-speaking audience.

Regarding the tone of coverage, results indicated that the vast majority of those involved in the conflict were framed negatively. These findings are consistent with past studies that most reports on *Al-Jazeera* TV channel are negative, in terms of explicit or implicit statements (Media Tenor, 2004). Similar results were also found in reporting other conflicts. Wall (1997), for example, found that Bosnians and Rwandans in their conflicts were framed mostly negatively in their countries. Based on the concept of agency, these results could be an indication that *Al-Jazeera* websites presented the combatants as contributing to the problems of that conflict. For instance, when these combatants were the agent of the action, they were rarely framed positively, suggesting that these combatants were rarely presented as trying to make positive efforts towards solving the conflict. Furthermore, results indicated that Al Qaeda agents were significantly framed more negatively (89.4%) and least positively (10.6%) than any other combatants involved in this
conflict. This, again, does not support the U.S. administration claims that *Al-Jazeera* has acted as the mouthpiece of terrorist organizations (See Al-Jadda, 2006).

Moreover, examining the frequency and percentages of tone of coverage in the two sites (table 4), there is no indication that *Al-Jazeera* expresses different views in its Arabic website, while sending an entirely different message in its English website (see for example HaLevi, 2007). As shown, the trend of negative coverage was consistent in the two sites. These findings, thus, contradict the accusation that Arab media, at least in the case of *Al-Jazeera* websites, send messages to their English-speaking online users, which are entirely different from those messages they send to their Arab-speaking online news consumers.

To conclude, the framing measures used to assess the coverage of the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict in *Al-Jazeera* websites provide little evidence that the news outlet is actively or openly seeking to produce an online version of news that supports or appeals to one ethnic or religious ideology; rather, the data suggested that *Al-Jazeera* is an Arabic media that produce similar news coverage of Middle Eastern and world events to Arabic-and English-speaking news consumers from around the world. As shown, results showed limited differences between how the two websites covered the conflict. Therefore, by and large, our findings suggested that *Al-Jazeera* websites provided the same perspective to its Arabic-and English-speaking users.

**Limitations**

Verifying whether the translation of the news content from one language to another may require changing words or expressions that might affect the way the news is framed would have been difficult. In essence, meaning may have been lost in translation. However, when coding the news content in the English-and Arabic-language websites, the primary coder found that many of
the stories were identical on both websites. Further, it should be noted that a considerable number of stories appeared only in one of the two websites. In addition, the observations presented in this study were not intended for generalization beyond the English-and-Arabic-language Al-Jazeera websites. Patterns of coverage may differ in other Arab media outlets. Nevertheless, Al-Jazeera news outlet as the leading and most influential network in the Arab region and in the world (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003) was worth exploring, particularly its controversial coverage of the U.S./Al Qaeda conflict. In addition, the framing patterns suggested here might be limited by the time frame from which the sample was chosen. However, the results offer important cues of how these websites and maybe Al-Jazeera network -- including Al-Jazeera satellite TV channel -- frame conflicts in general. Finally, the findings of this study are limited to the framework of the categories and the definitions used in this analysis; different researchers may use different categories and definitions to measure framing concepts.

Future pursuits should investigate whether the websites pattern of framing this conflict persists beyond the period of time that was analyzed in this study and maybe using other framing devices such as definitional frames or certain key words that represent specific themes. Further investigation on how this conflict, and maybe other conflicts in the Middle East, is presented in other Arabic and American online media appears to be a fruitful area of scientific inquiry.

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Table 1


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<th>English Website</th>
<th>Arabic Website</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S./Al Qaeda Conflict</td>
<td>99 (14.9%)</td>
<td>139 (12.7%)</td>
<td>238 (13.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Topics</td>
<td>567 (85.1%)</td>
<td>955 (87.3%)</td>
<td>1522 (86.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>666 (100%)</td>
<td>1094 (100%)</td>
<td>1760 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chi-square = 1.650, \( p > .05 \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English Website</th>
<th>Arabic Website</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead News Story</td>
<td>11 (11.1%)</td>
<td>8 (5.8%)</td>
<td>19 (8.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top News Story</td>
<td>40 (40.4%)</td>
<td>27 (19.4%)</td>
<td>67 (28.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other News Stories</td>
<td>48 (48.5%)</td>
<td>104 (74.8%)</td>
<td>152 (63.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>99 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>139 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>238 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Frequency and percentages of placement of news stories covering the U.S./Al Qaeda Conflict in the English-and-Arabic-Language *Al-Jazeera* websites (\( N = 238 \)).
Chi-square = 17.396, $p < .000$

