

Simplifying Terrorism: An Analysis of Three Canadian Newspapers, 2006-2013

Janelle Malo

Student, Conflict Studies and Human Rights Studies, University of Ottawa – Email address: jmalo007@uottawa.ca

Valérie Ouellette

Student, Conflict Studies and Human Rights Studies, University of Ottawa – Email address: youel052@uottawa.ca

Srdjan Vucetic

Associate Professor, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa

Email address: svucetc@uottawa.ca

Abstract: How do mainstream Canadian newspapers portray contemporary terrorism? The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States and the ensuing “war on terror” has deeply impacted media coverage of terrorism around the world. Canada is no exception and scholars have begun examining various aspects of terrorism coverage in the Canadian media. Inspired by framing theory, the following study adds to this growing literature by developing a model for understanding and evaluating media coverage of terrorism according to “degrees of simplification.” The model is applied to a sample of 379 articles drawn from three Canadian newspapers in two periods of time—June 2006-June 2007 and June 2012-June 2013. Three main findings are discussed. First, both *The National Post* and *La Presse* tended to present terrorism-related news and analysis using simpler frames than *The Globe and Mail*. Second, the coverage of domestic terrorism was far less simplistic than the coverage of international terrorism in all three newspapers. Third, while simplifying frames were more frequent in 2006-7 than in 2012-3, the study finds weak evidence that dominant framing practices employed by the Canadian newspapers dramatically changed between these two time periods.

Keywords: Canadian media, terrorism, newspapers

Resumé: Comment les principaux journaux canadiens dressent-ils le portrait du terrorisme contemporain? Les attaques terroristes du 11 septembre 2001 aux États-Unis et la "guerre contre le terrorisme" ont eu des répercussions profondes sur la couverture médiatique du terrorisme et des événements y étant liés à travers le monde. Le Canada n'y fait pas exception et chercheurs ont commencé à étudier divers aspects de la couverture du terrorisme dans le système médiatique canadien. Inspiré de la théorie du framing, l'étude qui suit s'ajoute à cette littérature grandissante en développant un modèle pour comprendre et évaluer la couverture médiatique du terrorisme selon des "degrés de simplification." Le modèle est appliqué à un échantillon composé de 379 articles tirés de trois journaux canadiens lors de deux périodes - juin 2006 à juin 2007 et juin 2012 à juin 2013. Trois constatations principales sont discutées. Premièrement, *The National Post* et *La Presse* se montraient tous deux enclin à présenter des nouvelles et une analyse des événements liés au terrorisme en utilisant des cadres plus simplistes que *The Globe and Mail*. Deuxièmement, la couverture du terrorisme national était beaucoup moins simpliste que celle du terrorisme international dans les trois journaux. Troisièmement, bien que les cadres simplistes fussent plus fréquents en 2006-2007 qu'en 2012-2013, l'étude apporte de faibles preuves indiquant que les pratiques dominantes de cadrage utilisées par les journaux canadiens aient changé considérablement entre ces deux périodes.

Mots-clés: média, terrorisme, journaux canadiens

Scholarly research on the connection between terrorism and the media has been continuous since at least the 1970s, but has skyrocketed since 9/11.¹ In this period, the world bore witness to the emergence of “new” forms of terrorism that were accompanied by “new” forms of media coverage. At the most basic level, the research agenda is motivated by two simple and occasionally uncomfortable facts. First, terrorism is a social communication process involving not only the perpetrators and victims of violence or threat of violence, but also the target audience or audiences. Second and related, there exists a symbiotic relationship between the media and terrorism, given that the former is one of the mediums by which the message of the latter is delivered to the audience. Put in the crudest terms, the media can be said to facilitate terrorism, in so far that it is through the media that terrorists are able to reach and address a greater target audience.²

This study contributes to this research agenda by examining how the news media covers terrorism in the Canadian context or, more precisely, how Canadian newspapers frame terrorism-related events taking place both in Canada and internationally. While this topic receives no shortage of generalized attention, a number of questions remain relatively under-studied by scholars. This paper considers three: What are dominant frames used by Canadian press coverage of terrorism? Do they vary across newspapers and across time? What are the main differences or similarities in how Canadian newspapers approach the complexities of terrorism and counterterrorism? The novelty of our analytical approach is twofold. First, we introduce a “degrees of simplification” model for analyzing frames employed in media reporting on terrorism. We then examine an archive of 379 discrete news articles and comments/opinion-editorials drawn from Canada’s mainstream English and French language newspapers across two year-long

snapshots in time between 2006 and 2013. The snapshot approach does not make our study longitudinal, but it does allow the evaluation of the conventional claim that Canadian media coverage of terrorism and terrorism-related events at home and abroad has become more balanced over time (for example, Simpson, 2013).

Our overall findings are as follows: first, *The National Post* and *La Presse*, each for different reasons, were more likely to present terrorism-related news and analysis using frames emblematic of simplification than *The Globe and Mail*. Second, the coverage of “domestic” terrorism-related events was consistently less simplistic than the coverage of terrorism abroad across all three newspapers. Comments and op-eds on the Toronto 18 and the VIA Rail plots in particular, were likely to eschew drama and address the political question of how Canada should respond to terrorism without compromising its core values in the process. With respect to terrorism-related issues and events abroad, there was less critical reflection. All three newspapers were more likely to conflate terrorism with Muslims and Islam when reporting on international events. We also found that *La Presse* was keen to criticize the militarization of counterterrorism, while *The Globe and Mail* and, in particular, *The National Post*, tended to support both the aims and means of the U.S.-led “war on terror.” Lastly, while there was more simplification in 2006-2007 than in 2012-2013, we found weak evidence that the dominant frames employed by the Canadian newspapers dramatically changed over time.

Let us briefly discuss why we choose to emphasise the importance of framing. First, how media frame terrorism has a considerable impact on the way in which audiences interpret reality. For example, in one national survey of terrorism-related risk perceptions (based on a sample of 1,502 adult Canadians interviewed by telephone), the “Canadian media was cited as the source most often referred to when

seeking credible information about terrorism” (Lemyre et al., 2006: 756). Second, news frames and political discourses are interlinked. As Norris, Kern and Marion have argued, perhaps echoing the uncomfortable political theory of Carl Schmidt, terrorism receives one-sided framing even in liberal democracies, partly because political leaders prefer it this way — differentiating “friends” from “enemies” helps them govern (2003a: 15). Simplistic framing ill-serves the public, but there are few incentives to resist it. Journalists are dependent on government officials to gain access to the information they require to write about terrorism, while opposition parties acquiesce because they do not wish to appear unpatriotic (Norris et al., 2003b: 297-8; also see Brinson and Stohl, 2012; Huband, 2008). News frames are also central to the construction of dominant ideologies and identities, not simply those of the news outlet, but also those of the state and nation. Focusing on the post-9/11 coverage of terrorism in the U.S. context, Powell finds that one-dimensional framing is dangerous because it can and does promote intolerance and prejudice (2011: 93-6; also see Bromley and Cushion, 2011). Consider an example closer to home: in an analysis of how Canadian newspaper headlines framed the war on terror, Steuter and Wills find no dearth of dehumanizing metaphors related to animals, insects and diseases used to describe terrorists (2009). Coupled with an all-too-easy conflation of enemy soldiers and combatants with Arabs or Muslims in general, the authors argue, these framings can serve not only to reaffirm broader political discourse of incommensurable differences between “us” and “them,” but can also open the door for “racism, oppression and even genocide” (Steuter and Wills, 2009: 20). Be that as it may, in terrorism reporting, like in reporting on so many other issues, the media has considerable authority and social power, which is why it is important to invest academic energy in trying to

understand the ways in which news frames are affecting political debates.

The rest of the paper is divided in three sections. The first details our theoretical framework and its limitations. The second section discusses our methodology and data; the third, our findings. In the concluding section, we relate our findings to the scholarly study of how Canadian newspapers frame terrorism-related events at home and abroad, and briefly address how our analytical model can be expanded further.

“Degrees of Simplification”

In the conventional usage, frames are words or phrases that set the parameters for what is valid, useful, relevant, or appropriate. To use a Canadian politics and society example, framing natural gas extraction as an economic issue rather than an environmental or aboriginal land claims issue draws attention to narrow financial or commercial concerns, while dismissing or rejecting discourses on climate change and social justice. Framing research is characterized by definitional anarchy and a multiplicity of operationalizations of key concepts and conceptual relationships. In this paper, we build on Entman’s well-known definition of framing as the manipulation, conscious or otherwise, of reality via modes of communication featuring “keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (1993: 52). So viewed, frames are ontological, normative, and prescriptive—all at once:

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 (Ibid.).