Table 3

Frequency and percentages of attributed sources used in reporting the U.S./Al Qaeda Conflict in the English-and-Arabic-Language Al-Jazeera websites ($N = 430$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Type</th>
<th>English Website</th>
<th>Arabic Website</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Sources</td>
<td>41 (20.6%)</td>
<td>65 (28.1%)</td>
<td>106 (24.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allies Sources</td>
<td>83 (41.7%)</td>
<td>89 (38.5%)</td>
<td>172 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Qaeda Sources</td>
<td>40 (20.1%)</td>
<td>32 (13.9%)</td>
<td>72 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Sources</td>
<td>25 (12.6%)</td>
<td>23 (10%)</td>
<td>48 (11.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Jazeera Sources</td>
<td>10 (14.8%)</td>
<td>22 (9.5%)</td>
<td>32 (7.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Frequency and percentages of tone of coverage in reporting the U.S./Al Qaeda Conflict in the English-and-Arabic-Language Al-Jazeera websites (N = 229).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English Website</th>
<th>Arabic Website</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>US Agent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>2 (11.1%)</td>
<td>5 (11.1%)</td>
<td>7 (11.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>12 (66.7%)</td>
<td>22 (48.9%)</td>
<td>34 (54.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4 (22.2%)</td>
<td>18 (40.0%)</td>
<td>22 (34.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>45 (100%)</td>
<td>63 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square = 8.821, p > .05
Table 5

Frequency and percentages of tone of coverage in reporting the U.S./Al Qaeda Conflict in the English-and-Arabic-Language Al-Jazeera websites combined (N = 173).
Chi-square = 6.630, p < .05
Note: The “Neutral” category was coded as missing.
Numerous countries joined the U.S. global war on terrorism post 9/11. Some U.S. allies sent troops to the battlefields in Afghanistan and Iraq; others offered financial and logistic support only.

As part of his move to introduce democratization to his state, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, decided to fund Al-Jazeera network in 1996. He planned for Al-Jazeera to be an independent satellite TV network free from government control and manipulation (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003).

On Sept. 6 2001 the FBI closed the office of the hosting company, causing Al-Jazeera website to shut down for half a day. The biggest network systems programming company refused to have a contract with Al-Jazeera because of “official pressure” it faced. In addition, the site was hacked several times. For example, three days after the Iraq War started, the website was hacked. And two days later, the website was hacked again for two days by an American programmer (About Al-Jazeera, 2003).

Founders of the network were rated among the 100 world’s most influential people (Elliott, 2004).

The results were only analyzed in terms of frequencies and percentages. Because of the limited Ns in some cells, a chi-square analysis was not feasible.

The neutral category was removed from the analysis due to the limited number of Ns.

APPENDIX

Sources
**U.S. sources:** A U.S. government or military official (President Bush, Senator, Ramsfield, a general, a U.S. official, a U.S. officer, U.S. military, pentagon, U.S. military spokesman)
A U.S. person without a political or military rank (Examples: U.S. witnesses; residents, or people in the street; experts or analysts)
A U.S. medium or representative of a U.S. medium (Examples: U.S. Journalist, correspondent, U.S. medium)

**Allies sources:** a government or military official from one of the allies countries (Examples: prime minister Blair, minister, a general, U.K. official, an officer, an official, U.K military spokesman, spokesman of British Government, spokesman of the Polish contingent)
A person from one of the allies’ countries without a political or military rank (Examples: witnesses, residents, and people in the street, experts, or analysts)
A medium or representative of medium from one of the allies’ countries (Journalist, correspondent, medium)

**Al-Qaeda sources:** A representative of Al Qaeda Network or a representative of a person or a group presented as related to Al Qaeda Network (Bin Ladin, Al –Thwahiri, Taliban official, Spokesman of Al Qaeda, spokesman of Taliban, Statement by Al-Qaeda, Web site of a group related to Al-Qaeda)

**International sources:** A representative of an international institution OR a government official, military officer, or an ordinary person from a country other than the U.S., U.S. allies or Al-Qaeda. International media or representatives of an international media were coded as international sources as well. (Examples: Kofi Annan, United Nations, NATO, ordinary Egyptian person, human rights groups, Agencies, Reuters)

**Al-Jazeera sources:** A person who works for Al-Jazeera network (Examples: A person working with Al-Jazeera network, Al-Jazeera.net, or Al-Jazeera’s correspondent)

**Agency**

**Agent:** An actor is a party of the conflict (U.S., U.S. Allies, Al-Qaeda) and individuals, groups, organization or actions that represent any of them.

**Positive agent:** A positive action/attitude is expressed through words and expressions carrying positive meaning for the agent. The agent afflicts positive change, acts to alleviate a problem, shows interest/concern for a problem, tries to find a resolution. Examples of words related to a positive agent are like: help, promote peace, relief effort, willing to negotiate, alleviate, humanitarian, build, construct, free, release, cooperate.

**Negative agent:** A negative action/attitude is expressed through words and expressions carrying negative meaning for the agent. A negative agent creates or worsens a problem with its actions or is attributed negative qualities. Examples of words related to a negative agent are like: destroy, unwilling to cooperate, bomb, kill, torture, acting irrationally, resisting positive influence, slaughter, afflicting people negatively.
**Neutral agent:** Coders coded the agent as “neutral” when there was neither a negative nor a positive action/attitude expressed through any words or expressions to carry any negative or positive meaning for the agent. In other words, when a news story tells what happens without assigning any qualities to the agent.

**No agency:** Coders coded it as “no agency” in two cases: 1. When there was no identified or implied agent in the headline of the news story, the lead, or the following paragraphs until the next sub-head. 2. When the agent was a party other than the parties of the conflict or what represented them.