While remarkably broad, this definition of frames and framing is nevertheless helpful in opening up relatively new analytical frameworks such as the one pursued here (see also D'Angelo, 2002; Scheufele, 2004). Indeed, even the broadest definitions tend to give way to narrow operationalizations when it comes to empirical analysis. In the existing literature frames are often analyzed in terms of types, such as episodic vs. thematic (Iyengar, 1991), substantive vs. procedural (Entman, 2004), issue-specific vs. generic frames, or advocacy vs. journalistic (de Vreese and Lecheler, 2012). Similar typologies can be found in a number of studies on how the media frames terrorism (for example, Norris et al., 2003a).

In this study we follow these approaches to examine how the Canadian media covers terrorism-related topics and events. What interests us is how the Canadian media deals with the complexity of terrorism. A large part of the challenge is definitional, as the students of terrorism readily concede:

Debates over how best to define terrorism have chased the elusive goal of finding the correct definition. And the key lesson that has emerged from this endeavor is that we will not ever find a single, correct definition. Instead, our collective goal should be to find a *useful* operationalizable definition that can help us to understand the world better and act in accordance with what we understand (Asal, De la Calle, Findley & Young, 2012: 475, italics in the original; cf. Eid, 2014b).

Arguably, the media approaches terrorism in a similarly pragmatic fashion—it condenses complex realities into *useful* frames in order to help its audience better relate to the

world. It also stands to reason that different media are likely to differ over what is or is not useful. To begin with, even when mainstream newsmedia uniformly recognize the illegitimacy of terrorist violence, there still remains a range of choices with how to address representations of terrorists' goals, ideologies, organizational structures, and actorhood. Recall that in the Entman model, a frame is said to contain four elements—problem representation, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. In reporting on, say, Hizballah in Lebanon, a journalist or a commentator may thus deplore terrorists tactics used at one time or another by this organization as immoral, but she can nevertheless portray the organization itself as a symptom of profound instability in Lebanon and the Middle East writ large and further discuss the causes of this instability in terms of past and current colonialism, rising sectarianism, botched democratization, failed international policy and so on. She can also acknowledge that Hizballah is a heavily institutionalized “state-like” actor that draws much of its political legitimacy from both religion *and* non-violent political, social, and cultural activism, and that its staying power depends on regional and even global developments rather than merely local ones (Abboud and Miller, 2012).

Similar framing choices present themselves in reporting on the Taliban activity in the greater “Af-Pak” region, the rise of the Mahdi Army in Iraq, the fall of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka and India, or, for that matter, assorted instances of Canadian terrorism. Each one of the half dozen pipeline bombings that have taken place since 2008 in Canada can thus be variously framed as either random violence against property, or as a political act, which can further be framed in terms of “environmentalist extremism,” “anti-industrial fanaticism,” “anti-capitalism,” and/or “anti-statism.” By the same token, the Toronto 18 case, or the Jabarah and Khawaja cases, can

be represented as either domestic criminal acts, or as terrorism inspired by extremist, anti-Western ideology of Al-Qaeda. The latter interpretations can be further split between those that fall on terms of “global Jihad,” “Canadian Islamofascism,” and “homegrown violent Muslim fanaticism” versus those that criticize such simplistic connotations, negative stereotypes and lazy Manichean discourses.

To examine variation in how the Canadian media interprets terrorism-related events and issues in different geographic areas at different times, we use “degree of simplification” as a metric. Extreme simplification include metaphors linking self-evident terrorists to animals, insects, and diseases (for example, Steuter and Wills, 2009), as well as dramatic narratives that index nothing but savage, barbaric, and otherwise anti-civilizational behaviour of terrorist actors (Perigoe and Eid, 2014; Powell, 2011; Seib and Janbek, 2011; Smolash, 2009). In the middle are frames that acknowledge the social and political bases of terrorism, while privileging mono-causal interpretations such as the idea that certain religious beliefs lead to terrorist violence (Jiwani, 2005; Karim, 2002, 2003, 2006; Poole, 2002), or that the problem of terrorism in a given context can best (or even “only”) be solved militarily (Edy and Meirick, 2007; Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2011; Ryan and Switzer, 2009). Least simplistic are frames that scrutinize the meanings of terrorism in a given context, reflecting over different types of terrorism, such as military versus non-military targets, state versus non-state, and domestic versus transnational. These frames reinforce judgments that the label “terrorism” is inherently political, and that the problem of terrorism always requires a political solution above all, whatever that may be.

We believe that this continuum can be useful for analyzing variation in the media coverage of terrorism. The three points on our ordinal scale are ideal-types in the sense that “highly simplifying” and “least simplifying”

frames do not exist in pure, mutually exclusive forms; indeed, deployment of one type of framing within any given newspaper item need not bar deployment of another. We also recognize that there is no one-to-one match between the article structure and use of frame types: whether a news story taken from international newswires like *l’Agence Française de la Presse* (AFP) or newspapers like London’s *Daily Telegraph* is more likely to fall on simplistic frames than an op-ed should be and is an empirical question for us.

In addition to searching for overlaps, gaps, or contradictions in communicating often subtle differences between “highly simplifying” and “least simplifying” interpretations of terrorism, an analysis the media coverage of terrorism-related events and cases must also separately examine how different assumptions, phrases, metaphors, and narratives deployed (for example, “ethnic war”, “war vs. crime” or the “security-development nexus”) fit into broader nation-specific institutions (Wittebols, 1992) and discourses on national identity (for example: Canada as a “warrior,” “peacekeeper,” “responsible international citizen,” “Western society” and so on). A closer reading is important because reporting on terrorism often covers broader themes such as the constitutionality of counterterrorism measures, immigration control, education policies, discrimination against minorities and so on, all of which can be said to directly relate to how national Self positions itself vis-à-vis its history as well as the rest of the world (Roy and Ross, 2011; Schaefer 2003; Smolash 2009). Importantly, “silences” can and do work as frames. A refusal to identify assorted anti-government armed groups in Afghanistan as “Al-Qaeda militants” suggests not only that these groups are not beholden to transnational terrorist interests, but in fact may be legitimate representatives, actual or potential, of indigenous interests.

We wish to be clear on what this study is *not* about. First, our analytical model

primarily builds on insights developed in political communication, linguistics, and sociology rather than in psychology, where frames and framing tend to be conceptualized and analyzed more narrowly as an individual-level phenomenon. Related, we look at frames, not framing effects—behavioural or attitudinal outcomes caused (or “shaped”) by variations in how a given piece of information is communicated by news media. This type of study would require a different research design, beginning with a theory of media effects and/or a theory of elite-media relations (for relevant discussions, see Chong and Druckman, 2007; Entman, 2004; Iyengar, 1991). The same goes for the relationship between news media frames and audience frames (see, especially Entman, 2004); this question falls beyond the scope of this article. Next, to better understand the often nuanced differences between the coverage of domestic vs. international terrorism as well as the coverage of terrorism-related events across different parts of the world, our study does examine the full content of newspaper items as opposed to relying on the analysis of headlines (Pan and Kosicki, 1993; Tankard, 2001). But while looking at the content of the news stories allowed us to comb through metaphors, examples and quotes, items like photos or cartoons were excluded from the analysis. Last, we do not criticize the use of simpler or simplistic frames as such because there is no reason to assume that less simplistic frames automatically offer greater possibilities for less antagonistic politics. It may be that simplicity can be desirable. For example, “every terrorist group will ultimately trade terrorism for sovereign state power” is simplistic but it opens up space for conflict resolutions through dialogue with political

actors “behind” terrorist groups (or political actors that terrorists claim to represent), or even with terrorist groups themselves (especially if they can credibly renounce violence). Conversely, highly contextual frames relating the root causes of terrorism to the inevitable clash of singular, monolithic civilizations can promote unnecessarily antagonistic politics.

Research Design & Methods

The Globe and Mail and *The National Post* were chosen because they are the two main nationally distributed newspapers in Canada. *La Presse* was selected because it is widely regarded as the main national (and traditionally federalist) newspaper of Quebec, as well as the largest francophone print media source in Canada. The ownership structures of the newspapers selected for the study vary, as do their political and ideological leanings. *The National Post* is generally thought to provide more conservative perspectives than those provided by *The Globe*, and *La Presse* is perceived to be one of the most left-leaning newspapers in Canada.³ The selection of the two time periods—June 1, 2006, to June 30, 2007 and again June 1, 2013 to June 30, 2013—was motivated by a desire to grasp some analytical sense of continuity and change in the news media coverage of terrorism over time. Comparing two year-long snapshots in the post-9/11 (also post-Bali 2002 and 2005, post-Madrid 2004, post-London 2005) period, our sample is systematic but not random since we sought periods rich with terrorism-related coverage of both domestic and international developments. It also accounts for variation in Canada’s active military engagement abroad, namely in Afghanistan.

Table 1

Keyword search results across 3 Canadian newspapers		
	Number of hits	Relevant hits
June 2006-June 2007	712	239
June 2012-June 2013	432	140
Total	1144	379

Table 2

	Categories of Relevant Newspaper Items (N=379)						Total
	<i>The Globe & Mail</i>		<i>La Presse</i>		<i>National Post</i>		
Columns/Op-eds	82	65%	21	20%	112	73%	215
News articles	43	35%	81	80%	40	27%	164
Total	125		102		152		379

Factiva and other digital databases were used to identify articles to be included in the data sample. A search of the database was undertaken for relevant news coverage using a series of keywords (for example, “terror*”) applied to both headlines and text (Table 1). Keyword searches were pretested to ensure that they covered a wide range of references to both international (Afghanistan, for example) and domestic terrorism-related events and cases (Toronto-18, for example). Results from the search were reviewed for relevance: to be included in the study, stories had to contain multiple sentences about terrorists, terrorism and counterterrorism, and had to be published as a news article, comment, opinion piece, or editorial.

The articles retained were then divided into two categories based on the year of publication and analyzed separately, allowing comparisons to be made between the separate

time periods. In all, 379 newspaper items were selected for analysis; 164 were news articles, and 215 were columns and op-ed pieces. As Table 2 shows, our sample is balanced overall, but the pieces in *La Presse* are mostly news articles, while those in *The National Post* are mostly columns and op-eds. Each newspaper item was read and annotated to determine sources and authorship (Canadian special correspondent, U.S. commentator, international news agency, etc.), as well as primary geographical location (categorized as either Canadian or foreign nation-specific). Key frames in each item and the most commonly reoccurring key frames across items were also extracted from the sample.⁴

The sample was subjected to a combination of qualitative content analysis (for example, Barnett et al., 2008) and discourse analysis (for example, Roy & Ross, 2011; Steuter and Wills, 2009). The latter methodology allowed us to

remain attentive to both conscious and unconscious “silences” (“exclusions”) that we believe also work as frames. With respect to frames, each newspaper item was read and coded on the basis of the ordinal scale by two analysts trained in the above methods who worked independently from one another. The two sets of codings of degrees of simplification were then compared to ensure methodological consistency. On 100 randomly selected newspaper items from the sample—meaning on more than a quarter of the sample—we used a simple percent agreement to assess how much the findings deviate from perfect reliability. The coefficient of 72% was achieved overall, which we believe is sufficient for a preliminary analysis like ours.⁵ Discourse analysis of course does not value inter-coder reliability as much as content analysis does, but we believe that the reliability of the observations can be increased by reporting the extent to which independent analyses correlate with each other.⁶

Findings

In terms of primary areas of geographic focus, roughly two thirds of all news items in our sample covered terrorism in an international or global context, while 129 (34%) focused on Canadian terrorism-related events and issues. To begin with, no article questioned the terrorist threat in the modern world, and only a handful of them suggested that the threat of terrorism is overblown (or explicitly argued that terrorism was not the number one problem faced by Canadians). Among the three newspapers, *The National Post* provided most space to terrorism, particularly in 2006-7, the main reason being the topicality of the Toronto 18 incident, a.k.a. the Ontario Terrorism Plot. This story was addressed in 58 out of the 91 newspaper items (64%) that constitute our 2006-2007 domestic terrorism coverage sample, followed by 7 stories, all in the English language newspapers, discussing the participation of Canadian

“mercenaries” in terrorist groups and insurgencies abroad.

The story later labelled the Ontario Terrorism Plot began with the news of the arrest of a group of Muslim men accused of planning to wreak havoc in major Canadian institutions based in Toronto and Ottawa, and then continued to inspire headlines in all three newspapers for months, as more and more details were revealed. In our analysis, the vast majority of news reporting relied on simplistic frames aimed at evoking a sense of drama. Comments and editorials supplied different more substantive frames ranging from the “emerging threat of homegrown terrorism” (to use a commonplace phrase from our sample), to the protection of civil rights, to the meaning of political community in the fast-changing global age. Attention was most consistently paid to the reactions of the Canadian-Muslim community and to the question of whether or not Canada’s military engagement in Afghanistan is increasing the risk of a terrorist attack on Canadian soil.

The National Post news frames were most likely to relate the event to the “pitfalls of multiculturalism” and prioritize the assurance of national security over the protection of civil liberties. *The Globe and Mail* coverage tended to be more neutral in tone, used less subjective language, and most articles commented on general trends as opposed to stories of specific individuals. The comments and editorials published in this newspaper presented more diverse perspectives than those in *The National Post*. Several pieces were highly critical of the sensational reactions to the Toronto arrests, moreover, in sharp contrast to the more conservative daily, the Toronto 18 incident was repeatedly framed as a success for Canadian security and policing institutions. Notably, both newspapers called for the extension of anti-terrorism provisions, proclaiming their necessity to assure the safety and security of all Canadians.

La Presse's content differed from the two English publications in several respects. Articles published in the French daily employed a more detached and tempered tone in retelling events and facts related to the Ontario Terrorism Plot. Reflective of an unwillingness to jump to conclusions, the eighteen men were referred to as “alleged” conspirators (their conspiracy, too, carried the “alleged” characterization). *La Presse* was most likely to critically address official interpretations following the Toronto arrests. It asserted that the accused could have no formal ties to Al Qaeda, that the foiled terror plot was not a response to Canada’s military activities in Afghanistan, that the accused maintained the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law, and that the principles of the country’s constitution must be respected in the application of the Anti-Terrorism Act. Multiple articles in the same newspaper also argued that the biggest threat to Canada was not terrorism, but the rise of cultural intolerance; some even chided the Harper government for using the arrests for political gain. *La Presse's* master frame, if in fact existent in this case, suggested that while Canada’s counterterrorist efforts need to be effective, they must also be democratically legitimate.

The size of the 2012-2013 “domestic” sample ($N=38$) makes generalization harder, but observations can be made in relation to two themes: the 2013 VIA Rail Plot and, again, the issue of Canadian citizen participation in, and/or sponsorship of, terrorist activities abroad. On the foiled plot to derail the trains of a national passenger railway service involving two foreign nationals of Muslim origin, *The Globe and Mail* was more alarmist than *The National Post*. Surprisingly, *La Presse* offered more benefit of the doubt to government officials than during its coverage of the Toronto 18 case in 2006-2007, expressing less concern for the rights of the accused and more support for punitive measures taken to ensure security. With regards to Canadian mercenaries joining

violent insurgencies abroad, *The National Post* and *The Globe and Mail* each ran six stories on the subject, while *La Presse*, two; what is remarkable, is that all 14 articles discussed this issue exclusively in reference to identities explicitly described as Muslim and Islamic. Not a single piece suggested that Canadian mercenaries may also include those who work for privatized military security providers around the world.

As shown in Table 3, five geographic areas predominate in terms of the coverage of international terrorism-related events: the “West” (44 items), Afghanistan (32 items), Iraq (22), Israel/Palestine (34), and Pakistan (23). In subjecting the international sample to content analysis, we could not with any degree of confidence identify which of these areas was subject to the most or least simplifying media framings, or which newspaper most or least consistently simplified the problem of terrorism around the world.⁷ What we offer instead are general observations about how the framing of terrorism in these five locales varied across newspapers as well as across time.

Reporting and commenting on terrorist plots and attacks in Western countries in both periods under study was characterized by very simplifying frames and an alarmist tone in all three newspapers. *The National Post* led the way and never grew tired of emphasizing that the West must show resolve, especially through military action, in dealing with terrorism. *The Globe and Mail* offered a comparatively more nuanced perspective on the militarization of terrorism, but still relied on simplifying frames. *La Presse* covered the same events, but published far fewer articles, especially in the 2006-2007 period. The little content that was published in *La Presse* tended to include short fact-based articles from AFP. The thrust of editorials and analyses within *National Post* and *The Globe and Mail* shows more similarity than a pairing of either with *La Presse*, possibly because they drew from different experts. While *La Presse* published comments by

authors based in Quebec and France, the two English language newspapers gravitated towards those from the rest of Canada, the UK,

and the U.S. This observation applies to other geographical areas as well.

Table 3

Framing of terrorism in 379 items across primary areas of geographic focus

<i>Perspective</i>	<i>The Globe & Mail</i>		<i>La Presse</i>		<i>National Post</i>		Total
	2006-7	2012-3	2006-7	2012-3	2006-7	2012-3	
Domestic	25	11	11	11	55	16	129
The West	9	5	4	21	3	2	44
Afghanistan	11	5	7	0	8	1	32
Iraq	7	0	5	0	8	2	22
Iran	0	1	0	0	1	2	4
Israel/Palestine	4	2	16	6	5	1	34
Pakistan	5	6	2	0	9	1	23
Somalia	1	0	2	1	6	1	11
Syria	1	5	0	0	1	5	12
Other	12	15	3	13	18	7	68
Total	75	50	50	52	114	38	379

Notes: Cell numbers represent total number of news items per category. Many items contained more than one geographic focus, and some dealt with “regions” like the Middle East, the Sahel or “Af-Pak,” but were categorized in terms of *primary* nation specific focus. In our terminology, “domestic” covers items focusing on Canada, “The West” assembles all news items dealing with Europe and the U.S., while the category “Other” covers items focused on locales not represented above such as Sri Lanka or South Africa.

Afghanistan received substantial coverage in 2006-2007, which is not surprising given the intensity of Canada’s military involvement in that part of the world during that time. Jeffrey Simpson, one of the most popular Canadian columnists, has recently characterized the news coverage of the early years of the Afghanistan war as “largely ahistorical, gung-ho, a big group hug for the Canadians—a travesty of journalism, really” (2013). While our analysis identified no jingoistic or pejorative reportage, the content was ripe with simplifying frames. Most news articles contextualized the Canadian mission as a continuation of a “necessary” U.S.-led effort against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorist cells.

Articles appearing in *The National Post* were most likely to focus on the Canadian troops and its allies in the Afghan conflict. *The Globe and Mail* used a similar approach, but offered a more balanced coverage through the publication of special articles by Greame Smith about the Taliban and broader Afghan perspective on the war (cf. Simpson, 2013). Notably, most editorials in both newspapers in this sample were structured around the progression of anti-Taliban offensives, but *The Globe and Mail* was more likely to give voice to frustrations with the U.S.-led campaign. The newspaper that consistently criticized the Canadian intervention in both periods under study, while also refusing convey the military

mood of the campaign or use strong revealing epithets when describing terrorists was *La Presse*.⁸

The coverage of terrorism and terrorism-related events in Israel/Palestine was most extensive in *La Presse* and *The National Post*, and most articles focused on the activities of Hizballah and Hamas. *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post* were more likely to provide a perspective firmly centered on the government of Israel than *La Presse*, whose AFP-supplied pieces provided facts, as reported by a variety of sources. *La Presse*'s comments and analytical pieces followed a similar multi-vocal track, in addition to being most likely to contextualize Palestinian terrorist activity in terms of the long history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Contrary to our expectations, the coverage of Israel/Palestine was not explicitly characteristic of differences in the perceived political orientation of the three newspapers, but we do note that *La Presse* focused 76% (22 out of 34) of its international content on this area of the world (Table 3).

Pakistan was typically mentioned in conjunction with the Afghan conflict, and was often presented as the other necessary front in the War on Terror. Most stories focused on whether the Pakistani government was doing enough to support the fight against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, with only a handful of articles reflecting on the complex and evolving structure of the country's state and society. No such simplification was made in the context of Iraq; in fact, this coverage was the least likely of the entire sample to simplify the meanings of terrorism. Both news articles and op-eds were at pains to explain the connections between the insurgencies against U.S. military occupation and the Sunni-Shia violence. This being said, *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post* were more likely than *La Presse* to focus on the politics surrounding the U.S.'s policy on Iraq. The Quebec newspaper was also most likely to minimize the link between foreign elements and anti-U.S. insurgency, and publish

discussions of European and Middle Eastern perspectives on this conflict.

The comparative analysis of the three newspapers between the two periods suggests that the coverage of the same conflicts became more detached in 2012-2013, with most comments and editorials assuming a more academic tone. The coverage of terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq significantly or almost completely dropped in the second period, reflecting the timing of Canadian (in Afghanistan) and American (in Iraq) military disengagement. For example, only two articles in our entire sample discuss Sunni and Shia militancy in Iraq in 2012-2013.

Conclusions

Using a basic framing model based on degrees of simplification, this paper has evaluated the coverage of terrorism in three Canadian newspapers in two temporal snapshots—June 2006-June 2007 and June 2012-June 2013. Three sets of findings emerge. First, *The National Post* and *La Presse* were more likely to present terrorism-related news and analysis using frames emblematic of simplification than *The Globe and Mail*. But while *La Presse*'s tendency toward simplification was largely a function of the newspaper's reliance on newswire stories, the simplistic frames published in *The National Post* were the result of multiple factors, such as its right-of-center ideology or its willingness to revert to government sources, opinions, and analysis.

Second, domestic terrorism was subject to fewer simplifications in all three newspapers than the coverage of international terrorism. The English language newspapers were more likely to attach an emotional tone to the reporting of the Toronto-18 and VIA Rail plots; in comparison, *La Presse*'s reporting on the same events was dry and more plainly descriptive. *La Presse* and *The Globe and Mail* appeared more likely than *National Post* to

argue that domestic counter-terrorism efforts must have a proper legal basis, with proper accountability structures. *La Presse* was also found more likely than either *The Globe and Mail* or *National Post* to criticize the militarization of counterterrorism under the “global War on Terror” umbrella. The Western bias of the Canadian newspaper coverage is evident, both in terms of choosing what terrorism-related events to cover regularly, and in terms of the use of 9/11 as a unifying frame.

Third, simplification dissipated over time, but the dominant frames employed by the Canadian newspapers did not radically change. While comments and op-eds in the 2012-2013 sample are on average more attuned to the complexity and evolving nature of the terrorist threat, especially within Canada, most news articles offered the same simplifications as in the previous period under study. It should be noted that the vast majority of articles in our sample (331 or 87%) cover terrorist violence explicitly labelled as Islamic or Muslim, using phrases such as: “inspired by Al-Qaeda,”

“Islamic fundamentalism,” “Islamist jihadists,” or, for that matter, “moderate Muslims.” This includes all but six articles out of 129 items that focus primarily on Canada’s domestic affairs. Muslims in general were not conflated with terrorist groups, nor are the politics of terrorist groups interpreted as a commonsensical interpretation of Islam, but what even a simple adjective “Islamist” does is to assign monolithic unity on an otherwise heterogeneous religious and cultural tradition.

These findings are little more than basic descriptive patterns, and are understandably limited in several respects given that they are the result of a preliminary test-run. As discussed, a “degrees of simplification” approach has features that can help illuminate some aspects of the media framing of terrorism that scholars know are important, but are yet to examine systematically. A more sophisticated scale for determining simplification can be developed next, and be used for empirical evaluation against a larger sample of texts across different types of media.

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Endnotes:

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² The "oxygen of publicity" aspect of terrorism has been examined since the 1970s, starting with the work of David Altheide, Brian Jenkins, Phillip Karber, Abraham Miller and others. We have no space for a literature review, but see, *inter alia*, Cohen-Almagor (2005); Conway (2012); Eid (2014a, 2014b); Freedman & Thussu (2012); Held (2008); Hoffman (2006: Ch. 6); Jackson (2006: Ch. 1); Kaplan & Weimann (2011); Tuman (2010: Ch. 1).

³ Data comes from the Canadian Journalism Project's website, J-Source.ca (accessed 21 January 2014). For ideology and patterns of ownership, see contributions in *The Canadian Political Science Review* Special Issue: Communications, the Media and Policy in Canada 3: 2 (June 2009), edited by Paul Nesbitt-Larking and Michael Howlet.

⁴ In retrospect, we acknowledge that we should have disaggregated our comments/op-ed category into editorials (opinions collectively expressed by the newspaper's news department), columns written by individual staff members and comments penned by outsiders. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this lesson learned. We did, however, categorize items produced by staff versus those from wire services and such.

⁵ The coding process did involve a degree of subjective judgment about what counts as simple as opposed to complex, but we attempted to resolve all major discrepancies and harmonize the coding rules before moving onto the rest of the sample. The coding was done in NVivo 10, which facilitates the use of more sophisticated inter-coder reliability coefficients but note that there is no consensus on which coefficient is most appropriate for researchers attempting to evaluate new analytical models (Neuendorf, 2002: Ch. 7). Also note that while we made sure that all articles included at least one frame, we did not seek to analyze framing frequencies across sources.

⁶ For examples and discussions on how to combine these two methodologies, see Papacharissi and Oliviera 2008: 59-60; Steger, Goodman & Wilson 2013: 25; Wagner 2010: 42. On interpretive social science in general, see Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, eds. 2014. A list of articles, by title and time period, is posted on the corresponding author's website.

⁷ Note that the inter-coder reliability was lower in the international sample, at 64% versus 72% overall.

⁸ An anonymous reviewer has suggested that *La Presse* may here be indexing the historic anti-militarism of its home province. This is certainly possible but note the ambiguity of the recent Quebec public opinion data on this score. See contributions in *Études Internationales* Special Issue: « Antimilitarisme et militarisation au Canada et au Québec. Tendances Actuelles et Perspective Historiques » 44 : 3 (September 2013), edited by Jérémie Cornut; especially: Massie and Boucher (2013).